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TRACKING YOUR SUCCESS

PROCESS DOES NOT EQUAL VALUE

REVIEWING THE PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Dan Markovitz, Markovitz Consulting

What's the purpose of the much-reviled performance review? Or to put it another way, what's the value created by a performance review? Most people would say it's essential for improving individual performance and providing guidance for career development.

But I think that we're conflating the process (the tool) with the value (the outcome). The annual performance review is no more necessary for improving performance than a pack of dogs is necessary to create a fox. In fact, in many ways it's antithetical to the value we're trying to create.

As W. Edwards Deming wrote in *Out of the Crisis*:

"Evaluation of performance, merit rating, or annual review. . . The idea of a merit rating is alluring. The sound of the words captivates the imagination: pay for what you get; get what you pay for; motivate people to do their best, for their own good. The effect is exactly the opposite of what the words promise."

Or as UCLA professor Samuel Culbert said (somewhat more colorfully), "a one-side-accountable, boss-administered review is little more than a dysfunctional pretense." The problem, of course, is that the system in which people work accounts for the vast majority of the individual's performance. (In the *Team Handbook*, Deming estimated it to be 90–95% percent of performance.)

That's why it's heartening to read that starting in September, Accenture will get rid of their traditional annual performance review. Instead, it will introduce a system in which employees get regular feedback on an ongoing basis from their managers after assignments. Like an increasing number of large firms (Microsoft, Gap, Medtronic, Adobe), the company realized that the enormous investment in time, effort, and energy wasn't yielding enough value. Management research firm CEB found that nearly 90% of HR leaders say the annual review doesn't even yield accurate information—and this for a process they estimate costs managers about 200 hours per year.

Leaving aside the specifics of the performance review, this move should serve as a reminder that we shouldn't equate our existing process with the value we're trying to create. It's one way to create that value, but not necessarily the best way. (And in the case of performance reviews, quite possibly counterproductive.)

Now, while it's true that lean thinkers are accustomed to thinking this way about manufacturing or service processes, we often forget that the way we create and share information—which is the primary task of knowledge workers—is also a process, and we should bring the same improvement mindset to this process as well. When you consider how unhappy most people are with the meeting and email culture in their organizations, why don't we bring a focused improvement mindset to fix it? Do you really need a 60-minute meeting with nine people in the room to disseminate information, or could you use an internal blog? Is dumping an unending stream of tasks via email on a person the best way to distribute work, or might a team-based kanban be better? Is a two-day strategy retreat the most effective and efficient way to set organizational direction for the next year, or is another form—strategy deployment, play-to-win, etc.—better?

Let's untether the process and the outcome. The value is independent of the process. When we see that our current way of doing something is only one way of creating that value, we're free to find a different—and better—way.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dan Markovitz founded Markovitz Consulting to help organizations become faster, stronger, and more agile through the application of lean principles to knowledge work. He has worked with non-profit and governmental organizations such as the New York City Department of Health, Planned Parenthood, and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, as well as a diverse roster of corporations such as Starkey Technologies, W.L. Gore & Associates, Abbott Vascular, Clif Bar, Hydro Flask, and CamelBak. He has also keynoted conferences and delivered seminars at the Lean Enterprise Academy Summit (UK), the Lean Island Conference (Iceland), the Lean Transformation Summit (US), the Rome Confluence Conference, the Outdoor Industry Association Rendezvous, the Printing Industry Association Continuous Improvement Conference, and numerous Association of Manufacturing Excellence events. He is a faculty member at the Lean Enterprise Institute and teaches regularly at the Stanford University Continuing Studies Program. He also lectures at the Ohio State University's Fisher School of Business. You can learn more about Markovitz Consulting at www.markovitzconsulting.com.

STAFF BIO PAGES

BENEFITS AND TIPS

Sam Shea, Manager, Publications, Printing Industries of America

In this article, we'll take a look at three reasons why staff bio pages benefit your company and provide three tips for making these pages as effective as possible.

Staff Bio Pages: Benefits

1. Staff bios add a personal touch, which is an important component for gaining the trust of your customers. In fact, a key red flag that a company is NOT reputable is a website with a lack of details about the people who work there.
2. Well-crafted bio pages highlight the expertise of your staff, which in turn establishes the expertise of your entire organization.
3. Staff bio pages give employees a "public" stake in the success of the company. People want to be associated with winning teams.

Staff Bio Pages: Tips

1. Photos: To capitalize on the humanizing aspect of staff bio pages, photos are a must. At the very least consider having professional photos taken for employees who interact with clients and the public.
2. Bios that brag: Along with listing day-to-day responsibilities, staff bios should highlight certifications and educational milestones, memberships in relevant industry and professional associations, and significant projects undertaken and completed.
3. Social media links: Links to an employee's professional social media profiles can add value to a staff bio page by providing a wider range of options for networking. One key point to note here is to distinguish between personal and professional social media accounts.

WRIGHT GLOBAL GRAPHICS

SAILING FAR WITH CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Kayleigh Smith, Manager, Marketing, Printing Industries of America

One of our favorite men, Benjamin Franklin, said these very wise words once: "Watch the little things; a small leak will sink a great ship." But it's not just ships you have to worry about. In the graphic communications industry, leaving one source of waste (or leak, if you will) untouched could cause you a lot of headaches and your business a lot of lost revenue.

On the bright side, the continuous improvement philosophy has helped many businesses in our industry discover and reduce waste in their companies. Using the concepts of Lean manufacturing, continuous improvement strategies aim to help organizations reduce costs, lower waste, and increase profit margins.

Over the last year and a half, Wright Global Graphics has been implementing continuous improvement strategies across their four U.S. locations and one international plant. After bringing in an outside consultant to lay the ground work in one small area of the business, the team tweaked and expanded the new philosophy into their other locations. They plan to finish implementing the methods in their third plant within the next couple of months and start in their fourth location this summer.

"After years of being involved in Lean and hearing about it through the industry, I chose Lean for my business because it seemed to be the most simple of the continuous improvement options," said Greg Wright, CEO, Wright Global Graphics. "It certainly rang into our needs for our company."

According to Wright, his company's experience is proof that these tools can make people work better—and we agree. It wasn't long after implementation that Wright started noticing the difference in his business, his employees, and his profits. While they used to work six days a week for 10 hours a piece, now his team is completing the same work in eight hours a day for only five days a week. Essentially, his machine operators are learning how they can get the same amount of work done in a fashion that doesn't require extra hours.

"We're getting rid of the things that make people frustrated at work. Using these strategies, we've been able to produce more with the set workforce. This means we're making more profit and increasing profit shares," said Wright.

What's Your Number?

As mentioned earlier, Wright likes the simplicity of the tools he found through continuous improvement, and this is demonstrated through one of his favorite and most successful implementation strategies: making everyone at his company accountable for a number. The machine operator's number involves how many sheets he's used in a work day. The sales associate is responsible for a specific number of calls. Even the receptionist is responsible for a number—picking up the phone in three rings.

"I want to get people focused on one or two Key Performance Indicators (KPI) that they can hone in on and really understand," explained Wright. "I want to walk up to everyone and say 'What's your number?' and talk about how they did or didn't make their number today—and why."

The Ownership Buy-in

During the 2014 PIA Continuous Improvement Conference in Dallas, TX, Wright learned what he considers the most crucial element of a successful Lean implementation: ownership buy-in. While attending some of the breakout sessions, he listened to a group of managers who really invested themselves into the philosophy, but because the owner of their plant didn't feel the need to learn about or get behind the effort, they were struggling to make continuous improvement plans successful.

"I could hear the frustration from other managers that owners didn't know what they were talking about or how important the issue was to the business. After hearing that, I educated myself in the area. Now when my managers say things like value stream, I know exactly what they are saying and I can offer my support to it," said Wright.

Because Wright oversees five U.S. locations (and one international plant), it's become important to him to have strong leaders at the heads of those plants who can report back to him. However, those representatives have to be champions of continuous improvement as well in order for the venture to be prosperous all around.

"It's really important for your leadership at the plant levels to be champions of continuous improvement as well," stressed Wright. "If they aren't champions of it, they won't succeed."

Tips and Tricks for Success

When asked about providing some advice for aspiring owners and managers looking to implement continuous improvement in their own organizations, Wright mentioned that keeping it simple and visual was the best way to go. When these rules are followed, you ensure that everyone can be involved regardless of their age, skill level, or hesitancy. Of course, celebrating the small wins and shying away from discouragement is a great way to keep the ball rolling, too.

Wright has also found that belonging to an industry organization, like PIA, has helped him stay on track and come up with new implementation ideas. By staying connected to the Printing Industries of America LinkedIn networking group and coming to the PIA Continuous Improvement Conferences, Wright has been able to hear other people's comments, take in some great advice, and get inspired in the process. Those are just some of the ways Wright has found to watch out for the little things.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about Wright Global Graphics at www.wrightglobalgraphics.com or contact Greg Wright at gregw@wrightglobalgraphics.com.

THE INKJET MOMENTUM

WHY THE HYPE IS REAL

Cristina Fernandez, Vice President/General Manager, Continuous Feed Inkjet Business Unit, Xerox

Inkjet offers everything: speed, volume, quality, and personalization. It's time to start paying attention.

The rapid growth seen in the high-speed production inkjet market has been truly stunning to watch. Inkjet will become the de facto technology as print providers grow and push profitability. It gives users the best of both worlds, no longer forcing the tradeoff between speed and volume for image quality, color, and personalization.

As we begin the second quarter of 2016, let's explore where inkjet is headed, the impact it will have, the challenges it must overcome, and the many opportunities it offers.

Why should print providers consider inkjet? Is it worth all the hype?

As previously stated, the continued evolution of inkjet technology is undeniable. According to InfoTrends, production color inkjet page volume is expected to exceed that produced by color toner devices in 2016.

We anticipate rapid advancements in image quality, speed, cost controls, and wider page widths that can further boost productivity. Inkjet will cost effectively address the volume segment that sits between the short runs of digital printing and the longer runs of offset. Over time, inkjet is expected to gain share from each technology.

The most dramatic impact will be in the higher volume band, where inkjet will bring the benefits digital print is best known for—including just-in-time manufacturing and personalization—to run lengths longer than xerography can reach cost effectively.

What key applications most prominently benefit from inkjet?

The majority of inkjet growth is linked with what are considered the fastest growing digital printing applications: transactional documents like bills and statements; promotional pieces, such as brochures, catalogs, and direct mail; and publishing applications, such as books, manuals, and periodicals.

In publishing, inkjet presses deliver true on-demand printing, where books aren't produced until orders are received. By following the demand curve more closely, the press is turned into a virtual document warehouse. This results in benefits such as risk reduction for inventory and warehousing, accelerated time to market, new revenue streams through better reprint management, and ultimately improved bottom-line business results.

In direct mail and promotional applications, inkjet presses accelerate the use of one-to-one and segmented communications incorporating variable color. Inkjet provides many advantages, such as making the impact and value of personalized color print more affordable, accommodating the growing demand for complex personalization, enabling postal discounts, and delivering a strong return on investment.

Inkjet also helps to improve transactional documents, particularly those that incorporate promotions. By including relevant promotional messages, these documents become effective marketing vehicles, encouraging recipients to read and take action. Inkjet provides advantages in enabling the "white-paper facility," as inkjet presses output full-color documents from white paper to eliminate costly offset pre-prints and warehousing.

How does inkjet differ from other printing technologies?

Each type of printing technology (offset, toner, inkjet) offers its own set of benefits depending on volume, image quality, cost, and application needs. But fundamentally, inkjet is a simpler technology because it has fewer moving parts. With inkjet, job setup and turnaround time is reduced as well as work in progress, waste, and labor.

The productivity of inkjet devices can be a game changer. That in itself makes the ROI of inkjet attractive.

What considerations factor into computing the ROI of inkjet?

Calculating the return on investment for an acquisition of inkjet technology can appear daunting, but it can be greatly simplified when breaking apart and evaluating its many components.

First off is the initial capital investment. In relative terms, this cost may be lower than some devices or higher than others, but perhaps more importantly—what device or devices is it replacing? Often, a single high-speed production inkjet printer can replace several less capable machines.

Also consider the capabilities inkjet enables that weren't possible before. For example, increased speed and wider media latitudes open up new opportunities for jobs that used to go elsewhere. This can help you tap into entirely new areas of revenue that either weren't possible—or profitable—with prior solutions.

And while ROI is a calculation of gains enabled through new opportunities, it's also a function of minuses by reducing costs throughout your operation. For example, turnaround time, work in progress, waste, and labor can all be significantly reduced. A dozen existing machines can be replaced with just a few higher-speed inkjet solutions, reducing staffing and square footage requirements.

Consider that in many environments, the traditional printing process has always called for thousands of preprinted offset shells to be printed and stored until a small amount of personalized information was added digitally. Jobs required multiple passes and multiple people, and because these jobs take longer, they often sit partially complete, paid for by you, but not generating revenue. And to make sure enough of the offset shells are on hand to complete a job, a percentage are often unneeded and thrown away.

All of this goes away with an inkjet solution. One day. One person. Virtually no waste.

Which leads to perhaps the biggest consideration of all: productivity. It's the game-changer that can flip the ROI discussion on its head. Because of the high speeds of inkjet solutions, you can produce more in a shift, a day, a year. As is the case in every kind of manufacturing, not only print, the more you produce in a finite amount of time, the more your costs come down. It's true in every business, but nowhere more than ours.

What are the main considerations when buying inkjet?

Since presses can be significant investments, the decision should be evaluated under the lens of having the right volumes and applications, which lead to a cross-over point that justifies the total cost of ownership.

When looking at print requirements, considerations may include printing speeds, page width, substrates, and special inks such as MICR.

Service maintenance costs, inks and consumables, papers (including specially treated and premium priced inkjet papers), and overhead costs should all be considered.

What's next for inkjet?

With the recent launch of the Xerox Rialto 900 roll-to-cut-sheet, narrow web inkjet press, along with Xerox's full line of Impika inkjet presses, print providers already have multiple models and configurations of aqueous inkjet technology to choose from. This selection complements the Xerox CiPress production inkjet systems, whose waterless solid ink minimizes absorption and allows providers to print on plain papers as light as 50gsm, helping to minimize postal fees.

Future innovations and enhancements of inks, heads and papers will further drive up the rate of inkjet adoption and build volumes. Smaller-footprint devices with lower acquisition costs will also make the technology more accessible to those looking to dip their toes into the inkjet pond. Productivity gains will be achieved through workflow automation, which decreases steps and human intervention by automating routines.

We believe the outlook for inkjet is incredibly bright and are excited to be intimately involved in helping to shape its future and continued growth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Cristina Fernandez is vice president/general manager of the Continuous Feed Inkjet Business Unit at Xerox. She was named to this position in October 2015. In this role, Fernandez leads Xerox's investments in the continuous feed inkjet portfolios and serves as the commercial lead on platform choices related to inkjet technology. She is responsible for the unit's marketing, business management, and go-to-market efforts. Prior to Xerox, Fernandez served as the leader of worldwide business development responsible for global operation and performance for Kodak, where she also held multiple management roles throughout her career there. She has extensive international management experience (Asia and Europe) in systems integration, driving solutions, reducing operating costs and improving operational processes worldwide. Fernandez holds a master's degree in International Business and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Florida International University. Contact her at cristina.fernandez@xerox.com

SNOWFLAKES, IDENTICAL TWINS, AND PRESS SHEETS

A LOOK AT PROCESS CAPABILITY

John Compton, Professor Emeritus, Rochester Institute of Technology

A central task of any manufacturing operation is to produce product that meets the customers' requirements. These requirements are often translated into the form of specifications on one or more of the product characteristics. To achieve the highest level of manufacturing quality requires that all of the product produced must conform to the specifications. As a result, the major objective of nearly all quality improvement efforts is to achieve a high degree of conformance to requirements. To this end, it is important to have an understanding of the concept of variability and its relationship to specifications.

The study of quality improvement to a large extent involves the study of variability. The need for such a study is rooted in this fundamental law of nature: variability always exists. Variability is everywhere around us. No two things are exactly the same, no matter how carefully they are chosen or manufactured. The statement is often made that "no two snowflakes are ever identical." In fact, scientists have examined the crystalline patterns of thousands of snowflakes, never finding two that were identical. Perhaps you have known a set of "identical twins." Although at first meeting they may appear to be identical, after many meetings over a period of time it becomes apparent that they are not truly identical. In other words, if the inspection or measurement is close enough, differences will always be found.

This concept can readily be extended to the printing process where thousands of seemingly identical sheets roll off the press. The law of variation guarantees that they will not be identical, no matter what characteristic we measure. Furthermore, it follows that no two rolls of paper, or cans of ink, or printing plates will be identical. When we measure carefully enough, we will always find differences. Variation has been "built in" to the universe. Thus, those quality assurance departments that have been given the charge to eliminate variation are faced with an impossible task!

How are we able to live with such disorder? One answer is that much of the variation encountered is trivial. That we don't worry about the differences in snowflake pattern or between sheets of paper in a ream means that we believe that these differences are small enough to be ignored. This belief (and it can never be more than a belief) must be based on some type of measurement of the objects or events involved. Furthermore, although individual events are never completely predictable, we can indeed discover patterns when we examine large enough numbers of items of the same set. By arranging the observations in a systematic way, we can find "order" in the midst of "disorder." The discovery of such patterns occurs through the collection of data and its interpretation by some simple statistical methods. Thus, one of the first phases in a quality improvement study of a process involves the determination of the amount of variability actually occurring.

Since variation exists in every process, a three-part study, often referred to as a process capability study, is required:

- Find out by measurement the nature of variation actually occurring.
- Determine the amount of variation that is tolerable.
- Compare the variation actually present with that which can be allowed.

The first part of the study involves a) picking a quality characteristic of importance, b) finding a way of measuring it, c) making the measurements on a large enough number of the items (product), and d) determining the amount of variation present in the results.

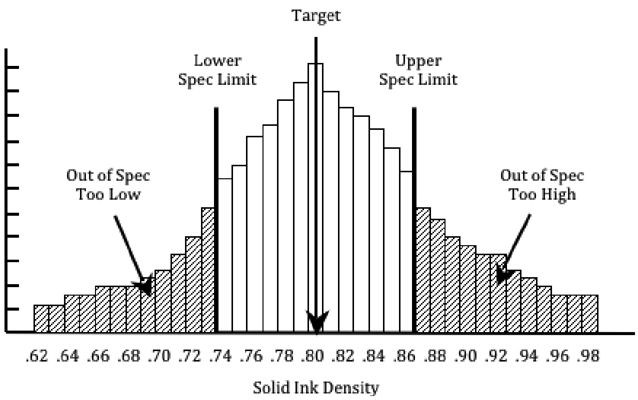
The second part demands that the customers' requirements on the product be expressed in the form of specifications that relate to a measurable characteristic. Specifications typically consist of two parts—the aim and a tolerance. For example, a print standard calls for a total dot gain of 24% +/- 4% for color printing. This means that the desired amount of dot gain is 24%, but if the dot gain is between 20% and 28% it is acceptable. The total tolerance (or allowable variation) is 8% (28% - 20% = 8%). These values have been established by carefully evaluating the appearance of the final product and determining the amount of tolerable change in dot gain. As stated earlier, the goal of the production operation is to turn out product that meets these requirements.

The third part of the study requires a simple comparison of what we have measured to what we can tolerate. The decision will be either that a) the variation is small enough so as not to be a problem or b) the variation is too large and requires that some action be taken.

Consider the following example. The specifications on a certain job call for a solid ink density (SID) of 0.80 +/- 0.10. Thus the aim is 0.80 and the upper spec limit (USL) is 0.90 and the lower spec limit (LSL) is 0.70. The total tolerance is 0.20. Similar jobs have been run on each of two different presses, sheets have been measured, and the results compiled.

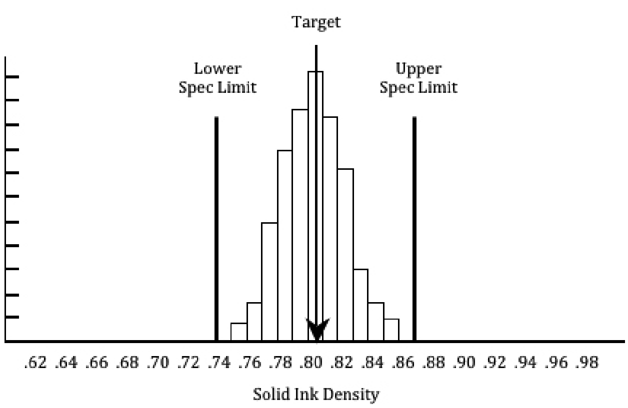
The results from Press A are shown in **Figure 1** where it can be seen that the amount of variation actually present exceeds the total tolerance. In other words, if this press is used to print this job, a considerable amount of non-conforming product will be made, some of which will likely end up in the hands of the customer.

Figure 1: Press A (Not capable of completely meeting requirements)



The results from Press B are shown in **Figure 2**. Here it can be seen that the amount of natural variation present is well within the tolerance set for the process. Nearly all of the product printed on this press will meet the customer's needs, meaning less scrap, less re-work and better productivity.

Figure 2: Press B (Very capable of meeting requirements)



Considering this particular job and its specifications, Press A has a low process capability, while Press B has a high process capability. Press B is obviously the better choice for this job.

In summary, when addressing the desire to improve quality, we must remember that variability always exists and it is necessary to determine its magnitude. Specifications are used to describe the amount of variation we can tolerate. A comparison of the two allows for decisions to be made that will often lead to quality improvement.

PRODUCTIVITY PYRAMID

ACCOMPLISH MORE IN LESS TIME BY CLIMBING THE SEVEN STEPS

Eric P. Bloom, President and Founder, Manager Mechanics LLC

The establishment of an ongoing, organization-wide productivity improvement program requires the right company culture, a continuous improvement mindset, innovative thinkers, and the active support of senior management—but this is not enough. To be successful, it must also have a defined set of processes, the ability to measure and communicate your results, and a clear understanding of how each productivity enhancement provides value to the organization. These processes are established on each of the seven steps on the Productivity Pyramid, which—if followed—creates a company environment where more is done in less time.

The Productivity Pyramid concept states that for productivity improvement activities to be effective and long-lasting, they can't be randomly performed. These activities must be organizationally grounded, systematically implemented, and administratively supported. They must align with your corporate goals and culture, be implemented with formal plans based on anticipated results, and able to be repeated going forward.

By climbing each of the seven steps on the Productivity Pyramid you put your company in a position to reap a windfall of enhanced productivity.

In addition to describing the stepping-stones toward the creation of a successful productivity program, the Productivity Pyramid can also be used to assess your organization's current productivity maturity. The seven steps can help you craft a plan for the future and also asses your current productivity abilities and needs.

Step One: Goal Alignment

The alignment of individual, project, department, and corporate goals is a mainstay of the strategic planning process. This is also true for your productivity goals. As a result, as you define your productivity-related activities, you must also prioritize them based on the answers to these two questions:

- Does this productivity project free up corporate resources that can be redeployed to achieve current corporate objectives?
- Will the productivity project, by its nature, assist in the potential success, efficiency, or cost effectiveness of any currently funded corporate projects?

If one or more answers to the above questions are "yes," then your proposed productivity project is a candidate for funding. Therefore, like all potentially funded projects, it should be prioritized based on its short-term and long-term return on investment (ROI).

Step Two: Holistic Mindset

Organizational productivity must be looked at holistically. All too often, individuals and organizations attempt to enhance their productivity through the improvement of one or two key business activities. It could be improved delegation practices, time management training, and the implementation of email-oriented best practices or other key internal processes. Improvements in each of these areas individually have the potential to provide substantial productivity gains.

By their nature, however, productivity improvements in one area can cause productivity losses in other areas. For example, an effort to reduce meetings may have the adverse effect of increasing emails. Reducing the number of people copied on emails may cause process inefficiencies. Improved time management prioritization techniques may help facilitate individual productivity improvements, but if team member priorities are not properly synchronized, project deadlines can be missed, and as a result organizational infighting can counteract all previous productivity gains.

Step Three: Supportive Culture

As people have personalities, organizations have cultures. Some people are open to change and some are not. Some organizations embrace change as a catalyst for future growth and profitability and some do not. Increasing productivity requires change. If your organization views the ability to change as an important business attribute, then ongoing productivity improvement can be the status quo. If your company is set in its ways, refuses to streamline its processes, and shuns innovation, then your productivity initiatives are unlikely to gain traction.

Step Four: Amplification

Amplification is the implementation of specific productivity amplifiers. Amplification refers to projects that have the specific goal of enhancing organizational effectiveness. These productivity amplifiers are:

- Interactive productivity
- Creative delegation
- Innovative meeting management
- Communication efficiency
- Personal/managerial productivity
- Time management
- Capability-based task prioritization
- Organizational productivity
- Ongoing process improvement
- Asset reuse
- Knowledge storage and transfer

Step Five: Measurement

Productivity projects should be measured not only on the amount of time, money, and resources they save, but also the organizational benefits they generate as a result. This step in the Productivity Pyramid defines the "opportunity cost" which would not have been possible without productivity gains. This realized opportunity cost is the true benefit of enhanced productivity.

Step Six: Productivity Driven Reinvestment

Productivity Driven Reinvestment is an extension and application of the productivity measurement process. Simply put: it forces organizational efficiency by requiring future projects to be funded, at least partially, through the savings of current productivity projects.

This concept can be implemented in three ways. First, if you require a portion of all projects, say 10%, to be funded by productivity savings, then you drive efficiency into existing processes, while still providing needed funding for new initiatives. In effect, this forces managers to continue to search for organizational efficiencies within their existing operations and not just incrementally chase funding for the next hot project. Second, it can be used as a way to fund projects that are proposed after departmental budgets have been finalized. This gives managers a way to self-fund newly arising department activities. Lastly, if for business reasons your organization must keep spending flat, then this technique can be used as a way of funding new projects without increasing your overall budget.

Step Seven: Reiterative

As organizations mature, one of the key factors that drive their scale and profitability is their ability to efficiently and flawlessly perform the same task repeatedly. Regarding productivity enhancement, even though each individual project may take very different forms—such as time management, email reduction, and meeting effectiveness—the overall process by which these initiatives are planned, approved, delivered, and measured should be as consistent as possible. The ability to drive uniformity into the productivity improvement process will allow you to reap greater short-term savings, as well as provide an ongoing framework that will help assure long-term sustainability and maximized cost savings.

By climbing each of the seven steps on the Productivity Pyramid, you put your company in a position to reap a windfall of enhanced productivity. The main question is: how can you use the newly found time, money, and resources that this productivity provides?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Eric P. Bloom is the President and Founder of Manager Mechanics LLC, a nationally recognized speaker, and author of the forthcoming book Productivity Driven Success: Hidden Secrets of Organizational Efficiency. *He is also a nationally syndicated columnist, certified executive coach, and an Adjunct Research Advisor for IDC. He is also a past president of National Speakers Association New England. For more information on Eric Bloom visit www.MrProductivity.com or find him on Twitter at @MrProductivity.*

GOOD LEADERS ASK DUMB QUESTIONS

SIX LEADERSHIP TRAITS IN DEFENSE OF ASKING THE OBVIOUS

Walt Grassl

Paul and Trudy work in a medium-sized company. Trudy was having lunch with Paul after a particularly grueling meeting.

"Paul, I can't believe what just happened in the budget meeting. None of the supervisors had the guts to point out an error the manager kept repeating. Everyone looked at each other, but no one spoke up. I wanted to say something but I was afraid if I was wrong, I would look stupid. As we were leaving, I asked Jim (her supervisor) privately if I was wrong and he said no, the manager was."

Paul said, "I believe good leaders ask dumb questions. It is not only OK, but one must question the obvious and call out the elephant in the room."

He went on to share a quote from his mentor, Sam, who said, "If you ask a question, you may look stupid for five minutes. But, if you don't ask, you stay stupid forever."

People may be afraid to ask dumb questions because of peer pressure. They may lack self-confidence. Whatever the cause, not asking dumb questions diminishes your value to your employer.

Here are six benefits of questioning the obvious:

Courage

Asking dumb questions allows you to develop courage. Courage is the ability to do something that scares you. Like facing most fears, the more we face them, the smaller they become.

Asking a dumb question is often a tough decision. Demonstrating the courage to ask also demonstrates decisiveness—an important trait for leaders.

Asking dumb questions indicates a lot about you. It indicates you are not intimidated by the situation. It indicates you add value as a participant in the meeting. It indicates you represent the silent majority in the audience—the silent majority who had the same question but lacked the courage to bring it up.

Openness

When you ask dumb questions, you acknowledge that you don't have all the answers. You show that you don't know everything. You are seen as more open to being questioned. You don't appear to be superior. You are approachable, relatable, and authentic.

Ask dumb questions to ensure you have all the facts, data, and opinions you need to make higher percentage choices. You will be a trustworthy leader. You will instill confidence.

People are likely to use you as a sounding board. They know you will thoughtfully consider what they say. They know you will honestly question them and offer suggestions. Good leaders value those open and honest people.

Vision

When you have vision, you imagine what might be. Asking dumb questions can help determine creative, out-of-the-box solutions to problems. Your wild idea/question may be totally nuts, but may inspire someone else. They may see a solution not quite as wacky as yours. That solution solves the problem, saves money, and/or greatly improves performance.

Another part of vision is contingency planning. What is your plan B?

If your company is awaiting a widget from a notoriously dependable supplier, questioning their reliability may initially seem to be a dumb question. But, the answer may be, "You're right, we should explore some contingency plans in case they are late. Thanks for reminding us."

Alignment

Many have left meetings comfortable with the decisions that were made, only to suddenly have those decisions change.

At the end of every meeting it may seem dumb to ask, "What have we agreed to?" You get agreement on what decisions were made, who is doing what, and by when. It may often seem dumb. But one day, answering that question will uncover misunderstandings. Clarifying misunderstandings takes minutes, and it can save weeks of lost time and money.

Understanding

When a new process is being deployed, asking questions may be seen as dumb. It may be seen as a sign of resisting change or questioning authority. But, blindly following a new direction can lead to problems. The organization may not get the intended results—not because the change was bad, but because the people implementing the change didn't understand why.

Avoiding asking the obvious can lead to company-wide groupthink. When members of the team blindly accept a new initiative or the direction of a project, there can be a crippling lack of clarity and cohesion.

The path of least resistance often leads to peril. By stepping up and daring to ask the dumb questions you ensure that everyone is focused and on the same page.

Teaching Moments

Good leaders learn to delegate. Delegation requires follow-up. It also requires confidence that the right things are being done the right way. One way to be confident that things are being done right is to ask questions. If they know the answer and assume you are dumb for asking, so what? If the answer you get indicates that they aren't on track, you have an opportunity to correct the course of action.

You will learn whether they grasp the concept. You may be surprised to learn that what you meant is not what they understood. When that occurs, try to explain it another way.

That evening, Trudy thought about Paul's words. She remembered that she had seen others ask dumb questions and nothing bad happened. She remembered an instance when a dumb question turned out to be not so dumb after all. She realized that she could handle feeling dumb for five minutes,if it meant speaking up. She felt she could maximize her value at work.

Her work life got a lot easier. She felt less stressed in meetings. She got relieved looks from her colleagues when she had the courage to ask the obvious.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Walt Grassl is a speaker, author, and performer. He hosts the radio show, "Stand Up and Speak Up," on the RockStar Worldwide Network. Walt has performed standup comedy at the Hollywood Improv and the Flamingo in Las Vegas and is studying improv at the Groundlings School in Hollywood. For more information on bringing Walt Grassl to your next event, please visit www.WaltGrassl.com.

THE RATIOS GO MODERN

PRINTING INDUSTRIES OF AMERICA INTRODUCES THE NEW DYNAMIC RATIOS

Tai McNaughton, Economist, Printing Industries of America

Over the years, the graphic communication industry has gone through a lot of technological changes. We've come a long way from Johannes Gutenberg's invention in 1440. Now, sophisticated presses can produce some of the most spectacular posters, wraps, and packages.

Here at Printing Industries of America, we dedicate our time to helping you keep your business on track with the current trends and technologies. Because of this, we began updating our processes to ensure we meet the needs of the current industry and marketplace.

Staying True to a Legacy

Since 1921, those curious to see how their firm stacks up against similar businesses have found answers with the oldest continuously operating financial benchmarking program in the private sector in the United States: the Printing Industries of America *Ratios* studies. As a tried-and-true resource for comparing similar printers, the data collected from the survey has helped companies determine what parts of their operation need a tune-up the most—and soon. Every year, the *Ratios* compile accurate financial information from hundreds of printing and related graphic arts firms. Then, they use this valuable information to create financial benchmarking tools and include information about assets, liabilities, working capital, salaries, sales, and profits.

Now, as the industry moves into a more technological age, graphic communications companies desperately need an updated way of providing and collecting data for the *Ratios*. This is why we are bringing you the new *Dynamic Ratios!*

Easy Data Collection Process

Those who used the *Ratios* survey in the past know that we go to extraordinary lengths to securely collect and provide usable data for the industry. While still true, we now make it easier to provide the information most important to you and your company.

New Shorter Survey Option

While we will still offer members the option to fill out the traditional 114-line survey, we now offer a condensed version as well. This new shorter version provides a 70% reduction in required information. Now printers need only provide 31 line items to participate.

New Focus on Key Performance Metrics

As you dive deeper into the shorter survey, you'll notice the numbers we ask for are based on key performance metrics. This helps printers simplify management decisions. For example, we now heavily focus on items such as gross profit as a percentage of sales, sales per employee, value added per factory employee, and other important variables.

New Spotlight on the Web-Based Survey

Although not totally new, we are focusing more of our efforts this year on the online survey option. However, participants can still download and fill out Excel and PDF versions of both the short and long *Ratios* survey forms.

Straightforward Financial Benchmarking Reports

With all the data provided, compiling, searching, and using the information sometimes becomes cumbersome. With the new *Dynamic Ratios*, we aim to resolve any confusion for our members with some updates to the way we layout and provide the collected and analyzed data. While printers still have the opportunity to receive traditional reports (PDF or printed), we've also created new and improved ways to get benchmarking information to companies.

New Secure Interactive Dashboard

Starting when the information becomes available, printers can use any device to securely access industry financial averages, operating averages, and profit-leader benchmarks no matter the time of day.

New Instant Graphics

An easily understandable graphic will allow every company to graphically view their company status based on their selected peer group.

New Peer Group Report

In order to get the most out of the new *Dynamic Ratios*, we strongly suggest members take part in the new peer groups. This online tool will allow members to create customized peer group reports by printing processes, products and market segments, firm size, and other variables. An online dashboard will provide this information 24/7.

The new ***Dynamic Ratios*** program will kick off with the normal 2016 *Ratios* survey cycle. The survey will begin in March with an end date of May 31. Margolis Partners CPA firm will continue as a strategic partner for the *Dynamic Ratios* and ensure data integrity, confidentiality, analysis, and report preparation.

For more information about the Ratios *study or how to participate, contact Tai McNaughton at tmcnaughton@printing.org.*

UNDERSTANDING VARIATION: NEW COURSE FROM THE iLEARNING CENTER

Quality improvement, to a large extent, involves the study and reduction of variability. Variability always exists (even in consecutive press sheets, for example), although the variation can be trivial. But as variation increases, quality and consistency decrease. The magnitude and pattern of variation can be discovered through the collection of data and the use of simple statistical methods to interpret the results. The latest addition to the iLearning Center, Understanding Variation, looks at the different causes of variation, how to measure it, and strategies to combat it.

Visit www.printing.org/ilc to learn more.

iLearning Center
www.printing.org/ilc

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Save the date for GRAPH EXPO 16, September 25–28, at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL.

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MARKETING MINUTE

Measuring the success of a marketing campaign is imperative to knowing what strategies work and what need to be changed. However, when you have multiple messages going out to the same audience about the same issue, how do you know which marketing piece worked and which didn't?

Download this month's Marketing Minute exercise at http://prnt.in/MM1604 to learn some simple ways that you can start tracking the success of you marketing campaigns.

Printing Industries of America

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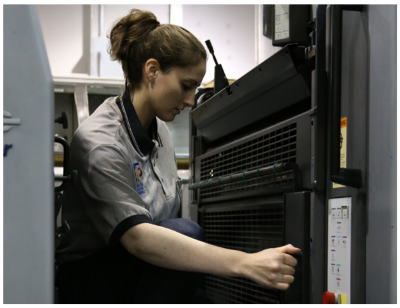

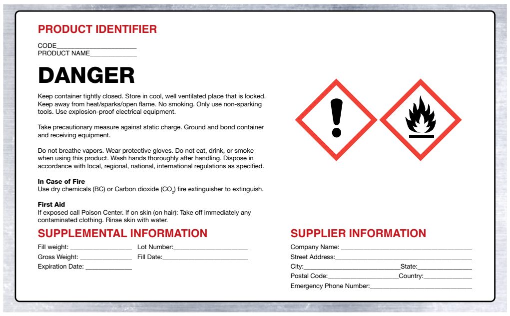
PRODUCT IDENTIFIER

CODE____________________
PRODUCT NAME____________

DANGER

Keep container tightly closed. Store in cool, well ventilated place that is locked. Keep away from heat/sparks/open flame. No smoking. Only use non-sparking tools. Use explosion-proof electrical equipment.

Take precautionary measure against static charge. Ground and bond container and receiving equipment.

Do not breathe vapors. Wear protective gloves. Do not eat, drink, or smoke when using this product. Wash hands thoroughly after handling. Dispose in accordance with local, regional, national, international regulations as specified.

In Case of Fire
Use dry chemicals (BC) or Carbon dioxide (CO_2) fire extinguisher to extinguish.

First Aid
If exposed call Poison Center. If on skin (on hair): Take off immediately any contaminated clothing. Rinse skin with water.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Fill weight: ____________ Lot Number:____________
Gross Weight: ____________ Fill Date:____________
Expiration Date: ____________

SUPPLIER INFORMATION

Company Name: ____________
Street Address:____________
City:____________State:____________
Postal Code:____________Country:____________
Emergency Phone Number:____________

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