

CASE STUDY:
IMPROVING UNIT PERFORMANCE
OF
A CONTACT CENTER

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Improving Organizational Performance

How can you hope to improve your organization's overall functioning when there are so many aspects to consider? Different processes, different people, and even different locations must optimize their operations to survive in today's climate of ever-increasing competition. Each operating unit needs to consider, "How can we contribute to the organizational objectives?"

All too often, management attempts at improving performance focus on the latest recommended "quick-fix." But the quick fixes often fix nothing, because high performance is the product of the right management, the right systems, and the right people – all working in alignment. Instead of concentrating on an isolated issue, it is better to understand how the delicate balance of these components can be achieved. With this in mind, let's examine each in detail.

"Right Management"

Management's role is threefold:

- to determine how each business unit can best contribute to the organization's objectives;
- to establish and maintain the systems that support performance;
- to ensure that the people performing the needed work remain satisfied and committed.

Regardless of the material benefits employees may enjoy, it is the behavior of front-line managers that is critical to both attracting and retaining talented employees. The skill set that was once considered innate among gifted managers has now been well documented and defined. Managers can be trained in the skills needed to keep employees involved, satisfied and committed. There is ample research demonstrating the link between employee satisfaction and increased productivity and reduced turnover.

“Right Systems”

One of the roles of management is to design, implement and maintain the appropriate systems that support performance. The “right systems” include the people systems used to obtain the desired performance from an organization’s workforce. These include:

- *work design;*
- *recruitment and selection;*
- *Performance appraisal,*
- *compensation and rewards; and*
- *training & development.*

“Right People”

An organization’s success is ultimately determined by the quality of its workforce. The “right people” not only can execute the tasks needed to achieve a company’s objectives, they also are a product of and are motivated by the supporting people

systems. Not even the “right management” and “right systems” will make the organization successful if the organization’s workforce is not comprised of the “right people.”

The proper alignment of these components can be examined through their application to a call center. A call center typically adds value to an organization by consistently providing the highest quality service to customers at the lowest possible cost.

- In a typical call center, the *work design* is centralized. Focus is on following policies and procedures. The work tends to be repetitive, and little value is placed on risk taking, innovation or creativity. Instead, emphasis is placed on controlling costs while increasing output quantity and quality.
- *Recruitment and selection* efforts for our hypothetical call center should focus on individuals most likely to work well within the work design. Individuals with solid verbal and quantitative skills who also excel at following clearly defined procedures would be an ideal fit.
- *Performance appraisal* for a call center should gauge total cost, time spent on calls, the number of abandoned calls, new sales, or lost accounts. All these measures reflect the unit’s ability to provide high quality service to customers at the lowest possible cost.
- In this situation, *compensation* might be based on organizational or group performance. These measures reward team productivity. Focus on individual performance, on the other hand, might lead employees to

circumvent the procedures and processes that are vital to achieving the unit's goals.

- For a call center position, *training and development* should focus on the skills needed to meet expectations. The value of following established processes and procedures as a team player might also be emphasized.

This makes sense—how can I apply it to my organization?

Starting at the Beginning: Job Analysis

This critical building block outlines the work design and forms a foundation upon which all other systems are built. Focus on the job, not the people who perform it, as you determine the exact job duties and requirements as well as their relative importance.

Recruitment

Use the data collected in the job analysis to pinpoint the specific knowledge, skills, abilities and experience desired among applicants. Then, maintain a sufficient pool to allow selection of only the very best candidates when they are needed.

Selection

Information acquired during the job analysis is also the basis for either obtaining or creating measures that will identify the candidates most likely to become high

performers. Some positions require similar knowledge and skills and as thus, are well suited to pre-existing tools. However, if the position requires unique knowledge, skills, and abilities, a custom-built tool might be more appropriate.

Compensation and Rewards

A paycheck is only one part of compensation. What other rewards might your employees crave? Some thrive on competition, while others might savor a spirit of community. Opportunities for recognition and advancement might be equally important to others.

Training and Development

Training should be formulated that is suited to target employees in both form and content. When properly designed, developmental tools boost individual performance on tasks identified as necessary to achieve the business unit's objectives.

By beginning with job analysis, we can learn the type of people who will most likely excel at the tasks needed. This information can be used in conjunction with an understanding of the desired outcomes to build the people systems of recruitment, selection, performance appraisal, compensation and training. These systems are pivotal to balancing the management, systems, and people needed for a high-performance organizational unit.