EPICENTRAL

A Newsletter from Epicenter Development Group highlighting ideas that improve organizations

Welcome to Epicenter Development Group's newsletter, EPICentral. The purpose of this newsletter is to highlight fundamental ideas that have helped organizations develop and maintain great manufacturing and service operations. We hope that you find our EPICentral newsletter helpful, and we would welcome your comments on its content.

A Deep Dive of Your Organization Through the Use of Metaphors

One of the first steps towards improving an existing process is to truly understand how it currently works. Unfortunately, although a system might seem simple on the surface, there are often a variety of forces at play that limit an organization's productivity, creativity, quality and overall performance. Until you understand all of these forces, it is often difficult to implement solutions that create real sustainable change. If fact, in some cases, a solution that may seem like a "no brainer" can, in fact, undermine other areas of performance in a negative way. This month's article talks about how a series of metaphors can be used to enhance the way we look at our organizations and to break through some traditional barriers for success.

Most people would agree that we often look at things through "conditioned" eyes. Over time, we start to see what we expect to see instead of what is actually there. In addition, we all look at things in a different way depending upon our own personal and professional background, experience, expectations and relationships with our coworkers. One method for counteracting our limited ways of seeing things and create new insights about our organizations is to use a structured review of organizational metaphors.

In Gareth Morgan's book "Images of Organization", he suggests a number of different metaphors that could provide a more complete understanding of an organization:

- *Organizations as Machines* - (Traditional) People are Components of a Big Machine
- *Organizations as Organisms* - Birth, Maturity, Death, Organizational DNA
- *Organizations as Brains* - Information Processing/Transfer, Learning, Holographic Design

- *Organizations as Culture* - Corporate Culture and Subcultures, Rule Following
- *Organizations as Political Systems* - Interests, Conflict, Power
- *Organizations as Psychic Prisons* - Thinking "Traps", Organizational Control
- *Organization as Flux and Transformation* - Forces that Effect Current Stability and Ability to Change
- *Organizations as Instruments of Domination* - Exploitation, Work Classes, Control

Each of his metaphors offers a different way of considering the dynamics of your organization, and combining them can lead to a number of new insights into how to best effect change.

Thoughts
- A process for how to use these metaphors would be as follows:
  - *Discuss aspects of your organization in terms of each metaphor*. Example: We are like a machine because we have a rigid organizational structure (positions) and all have defined responsibilities and tasks to complete.
  - *Discuss the implications of your discussion (insights)*. Example: Because we have a very rigid organizational structure, it is difficult for us to be flexible when dealing with our clients.
  - *Discuss potential alternatives*. Example: By creating overlap in our roles and responsibilities, we could be more flexible.
- The point of this exercise is to force yourself and your team to consider aspects of your organization from a new viewpoint to gain new insights and a deeper understanding of your business.
- The metaphors suggested by Gareth are only examples. Don't be afraid to create new metaphors, as desired, to enhance your work. The use of metaphors can often lead to new, more useful metaphors being created.

Next Steps

If you would like more information on this topic or other similar types of tools, please contact Bill Proctor with your request at wproctor@epicentergroup.com or 216-702-0952. You can also find previous issues of EPICentral at Newsletters.

Mr. Proctor also speaks on a variety of problem-solving and system design topics that can help companies significantly increase the success and profitability of their businesses. If you are interested in having Bill speak at one of your upcoming meetings/events or would like more information on any of the speaking topics, please visit Speaker Services or you can email sales@epicentergroup.com.

Epicenter Development Group is a unique consulting firm that seamlessly integrates the disciplines of Systems Engineering and Organizational Analysis & Development to create practical design solutions to your toughest challenges. It is on the cutting edge of problem-solving solutions and the creator of a unique process called

GreenRoom Engineering. This process adds greater value and cost savings for clients as compared to traditional engineering methods.

William Proctor, Epicenter's founder and president, has provided services around the country to more than 100 companies consisting of a variety of organizations; and Epicenter continues to grow as a resource for firms of all sizes.

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Epicenter News

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