

# The Competitive Advantage

P Squared Consulting

*Maximizing the Synergy of People and Process Improvement*

## Building Highly Effective Teams

By Scott R. Playfair, President, P Squared Consulting

### What is significant about these events?

☞ *Spacecraft explores and maps Mars*

☞ *Affordable personal computers revolutionize our lives*

☞ *The human genome is completely mapped*

**None of these incredible things could have been accomplished without teams!**

Because of the synergy (the whole is greater than the sum of the parts) created, teams can always out perform an individual effort. Always!

So what is a team? A team is a group of individuals...

- ☞ Who are committed to achieving common organizational objectives;
- ☞ Who meet regularly to identify and solve problems and improve processes;
- ☞ Who work and interact openly and effectively together;
- ☞ and Who – most importantly - produce results.

Most companies now understand that their only source of long term competitive

advantage is their employees. Because they understand this, they begin well intentioned Employee Involvement or Empowerment Programs/ Teams. Yet, many of these programs never achieve success, because the programs seem to wander aimlessly, unfocused or are presented with problems that the employee teams are not equipped to solve.

Whether you have embraced the concept yet or not, you already have teams in your organization. Every group or department that consists of a supervisor and that person's direct reports is really a team. Every day those teams perform and manage processes that are

their own. They know these processes better than any one else in your organization. And who better to improve those processes than the team that "owns" those processes. When a problem is identified in any of a team's processes, they typically bring together another type of team – a project team – to find the root cause of the problem and to solve it.

When companies talk about "Team Building", one's natural inclination is to think of some sort of adventure challenge or whimsical game. There is this weird myth that if we can play some "fun" game together without killing each other, then this will increase our future ability to work well together on a real

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## What Does Food Have to Do With Stress?

### Tips to Simplify Your Life

In this segment on stress, we will look at the connection between the foods you eat and the stress you feel. Many smokers reach for a cigarette when feeling stressed. But did you know that nicotine increases your stress levels by speeding up your heart rate? If you are caffeine sensitive, too much may make you feel anxious and stressed out. But what you eat can also affect your stress level!

#### Complex Carbohydrates

Foods high in complex carbohydrates like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans can give you long-term energy and can help fortify your body against the effects of stress.

#### Sugar

While sugar can give you a quick energy boost, it will leave you feeling more tired almost immediately. To see this effect

firsthand, try this experiment: hold your arms out to the side and ask another person to push down on them. Notice how well you are able to resist their pressure. Then dissolve a sugar cube (or one tsp. of sugar) under your tongue. Wait for 30 seconds, then have the other person try to push down on your arms again. You'll be amazed at how much strength you have suddenly lost!

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## Building Highly Effective Teams (cont'd)



*“A team is a group of individuals who produce results.”*

life project. Nice idea, but unfortunately team building isn't a game. Thus, team building must be centered around getting “real work” done.

For a team to be an effective, high performing group of individuals, four key elements must be in place.

The first element is a **Well-defined Mission or Goal**. What is the team's unique reason for being; a clear direction and clarity on what specifically they are tasked with doing. Do they understand what they are being asked to do and *why* it is important? Without this well-defined mission, a team can find themselves crossing undesirable boundaries, lacking direction and floating aimlessly without progress. A clear mission needs to be established and agreed upon from the very beginning. Team involvement in identifying the team mission will increase each member's buy-in and commitment. So, of utmost importance is that team members define the team mission and work in unison toward reaching their goals.

The second element is **Management Support**. Any team effort is doomed from the beginning if it isn't receiving internal support from management. For example, has management provided the team with the essential training it needs to get the job done? Are team members meeting in a desirable location, and do they have the necessary tools and support to complete their tasks? Does management show interest in the team's progress? This level of support speaks volumes to team members, boosting morale and ensuring all members that senior

management notices and appreciates their efforts toward achieving the defined goals.

The third element is a set of **Operating Norms**. Operating norms represent a clear set of agreements about how each member of the team will behave and how the team will work together. When the team gets together, their agenda is like a road map and their operating ground rules ensure that the team will have a smooth ride. Ground rules should include details such as:

- ☞ Where, when and how often the team will meet
- ☞ What behavior is expected from each team member
- ☞ Which method will be used for decision making
- ☞ What information will be shared, and how

The results or “minutes” of each team meeting should be a clearly defined list of action items – mutually agreed to by all team members. The minutes should also document any decisions that were made in the meeting. In doing that, all members of the team are committed and accountable for follow-up and all decisions that were made are communicated and not repeated six months later.

The final element is a **Commonly Shared Understanding of the Team Roles**. For each member of the team including the leader, it is important to understand what is expected of them - that all members must contribute and exhibit constructive behaviors. The leader should guide without dominating, should keep the group on track and provide the essential focus on meeting

purpose and the agenda. Each team member should provide constructive participation – contributing and listening to the view of others. And, above all, each team member must be trusted to prepare for the next session and come through with their assignments.

Another extremely important role that is often overlooked, is that of the facilitator. This person is not a member of the team and doesn't get into the content of the team discussions. The facilitator focuses on the meeting process and the use of proper tools which ensures team effectiveness.

In a perfect world, teams would be comprised of capable individuals who can solve problems and reach attainable goals. The perfect team would be made up only of members who can work in unison and reach mutually agreed upon goals.

However, it is not a perfect world, and teams are not always the perfect combination of people and ideas. In fact, many managers believe that teams are more trouble than they are worth. In that case, teams may be given little direction, no tools to complete their tasks, no training, and no clear model to help them identify the process from the beginning to the end.

Many organizations may soon be rethinking how to address their attitudes towards company teams. If you seriously consider providing your teams with a solid foundation, a proven model to follow, and enthusiastic support, your teams will achieve high levels of success and most importantly, achieve significant business results that impact the bottom line.

## Implementing Change – the first step

### Process Improvement Tool Box



*“Create an environment in which you build quality into the product or service rather than inspecting it out.”*

The first step in developing a systems thinking culture is creating an environment in which doing the right thing right, the first time, becomes important. It begins by building quality *into* the product or service rather than inspecting it *out*. That begins by helping every employee develop the standard of excellence to make that a reality. Continuous improvement is real and not just an empty expression designed to get more from employees. Focus on the external customer is constant and measured. Actions are taken to improve outcomes. Employees are treated with respect for their knowledge and their ability to solve problems, and customers are asked for feedback.

The role of company leadership is critical. Management must implement the behaviors that reinforce their belief in the value of their people. This creates a climate that is designed to encourage thinking and questioning. This will sometimes require the courage to make radical changes. Success is totally dependent upon the commitment and leadership of top management.

Ensuring profitable growth requires that we examine current beliefs, values and strategies, to see if there is a better way. Managing with a systems thinking orientation prevents the building of department “silos”. Rather than throwing problems over the wall for the next silo or department to handle, the focus is on improving the internal customer/ supplier links as a strategy to better serve the external customer and achieve a competitive advantage.

Under this new strategy, an old paradigm is broken: an organization is not greater than the sum of its parts. It is greater as a consequence of the cohesive interrelationships of its parts.

Every business activity is connected up-stream as well as down-stream. Everyone is dependent upon their internal and external suppliers to give them the input which allows them to do their job and to satisfy their internal and external customers. This is known as the customer/ supplier linkage and reflects how true and lasting strength can be created through building a strong chain. And just as a chain is

only as strong as its weakest link, so too is an organization's customer/ supplier linkage. It recognizes that solving one problem can create others if a leader's focus is too narrow or if management fails to look at the longer term, larger picture – the system.

As the rules of competition change, management must adapt or risk being left in the shadow of a new industry leader. Adapting means changing. Eventually every business will need to change the way it conducts its business. The nature of business is being redefined and successful organizations adjust. The question is not *whether* to change, but *how* to change.

For more information about developing a continuous process improvement culture at your organization, please contact P Squared Consulting.

Information/excerpt taken from "Cycle Time Reduction" and printed with permission by Total Quality Institute, P.O. Box 621102, Orlando, FL 32332

**99.9% PURE QUALITY**

In the USA it would mean:

- ? One hour of unsafe drinking water per month
- ? Two unsafe landings at O'Hare Airport each day
- ? 16,000 lost pieces of mail per hour
- ? 20,000 incorrect drug prescriptions each year
- ? 500 incorrect surgical operations performed each week
- ? 50 newborn babies dropped at birth by doctors each day
- ? 22,000 checks deducted from the wrong account each hour
- ? Your heart fails to beat 32,000 times each year

**Is 99.9% quality adequate?**

## Recently Overhead...

A recent client's Business Services Center, that was just rated the best in a world-wide competition, attended the P Squared Process Improvement training and had this to say:

*“The material discussed in class will play a vital role in my current job responsibilities – it gave me some very useful tools I can use immediately!”*

*“The course went beyond just training by immediately applying the material to a case study.”*

*“The team was provided with a very challenging and well thought out case to analyze.”*

*“The instructor was excellent, passionate and memorable. He made the learning easy and motivated us – everything was in laymen's terms.”*

## Who's Packing Your Parachute?

Charles Plumb was a US Navy jet pilot in Vietnam. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy hands. He was captured and spent 6 years in a communist Vietnamese prison. He survived the ordeal and now lectures on lessons learned from that experience!

One day, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, "You're Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. You were shot down!"

"How in the world did you know that?" asked Plumb.

"I packed your parachute," the man replied. Plumb gasped in surprise and gratitude. The man pumped his hand and

said, "I guess it worked!"

Plumb assured him, "It sure did. If your chute hadn't worked, I wouldn't be here today."

Plumb couldn't sleep that night, thinking about that man. Plumb says, "I kept wondering what he had looked like in a Navy uniform: a white hat; a bib in the back; and bell-bottom trousers. I wonder how many times I might have seen him and not even said 'Good morning, how are you?' or anything because, you see, I was a fighter pilot and he was just a sailor." Plumb thought of the many hours the sailor had spent at a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship, carefully weaving the shrouds and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he didn't know.

Now, Plumb asks his audience, "Who's packing your parachute?"

Everyone has someone who provides what they need to make it through the day. He also points out that he needed many kinds of parachutes when his plane was shot down over enemy territory - he needed his physical parachute, his mental parachute, his emotional parachute, and his spiritual parachute. He called on all these supports before reaching safety.

Sometimes in the daily challenges that life gives us, we miss what is really important. We may fail to say hello, please, or thank you, congratulate someone on something wonderful that has happened to them, give a compliment, or just do something nice for no reason. As you go through this week, this month, this year, recognize people who pack your parachutes.

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*"Every experience is a learning experience. Every time we try something--win or lose--we learn, we grow, we attain more confidence and competence for the next time."*

...Pat Williams  
Basketball executive




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*"A strong positive attitude will create more miracles than any wonder drug."*

...Patricia Neal  
Actor

## www.snopes.com... The Urban Legends Reference Page Web Site of the Quarter

However, this site is more than just urban legends. Urban legends are a specific type of folklore, and many of the items discussed on this site do not fall under the folkloric definition of "urban legend." They are following the more expansive popular (if inaccurate) use of "urban legend" as a term that embraces not only urban legends but also common fallacies, misinformation, old wives' tales, strange news stories, rumors, celebrity gossip, and similar items.

An "urban legend" is not the same thing as a "fictional tale" although many people

mistakenly use the term in that sense (e.g., "That's not true; it's just an urban legend!"). A tale is considered to be an urban legend if it circulates widely, is told and re-told with differing details (or exists in multiple versions), and is *said* to be true. Whether or not the events described in the tale ever *actually* occurred is completely irrelevant to its classification as an urban legend.

For example, the tale about a student who mistakes a math problem thought to be unsolvable for a homework assignment and solves it is an urban legend, even though

something very similar did once happen in real life. The tale is still an urban legend, however, because over the years many of its details (i.e., when it happened, where it happened, the identity of the student, the reaction of the student's instructor) have changed as it has spread.

So go check out the lore associated with Coke? , driving and cars, politics and legal issues, the military, computers and potential viruses, the Titanic, weddings and love, even today's news and the newest legend to be posted.

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*"You can't see the future  
through a rearview mirror."*

...Peter Lynch  
Business executive

## What Does Food Have to Do With Stress? (cont'd)

### Caffeine

In sufficient doses, caffeine almost perfectly mimics the fight or flight response – it causes the pulse to speed up, breathing rates to slightly increase and blood pressure to rise. If you have physical symptoms of stress, cut out

caffeine for one week and see if your symptoms decrease. Remember to eliminate caffeine from sources like chocolate, soda and over-the-counter medications (diuretics, diet pills and headache remedies).

A word of advice: if you are a long time caffeine lover, sudden withdrawal can bring on physical symptoms including headaches. Wean yourself off caffeine slowly and drink lots of water to help flush the residue out of your body.

## About Our Organization...

P Squared (P<sup>2</sup>) is focused on working with companies to maximize their human capital through the facilitation of positive change. We accomplish this by the use of our expertise in the following core areas:

- ☞ Team Building at All Levels
- ☞ Training and Development
- ☞ Team-based Process Improvement
- ☞ Cutting edge HR Practices

P<sup>2</sup> is a nationally known management consulting and human resource development firm based in Houston, Texas. We have helped small, medium,

and Fortune 100 companies with equal effectiveness. P<sup>2</sup> has a staff of seasoned professionals, highly experienced in its areas of expertise.

At P<sup>2</sup> Consulting, we believe that people are your most valuable resource. Our focus is getting people to do more and feel great about it. We help them develop an insatiable desire for continued personal and professional growth and improvement - which is a win for everyone.

Our specialty is helping clients develop cultures where continuous improvement,

higher levels of achievement, measurable standards of excellence, and exceeding customer expectation prevail. And to assist clients in sustaining true .....**Competitive Advantage!**

Offices in Texas and South Carolina. Contact us by phone at (936) 271-0712 or email at p2mc@wt.net Visit our web site at www.p2mc.com

**We look forward to hearing from you soon!**

*Scott Playfair, President  
Jan Barnett, Director, Sales & Marketing*

## The Parable of the Boiled Frog

### Brain Food

Maladaptation to gradually building threats to survival is so pervasive in system studies of corporate failure that it has given rise to the parable of the "boiled frog."

If you place a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will immediately try to scramble out. But, if you place the frog in room temperature water, and it doesn't scare him, he'll stay put. Now, if the pot sits on a heat source,

and if you gradually turn up the temperature, something very interesting happens. As the temperature rises from 70 to 80 degrees F., the frog will do nothing. In fact, he will show every sign of enjoying himself.

As the temperature gradually increases, the frog will become groggier and groggier, until he is unable to climb out of the pot. Though there is nothing restraining him, the frog will sit

there and boil. Why? Because the frog's internal apparatus for sensing threats to survival is geared to sudden changes in his environment, not to slow, gradual changes.

Is your company a learning organization or a frog? Can you adapt to the change necessary to achieve true **competitive advantage?**

... Excerpted from: "The Fifth Discipline  
The Art & Practice of the Learning  
Organization" by Peter M. Senge