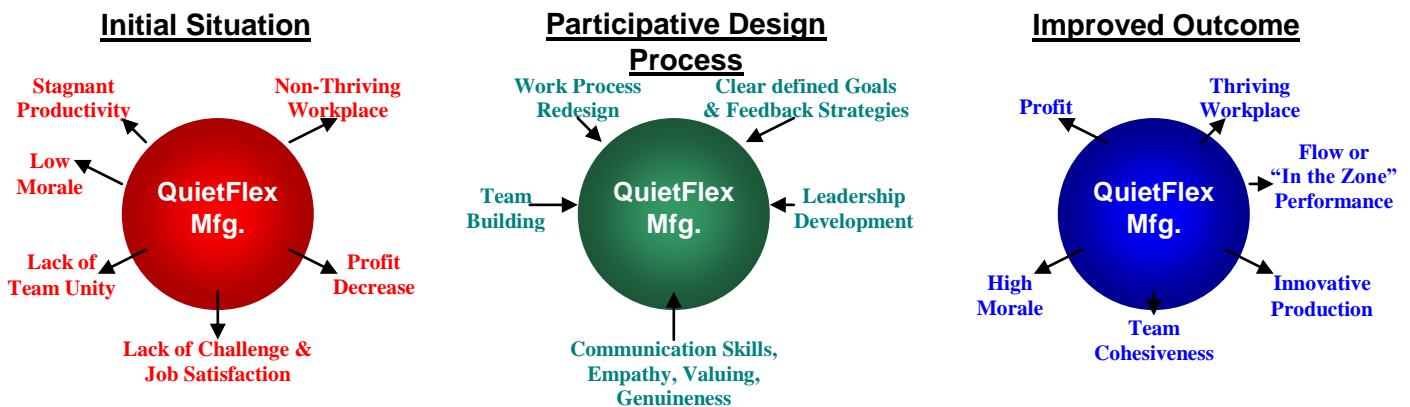




Stop the Union Improving Results at a Manufacturing Plant

The Situation

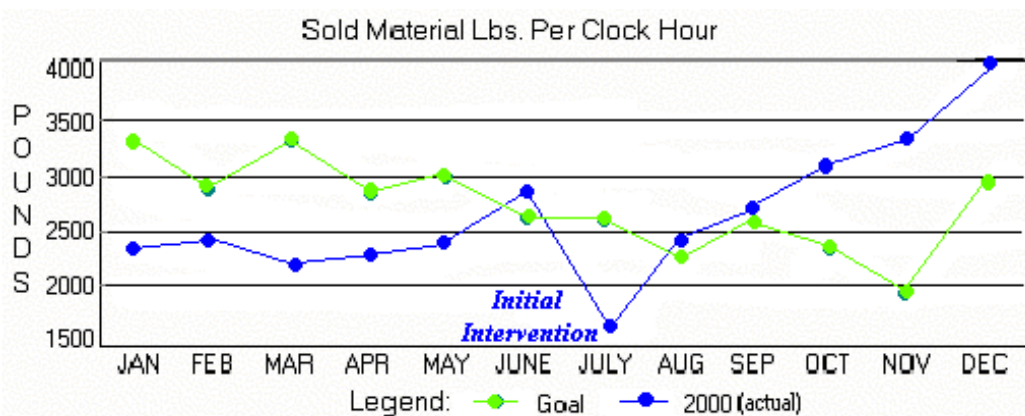
QuietFlex Manufacturing had a problem. QuietFlex manufactures air-conditioning duct parts, supplies, and accessories in the HVAC industry. Productivity needed to be improved, and one department was in conflict amongst themselves and with the company. Meetings were disintegrating into arguments over emotional issues, rather than yielding constructive discussions toward solving production problems and improving the workplace. Workers tended to bring nonspecific complaints to management, making resolution difficult, even though CEO Dan Daniel's priority was to create a thriving work environment. These miscommunications caused workers in one department to question their confidence in the company's leadership.



CCI Redesign Results

Mr. Daniel reports the situation at QuietFlex has dramatically improved. Workers in one department have been able to increase production from 2500 lbs per hour to 4000 lbs (62,5%) and continue to progress. In the meantime, scrap and reject have been reduced from 12% to .3%. The shipping department was able to reach 9 errors per million products shipped. Safety has greatly improved, since the work redesign. People's ability to participate has greatly improved the speed and quality of production.

People at all levels of QuietFlex are pleased with the results, says Mr. Daniel. There are "more pounds being pushed out the door, and since people are paid by the piece, we redesigned the pay structure so there are incentives to reduce scrap and waste further, and improve product quality. Employee earnings are already up by 30%. Our employees can produce more and not be as tired." Through work process design, employee hourly pay increased from \$11 to \$14. The business results have been decisive and continue to improve.





How CCI Made a Difference

By incorporating participative strategies at QuietFlex, employees have been given a role in solving future problems. Participative Design has “given the managers a way to deal with specific issues. Now they know to ask the employees to really define the problem and what they think the solution should be.” Mr. Daniel is pleased CCI helped QuietFlex both increase quality production and communicate with their workers. “I ask everyone to bring me solutions with their problems,” he says.

CCI also worked in the most troublesome area of the plant. He “threw CCI into the lion’s den,” by asking them to work with a group of workers so disgruntled, and so cut off from management, that they had asked the union to intercede on their behalf. As in the glass plant, CCI helped the duct workers develop detailed outlines of the work flow and define their problems. The workers proposed a set of solutions, and the management responded by detailing the changes they were willing to make, and setting a timetable for implementation. Now that most of the changes have been implemented, productivity is up over 30%; because compensation is tied to productivity, morale and pay for this group has also improved substantially. CCI opened the lines of communication between these workers and management, resolving the immediate issues and setting up a framework for future problem-solving.

Mr. Daniel is now a believer; the results at QuietFlex prove that Participative Design is a flexible and comprehensive model that can be used across industries and at all levels. The workers at QuietFlex have raised the quality and rate of production, and greater productivity means higher wages. They have learned to innovate solutions. Participative Design has helped all the people at QuietFlex reach their individual and common goals, and provided them with a framework for continued success.

The Task

Mr. Daniel wanted to help the QuietFlex employees be satisfied and challenged in their jobs, and feel important to the company’s overall success. He needed a way to “shift the focus from emotional issues to factual issues that I could do something about,” and hoped to “increase the production rate and decrease the amount of physical labor so our employees felt that the job had more value.” QuietFlex needed to move quickly to continue competitive production, and make plans to avoid a recurrence of the situation. Mr. Daniel wanted to bring everyone together around a set of common goals, reduce stress and physical labor, and find new ways to solve problems into the future.

Mr. Daniel had attended a Caridas Consulting International (CCI) workshop about using Participative Design to build individual involvement in company success. He said, “It was a good seminar for strategic executives, but I initially questioned how well it would work on the plant floor.” He contacted CCI to tailor a program for QuietFlex. Mr. Daniel sought an approach in which all stakeholders could win. He valued the talents and skills of his people and wanted to bring out those strengths to build internal capability. He knew CCI specialized in improving performance and productivity through people. The task was to improve the quantity and quality of production, increase morale, and improve communications to manage problems effectively over the long term.

How Participative Design Works

Mr. Daniel was eager for solutions that would work for everyone at QuietFlex. He had been intrigued by CCI's participative strategies, and knew that such an approach made sense for his company. The best solutions arise from the daily needs of work, and the best-informed people are those who are doing the work. Participative Design calls for change in the location of responsibility, so the people doing the work initiate the changes. People are encouraged to be self-managing, though not autonomous. Managers provide redesign guidelines, so that everyone contributes to the process and develops reasonable expectations for change. Mr. Daniel was eager to see how Participative Design could both address the employees' needs and improve the bottom line at QuietFlex.

The company's initial work redesign sessions lasted two days for each shift. CCI helped participants define and evaluate their current work process and make suggestions for improvement. Certain features of the production process were not flexible; CCI got the group to focus positively on what could be changed. Initially, work redesign sessions were difficult because people were not convinced there would be any real change. As they saw their suggestions being implemented, people began to improve their productivity and commitment to the company, as well as their own expectations and morale. Plans created within this collaborative framework earned the commitment of everyone on board. People were eager to implement the plans of their own making. They became innovative problem-solvers, and as issues arose, they found the initiative to create solutions. CCI conducts follow-up sessions with each area every six months.

Some of the benefits of Participative Design are:

- Employees apply their own skills and talents to improve productivity.
- People take responsibility for solving their own work process issues.
- Employees increase commitment as a result of having a say in their work.

Value Added Service

CCI recognized that positive business results could not be sustained and company-wide improvements would not be complete without guaranteeing their successful delivery. QuietFlex leadership realized they needed to improve employee relations immediately. Enhanced communication and conflict resolution skills have made the workplace conducive to the introduction and execution of new ideas. Now QuietFlex keeps employee relations strong by helping managers be quality communicators. CCI consultants helped managers develop:

- basic communication skills, with an emphasis on solving business issues
- conflict prevention and resolution skills so a positive work environment is maintained
- advanced communication strategies preparing the manager for difficult and complex scenarios

Immediate feedback from top managers shows these skills gives them a sense of interdependent control and improves their relations with employees. The managers are eager to further develop their communication skills and build on their initial accomplishments.

For further information on CCI or Participative Design Process, please contact Evangeline Caridas at 713-629-5692 or visit our website www.flowmanagement.net.