# A 3-STEP WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT APPROACH TO ENSURE A MULTI-LAYERED ORGANIZATION MEETS ITS QUARTERLY GOALS

## Organizations Want a Success Driven Culture – Most Unintentionally Promote Failure

Harvard Business Review (HBR) published finding in 2012 stating that 10% of an organization's operational budget is lost due to inconsistent performance. Human resource groups, including Gallup, polled various businesses and determined, on average, that up to 2/3rds of employees become demotivated from their work experience. Being demotivated is a principle cause of inconsistent performance. It is not about employees wanting more financial incentives from their organization, on the contrary. So, what prominent actions within an organization are causing employees to become demotivated, promoting inconsistent performance?

Dr. Peter Drucker and Dr. W. Edwards Deming, czars of business management, insist that if organizations want to be financially healthier, it is the responsibility of leadership to ensure consistent and successful performance from their employees. When failed expectations do occur, if unchecked, many managers instead promote a downward, spiraling cycle causing more failure and inconsistent performance. Again, the issue driving this downward cycle is not based on financial incentives, but on three factors involving how management deals with its workforce: (1) time, (2) focus and (3) intensity.

The cycle starts when leadership spends more time reacting to failure rather than ensuring employee success. If an employee gets more intense time from management on failure rather than success, failure naturally becomes the focus. Both manager and employee can potentially become demotivated because both perceive that they cannot do good work for their organization. Inability to be successful is demotivating! The downward cycle gets worse when line management puts an unbalanced emphasis on process, without ensuring a team has the ability to successfully follow it. Assumptions are made and communication about success is neglected.

Surprisingly, it all starts with good intentions: people caring about doing good work! The manager wants to do well for his boss; and the employee wants to do well for his manager. Fear and the stress of failure start to promote the downward cycle, continued by disapproving conversations, unintentional arguments and eventual finger pointing. Most are unintentional, natural responses to a projected inability to succeed.

The cycle can be stopped by proactively identifying gaps, including those hidden, that limit an individual or team's ability to meet expectations. After identification, those gaps must be quickly closed to ensure that the likelihood of a team's success is improved, before adverse operational costs are incurred. Likelihood of success is not a "yes" or "no" state of potential performance, but depends on the consistent alignment of the workforce to achieve management expectations, i.e., achieve success. These alignment levels need to be continually monitored and quickly addressed when gaps are identified. The key is to be proactive about a manager's (1) time, (2) focus and (3) intensity success, instead of reactive about failure.

This proactive ability to quickly and continuously identify and close workforce alignment to meet expectation gaps in order to improve a team's likelihood of success is noticeably absent in today's reactionary business culture. Because of this absence, many business issues are band-aided with false assumptions or misinformation leading to misalignment, where the fear of failure is perpetuated. These alignment gaps are the cause of the HBR's findings. Alignment gaps limit a team's ability to reliably achieve successful outcomes, i.e., consistently meet business expectations, overly a quarterly financial period.

If an organization wants to achieve excellence and spend efficiently, management needs to master the ability to quickly identify and close alignment gaps to improve a team's ability to meet expectations. The bigger and more layered an organization becomes, the greater the need to have visibility into these gaps and the quality to which they are addressed. It is unaddressed gaps, offering limited or no visibility for leadership to take action, that kill the organization's true performance potential in reaching quarterly and yearly goals.

## Three Step Approach to Continually Focus on Creating Successful Results

Over the last 30 years, the three step approach has been developed and refined to ensure that management can (1) identify alignment gaps that limit teams in achieving success, (2) permanently, quickly and efficiently close those gaps, and (3) have visible, objective knowledge to continually improve alignment in meeting business expectations. The bottom-line is that the three step alignment approach, in a very straight-forward manner, focuses management and the workforce on continuously improving the organization's likelihood of success in reaching quarterly and yearly goals.

Having decades to refine this approach, all three steps are now condensed into a self-guiding form, making it easy for teams to follow and achieve results. During this time, this approach has also been streamlined to allow managers to receive "actionable" knowledge from employees within minutes from using the form. "Actionable" knowledge is visible using an automated business dashboard, see example below.



**Dashboard Identifying and Improving Alignment Gaps - and Related Cost Reductions**

The dashboard (shown above) is configurable and displays continuous cost reductions as a result from teams completing all three steps. The three steps are:

**Step 1.** This step involves identifying alignment gaps in being successful in meeting expectations, including issues that normally remain hidden and promote finger-pointing. Because of the evolutionary advancements made over the years, this step takes minutes to complete. Within minutes, the degree in which a team is likely to be successful, i.e., the gaps, becomes objectively revealed.

**Step 2.** This step involves closing the alignment gap by measurably improving the alignment for employees to meet management expectations through achievable action items. Step 2 quantitatively translates the results from Step 1 to provide vertical and horizontal visibility into a group's alignment, as described in the business dashboard above.

A theory of constraints analysis is applied to the numeric conversion algorithm, combined with a weighting factor defined by the organization, to determine the lowest to highest level of alignment to successfully meet expectations with assigned tasks, i.e., the biggest to smallest gaps. This approach supports a peer-to-peer collaborative process in overcoming barriers to permanently close those alignment gaps and measurably improve a team's likelihood to meet expectations.

Uses a rapid group problem solving, collaboration and consensus process, the resulting synergy quickly and efficiently finds practical solutions based on the specific needs of the person being supported. A natural by product are action Items that are displayed using the business dashboard previously shown. This allows for needed visibility and feedback throughout the organization, where teams are set up to cause financial reductions, improved teamwork and wise decision making.

**Step 3.** This step involves using actual results as a learning and growth process for employees to more effectively achieve goals in the next financial quarter. The results of this step can be automatically displayed using the previously shown business dashboard. This approach provides a simple, self-correcting feedback process which ensures employee efforts are translated into learning value (lessons learned). This approach allows employees to objectively view their results and categorize what was learned from the experience of "doing." Each category represents an environment that influences an employee's ability to successfully meet business expectations by being better aligned to do the work.

The categories are: (1) Outside Influences (i.e., Global Environment), (2) Structures/Processes/Formats used by the Organization (i.e., Business Environment), (3) Team and Peer Dynamics (i.e., Social Environments), and (4) Individual Capabilities and Motivations to do good work (i.e., Internal Environment). The learning format is focused on either "what worked" or "what didn't work." This approach helps the employees focus on one or both, depending on their observed outcome. This approach ensures that whatever the results, the learning is recognizable, sometimes profound, and always promotes a success-focused culture.

## Successes Prove Three Step Approach Ideal for Multi-Layered Organizations

This three step alignment approach has been refined for over 30 years within a variety of multi-layered government and commercial organizations with noteworthy success. Testimonials and case studies are available on the Catalyst Technologies website at www.catalysttechnologies.com. This approach was first used as part of a project manager's tool bag, where it supported Department of Defense managers in recovering a failed billion dollar program involving national security. The alignment approach then migrated for use in supporting large commercial projects, including a NATO program that was also in jeopardy of successful completion.

Consistently, the three step alignment approach has had dramatic successes in ensuring project teams have the highest alignment in meeting expectations. It has been used within a wide variety of industries, small to large, commercial and government. In all cases, the three step approach was a welcomed highlight for everyone to use within the organization.

Without surprise, employees want to have a high alignment in showing their true potential to management. Line management wants to promote organizational excellence, where their assigned tasks are completed reliably, efficiently and with quality, independent of the circumstances or situations that might challenge the outcome. Senior management values this type of success-focused knowledge to better plan, and to ensure quarterly and yearly goals are reached. Overall, an organization enjoys the ability to spend less to reach goals more reliably.

## Next Steps: Improving Workforce Alignment to Business Expectations Demo

"Seeing is believing" and an experiential demonstration delivered in three phases allows potential users a firsthand experience, where each phase provides measurable ROI value. Based on previous successes over the last 30 year period when using this three phase demonstration approach, user groups have benefited by being able to measurably experience a wiser, more efficient means to achieving successful results. The goal of these three phases is for participants to experience this claim firsthand.

The three phases are described below, taking between 8 to 12 hours depending on the issues an organization wishes to resolve, and are based on the three steps described in the previous sections. The first two phases can be combined into one session. Again, the goal is for each phase to prove value in order to proceed to the next phase.

**Phase I (1/2 day session):** The goal of this phase is to have a selected group assess and discover any gaps with their alignment in meeting business expectations. This session takes from 2 to 4 hours, based on the needs of the participants and is in two parts. The first part helps management understand expectations in an outcome. It helps to define the big picture and immediate needs. The second part focuses on assessing any gaps in workforce alignment to wisely and efficiently meet these expectations. At the end of Phase I, the participants will have measurably determined alignment gaps focusing on core issues and how they need to be approached.

**Phase II (1/2 day session):** The goal of this phase is to improve the alignment in meeting expectations by rapidly and effectively resolving core issue using the problem solving structure presented. The key to Phase II is a hands-on, half-day workshop where participants use the form to break barriers associated with core issues that close gaps and improve workforce alignment in meeting the defined expectations. Phase II allows participants to experience this evolutionary rapid problem solving approach first-hand. Rapid because what normally takes days or weeks of problem solving is done within hours focused on resolving the root issues. At the end of Phase II, the participants have addressed the root issues and determined the needed actions to measurably improve their alignment in meeting their organization's expectations.

**Phase II I (1/2 day session):** The goal of this phase is to determine potential next steps for organizational implementation. Phase III consists of a final two to four hour meeting with decision makers to review results and ROI benefits. Using the data from Phase I and Phase II, a green/yellow/red business dashboard along with supporting data makes it easy to participants in this last phase to interpret the results to determine measurable ROI benefits. Testimonials and firsthand accounts of Phase I and II participants are part of this final session.

During Phase III, the review of the business dashboard shows how the data generated from the two previous phases demonstrates the following areas of benefits from the alignment process: (1) cost reductions; (2) improved team performance; and (3) resolved business issues throughout all vertical and horizontal layers of the organization. The measured value, including financial ROI, is calculated and presented. The goal is to demonstrate a 10 to 1 or greater ROI.