

Problem Solving Teams

Types Of Problem Solving Teams

There are two different forms of problem solving teams, both of which will be relevant to most organisations. They are:

- **Improvement Teams:** These are based on the Japanese developed Quality Control Circles, and are voluntary groups of people using basic statistical and analytical tools to identify and solve quality and related problems in the workplace. They serve the dual function of being both quality improvement teams, and enjoyable for those participating, thereby increasing job satisfaction.
- **Project Teams:** These are formed on the basis of a specific management decision to address a particular problem. Membership is usually by invitation, as the balance of skills and experience is normally of importance to the success of the team, and cannot be guaranteed by voluntary membership. The team exists only for the duration of the problem nominated by management.

Setting Up Improvement Teams

Teams can be established in an almost endless number of ways, and the team's establishment depends largely on the culture and the organisation and the intended outcomes of the program.

There is usually a blend of management and shop floor input in the selection of Team Leaders; members are usually voluntary, but can be drawn from one area, or from a number of different areas. This is essentially a decision for those coordinating the program.

Setting Up Project Teams

Disciplinary Representation

The team may require expertise from a number of technical disciplines: electronics, mechanical engineering, chemistry, metallurgy, and so on. This expertise can be provided either by a suitably qualified member of the team, or by calling in expertise from "consultants" from other departments - or even from other companies, such as suppliers - as required.

Functional Representation

The team may require input from a number of functional disciplines: design, purchasing, production, engineering, etc. Again, such input can be obtained through the "consultant" approach; normally, however, it would be through membership.

Status Representation

It may be necessary, and is often good sense, as well as good PR, to solicit membership from throughout the levels of the organisation: upper management, middle management, executive, supervisory, leading hand and operator.

Nomination To Membership

The manner in which people become members of the team is in itself a tactical decision: membership can be

- Totally voluntary (in which case consultant expertise must be used, as there is no control over the membership): a notice is posted inviting volunteers to join under specified conditions
- Volunteers can be called to fill nominated positions (2 development engineers, 1 research chemist etc)
- Nominations can be made by department or senior managers to fill predetermined positions (the final decision should still be in the hands of the people nominated)

Management Role

There is no absolute right or wrong approach with quality teams; however, in general terms, the probability of success will be proportional to the perceived autonomy of the team.

Therefore, teams should operate on a strictly democratic basis, and any superior-subordinate roles within the group should be left at the meeting room door: managers should take no controlling role, and there should be no hint of recrimination for things said or implied within a team meeting.

Please accept my resignation. I
don't want to belong to any club
that will have me as a member.

(Groucho Marx)