



Solutions on the Fly

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Faster and Cleaner





Session Focus

Look at dealing with the pressure for providing quick fixes or “needing it yesterday”

- Identify key success factors for performance solutions
- Determine the critical questions to ask clients for project success and shorter cycle time
- Develop a tool kit to shorten diagnosis time and speed up intervention implementation



Caught Between a Rock... and a Hard Place

- More competitive world, more pressure for fast results, less tolerance for analysis
- More complex world with multi-faceted systems so “off-the-shelf” and “quick fixes are more likely to result in failures

We're at odds--faster and simpler solutions within a more complex and interactive world



Systems Archetypes

A system archetype is....

- A common pattern of behavior within an organization in response to a particular action or circumstances
- Predictable and repetitive regardless of the industry
- Provides us insight on why so many typical approaches to quick fixes result in failure



Beware Fixes That Fail

- Rush for quick solution, usually simplistic
- The fix sometimes produces a temporary boost but doesn't actually correct the problem
- After a brief lull, things get worse
- Often, the “quick fix” also produces unintended consequences with big problems
- Example: Revenue shortfall leads to layoffs which saves money initially but then hurts revenue over time as staff are overworked and details suffer



Fixes That Fail--Applied

- Turn to the person next to you
- Identify a “Fix that failed” —a quick, simplistic solution that initially might have helped but didn’t address the real problem and ended up contributing to it or making it worse
- Identify any “lessons learned” from this
- You’ve got 2 minutes



Our Challenge

In a world that is moving faster and is more competitive....

- How do we generate fast responses...
- That actually improve performance...
- And have staying power?



Fast Improvement Tip #1

Identify exemplary performers

- Not a true performance analysis—just PIP
- Distinguish between ideal workers (model employees) versus those who consistently get better results
- Recognize that your “exemplars” may not actually be stars at everything but perhaps only one element of the job (a mediocre proposal writer who is brilliant at concept development)
- Use accomplishments to determine exemplary work



Exemplars—an Example

- Sierra Millwork, an Andersen Window distributorship wanted to improve sales, client asked for relational selling training
- An exemplar sold more windows than the other 7 sales reps **combined**
- Rather than try to figure out why the other 7 weren't selling as well or what competencies made sense, just look at what the exemplar did that was different. He focused on not selling and being seen as a technical expert



Fast Improvement Tip #2

Use performance analysis with big or expensive solutions

- Sometimes doing a front-end analysis results in faster solutions than doing what the client asked for
- Performance analysis/Front-end analysis identifies short-cuts and efficiencies



Performance Analysis: Two Examples

- Universal Studios—the Case of the Singing Draculas: request for analysis because all of the available options seemed like bad ones, analysis saved time and money
- Lockheed Martin—request for team building because of turnover, analysis demonstrated that turnover was no longer a problem, saved money and identified unanticipated ways to improve performance within the team



Fast Improvement Tip #3

Shorten the Assessment/Design Process

- Design-Delivery tradeoff: decide how to compensate
- Instead of distinct design stages, blend them—for more details check out www.thiagi.com/rid.html or Rossett's First Things Fast
- Use templates and frame games that provide structure and allow you to just plug in content
- Looks for ways to automate (Performance DNA Desktop)



ISD Compression: Three Examples

- Florida Govt: request for time management training proved to be a poor fit, veteran facilitator was able to go with a quicker/looser design relying on more interaction (from classroom to working meeting)
- Booz Allen Hamilton: concurrent development of online resource rather than sequential ISD process
- Internet company: needed quick roll-out of training courses and coaching tools because of lawsuit. Relied on templates with field offices filling in the blanks



Fast Improvement Tip #4

Be Proactive

- Talk to clients about their priorities and stretch goals. Ask questions (“have you figured out how you’re going to do that?” or “what do your people need to do if you’re going to hit that target?”)
- Identify organizational priorities or key departments and plan ahead
- Make counter demands on “need it yesterday” client requests



Proactive Example

Va. Dept. of Transportation:

- Weak standards for budgets and performance so, to start somewhere, Commissioner sets arbitrary targets, then a year raises the bar
- VDOT performance consultant contacts all Regional Managers to ask “have you figured out how you’re going to hit that target? Would it be helpful if I could give you some analysis to help you identify options?”



Fast Improvement Tip #5

Gather data upfront and save it

- Shorten the interview and information gathering process by creating good background records
- Bureaucracy and “department policy” can be your friend—too many internal clients are suckers for “sorry, it’s a new policy on all requests...”
- Emphasize this work at the front-end of the project, at the backend people will blow it off



Gathering Data—an Example

Goal	Goal Metrics	Goal Status	Relevant Performers	Performer Results	Task Details	Knowledge & Skills	Gaps	Causes	Performer Notes
Customer retention	Quarterly by sales region	18% off	Sales Directors	Meet company goals	-assign leads, manage sales teams	Management and motivational skills	Not motivating sales staff	?	All used to be sales reps
			Sales Reps	Sales closed, sales volume	Meet with customers, pitch and close	Close sale, product knowledge	Not checking in enough from the field	?	Good retention records in the past
			Sales Associates		Support sales reps, respond to customer issues	Administrative, communication skills	Too much to do	?	High turnover (entry level position)

(adapted from Toni Hodges-DeTonca)



Fast Improvement Tip #6

Look for partial or incremental responses

- Field offices are golden opportunities
- Call it a “pilot” or “demo” program
- Go with a job aid even if it’s only a partial solution
- Look for something small but quick that wins you additional time by increasing your credibility



Incremental Example

- Wal-Mart CEO wanted mandatory training ASAP for all greeters (incredibly expensive, very time consuming and would sidetrack critical initiatives). Time frame was 3 weeks. Counter response was to provide coaching within 2 days for problem stores.
- Canadian transportation firm wanted program (training, coaching, job aid, standards) to be rolled out to all employees nation-wide. Solution was to begin initial program in one field office the first month.



Fast Improvement Tip #7

Use Job Aids as a Partial Fix

- Job aids can be developed 75% faster than training with a quicker rollout for big populations
- More bang for less buck—less expensive than training and therefore usually have a higher ROI (even if the impact is less)



Job Aid Example

- The Checklist Manifesto (Atul Gawande) surgical job aid: issued to surgical teams in hospitals in England, the US, Canada and Tanzania reduced post-surgical complications significantly in every hospital that used it (from 14-42%) and also significantly reduced deaths after surgery
- IT firm with programming consistency issues: West Coast Region spent 9 months training, East Coast took 2 weeks to rollout a job aid on the same problem



Fast Improvement: Your Take!

- Move to one of the pieces of flipchart paper around the room. The group of people you're with will have 2 (two) minutes sharing one magic marker to add your insights/suggestions to the category on that paper (such as: "questions to ask to keep the project moving fast" or "Tips for faster ISD")
- Agree with an idea—check, disagree—"x" and unsure "?" next to the suggestion
- I will let you know when 2 minutes is up
- Then rotate clockwise to the next piece of paper
- Do not jump around from paper to paper



Summary

- The “need for speed” isn’t going to go away
- Working faster isn’t an option—you’re just running harder and falling behind
- Giving clients what they ask for in these situations is usually a prescription for failure (plus a self-perpetuating problem—because it encourages more last-minute requests)
- Pressure for speed has pros and cons—it’s just a question of how intelligently you adapt



Presenter Info

Joe Willmore is President of the Willmore Consulting Group. He is a past President of the DC Metro Chapter and former member of ASTD's Board of Directors. He will be presenting two sessions at the ASTD 2008 Conference on Organizational Culture. Past clients have included: Northrop-Grumman, Wal-Mart, Washington Nationals, Washington Wizards, Smithsonian Institution, and National Geographic Society. He is the author of Managing Virtual Teams, Job Aid Basics and Performance Basics. He can be reached at Willmore@juno.com or 703.855-4634.