

THE QUESTIONING METHOD

WHAT - WHY?

WHERE
WHEN
WHO } WHY?
HOW - WHY?

First, ask the questions, **What and Why**. If there is no good reason for doing something we should recommend that we stop doing it. These improvements provide maximum benefits for minimum costs as we eliminate all expenditures of time, effort, materials etc. The costs, if they exist, are trivial - requiring no new equipment, no new forms, no programming, no training, etc. We simply stop doing things that are unnecessary. But, it may be awkward to speak out about things being unnecessary. It may not seem politically safe. And, there may be people in the organization who will not see this as an opportunity to redirect resources but simply as a justification to cut staff, shifting the emphasis from best output to least cost. For this reason, making recommendations to eliminate unnecessary work is an issue of courage and integrity, - courage to speak up and integrity to keep the focus on eliminating work, not people. People, of course, are a resource to be utilized, not an expense to be gotten rid of.

The next group of questions, **Where, When, Who and Why**, also produce large benefits for small costs, but they involve interdepartmental assignments and coordination, which makes them political. They involve having tasks done in the most appropriate places, at the most convenient times, by the right people. Since this involves simply repositioning tasks already being done the benefits and costs are found in how much better the work suits its new positioning. Interdepartmental cooperation is the foremost requirement for dealing with these questions and where it is not available organizations settle for tasks being done in the wrong places, at the wrong times, by the wrong people.

Finally, we have the questions, **How and Why**, which have by far the greatest implementation costs and can even result in less effective processes than the ones they replace. The costs can include new buildings, new equipment, programming, supplies training, etc. The benefits may be superb where the new methods actually do a better job. But, they can also be negative if they are developed and approved by people who aren't close enough to the work to know what will actually do a better job. A lot of this occurred in the early eighties at the peak of the excitement over paperless offices. This can be avoided by working out new methods on process charts, with operating people participating.

Traditionally, the worst outcomes have occurred in bureaucracies where political pressure and employee alienation have resulted in skipping over the first four questions and simply automating whatever is currently being done. The ultimate disaster finds automated processes performing unnecessary tasks at the worst time, in the worst place, by the worst person, using the most expensive equipment money can buy.

Recently this nonsense has taken a new twist. Organizations that appeared to have advanced beyond bureaucracy seem to be sliding back into it. They are alienating their people by developing new processes based almost solely on equipment solutions. The principal focus is to cut staff for immediate profits. Unfortunately, while they are dealing with the big questions, **What, Where, When and Who** as well as **How**, they are doing it superficially and out of sequence. Systems decisions are being made by people whose primary knowledge is how to work with computers, and arbitrary, superficial assumptions are being built in. By firing or retiring the people best fitted to bridge the gap between these fanciful systems and reality these organizations are rendering themselves unable to correct their mistakes. Soon they will have achieved bureaucracy with alienated employees who will tell us, "We're sorry, we know it doesn't make sense but that's our procedure and there is nothing we can do about it."

Traditionally the best outcomes have occurred in organizations that have cultivated the resource qualities of their people, creating work forces of responsible adults who choose to make a difference. The improvement process is put into their hands, the most knowledgeable people in the world, and they are encouraged to eliminate every bit of work that they can. They are assured that it is *work being gotten rid of and not people* and the organization lives up to those assurances. These organizations achieve outstanding results because their people won't let it happen otherwise. In these organizations there is no question of trading-in people for superficially designed computer systems. They opt instead for the world's best computer systems designed and operated by the world's best people.

The Questioning Method

WHAT - WHY?

Eliminate

WHERE - WHY?

Change Place

WHEN - WHY?

Change time/Sequence

WHO - Why?

Change Person

HOW - WHY?

Change Equipment, Material, Facilities

"Work Smarter not Harder"

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