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# Rapid Results!

**How 100-Day Projects  
Build the Capacity  
for Large-Scale Change**

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## Attaining Hard Results in Soft Areas

The same results-focused approach that produces dramatic improvements in hard dimensions of business priorities—revenue, cost performance, profitability, quality, and customer service—is equally effective in achieving measurable improvements in the soft areas of organization performance. Those areas include worker health and safety, employee diversity, job flexibility, organization culture, corporate image, communications, and employee satisfaction.

Untold billions of dollars are expended on activities related to such goals, and more billions are lost as a result of failure to address such goals competently. For example, the U.S. Department of Labor reported that there were 4.7 million nonfatal injuries in private industry in 2002, a staggering 5.3 cases per 100 full-time workers. More than half of these resulted in days away from work, or job transfer or restrictions, costing U.S. industry many billions of dollars. On another dimension, class action suits for discrimination in employment, compensation, and promotion have cost individual companies settlements in the hundreds of millions of dollars.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these astronomical costs, very few companies are satisfied with their accomplishments in this area.

## Why Are Hard Results So Elusive in Soft Areas?

One reason that results are difficult to achieve in the soft areas is the same underdevelopment of implementation capability that plagues improvement initiatives in hard performance areas. These soft areas are harder to pin down and thus are even less susceptible to big-fix, top-down cures. In addition, some unique barriers hamper results achievement in these soft areas:

- *Soft goals don't seem key to business performance.* Managers may not make the connection between poor performance in soft areas such as health and safety, diversity, and employee involvement on one hand and the company's bottom-line results on the other.

- *Self-defeating goals are set.* Managers know they should address these soft issues, but often set goals so lofty and visionary as to provide no impetus for change or guidance for action. "We will become the employer of choice." "We will be the most innovative company in America." Goals such as these fail to produce a sense of urgency or clear guidelines for action.
- *Results measures are weak or absent.* There is some truth to the maxim, "What gets measured gets managed." Unless soft areas have ongoing performance measures like the ones for market share, inventory turns, and product quality, they won't get the attention or the results.
- *Accountability is diffuse.* Usually no one individual or function has total responsibility for achieving the improvement in soft areas such as diversity or worker safety or turnover. And when accountability exists at all, it is too often for *activities* (get a program under way) and not *results* (reduce accident frequency by x percent).
- *Too much reliance on staff functions and outside consultants.* Many seasoned managers see their jobs as delivering the hard business results and feel that issues such as organization culture, diversity, employee satisfaction, and health and safety, while obviously important, are really extras. They are more than happy to turn these issues over to staff specialists or to outside consultants.

Even if only some of these barriers are operating in a company, it can make success unattainable.

## Rapid Results in Employee Diversity: The Citigroup Europe Experience

The rapid results approach places the responsibility for results squarely on line managers. Using rapid results projects to address soft performance areas ensures not only that measurable results are produced but also that implementation capability is developed.



Citigroup epitomizes a company driven to achieve hard business results. Earnings per share and ROI are the watchwords of corporate success. However, past efforts to diversify Citigroup's leadership, such as diversity conferences, awareness training, and building networks, did not command the same attention from the company's hard-driving executives as revenue growth or profitability. Lynne Fisher, director of diversity for Europe, decided to use rapid results projects to launch a sustained initiative to enhance the diversity of the leadership group. After gaining the commitment of the senior management of European Operations, she set up cross-functional, cross-business project teams to make measurable progress on diversity within a hundred days.

The teams set goals for recruitment, for sponsorship and career development, and for retention, work-life balance, and respect. The recruitment team, for example, set a goal to increase from 30 percent to 40 percent the number of women applicants for investment banking positions. The work-life balance team set a goal of having twenty-six employees from one function working at home within a hundred days. Goals such as these enabled the project teams to create and test out various solutions and learn what it takes to achieve and sustain measurable improvements in diversity.

By building in scheduled progress reviews, Citigroup brought the same management disciplines to diversity that it employs in its banking businesses. Further, these reviews signaled senior management's continued interest in the issue. The participation of various high-potential employees on the project teams was a development experience in its own right and provided the team members with career-enhancing visibility.

These projects not only produced results, they generated a sense of excitement about the possibilities for improvement. With each breakthrough success, more managers grasped the idea that diversity and inclusion goals are amenable to a more businesslike approach. Initial successes helped pinpoint changes that needed to be made in various human resource management systems—recruitment, development, assessment of management talent—to achieve comparable results across the corporation. For example, diversity performance

has become a core component of managers' annual performance appraisal. As part of an annual talent review, Citigroup has added a "deep reach" assessment several levels down in the organization to ensure that diverse talent is getting the kind of developmental experience early in their careers that will equip them to compete for senior-level opportunities.

### Keeping Connecticut's Health Workers Healthy

The experience of Connecticut's Department of Mental Health illustrates how organizations can build on rapid results successes in soft areas to sustain and expand higher performance levels. Some years ago, the department was alarmed by the growing number of employee injuries caused by interactions with patients—including assaults. These injuries not only undermined employees' physical well-being and morale, they also drove up workers' compensation costs.

Sincere but uncoordinated initiatives to correct the problem (introduced by hospital administrators, medical staff, and the unions) were having little impact. No one in any hospital had overall responsibility for reducing incidents of assault, nor did anybody have an overall picture of how various factors were interacting to increase patient distress, a major contributor to assaults on staff.

In a low-risk, low-investment way, two wards in one hospital, Fairfield Hills, were selected to pilot a rapid results approach. Multidisciplinary teams set a goal of reducing incidents by 10 percent in a few months. For the first time ever, the doctors, nurses, attendants, and others who worked in the wards collaborated in a joint undertaking. They analyzed patient incidents and assessed the possible relationship between medication, nutrition, patient-handling practices, restraining equipment, and ward culture and the occurrences of incidents. They examined which patients were causing the incidents and whether the incidents showed any other patterns. As the team discovered the key factors, they tested a combination of remedial strategies. They discovered that certain patients caused most of the incidents, and that most incidents occurred at certain times of day. They were able to alter the



focus of employees on the wards to respond. The result: they significantly overshot their goal, reducing the incidents on the two wards by 60 percent. When extended to all six wards in the hospital, the year-over-year reduction in staff injuries was 75 percent, reducing the workers' compensation cost by a significant amount.

This approach was adopted by a second hospital in Norwich with equally dramatic results. To sustain the results-focused improvement effort, the hospital trained internal facilitators, both management and union, to support rapid-cycle projects throughout the hospital—and, ultimately, throughout the state. A sister department, Mental Retardation, applied this results-focused approach statewide as well, reducing its workers' compensation costs by over \$10,000,000 per year. This Connecticut story is described in more detail by Suzanne Francis and Matthew McCreight in "Restoring Health to Workers Compensation."<sup>4</sup>

### It's Not Rocket Science

Citigroup and Connecticut's Mental Health and Mental Retardation departments and many other organizations have achieved measurable gains in soft performance areas by exploiting rapid results projects. In doing so, they have followed essentially the same formula as the one for achieving rapid results in hard goals. For many managers it seems less natural to use these disciplines in attacking the soft goals. Nonetheless, although defining the measurable goal may require a bit more creativity in the soft areas, the tasks are essentially the same and the success rate is just as high.

### Rapid Results Projects Create an Execution Culture

As an organization carries out more and more successful rapid-cycle projects, a culture of execution evolves. People become more willing to tackle goals—both short term and long term—and more competent in achieving them.

A number of years ago, for example, Fred Poses, who went on to become the chairman and CEO of American Standard, was general manager of a plastics materials division of AlliedSignal. Poses wanted to accelerate growth of his division, but with no financing available for expansion, he would have to get more mileage out of his current resources if he wanted to grow. He decided to begin by focusing on one set of extruder machines. He challenged his manufacturing manager and the extruder team to get more quality production. Putting their heads together, they quickly sketched an approach to achieve a 25 percent increase in output from one set of extruders in about six weeks.

The manufacturing and extruder teams worked every day on the project. They discovered they had to reduce the changeover and cleanup time between runs, which meant a different changeover routine. It meant having cleaning supplies and spare parts immediately at hand. The maintenance department took responsibility for this. They discovered they had to get the warehouse to provide more raw materials every day, which in turn meant a faster order cycle from suppliers and more storage space near the extruding machines. The purchasing and warehouse people took on that task. They learned they needed more frequent lab tests and faster lab response to assure on-spec quality at the higher output rate, so they asked the lab people to do that.

Dozens of other improvement ideas were identified and introduced. Doing all this in a six-week time frame was a whole new experience for everybody involved. The project demanded a lot of ad hoc experimentation. They learned as they bumped into roadblocks each day and worked creatively to find ways around them.

By the end of six weeks, the whole system was actually beginning to work at the expected level. People discovered they could get the same old machines and the same old people and the same old facilities to produce much more without new investment.<sup>5</sup>

But much more was accomplished than the productivity boost. In achieving the results, people changed their views about what might be possible. "We no longer needed to spend time arguing about why it can't be done," Poses explains. "There's a culture of let's give it a try and see."

### **Measuring the Unquantifiable Soft Areas**

Peter Drucker asserts that performance can always be measured or at least judged. He cites a breakthrough in his understanding in working with the director of a mental hospital. The director helped him understand that the breakthrough for the patient comes when the patient realizes that they are sick - not the rest of the world - and this can be measured.