

Building Capability



LEARNING IS JUST ONE IMPORTANT COMPONENT IN THE QUEST TO INCREASE CORPORATE PRODUCTIVITY, EFFICIENCY, PROFIT AND SAFETY.

BY SAM PONZO AND MATT SHALLOW

High-performing organizations often share a holistic management approach that includes three fundamental pillars: efficient systems and operations, a skilled and capable workforce, and a culture that embraces the company vision with trust, openness and innovation.

At DuPont we have found from our own experience and from working with hundreds of clients globally, that by having such a system in place, organizations are more effective at achieving sustainable growth while eliminating inefficiencies and waste, solving problems, and measuring progress. Integration of technical elements, capability and culture are essential for achieving success.

For existing companies that are already productive, efficient and profitable, a good foundational operating culture often is built around establishing engagement with employees, where employees and unions are working together



building capability

with management. Defined roles, employee involvement and proper procedures drive quality and productivity. Leadership plays a critical part in modeling desired behaviors and supporting change by demonstrating transparency with their own learning journeys.

WHERE TO BEGIN

As with most corporate initiatives, changing the culture begins with a baseline assessment, which can help determine the internal climate of a company from a technical standpoint. It also takes into consideration other existing systems and practices already in place that can be built upon. It includes truly understanding the existing culture and interrelationships between line leadership and the shop-floor level.

This discovery process brings to light key cultural interferences that undermine the potential of the organization. By understanding the current climate, leaders can

identify the mindsets and behaviors needed to align cultural norms with the organization's vision and mission.

Our experience also has shown that people are the key to achieving excellence, and there is no simple solution to building and sustaining a capable workforce — and therefore a more capable company. It is a long journey with the result being a corporate culture based on best practices and world-class performance.

Before embarking on a journey of

improvement, leaders must understand their employees and their employees' aspirations. Only then can a roadmap be designed that will start the entire organization on its way. (We use the word "journey" a lot, because it's based on DuPont's own learning, our theories on project management, and getting away from a "check-the-box" mentality. It's an ongoing set of activities to get each and every person in an organization to challenge himself (or herself.)

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LESSONS LEARNED

When DuPont undertook such a "journey" a few years ago, we had a number of decentralized initiatives and programs that had existed for 24 years or more. Much of the success we had back in those days seemed to be short-lived. So we decided we needed an integrated approach.

To effect change, we found that our leaders needed to be role models, and our systems needed to support whatever changes we were to make. Employees from the bottom to the top needed to understand where they were going, and then we had to focus on giving them the skills to do their respective jobs.

Too often, corporations like ours take a very project-by-project approach. That means focusing on safety one day, on capability building the next day, on Six Sigma next week. This results in initiative overload with employees and mid-level managers trying to manage multiple programs that are not tied together. It makes the work a lot harder.

CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

The answer to the overload problem is to establish capability building as the goal rather than achieving a specific outcome. In other words, set a clear focus for an

organization or jobsite by defining what they're trying to improve upon and what improvements can occur. That approach has been helpful for us and our clients.

The cultural thrust must be moving from a focus on training to one on capability building. For instance, when you think of training, you often think of a training event. On the other hand, when you think about capability building, your goal is to improve skill level in a specific area. Many companies are focused on training dollars spent and total hours of training, rather than whether their employees actually acquire new capabilities.

This is where a critical capability development piece can enter the process. For instance, there was a time when our plant managers were overwhelmed with initiatives thrown at them by different people and different departments. We realized that a "One DuPont" concept was needed to help us in terms of leveraging practices and being economical with our resources. We found that we had to create a focus on people, recognizing that they are the ones who drive the engine that makes all this happen. Our people were the critical design element.

We next found that leaders must focus on the shop-floor level where employees can see "what's in it for them" and feel a sense of ownership. To sustain that enthusiasm, we found that we needed to engage people better, make better sense to them, and be transparent about what our goals were.

CULTURE MATTERS

What works domestically doesn't always work abroad, and vice versa. National culture plays a distinctive role. For instance, Mexico has more of a hierarchy-driven culture. Coaching skills are different, too, which impacts how an organization rolls out a learning strategy.

DuPont Sustainable Solutions is a global organization with consulting experts spread among the four major regions to service clients in all corners of the world. Our clients represent a variety of industries with diverse economic, political and workforce challenges. Organizations in emerging countries are quickly catching up by learning from others in more developed countries and



avoiding some of the less successful initiatives tried years ago.

We have to be able to adapt and help tailor solutions for a wide range of client needs.

Video learning is one of the best examples of the differences between devel-

oping countries and emerging countries. In some parts of the world, companies are still struggling with video learning because sufficient bandwidth is not yet available. In such places, you design training on the shop floor. In those cases, smaller bits and smaller packages are important, because the opportunity to bring everyone off the floor and get them in a classroom to view a video is really start-

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ing to disappear in manufacturing and other production facilities.

DuPont consultants recently finished a three-year assignment in Russia working with a company that was very rudimentary in its infrastructure, technological processes, and its ability to communicate with employees. We were almost starting from scratch in terms of designing and building the capability program. The company culture was changing from a command-and-control culture management style.

Part of what we learned in Russia is that a company must first understand its culture from an organizational standpoint, and also from a geographic standpoint. In some parts of the world, interactivity is really important, so passive ways of conveying knowledge is less effective. Video and games help keep the learner engaged — essentially just good adult learning principles. We also learned that people also might have less time, so gaining effective knowledge right away is important.

Letting employees know where the applicable information resides and how to access it quickly, rather than forcing them to retain it themselves, is vitally important.

Employees in Russia or other countries around the globe — maybe even here in the United States — also need to know where to access information. None of us finds information in encyclopedias today; we're used to having information at our fingertips. It's become less an encyclopedia era and more a Google era. So letting employees know where the applicable information resides and how to access it quickly, rather than forcing them to retain it themselves, also is vitally important.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

At DuPont, we have found what we call a “tool kit” of best practices. The focus is on keeping human and mechanical assets up and running, keeping leadership and employees engaged, and eliminating waste. We have a package of training — supported by coaching — to imbed best-practice behaviors, which is a different approach than traditional classroom learning.

To get an entire organization to accept a new culture, consultants, coaches and trainers have to meet employees where they work. It's not about the employee adapting to your style. You have to adapt to them. We saw that clearly in Russia and other parts of the world.

Coaching methodology and follow-up is a critical element in motivating people to change old ways of doing things. You want to be more transparent, give people information they need, and help them cope with problems where they start. The right way to go about building a corporate capability program is analyzing the needs of the customer and building from the bottom up.

This approach has been time-tested

across many organizations and cultures around the world, and it has the same universal elements. It works in the United States and also plays out in a global environment. 🌐

—Sam Ponzo is global practice leader of learning and development for DuPont Sustainable Solutions, and Matt Shallow is a senior consultant in the Operations Excellence practice. For more information, visit the website www.training.dupont.com.