SixThinking Hats
Case Study: Hewlett-Packard

The Problem

Hewlett-Packard, one of the world's largest organizations, is a leading global provider of products, technologies, solutions and services to consumers and business.

The May 2002 merger of Hewlett-Packard and Compaq Computer Corporation created a powerful team of more than 140,000 employees in 160 countries. As you can imagine, along with the tremendous opportunity created by this merger came a lot of chaos.

The enormous task of merging the two giants together without losing sight of the customer came down to the capability of individual teams working together to create plans in line with HP's corporate goals...fitting the pieces together. No easy task when performed in the midst of clashing corporate cultures and crushing morale problems.

Jon Albregts, a Process and Quality Management Network Storage Solutions team member, was given the task to organize the strategic planning meetings for his team—meetings where every team member was asked to present their business plan. **This team had expressed concern that poor group dynamics were really holding them back—a lot of power plays were interfering with performance.**

How then was Jon to get this group to work together to generate useful ideas to meet their goals—and all within two days?

The Solution

Just prior to being given the task to organize the strategic planning meeting, Jon had completed three days of Creative Thinking training. Having been through many fruitless training sessions, Jon admitted, "I was really dreading spending three days in a classroom. But less than an hour into the class I was hooked."

After the training session, Jon emailed the facilitator, Mike Sproul, to tell him how pleased he was with the training. He had recognized the opportunity to apply the skills he just learned to the task at hand. So he decided to elicit some advice from the expert.

Expert Help

Mike Sproul, one of 18 de Bono Master Trainers in the world helped pioneer the use of cross-functional engineering in product management teams. His extensive work in this area led him to realize the critical need for focused, simple, and effective team-based collaborative and creative thinking methods. Mike holds seven U.S. patents and five foreign patents.

As tangible evidence of his belief in the team environment, each of those patents has at least one other person listed as co-inventor.

Jon emailed Mike his plan for applying the de Bono's Six Thinking Hats he'd learned during the creative thinking training. Jon had mapped out a solid foundation for the event. Mike helped Jon tweak the outline and coached him through baseline expectations. Here's what the two of them came up with:

Pre-work:
An email request was sent out to each member of the team. The request included an outline of the overall goals of the group. Each member was asked to come prepared to present the neutral details, facts, information and facts needed (white hat) for their plan.

Day of the Event:
Each member presented their business plan and then Jon facilitated a Six Hats thinking session with the group around each team member's #1 initiative. Here's the thinking sequence that was used:

    a) White Hat (Any questions on the details presented? Anyone have the missing facts?)
    b) Yellow Hat (What are the benefits of this initiative?)
    c) Black Hat (What are the cautions, problems, challenges?)
    d) Green Hat (What are some ways to overcome the Black Hat concerns?)
    e) Lateral Thinking: Alternatives (What are some alternative solutions / ideas?)
    f) Red Hat (What's your gut feeling about the plan?)
    g) Blue Hat (Identify next steps. Are we ready to implement?)

Each presentation took approximately 25 minutes. Participants were surprised to find that the normal argument and debate that had typically frustrated them and hampered results was very significantly reduced. Not that their meeting was a love fest, but no one could argue with the results...they had accomplished far more as a team than ever before.

The Results

Using the creativity tools (Six Thinking Hats & Lateral Thinking) had a HUGE positive effect. All initiatives were prioritized and evaluated based on "do-ability vs. impact." The thinking session provided the insight needed to move initiatives toward high impact / low cost.

After meeting for two days—in meetings that usually leave people drained, uneasy and frustrated—not only did the team improve and prioritize business plans, but they came out of it saying, "This was the best team building activity we have ever gone through!" Several participants were so impressed with the Six Hats as a tool that they asked to have the HP intranet-training link sent to them. They want to learn more about the process that helped create the success they had just experienced.

At Compaq Computer, the de Bono programs, Six Thinking Hats® and Lateral Thinking TM, have been used as part of the quality initiative for several years. The success of the de Bono tools in the quality program has spread to numerous divisions and segments of the new Hewlett-Packard/Compaq conglomerate

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