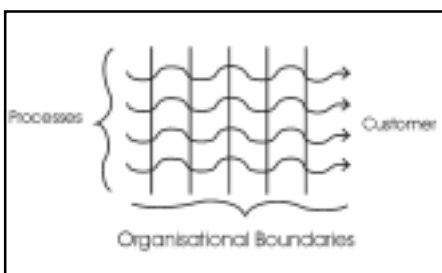


Designing dynamic, lean organisations - breaking down boundaries – or putting them in the right places?

Many of our clients and colleagues are familiar with the Rubicon model of Process, Structure and Culture – informed by Vision and Strategy – as the fundamental, inter-related realms of organisational development. Here, Rubicon director *Steve Briault* briefly reviews the structural aspect of our work.



Change and improvement projects can start in any of these fields, but will quickly raise issues in the others which require attention. This integrated approach avoids the dangers of one-sided interventions, where for example attempts are made to change the organisational culture without addressing structural or process deficiencies. Recent issues of Crosscurrents have focused heavily on our work with lean process improvement methods, but we often (usually, in fact) find that some of the most important obstacles to flow lie in the fragmentation of processes by poorly designed structures.



When the organisational, financial, informational, physical and job structures are not aligned with the core work processes, the resulting symptoms are all too often those listed below (see box).

ORGANISATION DESIGN Some consequences of structural mismatches

- *Confusion*
- *Inter-departmental tensions*
- *Boundary issues*
- *Grey areas of unclear responsibility, authority and accountability*
- *Barriers to communication*
- *Blockage of initiatives*
- *Lack of ownership*
- *Quality problems*
- *Impaired teamwork*
- *Parts optimised at the expense of the whole*
- *High personal stress*
- *Sub-optimal individual and overall performance*

Structuring is about connecting and differentiating; it is about the placement of boundaries. Boundaries are often unpopular in management circles today: but they are not in themselves undesirable. Without internal and external boundaries, no organism or organisation could



thrive. The issue is not to abolish all boundaries, but to place them appropriately. Based on

Christian Schumacher's seminal Work Structuring Principles, our approach to organisational design starts with analysing and optimising the process, then identifies "Whole Tasks" – process segments which contain a significant value-adding activity and all the other actions which support it – and matches these to right-sized, multi-skilled teams. Next, it provides these teams and their leaders with what they need to plan, do, evaluate and continuously improve their own performance. The wider organisational context is then composed by an objective method, called Affinity Analysis, which identifies where the closest and weakest links are to other activities. By this means, boundaries can be placed where they best belong, at the points of minimum interdependence. This creates the structural conditions for the flattest viable management system, and for the genuine empowerment and involvement of people at all levels in a culture of continuous improvement.

Rubicon's web site

Please visit our web site at www.rubiconassociates.com and let us know what you think. If there is anything you would particularly like to see, do tell us.