

An Approach That Works

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It all began with a question at a Branch Managers' Conference. The question was: this sense of belonging we are all talking about: how can we build it? Is it enough to mention it parrotlike? At that time the Top Management of the company was considering how to make our supervisory and managerial force self-propelled units... The feeling that 'ideas are not expected of us; in fact, they are thrown back at our face' was mentioned at a Foremen's Conference. ...The writer who attended all the above discussions brought to the Top Management's notice the *Work Simplification programme that has provided at least a partial answer to these basic problems elsewhere in the world.* They said: Let us try it with whatever modifications you suggest for Indian conditions.

THE CLEVELAND ELECTRIC Illuminating Company had a problem which may be stated in their own language: "For many years, we in the utility business have been faced with the problem of improving and expanding our services and providing reasonable rates for our customers; to accomplish this objective under conditions of steadily rising costs for labour and materials, along with increased taxes, presented quite a problems... Our executives realised that we must continue to *give service of the highest quality at the lowest possible cost in order to stay in business.* We needed an organised cost reduction programme. Our Top Executives were looking for something to complement the present work being done toward cost reduction." They wanted to select a method that would bring *quick results at a reasonable cost.* They looked at three methods:

In the light of expected accomplishment the first two methods were discarded. It was decided that they would: 1. take too long to show real accomplishment. It would

take years to cover all the operations. 2. be too costly. 3. *cause resentment to employees because outsiders would be, in effect, telling them how to do their jobs.*

After investigation, we decided to use Work Simplification. This method would provide *a means of letting our people take a more active part in the overall cost reduction programme.* It looked good because: 1. it could be carried on, for the most part, with our own people. 2. results could be accomplished sooner 3. morale could be raised as the result of individuals improving their own jobs and receiving full credit for it. 4. it could become a way of life with us, a part of our job. This would provide a continuing effort toward waste reduction and the improvement of jobs."

What is this work simplification? It is the name given by Allen Mogensen (who pioneered this approach) to "the organised application of commonsense on the part of everyone involved to eliminate waste of time, effort and material, thereby making one's job easier and better". Literally thousands of organisations—factories, offices, government departments, banks and even hospitals—have taken the Work Simplification programme in the last few years. And all of them are

*The writer, a management consultant, got his initiation in Work Simplification from Professor David Porter of the New York University. He had his professional training under the well known Management Consultant, Mr. Walter Scott of Australia.

enthusiastic about it and a survey of over 500 projects reveals why the West is going in more and more for this approach.

Financially, the programme has been found to pay for itself many times over and even during the first year. To mention a few, the Bell & Howell Company saved 61000 dollars in the first year of the programme; the Maytag company saved 31000 dollars in the first year and 54000 in the second. The Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company, it has been recorded, has saved thousands of dollars on simplified paperwork alone... "we had over a million dollar direct savings from proposals submitted by trainees during the training periods. And the ratio of measured savings to cost of operation of the project is approximately 10 to 1". (Ford Motor Company of Canada)... "Financially, the programme has already paid for itself many times over... The majority of projects have results in the lowering of manufactured costs from 16 to 30%. The first two full years of the programme resulted in measurable savings in excess of a million dollars. Savings continue at a high rate." (Texas Instruments).

The indirect benefits have been summarised by one writer this way:

I mproved human relations and morale
 M inds of personnel opened
 P roductivity increased
 R esistance to change decreased
 O perator gains personal satisfaction
 V iewpoints of management changed
 E xpert services more readily accepted
 M ethods improved—costs reduced
 E mployee gains in status
 N eeded supervision developed
 T eamwork greatly improved

I quoted the benefits abroad at length because experience in India is limited for one thing, and *about the same results have been obtained here for another*. In the first unit that the writer introduced the Work Simplification* technique, even before the first six

months were over, the job section had a 75% rise in production and 0.3% rise in labour hours and the production section reduced the manhours per unit by 15%. There was evident enthusiasm among the workforce and the worthwhile improvement proposals progressively rose until on one single day the number was hundred and two. The ratio of cost of this Work Simplification project to savings was noted to be 1 to 4. The workers now joined hands with the supervisors and managers in welcoming men who will help them perfect their methods-improvement ideas. They sit in groups to review a current operation. They asked for permission from the supervisor or foreman to experiment with a new idea. There was a lively work atmosphere.

As a productivity raiser and a morale booster, Work Simplification can be described as a tested approach. I use the word 'approach' instead of 'technique' because Work Simplification is much more than a technique. A methodology is there but much more is a basic philosophy underlying it. Bill Hagen, the Chairman of the Boeing Airplane Company remarks, "People want to help cut waste and needless costs, if given an opportunity. We have facts and figures to show how much expense has been avoided by this growing cost and waste consciousness on the part of the employees. This project has convinced us that people want to help; that given a chance they can overall help us better than the staff specialists; that there is a pronounced change in the attitude and atmosphere of the workplace... If we want to change the attitude of labour, we Management should change our attitude to them first."

The same point of view was well explained by William M. Stocker Jr.: "Are you seeking an expert, a super-intellect, to solve the problems in your plant? Perhaps the best solutions are right at hand in the know-how of your own people. These jewels are free for the asking. All you need is to organise the expedition, provide the tools for prospecting, and help sort the stones. You will be amazed at the profit that lies buried in your garden." Many companies to which we recommended this approach frankly

* The writer has adapted the Work Simplification programme for Indian conditions and he prefers to call it OWRMI—Organised Companywide Waste Reduction Through Methods Improvement.

prefer the expert approach—"this approach that you suggest is too much trouble", they say.

In the very first case, Top Management gave a personal lead and provided for the pitfalls namely, lack of strong and continuous top management support, insufficient care in organising such a programme, resistance from experts and higher-ups, lack of honest recognition and insecurity fears of employees. The results have been satisfying and continue to be so.

In a second case, the programme was started with enthusiasm but it has not worked out well, much to the disappointment of the workforce. Two major inadequacies can be pointed out. One was this. The company tried to copy the practice from another company. It missed the point that like a good suit, though it has the same basic essentials of other suits, it must be tailored to meet the purpose, girth, height and price of the individual organisation concerned. The other inadequacy was that the company expected it to be *a one shot deal*. It did not quite realise that to get the effect and results you want, it must be a continuous programme, it must be kept awake.

In the third case, the lessons of the first two were taken into account. Top Management support was available in full measure. Adequate care was taken in organising it. Provision was made for continuous follow-up. An additional feature was that the captain of the team believed in the purpose, propriety and philosophy. The results even during the first six months have been satisfying. For more reasons than one industry in India should take up this approach. We do not have now and *we cannot hope to have in the near future enough industrial engineers to blanket all operations* in our plants, even assuming we hold it is the expert approach that will pay. Given the encouragement and the know-how, our work force at every level is as anxious as ourselves to cut out waste in every shape, form and degree. Since the strategic aspect in every improvement proposal is the implementation, and since this approach makes for implementation almost automatically, this sounds a good business proposition.

Raising productivity is one thing and raising it quickly and in a lasting way is another. But it calls for a sacrifice. The sacrifice is not in terms of money but in terms of certain values and attitudes.

