

Worlds Most Progressive Penal System Uses a Cockpit to Excel on Continuous Improvement

With the existing management team being put on non-active, and with a critical judgment of society on how to deal with illegal immigrants and a work force that had little or no commitment to its job, we had to make changes that had major impact rapidly. The organization wasn't focused on one direction. When asking the work force if they knew what they had to do today or whether they were doing a good or bad job, most workers didn't know the answer. Time was running out, and society does not tolerate failures in the prison system. Also, we had an absenteeism ratio of 14 percent, plus high personnel turnover.

— Jan Piek, turnaround manager of PI Tilburg (PIT), The Netherlands

Jan Piek faced a daunting task when he was appointed general manager of PI Tilburg. PIT's previous management team had been replaced in the wake of mismanagement, and Piek was the man selected to get the institution back on track.

PIT is where the Netherlands Ministry of Justice holds illegal male immigrants, for a maximum of 12 months, until their country of origin can be determined.

"We try to be a positive influence on each individual, preparing him to make his way in life," Piek says. "Once the country is known, they are sent back, hoping that this person can make a living in his own country."

In an immigration prison with more than 520 detainees with cultural diversity, language obstacles and limited resources, drastic changes were needed to satisfy the increasing demands from society, as well as to get personnel committed to their job.

Who better than the work force (the institution's guards) to decide upon those changes and make them happen?

Ideas From the Bottom Up

It was a group of skeptical and jaded guards that attended a kickoff meeting for the effort to solve the institution's problems. Disoriented by a room covered with brown paper with processes mapped on it, the guards got involved for the first time as major players in

their work environment. They were the ones making the remarks, correcting the procedures and explaining the day-to-day tasks and activities. They were also the ones discovering the bottlenecks and expressing possible solutions. Kept on track by objectives set forth at the beginning of the meeting, suggestions and answers were flying all over the room.

Management, work force and ZWA consultants rolled up their sleeves, building teams to make drastic changes for the institution. "Coming up with opportunities for improvement is the easiest part of working toward a better organization," Piek says. "Getting those ideas implemented is the hard part."

"That is why, the involvement of the work force was enlisted from the beginning. They are the ones who finally have to implement and work with the changes to come," Piek says.

Real Time Feedback

Starting by defining simple, primary processes that explain the whole trajectory of a prisoner from arrival to departure, operational improvements were initiated. Teams were assigned to implement the operational improvements quickly. Piek: "After making changes, it is important to monitor bottom-line performance, or you risk ending up with chaos".

"The institution's traditional quarterly management reports did not give quick

enough feedback for the new setup," according to Piek, "so we built a performance-measurement system that reflects accurate performance in real time."

During the process trajectories, key performance indicators were defined to



accurately follow output performance in each primary process and each phase within a process. Such indicators are feedbacks of end-results; financial and nonfinancial.

"Real-time performance measurement is necessary to reassure the right decision-making and to notice any wrongdoing on time," Piek says.

"In the past, guards would be dependent upon the orders of their superior.

Having access to real-time displays of financial and nonfinancial results, the work force now turns to this 24/7 cockpit tool for reassurance."

Developing a Monitoring Tool

Collecting financial data was just a matter of making a link to the existing financial system. Although it sounded simple, in practice an interface connect-

On the other hand, collecting nonfinancial data meant building a data-capture application. This application gathers information reflecting quality levels in the form of prisoners' behavior patterns. Els van Engelen of PIT's information technology department finds this achievement unique. "Rarely does an organization store data on behavior patterns," she explains, "and it is less likely to find one that is updated on a regular basis." To stay updated, a system that came to be known as the 'Clicking System' was developed. "This front-end system gives guards a simple method to enter data that reflected the detainees' behavior and their changes," adds John Verhoof of PIT's IT department.

Fifteen parameters of behavior were defined, allowing comparisons between current behavior levels and behavior levels at entry. These parameters are reviewed and entered with a click of the mouse into a database every week for all detainees. Verhoof: "The 'Clicking System' is enhanced with colors that give instant feedback to guards when making an detainee evaluation."

Consultant Jui says getting employees to buy into the process was crucial. Jui: "When we started building the new systems, we were very aware of the low commitment of the work force. That is why we designed and built the systems in a Rapid Application Development [RAD] setup."

Together with ZWA, 40 employees from different levels of the organization worked to complete the functional design and technical building of the system. That involvement helped to give employees a sense of ownership right from the beginning.

All software development – linkages, front-end screens, representation of data, etc. – was coded using Visual Basic as a programming language. This allowed the fast programming pace that RAD required, as well as the use of ActiveX controls that represent numeric data graphically. It also permitted relatively simple connection to the existing databases that held the information to be displayed.

With the help of the Cockpit, a developed user-friendly and graphical tool, this information is now available to all employees. Serving as a monitoring tool for management and the work force, the Cockpit is linked to systems displaying information needed for day-to-day decision-making, keeping everyone in the organization focused and committed to the same objective.

Empowerment

With its new direction, PIT is now known for having the world's most progressive approach to dealing with illegal immigrants. Personnel absenteeism and turnover rank among the lowest in the governmental sector. And management and the work force are well aware of the effect of their own daily performance on financial and quality results.

Piek gives a large share of the credit for PIT's turnaround to the system. "Having all tools on hand, financial and nonfinancial real-time information, goals clearly stated, and a green light to be as innovative as possible, employees are experiencing real empowerment, making their own decisions and improving operations constantly by doing two simple tasks: experiment with operational changes and measure bottom-line results."

