

BALANCE STRUCTURE WITH INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY TO WIN IN GLOBAL COMPETITION

by Bradford L. Goldense, CMfgE, CPIM, CDP

One cornerstone of a successful rapid product development process is to have a "Structured and Documented Process." Getting to one however, as many companies have found out, is a challenging proposition. It is especially difficult as the structuring of the process necessarily occurs early in the reengineering effort when belief and buy-in may not yet have solidified.

One of the most often mentioned arguments regarding structuring the process is that it will reduce innovation and creativity. A greater discussion of where innovation and creativity should occur over the greater spectrum of basic research, applied research, development, and design is beyond the scope of this article. For practical purposes this discussion will be limited to those products falling under the range of specificity commonly referred to in industry as "New Product Approved For Development." Quite a range of stuff falls into this basket, but it does eliminate some of the creative spectrum associated with the early phases of research.

Creativity and innovation are and should remain integral with the "historical definition" of successful product development environments. Unfortunately creativity is all too often defined as "taking as much time as necessary to conjure up a great product idea and design it." This view was acceptable before global competition, and before product life cycles shortened to the point that they were significantly less than the historical product development cycles. Creativity, for most companies, must now be achieved within known time windows or the market will be gone and your competition will be on to the next generation.

A structured and documented process is essential for success in a rapid development environment. Product developers should take a lesson from manufacturing professionals in this regard. The USA is now again the world productivity leader because the process variation in manufacturing has been tamed. The key to predictable results, for both product developers and manufacturers, is to "have a known process that is consistently applied." When a cross-functional development team is formed, their goal is to develop a product.

If teams also have to develop the process that they will use during the course of developing the product, then energy is diverted and slippage is amplified.

Individual member values on what is important to emphasize in a product development process differ significantly. These differences lead to further time erosion while everyone comes to an agreement as to how the team should work together and what specific deliverables they have to produce during the development process. Energy is be wasted on the process, when it should be focused on the product which is the goal of assembling the team resource pool.

Companies owe it to their development professionals to provide the process. Once an acceptable process had been defined, it should be used consistently across all development projects. Phases and milestones should be common so everyone, including senior management, knows what state the product should be in at any given milestone. Marketing reviews and numerous design reviews should have specific focus to reduce the likelihood of error. They should not be confused with project status and schedule reports. Documentation should be standardized for each milestone, marketing review, design review, and other development checkpoint. Developers and reviewers cannot be effective if their "information vehicles" differ with every project and product.

Define a rapid product development process, then continually work to reduce the variation of that process. Strive to keep serious innovation and creativity off the critical path or time line of new product development projects. Structure the organization invention and creative activities to precede "New Product Approved For Development." and tend away from relying on "discovery" to achieve the success of a development phase typically referred to as "design."

For More Information Please Contact:

Goldense Group, Inc.
1346 South Street
Needham, MA 02492 USA

WPh 781-444-5400 WFx 781-444-5475

URL www.goldensgroupinc.com

© 1995-2002 Goldense Group, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

