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Leading Organizational Change: A Case Study in Improving Performance by Improving Culture

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**Leading Organizational Change: A Case Study in Improving Performance by Improving
Culture**

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the role that positively changing organizational culture plays in positively improving organizational performance. The research presented will look at how organizational culture is best defined, as well as expand on some key concepts like trust and engagement that are typically present in effective cultures. It considers the role leadership accepts in managing organizational change through their willingness to choose the right model for change and embrace the fact that challenges and complexities exist during the course of change. Both the research and the case study provided will support encouraging an organization looking to improve its performance to start with improving its culture. The writing outlines the cultural journey that my organization, Brazeway KY (BK), underwent over the course of several years. The positive results in the case of Brazeway KY, support the research that suggest intentionally focusing on cultivating a better culture leads to experiencing better organizational performance.

Keywords: Organizational Culture, change, engagement, trust

Leading Organizational Change: A Case Study in Improving Performance by Improving Culture

Manufacturing organizations are labeled as successful or unsuccessful based on whether or not they consistently demonstrate high performance against productivity standards and goals. Leaders in manufacturing organizations are responsible for developing a high-performing team capable of delivering and sustaining success. For an organization to achieve and sustain high performance it is necessary to build an effective culture. When an organization is underperforming, more often than not, that organization, is in parallel experiencing an ineffective culture. According to Farrell (2018), “since culture is the underlying explanation for how people work together, it can provide insights into why an organization or department is successful or if it is not achieving the desired results.” (864) When facing these challenges, leaders must consider taking on the task of fixing the culture in hopes of fixing the performance. Neagu and Nicula (2012) conclude:

The concept of organizational culture is relevant to any issue that seeks to ensure efficiency in the organization and attempts to deal with, i.e. to adapt to changes in the current socio-economic context. Organizational culture influences substantially more often all processes, relationships and results in a company. In this context, the culture exerts a major and quasi-generalized impact on the volume and quality of their products and services; costs and prices of products and services; sales and company turnover; proportions of profit and dividends; proportions and structure of investments. The management success also depends on owners, managers and leaders’ ability to create, maintain and develop a “strong” organizational culture to energize its components to achieve the objectives (424).

Correcting the course of an organization's ineffective culture is a formidable undertaking involving establishing trust, engaging associates, having crucial conversations to enhance collaboration and acknowledging areas within their current culture that need to be improved. Organizational leaders must be committed to developing plans for improvement, ruthlessly prioritizing those plans and implementing those plans with conviction. The goal of this writing is to present a case study demonstrating the journey that my organization – Brazeway KY – underwent while turning around a struggling manufacturing facility by focusing on cultural change as the catalyst to drive improvements in all areas. The case study will detail the three-year journey that Brazeway underwent in turning around its under-performing, unpredictable and ineffective culture by re-establishing trust, raising expectations, focusing on accountability and improving feedback. Each of these core cultural principles will be discussed throughout this writing. Ahead of looking at how cultural change at Brazeway made a positive impact on the organization, I feel it is important to review the research surrounding cultural change in organizations and the relationship between high-performance and effective organizational cultures.

Review of Literature

At this time, it is important to know what is meant by organizational culture, the benefits of a strong culture and why it is important for leaders. What is organizational culture? Katzenbach, Oelschlegal and Thomas (as cited in Farrell, 2018, p. 862) state that organizational culture “is the self-sustaining pattern of behavior that determines how things are done” and includes the basic assumptions that an organization has developed to operate within its environment. Neagu and Nicula (2012) propose three major components of culture:

- Basic postulates refer to elements involved guiding the conduct of members of the organization or group, the way they perceive, think or feel certain phenomena. The group has a certain behavior in regard to a decisive situation, it does not only act in a particular way, but it also interprets the behavior of other people, other groups in relation to that situation. Understanding these basic postulates adopted by the company facilitates predicting the behavior of its members to a given situation.
- Values and norms refer to the beliefs or core values of leadership and become a true action guide used to deal with new problems. Group members share the belief that these values are the most effective. This belief would develop only after obtaining tangible results, judged by the whole group as positive.
- Cultural products correspond to visible elements associated with the organization: means of written and/or oral communication, behavior of group members to each other or in relation to persons who are not part of the group or company, performance assessment, hence everything that corresponds to the functioning of the organization (421).

Farrell (2018) further states, “the culture of an organization is the way people behave and work within an organization.” (863) Farrell (2018) adds, “discussion of organizational culture typically arises in conjunction with the need for change or with the arrival of new leadership.” (864) Why is it important for leaders to understand the culture of their organization? According to Farrell (2018),

Understanding the culture explains the social structures, reporting lines, and effectiveness of an organization. To move forward, to achieve the strategic mission, to focus on goals, an effective leader needs to understand and appreciate how culture contributes to the work and how culture can be used to support and advance an organization (863).

According to Neagu and Nicula (2012),

Organizational culture in a company helps us to understand the differences that arise between what is formally and officially declared by managers and what actually happens within the company. Various rules, procedures, statements, declarations or decisions are interpreted and applied through organizational culture (421).

When looking at the benefits a strong culture brings to an organization, from the human resource management perspective, Kerdpitak and Jermstiparsert (2020) state,

Finally, it is concluded that the culture of the organization and high commitment of the employee both are necessary for the success HRM practices because culture and commitment enhance the motivation of the employees to cope with organizational goal. The conclusion also includes the support of the organization help the culture and commitment of the employee to improve the performance of HRM practices (414).

In like manner, Simovik et al. (2020) suggest that,

Organizational culture is a factor of great importance since it determines the inner environment of the organization in which members of the organization do their job and receive desired results. Employee satisfaction in a way depends on the organizational culture, which is dominant in the company, so different types of organizational culture affect the level of employees' satisfaction with the job they do (235).

Changing the culture of an organization involves intentionality, commitment and patience. Morgan (1998) writes, "Changing a business culture is a long-term process, and you must be committed to it for the duration. It's unrealistic to think you're going to make widespread, long-lasting changes that will generate results in a short time. Be patient." (13)

Organizational culture change requires planning and the recognition that change, of any kind, comes with challenges and complexities. Mascula (2014) summarizes a few of these:

- Sources of organizational culture change can be found both inside and outside the organization.
- Creating a new organizational culture, an important change brought by the existing organizational culture is a complex process.
- Promote and strengthen cultural change is a difficult and relatively slow.
- It is not enough to agree on a new vision and organizational culture issues that change.
- Changing organizational culture may meet resistance from some members of the organization.
- Changing organizational culture requires communication because it is synonymous with the changing attitudes of their organization (395).

In the case of organizational change, it is important to know where to start out on the journey of implementing lasting positive change. There are multiple approaches to how change can be executed and the role leadership plays in the process. According to Higgs and Rowland (2005), it is important to determine what approach to change management is best in today's business environment, what leadership behaviors are associated with effective change management and are leadership behaviors related to the underlying assumption within different approaches to change? With respect to what would be the best approach to change management in today's business environment Higgs and Rowland determined that sophisticated and complex models of change management are more recommended than simple and DIY models. In answering the question of what leadership behaviors are associated with effective change

management, Higgs and Rowland concluded that two of the three factors listed in their research point to success in change management. Those two factors are framing change and creating capacity. Framing change is characterized by establishing a ‘starting point’ for change, designing and managing the change journey and communicating guiding principles. The creating capacity factor is characterized by creating individual and organizational capabilities and communicating and creating connections. The third factor and the one least likely to create successful change is shaping behaviors. Shaping behaviors is characterized by what leaders say and do, making others accountable, thinking about change and using an individual focus. This research supports the conclusion that when leaders are initiating change in organizations, selecting the right model for change and exhibiting the right behaviors create a space more conducive to success.

Moreover, at Brazeway, we recognized that in designing and managing our change journey it was critical to be tethered to the guiding principle of trust. As Page et al. (2019) puts forth, “Trust and respect are the cornerstones identified as the basis from which a healthy and positive culture can thrive” (33). That leads to the question - what is trust? McLain and Hackman (1999) assert, trust is the belief that a specific other will be able and willing, in a discretionary situation, to act in the trustor’s best interests.” (155) Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) state:

The definition of trust proposed in this research is the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party (712).

Obviously, trust doesn’t just occur in an organization – it must be built. On the topic of building trust, Civelek et al. (2015) offer,

Organizational trust doesn't appear itself within the organization. Creation of organizational trust is related to the manner of management which the managers apply. In order to establish the trust in the organizations, it is necessary the managers should act ethical, and show the philanthropy to the employees. It is necessary that the managers create such environment within the organization in order to encourage the employees having the innovative ideas in the corporate organizations (221).

So how does building trust occur in an organization? According to McLain and Hackman (1999), "trust-building occurs when an individual tests another person in a way that increases confidence the other is willing and able to act in the individual's best interest in the future." (156) According to Gilley and Gordon (2012), a strategic plan around the vision of the organization when implemented properly will be noticed by the associates and build further trust. One of the key factors that leaders of an organization must understand as it begins the journey of cultural change is that it will require establishing, or in some cases, re-establishing trust and credibility among its associates. For Brazeway, the opportunity was to re-establish trust as we started the journey toward cultural change. As leadership in Brazeway we needed to adopt the definition of leadership put forth by Gilley and Gordon (2012). According to the authors, "Leadership, in our opinion, is a simple process with trust as a foundation that interacts with the model's other components, which then feedback and reinforce further trust." (29). Furthermore, research from Gilley and Gordon (2012), stated that building trust is a difficult and time-consuming process. (30) In order to help this process, Gilley and Gordon list seven factors that can help build positive, healthy and trust-based relationships. They are - freedom from fear, communication, interaction, acceptance, personal involvement, trust, and honesty. (30-31) The research by Gilley and Gordon outlined a case study in how an underperforming organization

experienced improved performance through embracing a trust-leadership model. The five stages of the trust-leadership model discussed were: having intentional presence and engagement with associates, using communication and vision, showing compassion, treating associates as stakeholders and providing reward and equity. In carrying out the tenants of the trust-leadership model, organizations can experience the benefits of enhancing and building managers' and associates' self-esteem, enhancing productivity, enhancing and building organizational communication, enhancing and building organizational understanding and enhancing and building organizational commitment. (30) One of the key takeaways in this research regarding trust is the role of the leader making it a priority to have a relationship with their associates. A leader should be intentional in their efforts to have a presence with the associates and engage the workforce in a sincere, professional manner. That presence should include demonstrated care and compassion. As Gilley and Gordon (2012) add, "Compassion as used in the model deals with a leader's empathy toward associates in terms of their personal and professional lives." (31) The idea is for leaders to engage associates as colleagues. This further develops the concept of trust in the relationship between leaders and associates. By making it a priority to build trusting relationships through engaging associates, Skiba and Wildman (2019) point out that if associates that are engaged by a competent, predictable and benevolent supervisor then it lessens the associates' level of uncertainty in the workplace. According to Skiba and Wildman (2019), "the absence of trust in a relationship, individuals experience more uncertainty and must dedicate cognitive resources to evaluating the fairness and trustworthiness of those around them." (221) Skiba and Wildman make the case that while empirical studies have not yet addressed felt trust, it is expected to increase feelings of workplace certainty. "Subordinates will also feel more

secure about their employment as they feel valued by the supervisors' trust in them.” (221)

Maximo, Stander and Coxen (2019) state:

When an organization builds an environment of trust, its associates will reciprocate by becoming more engaged in their work. Both the organization and associates should participate in a give-and-take relationship. This will help both parties feel confident as well as foster a positive work environment which enhances work performance, psychological safety and work engagement (10).

If trust is built through building relationships and relationships are built through engaging associates, then it becomes imperative to define and build engagement with associates.

Unfortunately, defining associate engagement is not a simple task. According to Shuck (2019), “across the spectrum of three decades, there have been many definitions of engagement proposed by the literature.” (8) The definition of associate engagement that Shuck offers is “associate engagement is the maintenance, intensity and direction of cognitive, emotional and behavioral energy.” (8) Shuck provides a more in-depth breakdown of the definition which adds additional insight to the concept of associate engagement:

More, this definition denotes that in its full state, engagement requires three unique features – first, the maintenance of energy, suggesting that associate engagement is (a) active, stable, and steady; (b) that the experience of associate engagement varies (or can vary) in intensity based on individual interpretation of a single experience or series of experiences; and last, (c) engagement has some level of directionality – that is, associate engagement does not happen in a vacuum, but rather is targeted at something, someone, or toward someplace through intention. Associate engagement is uniquely focused in a

working context and captures the full involvement of an individual's work including the psychological experience of work and working, which makes up what it means to be engaged in actual practice (8).

Shuck's work in the area of associate engagement highlights the importance of engagement being active and directional. Lockwood (as cited in Ngwenya and Pelsler, 2020, p. 4) furthers the discussion by saying:

Associate engagement is an intellectual and emotional bond towards organizational commitment by associates and is exhibited in three distinct behaviors. The first distinct behavior is talking positive about organizations to customers and stakeholders by their associates. The second behavior is associates demonstrating high enthusiasm for becoming members of the organization. The last distinct behavior is when associates achieve bigger results and effort to contribute to organizational success.

Similarly, Alarcon et al. (2010) remark, "Organizations that can foster engagement may be able to retain workers longer than organizations that fail to promote engagement. Organizations may save considerable resources by investing in good leaders that will promote an environment that encourages engagement." (307)

Furthering the topic of benefits brought to an organization by engaged associates, Macey, et al. (as cited in Gupta and Singh, 2017, p. 678) note, "the engaged associate has a sense of purpose and energy that is revealed in personal initiative, adaptability, effort and persistence in attaining the objective of the organization." Bhatnagar and Biswas (2010) add, "objectives are more easily met when associates are engaged and more likely to fall short when they are not." (276) In applying the above research, leaders should recognize both the importance of engaging

associates as well as the impact engaged associates make on an organization. For Brazeway we recognized the opportunity to get our workforce more engaged and understood that a disengaged workforce would not help in executing the change we needed. Brazeway needed to understand how to increase engagement and put those things into practice. Some insight into the opportunity to increase engagement was offered by Barros et al. (2015),

- have a mission statement focused on the positive difference the organization is making in the world. Help the employees feel the connection between their personal job and the mission of the company.
- put things in place so that while at work the employees can focus on work and not be stressed about outside personal matters.
- always keep the main focus on the growth of the employees through direct face-to-face feedback.
- come up with a way for employees to provide feedback and suggestions on the direction of the company (102).

To this point I have discussed organizational change being a challenging undertaking that involves leadership deciding the best model for change management. I then focused on the key principle of establishing trust in leadership. Trust, as discussed, comes through the conduit of building relationships and those relationships are developed through associate engagement.

When leaders engage with associates, associates become engaged. The next stage in the process was to properly leverage the improving relationships and engaged associates to create opportunities to have crucial conversations. What are crucial conversations? Crucial conversations are, according to Patterson et al. (2012) “a discussion between two or more people where (1) stakes are high, (2) opinions vary, and (3) emotions run strong.” Avoiding these types

of conversations can yield damaging results to an organization. Pilette (2006) suggests “by not directly discussing their concerns, the emergence of ineffective individual and team behaviors—including working around the person, warning others about them, alienating the person, gossiping, and complaining—allowed risks and problems to remain unaddressed.” When an organization is willing to equip and empower their leaders to have these crucial conversations, they should expect positive results in the way of collaboration and teamwork. As Pilette (2006) continues. “Conversation is the gossamer thread of collaboration and teamwork. In the relational settings of today’s organizations, each conversation provides an opportunity to share our voice and inspire others to share theirs. Collaboration and teamwork begin inside each of us and grow, develop, and are negotiated through relationship dialogues. Every conversation is an invitation to a positive revolution, to meet others who might otherwise be considered “them,” and to learn and cocreate a world that works and is safe for everyone.”

Finally, research demonstrates that organizational change comes with the need to diagnose problems within the organization and determine if external help is needed to initiate and promote change. It is imperative for leaders in an organization to honestly evaluate the current state of their organizational culture. Tapia and Walker (2020) note that “anyone who neglects to diagnose and fully understand the organizational culture will become its victim.” (14) Tapia and Walker (2020) go on to say, “organizationally intelligent change leaders have the knowledge, skills, and tools to identify, diagnose, understand, and change their organizational culture.” (15) According to Dyer and Dyer (2019), high-performing teams are not only aware of what is impeding their performance but are able to take corrective action to solve their problems and achieve their goals. How do organizations seeking to become high performers become aware of

problems in their culture? Dyer and Dyer (2019) listed the following symptoms and conditions that exist in an underperforming team:

- Failure to achieve team goals
- A reduction in productivity
- Unexplained increase in costs
- Increases in grievances or complaints from team members
- Complaints from clients about quality of the product or service
- Conflict among team members
- Confusion about assignments
- Lack of broad team support for decisions
- Decisions not carried out properly—lack of follow-through
- Apathy and general lack of interest or involvement of team members
- Lack of initiative, imagination, or innovation
- Ineffective meetings
- Problems with the team leader—high dependence on or negative reactions to the team leader
- Poor communication (people not speaking up or not listening to each other) (77-78)

As the research notes,

Ultimately the team leader or manager is responsible to develop a productive team and develop processes that will allow the team to regularly stop and critique itself and plan for its improvement. (83)

Dyer and Dyer (2019), go on to state

Unfortunately, many team leaders and managers have not been trained to do the data gathering, diagnosis, and planning and take the actions required to maintain and improve their teams. (83)

This would lead organizational leaders to have the wisdom to reach outside the organization to obtain a consultant's help in working through the process of organizational change. For Brazeway, we enlisted Humanergy, a leadership development company.

As the research leading to this point suggests, changing an organizations culture is a key step in seeing improved performance within that organization. An organization must be willing to evaluate their culture in the same manner in which they evaluate their performance. Often times, the factors negatively impacting performance are ones that can be corrected through improving the culture. In the case of Brazeway, a large cultural factor that needed addressed was the concept of trust. Associates had heard the messages of change so many times without experiencing real, lasting change that it led them to no longer trust the leadership. Associate engagement had to be increased. Leadership had to build or rebuild relationships with associates. An ineffective culture had to be changed in order for a high performing team to be launched. So, what were the steps taken by Brazeway leadership? The remainder of this writing will detail the steps taken over the course of a three-year journey and the improved performance which resulted from those efforts.

Case Study

To start, Brazeway is a global leader in aluminum extrusion and heat transfer components for HVAC, appliance, commercial refrigeration and automotive applications. Founded in 1946, the organization has a long history of innovation and achievement. The corporate headquarters are located in Adrian, Michigan and there are three manufacturing facilities across North America – Shelbyville, Indiana, Hopkinsville, Kentucky and Monterrey, Mexico. The Hopkinsville, KY facility will be the focus of this paper. The Hopkinsville location was opened in 1988 and I began working there in August of 1998 as an entry level manufacturing associate. The Hopkinsville, KY plant had seen a great deal of success over the years and in 2016 found itself at a critical point. The plant had been routinely falling short of meeting its financial goals, the culture was in disarray and there was growing concern about what the future would hold for the Brazeway KY facility. Brazeway KY had reached a point of crisis and solutions needed to be implemented quickly. Brazeway Senior Vice President of Operations Jeff Adams, provided some history on how Brazeway KY reached this struggling state of operations:

BK's fall from grace for lack of better terminology - took front and center when the plant shifted from an evaporator plant to an extrusion and hairpin plant. In 2008/2009 we expanded the plant and brought in / absorbed the Adrian, Michigan plant (extrusion and CTL). The plant had to shift from evaporator team-based assembly manufacturing to extrusion/CTL/hairpin manufacturing which is more 1 or 2 person lines and part harvesting. The workforce and the leadership were not able to adapt to the change ... you might say change management was a key downfall. During this time, we also migrated from a 3-shift operation to a 4 crew 24/7 operation. Another aspect the historic workforce was unable to or unwilling to adopt to this new schedule. We made a change

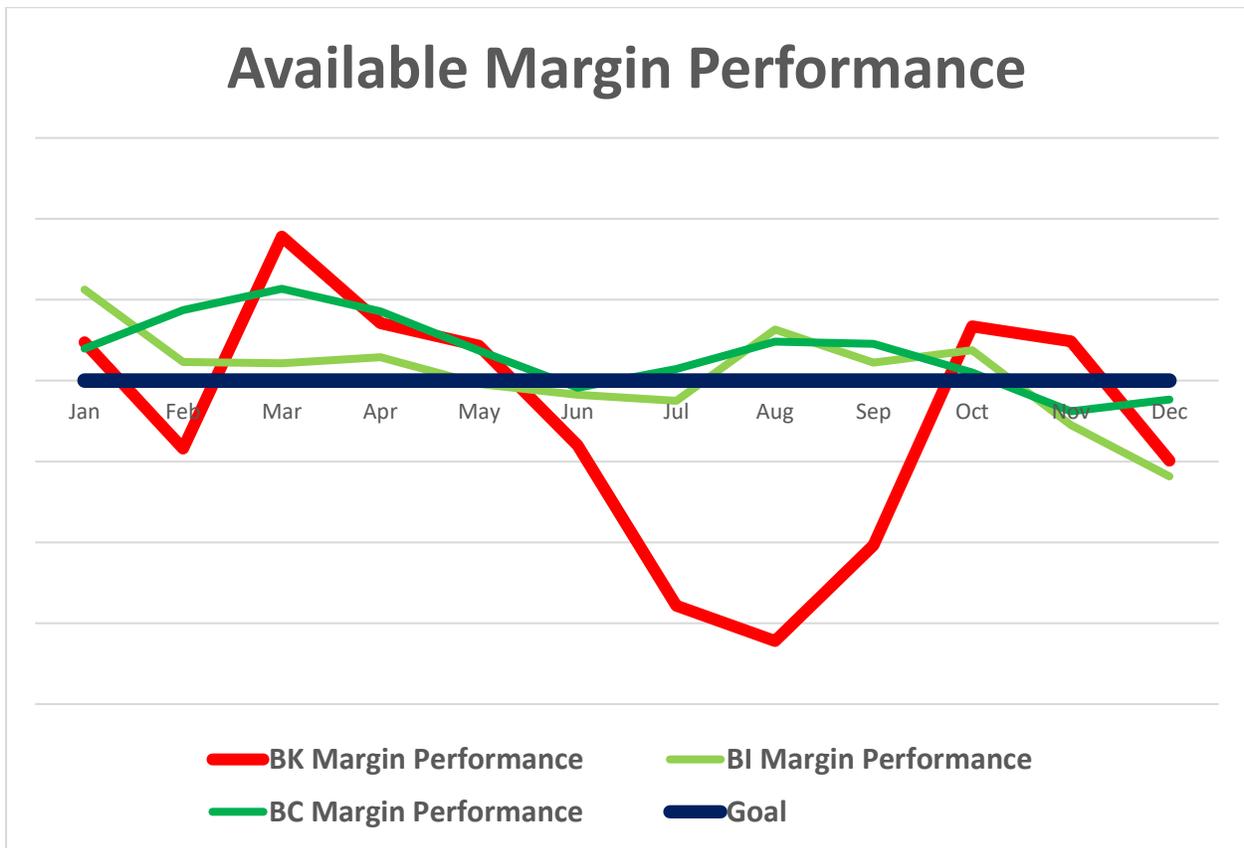
in leadership around 2011 and this was well embraced and we did have immediate improvement. We had a Quality Surge, A BK Surge and A BK Plan all of which were focused efforts to right the ship in BK – all with success that unfortunately was not sustained. As the business grew in complexity these improvements waned. Brazeway decided to complete a culture survey and partnered with our leadership coaching consultants (Humanergy) to identify key levers to help us on our journey. In year one of this endeavor we did not do a good job of prioritizing the key few opportunities. The BK Team identified levers in every department and I believe we had almost 30 Key Levers to start. All well intentioned and yet did not bring alignment across the departments on the vital few areas that we needed to make progress. By year two we brought these 30 levers down to 4 and started getting focused (J. Adams, personal communication, April 1, 2021)

When asked what the key challenges were concerning Brazeway KY, as it related to expected performance, Mr. Adams discussed:

Certainly, the mantra that I/we beat for BK was the variation in results. We could not predict from month to month what the performance of the plant would be. One month we would be at plan, and the next we would miss by several hundred thousand dollars. If you think about continuous improvement you first need to understand what the baseline is, what is the standard expectation. We did not have this. Or think about problem solving and Six Sigma ... first reduce the variation. Four key things stuck out – (a) a culture of accountability – people and departments were not accountable for their performance; (b) a culture of trust – we were not delegating tasks and trusting one another to accomplish those tasks; (c) a culture of silos (production / engineering / maintenance / quality) failing to collaborate; (d) a culture lacking transparency – we were

not communicating in a transparent, consistent fashion; (e) a culture short on capabilities – we did not have the process capability in our equipment nor the technical expertise in our people that the business required. This indicated the culture and to some degree the team in place in BK was not what the plant or business required to sustain performance (J. Adams, personal communication, April 1, 2021).

The following graph presented by Mr. Adams, highlights the inconsistencies regarding financial performance of the Brazeway KY manufacturing location in comparison with Brazeway sister plants in Shelbyville, Indiana (BI) and Monterrey, Mexico (BC) during the year 2015. The red line is BK while the two green lines represent BI and BC. The blue line is the goal. As represented in the graph predictability of the performance in the BK plant was nearly impossible during this critical stage.



Humanergy co-founder and consultant John Barrett had the following to offer when asked about the culture in place during 2015:

BK culture could be simply characterized as paternal and split, meaning:

- Paternal - BK self-identified as a family company with a family culture. There was a strong centralization of power in the organizational hierarchy combined with a strong care for people. This manifested in the daily work as top-down micro-management combined with a lack of accountability. Business performance issues were slow to be identified, slow to be addressed and poorly executed.
- Split - The paternal culture existed within the salary ranks. And, it was most visible and impactful between the salary and the hourly workforce. This resulted in a significant lack of workforce engagement, accountability and performance (J. Barrett, personal communication, April 15, 2021).

In February of 2016, Brazeway KY brought in a new plant manager, Steve Wilson. Mr. Wilson was given the task of reawakening a plant that had historically achieved success. Mr. Wilson's arrival and the enhanced, focused partnership with Humanergy would set Brazeway KY on a cultural journey intended to fuel necessary improvements in plant performance. Our Humanergy consultant, John Barrett, lists the following items as keys to effective cultural change in organizations:

- The understanding that culture is not an addition to the work, it is the work, it is how work gets done and done well.

- Top-down sponsorship and support - people need to know that the changes they are making are supported by the people in power. And, they are inspired when they see senior people make the effort to go on the journey themselves. People don't expect their leaders to be perfect but they do expect them to try and to hold themselves and others accountable.
- Recognizing that culture training is not PR - events, t-shirts, posters, speeches, videos - it is real change in the daily experience of people in the workplace.
- Culture is an emergent phenomenon where every day we teach others and learn from others how to work together.
- Culture changes everything AND we can't change everything all at once. So, we have to start somewhere impactful and build it progressively, step by step.
- Culture is a means to an end, not the end in and of itself. Thus, it is critical to always ensure culture is thought of as "how we get work done to deliver sustainable, competitive advantage". Culture is purpose driven; it is not the purpose.
- Culture is like a garden and needs constant maintenance and cultivation to keep it alive, healthy and productive.
- Culture evolves naturally, it drifts. Thus, it needs regular audits to maintain it.
- Competitive advantage evolves so culture needs to evolve to deliver. For example, we now have a "new normal" due to Covid. How do we adapt and intelligently design our culture to enable our continued success?

When asked about his philosophy coming in, Mr. Wilson replied,

I introduced a pull, push and (finally) flow. My approach was to start by pulling everyone into conversations about what winning looked like. Next, I was upfront with the team that in order to be calibrated, I must get into their “sandbox” (area of perceived ownership based on position); this is considered the “push” of an agenda. The final and most critical phase is the strategic delegation with confidence or return of ownership (push/pull = flow). The hidden key is that ownership never changed in terms of responsibility. I simply calibrated others to see what was possible. BK has been a true example of how much can be achieved through collective efforts. Think about it in terms of *smarter not harder* (10% of 1 associate’s efforts versus 10% of 100 calibrated associates’ efforts; imagine the possibilities) (S. Wilson, personal communication, March 30,2021).

Emphasis Around Safety

First, we needed to address the level of effort and emphasis that was placed around safety. Our safety culture had drifted and needed to be reinvigorated. It was crucial for us to create a culture where safety moved beyond a priority and became a value. As our EHS coordinator, Jennifer Arnold says, “priorities can change but values are permanent” (J. Arnold, personal communication, March 30,2021). Our leadership team recognized that a safe place to work each day meets a basic need for all people and would serve as a great first step towards rebuilding trust among our associates. Our EHS coordinator recalled the three challenges she gave us to change the safety mindset in our plant. She listed those as:

- Walk the talk. Leadership through demonstration. Set the example. Plant manager set the tone for walking the talk with each level following
- Set expectations and hold people accountable.

- Intentionally create interactions involving safety from top to bottom and bottom to top. Develop a safety engagement tool designed to create engagement at all levels. Involve all area representatives in incident investigations and seek input from associates around solutions (J. Arnold, personal communication, March 30,2021).

Safety had to be more than just a message people heard, it had to be a movement modeled for people to see. As leaders we had to set the tone for the safety culture we desired. Little changes like making safety the first thing we discussed in every meeting organization wide. According to our Plant Manager Steve Wilson, “It was crucial to reinforce our stance with actions not just words. Every plant MDI tier meeting, PBL meeting and Quarterly meeting started with safety (not optional). We would occasionally restart a meeting if we inadvertently missed this requirement” (S. Wilson, personal communication, March 30,2021). We had to go about changing the experience our associates had when it came to safety. If the choice between safety and production had to be made, safety had to win out. As in other areas, accountability had to be driven to the individual level. We went about the work of intentionally engaging our associates and challenging them to take ownership in theirs and their coworkers’ safety. On the topic of safety ownership, BK Plant Manager stated, “We shifted from a traditional philosophy of *single ownership* to total accountability. In short everyone had ownership and everyone was responsible for their safety along with the safety of others” (S. Wilson, personal communication, March 30,2021). Our EHS coordinator, developed a safety observation program which created designated, specific opportunities for unsafe practices to be recognized and positive safe behaviors to be applauded. The goal was to move from a reactive safety culture to a proactive safety culture. A safety culture that worked to eliminate potential hazards to our associates before they actually manifested themselves. Correcting unsafe acts and unsafe conditions were a

priority and received escalation according to their severity. If either existed in a manner to cause immediate harm to an associate then that process would be shut down until the issue was corrected. In all meetings, safety discussions were moved to the top of every agenda and speaking about safety was encouraged throughout every level of the organization. In every production area, the line side information boards provided associates with safety updates specific to those areas as well as plant wide safety information to greater communicate the importance of safety in our day to day operations. When asked about the importance and impact made by communicating safety in new ways, Mrs. Arnold emphasized,

It was critical for us to build relationships between leadership and frontline associates around the goals of our new safety culture. Following up on concerns and conversations was important as the associates needed reassurance that we were serious about their safety. They needed to know that we were actually listening and acting on their concerns (J. Arnold, personal communication, March 30,2021).

To highlight this, we implemented weekly production floor walks, known as Gemba walks, which utilized cross-functional participation to observe real-time opportunities around safety, production, quality and waste. These walks involved seeking input from the associates working in the area. We would identify opportunities by observing the area and speaking with those who had the best knowledge of the area. The things that needed improvement were put into an action register specific to that area and posted on the lineside boards in that area. Those responsible for completing the actions would then follow up with the associates in the area to make sure they knew the items were completed. When our cultural journey began in February of 2016, historical numbers of safety recordables had been on the rise year over year. Over the course of our three-year journey toward cultural change we reached a level of zero OSHA recordables for the year

2018 and have maintained that level for three straight years. The safety culture at Brazeway KY is now the benchmark across the entire organization and most importantly, our associates work in an environment that values their safety above all else. A culture of safety is integral to an overall healthy organizational culture. In this area, BK Plant Manager concluded,

Once everyone realized that the plant leadership embraced a *safer way of life* at BK, the hardest work was done. Our associates embraced and matched the energy of our staff.

The facility expected that all accidents could be avoided or mitigated. Truly our team understood that safe behavior starts with a simple glance into a mirror. We all make the choice to remain SAFE (S. Wilson, personal communication, March 30,2021)!

Open and Honest Assessment

Second, there was a need to evaluate our frontline workforce and honestly assess if we had the right people in place to accomplish the work needed to build the culture we wanted. The process was difficult and we had to face the brutal reality that overtime our manufacturing plant had accepted less than ideal attitudes, teamwork, commitment and execution from our associates. If an associate achieved the daily goals and expectations where it concerned throughput and scrap, they were considered a strong performer regardless of other potentially harmful exhibited behaviors and attitudes. The leadership team at Brazeway Kentucky spent several hours across several days evaluating our workforce and assigning a rating according to “performance” as it was defined for us at that time. The rankings of A, B and C were used with A be an outstanding contributor, B being an average contributor with upward potential and C being someone who barely meets expectations. The results were sobering as we realized that we had only a handful of A’s and B’s and our frontline personnel was predominantly composed of associates who were barely meeting our expectations around performance. Going through this exercise made it clear

that we needed to develop plans to address each group. The A rated performers needed to be recognized and multiplied, B rated performers needed to be coached up and C rated performers needed to be held accountable, disciplined and removed if necessary. Unfortunately, we lacked the proper tools to carry out these actions. How do we recognize and multiply top performers? How do we coach up and grow those who have upward potential? How do we handle the task of driving accountability and making the right decisions when it comes to removing under-performers?

With these questions in mind, concerning recognition, recognition booklets were ordered and a program was developed for rewarding those who went above and beyond. Managers were given these recognition booklets in an effort to promote and acknowledge those positive behaviors we wanted to see reproduced in all of our associates. Associates could redeem those recognition tickets for dollars toward the purchase of items in our breakroom. The recognition tickets were also helpful in reviewing those associates nominated by their peers for our annual Associate of the Year award. Further, leadership was more intentional in seeking out associates to thank them for their efforts and express gratitude for their service. Our new Plant Manager promoted and modeled increased floor presence from the leadership team at Brazeway KY as a way to intentionally create the space to encourage good behaviors and recognize our positive contributors more regularly. Recognizing good efforts and building repour with our associates was another important piece of our cultural improvement. The effort to develop a formal recognition program and intentionally seek out opportunities to commend good work behaviors was noticed by our associates. It meant something to them that leadership would take the time and acknowledge their efforts on a personal level. Our teams began to take great pride in

receiving the recognition cards. They were excited to know that Brazeway leadership were noticing the good work they were doing.

Additionally, we determined that the opportunity around coaching and growth could be most impacted by improving the cadence and manner in which feedback was given to associates. We identified that our current methods of associate development and evaluation did not provide associates with regular, near real time feedback regarding their performance. Associates were evaluated annually and there was a clear lack of coaching and development provided from annual evaluation to annual evaluation. Often times, when feedback was given, it was done so to correct bad behaviors and not recognize and applaud good behaviors. Supervisors were not given the tools and the space to perform the critical task of coaching up associates, so it was important for those obstacles to be overcome for the benefit of our cultural growth. As Production Manager of the Brazeway KY facility, I developed and deployed a coaching and feedback system that would support the annual review process and help us make coaching a priority. I started by looking at how we quickly and simply communicated our performance expectations. We use the color green to indicate strong performance (at or above standard), the color yellow to indicate average performance (just short of standard) and red to indicate poor performance (well below standard). This color-coded system was familiar to our associates and a simple, visual way to communicate their personal performance so I wanted to duplicate that methodology. As far as a cadence, I felt once per month would be an appropriate starting point. The expectation laid out to frontline supervisors was they would provide one of these performance feedback reviews each month for each associate on their respective shifts. The reviews, which I labeled Monthly Snapshots, were to be completed in a one to one fashion between frontline associate and frontline supervisor. The review conversation would be a two-way conversation designed to encourage the

good, coach up the average and eliminate the bad performance activities in our associates. I titled the sections:

- Green – was the GO area. The intention was to applaud these habits and encourage them to continue to demonstrate these on a regular basis. These are the things we desired in our culture.
- Yellow – was the GROW area. The intention was to discuss the items under this section to develop plans (partnership between supervisors and associates) to improve and encourage taking these habits to the next level. How can we work together to get better?
- Red – was the NO area. The intention in this section was to put an immediate end to these behaviors and activities. Examples are poor safety, poor attitudes, poor teamwork and poor attendance. NO items were to be stopped immediately and if not, discipline would be escalated quickly.

The Monthly Snapshot form I developed is pictured below. The intent of the design was to be simple and to the point. The focus of the review was to encourage open conversation and coaching.

Monthly Performance Review Snapshot

Employee:	Month:
Supervisor:	
GO	
*	
*	
*	
GROW	
*	
*	
*	
NO	
*	
*	
*	

Once completed these reviews would be saved and supervisors could use them once the annual review process came around to aide in the scoring and comments. Using this new system helped continue to build trust as associates regularly were notified of where they were in regard to their performance and were given regular time to sit in front of their supervisor and have a two-way conversation. The benefit on our culture by implementing this new system was immediate.

According to Chad Williams,

At the beginning of using the Monthly Snapshots, there was some speculation as to the purpose and motivation behind the addition of another review. Once the associates realized the intent and experienced a few of the snapshots, the majority were encouraged by the feedback and welcomed the time to engage with their supervisor (C. Williams, personal communication, March 30,2021).

The feedback from our associates was very positive as they agreed it was very helpful to their growth to hear from and speak to their supervisor on a more regular basis. My supervisors found

the form very helpful as well. Marlo Palermo, one of my manufacturing supervisors noted,

When I did the snap shots on D shift, I was surprised to find that the employees were happy to have the time to sit and discuss the comments good or bad. It was an opportunity for me to fill them in on why I wrote the comments and the ways that I was willing to help them through issues. For the good comments and performance, it gave me the space to recognize and applaud their work. It's a more personal approach rather than just a passing comment asking them to do something or fix something on the production line. I had a few times on D crew where I actually was surprised by the employee going into detail about what they would like to accomplish and what their next steps should be in order for them to advance in the organization (M. Palermo, personal communication, March 30,2021).

The Monthly Snapshots created yet another opportunity for improved engagement, communication and trust-building to make a positive cultural impact throughout our manufacturing facility. John Barrett of Humanergy, when asked about the cultural impact of introducing regular evaluations, said,

Cultural change occurs over time when leadership changes the daily/weekly/monthly experience of the workforce in meaningful and impactful ways. The workforce monthly check-ins, coaching/review/feedback meetings, was the powerful place to start this change. Any type of high performance requires a control system that provides strong signals to people of regarding targets for performance, variances, coaching/guidance for improvement and consequences that are meaningful. This is what the monthly check-ins instituted. Two additional, critical aspects of the check-ins were: 100% consistency and the measurement of WHAT and HOW. People were given clear and consequential signals

of what was important for performance, why it was important and how to be successful. The response of the workforce was 25 % immediately embraced the new expectations as "long overdue" and thrived, 50% embraced the new expectations over time (consistent repetition) and elevated their performance and 25% of people were successfully exited from the business and replaced. The net impact over time was profound. It not only systemically elevated the performance of the hourly workforce; it also enabled the salary workforce to elevate their thinking and impact on the business (J. Barrett, personal communication, April 15, 2021).

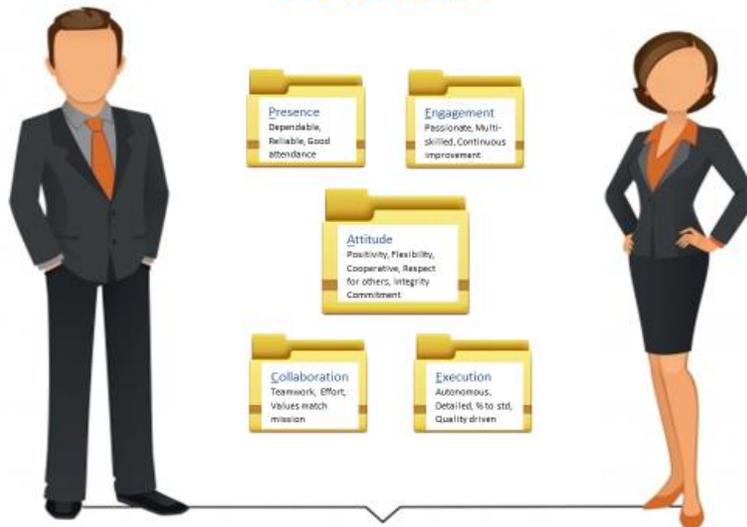
Lastly, to address the action of needed accountability and decision-making improvements, Brazeway KY needed to have a method in place to clearly communicate what was expected. If we were looking to the raise the bar on associate expectations, we needed to define the bar. What does an ideal associate in the culture we desired look like? As the Production Manager, I sought to develop and deploy an expanded definition of performance. A definition of performance that went beyond our traditional definition of performance which only focused on throughput and scrap percentages. A performance definition that included other key characteristics that were crucial to cultural transformation. This led to my creation of a template to name and define what characteristics we would expect our associates to exhibit in order for us to be successful. I called this new performance standard the PEACE model. It would capture 5 categories that identified the traits we would expect in current associates and look for in new associates. We would filter all personnel decisions through this model. Whether we were hiring or firing, decisions would be made with the support of this tool. The 5 categories were:

- Presence – this category would address attendance, timeliness to meetings and break times. Will they be on time each day? Are they committed to the job?

- Engagement – this category would capture expectations around continuous improvement, expanded skills and desire to achieve. Do they participate in the process? Are they looking to be the best?
- Attitude – this category would lay out expectations around integrity and character. Expectations to be cooperative, respectful and committed to the organization. Do they display the character and behaviors that maintain the respect of themselves, their coworkers and the organization?
- Collaboration – this category would place emphasis on teamwork and making sure values match the mission. Do they work well with others?
- Execution – this area would include the previous definition of performance. How does the associate execute in his achievement of production and scrap goals? Do they have an eye on the quality of the product?

The poster below was developed and posted across the plant.

Attributes of an Ideal Employee P.E.A.C.E



Our associates now had a clear and concise definition around what we expected them to be each day. Our frontline supervisors now had a standard they could apply during the review process and a goal they could point to when providing coaching to associates. Brazeway KY Human Resources Manager Jessica Smith noted,

The development of the PEACE model greatly impacted our workforce in a positive way. It is no longer enough to come to work and just do the bare minimum to get by. We now have a standard to which we hold all employees. Long gone are the days where we deal with employee's attitudes because they have great production numbers. When we first implemented the PEACE model, we reduced our headcount to remove those employees that did not meet that definition and had an immediate positive impact on morale. Toxic people can be demoralizing to a team which is not the culture we are trying to cultivate (J. Smith, personal communication, April 2,2021).

John Barrett furthered that the PEACE model,

One great part of Brazeway Kentucky's cultural journey was that the process itself has undergone continuous improvement to increase its effectiveness and impact. The introduction of the PEACE model is an important upgrade. The PEACE model added clarity and precision to the expectations. This common language and common expectations eliminated "waste" in the process caused by misunderstanding and misalignment. Thus, it increased the value and impact. The PEACE model could now be used to strengthen all aspects of talent management - hiring, selection, training, coaching and succession. Thus, the holistic and immersive quality of the cultural change was increased (J. Barrett, personal communication, April 15, 2021).

Although ranking our associates was a difficult exercise for BK managers to undertake, the actions taken and the ideas implemented proved to be a positive step forward in building the culture we desired. We now had a way to provide recognition, increase feedback and drive accountability through the use of a standard, expanded definition of associate performance. Our associates responded positively to all of these measures. We began to see the A rated performers re-engage and feel confident our culture change efforts were real. Their past experiences of promised change and failures to see that change had caused them to be skeptical. For them, it was important to see change not only talked about but actually implemented. Our A performers wanted to be successful and it was very important to keep them engaged by showing them that things were headed in a new direction. Our B rated performers were excited to be challenged and improved by the opportunity to grow. Our C rated performers understood that we would no longer be accepting less than ideal efforts from our frontline contributors.

Reestablishing Trust and Leadership Presence

Third, we identified BK's frontline supervision had lost the trust and respect of their teams. This was evident across multiple areas of their responsibilities. Supervisors were doing a large number of tasks that prevented them from being the frontline leadership that we needed to enhance our culture. They had developed into micro-managers with schedules filled daily with tasks designed to audit the work of associates rather than having the space to lead their teams. I met with my supervisors not long after I was promoted to Production Manager to get a sense of all of their day to day responsibilities. I asked them to list out all of the activities that filled their calendars and looked for ways to free them up to be focused more on coaching, leading and developing. Many of their activities were a result of a lack of accountability and lowered expectations toward associates. After reviewing these lists, I removed many of these tasks and

worked with supervisors to develop new standard work for them. Standard work is a document that captures the “what” where it concerns the tasks people perform in their work. Coaching and development was to be their focus and all other tasks were secondary.

Now, if we were going to improve our culture, the frontline leadership would have to re-establish trust and authority. To rebuild trust our frontline associates needed to see their supervisors demonstrate consistency and follow through. Once I gave them the time and space to lead, my responsibility shifted to working with supervisors both individually and collectively to hold them accountable, set them on a course of action and empower them to lead with my full support. Over the years they had been stripped of the ability to exercise their given authority. Not only did they need to rebuild the trust of those who reported to them, they needed feel trusted by their leadership to carry out their responsibilities. Brazeway as an organization partnered with a company named Humanergy to aide in the development of leaders across the organization. Brazeway understood that developing front line leadership was critical to changing our culture. As a result, the frontline leaders at BK were provided 4 leadership development sessions per year. These sessions in combination with team sessions and management sessions, all guided by Humanergy coaches, provided continued development for all influencers in the organization. Specific to frontline supervision at BK, the goal of those sessions was to teach them how to better communicate, handle conflict and develop their teams. They had to be given the tools to be successful so they could commit to the task of putting their teams in a position to be successful each day. When asked about the impact that these Humanergy sessions focused on developing frontline leaders made in the cultural improvements, HR Manager Jessica Smith offered the following,

I believe that the key to make effective change in an organization is getting buy-in from your employees. That starts with the frontline leadership. Investing in those employees are necessary if you want to implement meaningful lasting change. Humanergy has been a huge catalyst in improving our culture. Our employees understand the company is investing in making the better leaders and helping to strengthen those skills in communication, teamwork, and leadership which filters down to other employees. I believe that are employees enjoy participating in Humanergy and are engaged and actively participate in those sessions. It makes good business sense to invest in ensuring that employees are able to develop those necessary soft skills needed for overall success, not only for themselves but for the company as a whole (J. Smith, personal communication, April 2, 2021).

In addition to formalized leadership training from an outside source - Humanergy, the efforts to regain the authority and respect of supervisors were bolstered by giving them parameters they could operate within as it concerned discipline. They no longer had to get permission to remove an associate who was not following the rules or meeting expectations. While we were building a coach first and discipline last group of leaders, it was important to send the message to our associates that refusal to follow the rules was not an option. There were examples such as a refusal to move to another department to support the needs of the plant, open cell phone usage while on the floor, disrespectful treatment of peers and supervisors and not wearing required PPE (personal protective equipment). Before we implemented changes, the supervisors were only allowed to write these offenders up and could not send someone home without permission from HR and the Production Manager. I removed this restriction. Associates who displayed disrespectful and disruptive behaviors could be sent home without pay for the

remainder of the shift. From there the event was summarized and communicated by Supervisors, reviewed by the HR Manager and Production Manager and next steps determined. I like to refer to this step as giving frontline supervisors the bite back to their bark. These moves delivered the desired impact. When asked about the success coming from changes made to our supervisory culture, Chad Williams, our Maintenance Manager, commented,

The supervisors are the first line of defense and act as a sounding board for the associates on the production floor. As the supervisors-built trust and respect with management, it led to them garnering further responsibilities and empowered decision-making bandwidth. This resulted in increased credibility with the production associates and allowed them to get real time feedback with answers they could trust (C. Williams, personal communication, March 30,2021).

Supervisors were freed up to be cultural change agents and embraced their new role. The combination of the PEACE model, Monthly Snapshots and restored supervisor authority created a place for accountability to thrive. There were now clear expectations, clear lines of authority and clearly allocated spaces for associates and supervisors to engage in coaching designed to create cultural and performance improvements. In regard to the importance of investing in the training of our frontline leaders, John Barrett remarked,

The frontline leadership was an important part of the culture journey. The monthly check-ins provided a drumbeat to the hourly and supervisory leaders as to WHAT needed to be delivered and HOW people needed to work together. For the supervisors and team leaders the challenge was to ensure that their mindset and skillset matched the expectations as defined in the PEACE framework. If leaders didn't walk the talk this would cripple the effectiveness of the monthly check-in. If leaders did walk the talk then

they could amplify the impact by daily actions with their people. It became a virtuous cycle with the training and the check-in reinforcing and amplifying the cultural change (J. Barrett, personal communication, April 15, 2021).

Improving Communication

Fourth, we recognized an opportunity to improve communication across multiple levels. We wanted to transition our communication efforts from a top-down model toward more of a two-way model. A top-down model of communication is one where communication is filtered down from the top of an organization's leadership to the bottom levels of an organization. What we wanted to achieve by moving to the two-way communication model was increased engagement between leadership and frontline associates. We wanted communication to be less about working through a published list of talking points and more of a conversation where questions and ideas could be discussed. We also increased the frequency of plant-wide meetings from just once per quarter to once per month by adding a plant two-way meeting in addition to the already scheduled quarterly meetings. The quarterly meetings remained in place as they were a chance for a corporate officer to stand in front of the BK team and review the quarterly financials and company plans. The monthly two-way communication meetings would be facilitated by our BK Plant Manager along with assistance from other members of the staff. The goal of these monthly meetings was to reinforce safety, present plant financials from the previous month and provide value stream leaders with an opportunity to provide updates on specific projects in their areas. We intentionally left 15 minutes on the agenda for questions and comments from all meeting attendees.

A second opportunity in the area of improved communication that we addressed was to use all resources available to saturate our associates with information. We leveraged technology

to have televisions set up in breakrooms and high traffic areas so information was readily available for associates. We created line side boards to focus on communicating critical information. It was important that information was clear, concise and pertinent. The use of value stream leaders (discussed in more detail later) to organize and oversee the lineside boards in their areas helped keep information presentation consistent and timely. These steps allowed us to communicate information more effectively and timely across all shifts. In the early stages of our cultural change journey we stressed over-communication as an acceptable practice. I coached supervisors to avoid assuming that the critical points were heard and understood. Humanergy coached all leadership to use the helpful tool of “closing the loop” as a way to improve communication. Closing the loop involved the speaker making sure that the receivers of the message (communication) repeated back to them what they heard and what they understood about what they heard. It stressed the importance of not leaving things open to interpretation. Associates felt more connected to the direction things were headed as communication efforts were improved. Once again, our people felt increasingly engaged as we intentionally focused on enhancing their experience. The concept of two-way conversation in meetings was different for most of our frontline associates and it took them some time to participate comfortably. However, once they embraced it, the meetings became more productive and less just going through the motions.

Collaboration and Cross-functionality

Fifth, it was important to move the leadership from a silo approach to management toward a more collaborative, cross-functional approach. The primary functions of the plant were production, materials, maintenance, quality, safety, engineering and continuous improvement. Each one of these areas had a manager or a coordinator over them and over time collaboration

and alignment had devolved into competition and finger-pointing. Leaders in those areas acted out of self-preservation and often times not in the best interest of Brazeway's overall goals. This environment eventually led to decisions being made in a vacuum. Departments were not communicating with each other and had lost sight of how they impacted each other with regard to activities. Under the leadership of our new Plant Manager, new people were placed in key roles and the push for collaboration and cross-functional engagement was prioritized as a key to our cultural improvements. On this topic, Steve Wilson recalled, "Assembling and placing the correct team on the field was important. We had most of the pieces in place, but some were misplaced in terms of assignment" (S. Wilson, personal communication, March 30, 2021). In a like manner to some key personnel movements in the staff, one of the first changes made in the space of redefining management collaboration was to assign plant manufacturing engineers as newly created value stream leaders. These value stream leaders were responsible over the processes in their specific, assigned area. They would work with their (engineering) manager, the production manager, the maintenance manager, the shift production supervisor, the maintenance shift leader and the areas frontline associates to help meet the needs in the area. A daily meeting was created for all of these resources to meet each day and discuss opportunities and successes in the past 24 hours in all value streams. BK had two primary value streams (round tube extrusion and microchannel extrusion) and each value stream contained multiple processes which were different and related. In order to further boost collaboration, we created a physical environment which combined representatives from engineering, production and quality for each distinct value stream in offices together. This type of collaboration produced immediate results as shared responsibility and activity in the areas created a sense of open-communication, pride and mutual understanding among team members. The responsibility of success and the accountability of

shortfalls was no longer an individual burden. The changes implemented highlighted that success was ultimately found in the strength of the team and not in the strength of the individual. John Brooks, BK Quality and Engineering Manager had the following to say regarding the cultural enhancement brought about through creating Value Stream Leaders,

The addition of value stream leaders provided a more specific focus on the assigned areas by both engineering and quality. These two groups led the improvement and problem-solving efforts within the plant and were finding it somewhat of a challenge to effectively communicate the required documentation and information supporting these activities. Combining these two groups into the same office space greatly improved their ability to communicate and more importantly established a higher level of trust and understanding that has grown to become a strength for the entire plant (J. Brooks, personal communication, April 5, 2021).

Equally important to developing a more collaborative team, was the revamping of our daily tier meeting. The daily tier meeting was a morning kick-off meeting each day to discuss the previous 24 hours of production, recognize successes, identify improvement opportunities and establish priorities for the next 24 hours. The silo-based thinking had made a negative impact on this meeting as well. Many team members were coming unprepared and those that were prepared came only to defend their actions and put blame on the “other” departments. There was evidence of personal agendas, damaged relationships, poor teamwork and broken trust across departments. Our “new” team began to focus on being open and honest in communication and accountability. We embraced the idea that we all had areas that could be and should be improved and that any feedback would be taken with a spirit of best intentions and not competition. It was necessary for the team to have crucial conversations to clear the air and address concerns and conflicts head

on. Many of these sessions resulted in realignment, a better understanding of what was happening and a desire to build true collaboration. The meeting began to transform as paying attention to details and completing actions became a priority for each member of the team. In both changes – introduction of value stream leaders and revamped tier meetings – a more collaborative environment was the end result. Teamwork in our culture was no longer something we talked about as leaders; it was now something we honestly modeled. Extrusion Engineering Manager Luke Springfield provided support to the impact of value stream leaders and our enhanced team collaboration efforts by saying,

For me, one of the main benefits was the ability to communicate better between departments. In the beginning of our culture shift, there was definitely a reluctancy to communicate with other departments. The relationship was very diminished and needed a lot of work. A lot of departments, in my opinion, did not feel comfortable openly communicating with other departments. For me and my department particularly, a major benefit that I witnessed was the relationship between maintenance and engineering growing. In the beginning, neither department hardly ever talked to one another. Now, there is a meeting with both departments every morning that has open dialogue from both departments. Seeing this relationship grow and get repaired was a major benefit. Now, both of these departments communicate multiple times per day and have really helped drive communication between other departments as well (L. Springfield, personal communication, April 10, 2021).

Reactive to Proactive

Sixth, we needed to move from a reactive and fire-fighting culture toward a more proactive anticipation, preparation and planning culture. A culture that was able to be sustained

and would provide a space for creativity and talent to thrive. One key in making this a reality was a renewed energy and emphasis around harnessing a continuous improvement (CI) culture. In manufacturing, the concept of continuous improvement focuses on making changes to the current state of conditions across multiple disciplines in the plant. Processes, labor content, and material flow are all instances where focused CI efforts can be applied. While there had been some successes in the area of continuous improvements over the years at Brazeway KY, as with other things we have discussed, it was sporadic and not sustained. Primary tools we used for engaging our associate's minds to think in a more continuous improvement way were the deployment of 5S+Safety standards, events and projects. The 5S+Safety philosophy combined safety and the 5S techniques introduced in Japanese manufacturing – (English transition) Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize and Sustain – to drive organization in our plant. Our new CI Coordinator Luz Spinola began to educate our leadership and frontline personnel on the use of 5S+Safety in our facility as a way to identify opportunities for improving both the visual appearance of the facility and the physical execution of job-related tasks. Introducing CI in this manner created the space necessary for our frontline associates to look at their work in a new way. It gave them permission to challenge status quo and not only find ways to improve our plant but also participate in the work to see their ideas implemented. To expand on this point, CI Coordinator Luz Spinola articulates,

One of the first things that we did as we were starting our CI journey was to implement 5S+Safety across the board. It is well known that a clean and organized work environment has great influence on employees' engagement and fosters teamwork. As our associates started to see the impact of the small things that we were doing, the change became more evident in other areas, for example: it was much easier to find deviations to

our product or process, everyone felt more empowered to make suggestions and communicate their concerns as they trusted us to get them an answer or the right tools they needed to address them. The implementation of this tool provided everyone with a new way of working and new expectations that were set by the team on what things needed to look like and how that mattered because it makes everyone's job easier.

As we moved forward on our journey, the team started to adapt to the constant change that comes with Kaizen events and improvement projects which set the stage to make it easier for everyone to adjust to almost anything that was thrown our way and, as expectations were clearer, the team started to participate more in bringing ideas to make sure that we were meeting our targets. We saw a clear path to better performance and everyone was on board to get there. By now everyone knew that continuous improvement was not about working faster or harder but working smarter, more efficient and finding new and easier ways every day (L. Spinola, personal communication, April 2, 2021).

Furthermore, Brazeway KY implemented a more formalized approach to problem-solving. The goal was to establish a consistent, repeatable reaction plan when addressing problems. Our new approach to problem solving would involve engaging representatives from multiple disciplines (engineering, maintenance, production, quality, safety, etc.) across multiple locations (Brazeway Indiana and Brazeway Mexico) in an effort to generate viable, long-term solutions to problems as they arose. This style of problem-solving would be in alignment with our efforts to move beyond siloed thinking and create a more cross-functional, collaborative environment. We began to teach and deploy the use of problem-solving tools like Is-Is Not, 5-Why, Ishikawa diagrams and 8D's to support our new methodology. With this transition to formal problem-solving, the responsibility of bringing solutions to the table was no longer solely

on the shoulders of the department specific to the problem. Whether it was a maintenance, engineering, quality or production problem historically, in our new culture, it became everyone's opportunity to find a solution. More than ever before, frontline associates were asked to participate in these problem-solving events which furthered our efforts to expand their engagement in our culture. They thrived in this new participatory environment and displayed their creativity and thoughtfulness once engaged. They were the experts and were excited to be asked to participate in making things better. An additional benefit from these efforts was the ability to have these problem-solving efforts documented so we could avoid repeating them in the future. These outcomes were made available for all three Brazeway facilities to see should similar opportunities arrive in their facilities in the future. All of the corrective actions, improvements and process changes coming from this formalized approach would capture the data and evidence we needed to help minimize on firefighting when addressing issues. To support both the benefits created by implementing the changes made and the continued opportunities available as we strive to grow, BK Quality and Engineering Manager John Brooks contributes the following,

To be honest, I'm not sure we're fully engaged at the proactive anticipation, preparation, and planning stage throughout the plant. We do have some areas that are in better shape than others. But we still have our share of firefighting to overcome. We are much better at verifying effectiveness of corrective actions and improvement ideas with data and supporting evidence. Preventing recurrence is also starting to become ingrained in our actions as we work through problems. These two efforts are the basis for looking across and looking forward for other areas in the plant that may be affected or have similar opportunities for improvement. I think we are beginning to learn the benefits of this

follow through to help become more proactive as part of our mindset when working together discussing issues (J. Brooks, personal communication, April 5, 2021).

Brazeway Extrusion Engineering Manager Luke Springfield, when asked to share the benefits experienced by our culture and performance through more formalized problem-solving stated,

Moving to a more formalized method of problem solving had quite a few benefits. One is the ability to go back and review issues if a similar or the same issue arises again. By having a more formalized approach, the documentation of the action items taken to fix the issue along with the analysis performed to identify the issue have allowed us to go back and review all of the work done to fix the issue a lot easier than before. In the past, not all of the items were documented and the work done was not organized and stored in the same location. It made things a lot harder if we had to retrace our steps for any reason.

Another benefit is that we have moved from “band-aids” to actual fixes. In the past, we would “band-aid” a lot of issues because we were not really understanding the root cause of the issue. By taking the formal approach, we have been able to permanently fix more issues and keep them from coming back more successfully than we had in the past. The formal problem-solving approach has also allowed us to continue our culture impact by involving more people from cross-functional teams. Each problem-solving event has a representative from production, safety, quality, engineering, maintenance and we also get operators involved. By bringing the team together in a formal fashion, this has driven more ownership over the issues and has helped drive our problem-solving efforts in a more efficient and accurate manner (L. Springfield, personal communication, April 10, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the inconsistent and unpredictable results delivered through the first three quarters of 2015 by the Brazeway KY manufacturing facility was the culmination of the previous few years declining performance and broken culture. Brazeway KY had become a culture that had lost its identity and a plant that was not capable of performing in a manner to deliver the results it had delivered in years past. Brazeway leadership found itself at a critical point in the organization's life and changes had to be made to correct the ship. Previous attempts to improve performance were successful but short-lived. Brazeway KY needed to implement changes that would be impactful and sustainable for years to come. From the highest level of leadership in Brazeway and all across all other levels of the organization, there was a genuine desire to see Brazeway KY experience success once again. The support offered by everyone at Brazeway would prove necessary as the work ahead was substantial. As the research highlighted in this article shows, addressing the culture of an organization is a major key in seeing measurable improvement in organizational performance. Beyond the research, in this paper I have detailed 6 major steps that Brazeway KY took to positively impact culture and influence performance.

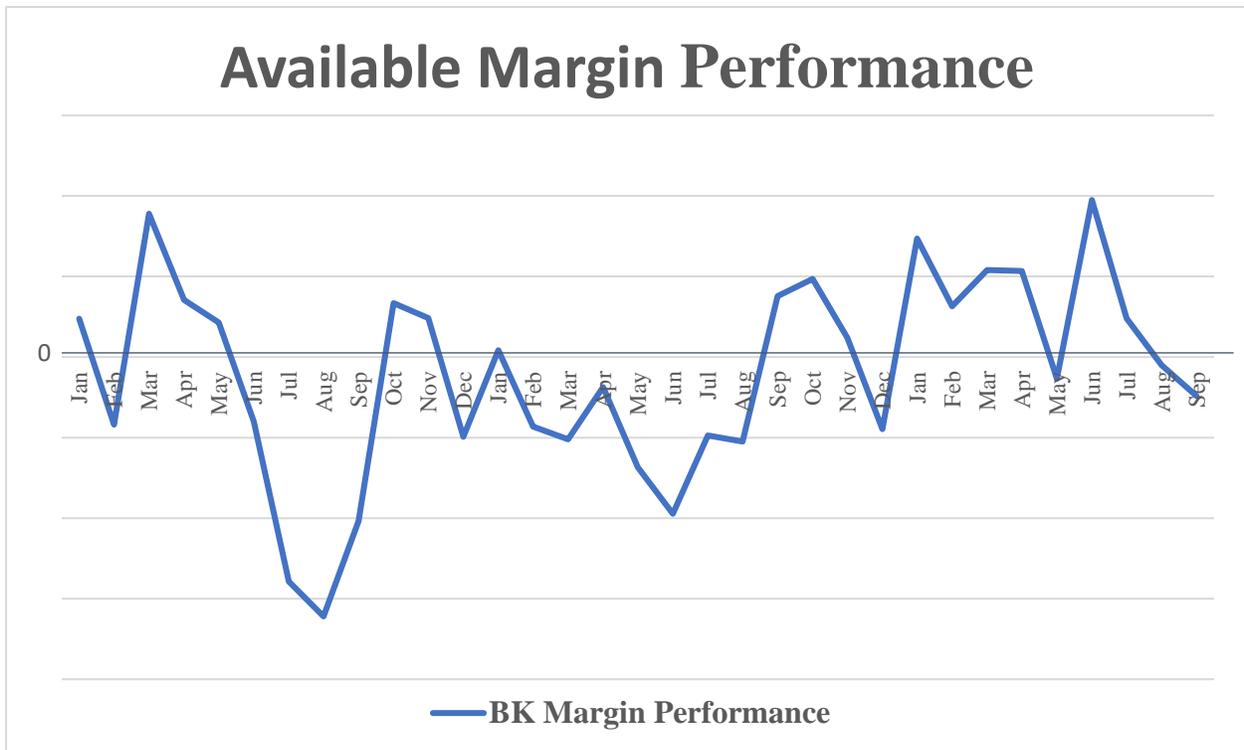
Those steps were:

1. Increased effort and emphasis around safety
2. Open and honest evaluation of our existing workforce
3. Reestablishing trust and leadership capacity in frontline supervision
4. Improving communication
5. Transitioning leadership from a silo approach to management toward a more collaborative, cross-functional approach

6. Transitioning from a reactive and fire-fighting culture toward a more proactive anticipation, preparation and planning culture

Each of these steps and the associated activities and actions tied to them were all thoughtfully designed to build trust, enhance engagement and increase teamwork throughout every function of Brazeway KY. The journey to cultural change was not easy and it had to begin with the understanding that we didn't find ourselves in this position overnight and we would not be able to fix it overnight. It was equally important for us to honestly assess where we were and maintain the belief that the future of our organization would be better. Our leadership team embraced the statement of Admiral James Stockdale, "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end — which you can never afford to lose — with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be." Entering 2017, the seeds sown in the name of cultural change began to produce the results we needed to invigorate improved performance and reap the benefits of our efforts. When asked about when Brazeway corporate leadership began to see improvements, Senior VP of Operations Jeff Adams spoke to the transition from late 2015 through 2016 and into 2017 by saying:

As you can see in the graph below, we saw a small snap back in performance in Q4 of 2015 which demonstrated what was possible. This coincided with my time back in BK for those months to help provide focus and identify the vital few areas that drove performance. As you see below, we fell off in the first half of 2016 as we brought in new leadership and began that transition. In 2017 we saw more consistent performance and performance consistently above plan ... I would say by mid-2017 we began gaining confidence in a shift in performance/culture (I no longer had to supply special Board reports on BK) (J. Adams, personal communication, April 1, 2021).



Mr. Adams added,

The graph above shows financial performance and the story of culture is much greater than this. During this time, we witnessed several changes:

- A focus on process – do what we say we will do (focus on procedures and standard work)
- A focus on communication – our Tier meetings (MDI) evolved several times to get us to focus on what is important.
- A focus on people – Plant 2-Ways, Gemba walks, Round Tables, Celebrations, Cookouts, etc.
- A focus on Safety First – safety shares, CARs for every event, Near Miss reporting, etc.

- A focus on Quality – QDC, process control, etc. (J. Adams, personal communication, April 1, 2021)

Our BK leadership team was committed to the journey and the plans we developed were implemented with the conviction necessary to deliver the improved culture we knew would lead to consistent, predictable high-achieving performance. Our priorities were focused on building an effective culture and that culture led us back to the financial prowess that Brazeway KY had once enjoyed.

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