

Case Study Analysis: E-Class Grades Software

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Topic: E-Class Grades Software
Client: Mr. J. - Superintendent of Schools District of Brainy Bunch
Performer Group: Teachers
Project Overview:

Cast of Characters:

Mr. J. - Superintendent of Schools District of Brainy Bunch

Mr. T. – Principal of Brainy Bunch High

Mrs. M. – Principal of Instructional Services District of Brainy Bunch

Mr. G. – Vice-Principal of Instructional Services District of Brainy Bunch

Mr. T, principal at Brainy Bunch High in the District of Brainy Bunch, had a problem on his hand. During a regular monthly staff meeting, the teaching staff became adamant that the grading program (Chancery E-Class Grades) was not user friendly and required too much time to learn. Although this grading program had been implemented more than five years ago, it seemed that whenever the end of term came around, these types of comments would re-appear. What this has led to at reporting period was teachers submitting their reports late and often with errors. In fact, 25% of the reports submitted needed some type of correction. The errors were mostly human, data entry and set up. In turn, this has decreased the efficiency of the administration and their staff, as the core of their responsibility consisted of editing and chasing down the teachers to correct their mistakes. On top of this, the parent as well as the student satisfaction survey index was at an all time low, 70% and 75% respectively. Being a new administrator in the school, Mr. T. wanted to make sure that the teachers' needs were being met. Mr. T. thinking he had a training problem on his hand contacted Mr. G., vice-principal of instructional services, who role included providing E-Class Grades software support.

The District of Brainy Bunch takes great pride in the integration of technology in the classroom. They also view technology as a tool to ease the workload of the teachers. These important initiatives require progressive thinking leaders who are not afraid to take calculated risks. In such an environment, Mr. G. did not hesitate to reschedule his timetable to be at the school on two different days to accommodate the block schedule of the school. This allowed the teachers come to him during their spare blocks. When the day came around, Mr. G. was surprised when no teachers took the offer for extra help. However, in the back of his mind, Mr. G. knew he was just doing what was asked. After all, Mr. T. had a better understanding of his staff than he did.

Term two came to an end and the same request was asked of Mr. G. Mr. G. was less than enthusiastic with the request since his experience in term one. Although, this was communicated to Mr. T., Mr. T. reassured him that there were many teachers who showed interest. Not wanting to be disappointed the second time around, Mr. G. made different arrangements this time and offered to help out on an individual basis by appointment only. Once again only two teachers took the offer from a staff of fifty-five. Mr. G. was a little confused. Didn't Mr. T. say there were many teachers on staff who were stressed and unhappy with the grading program? Moreover, the district provided

on-going training at the district curriculum centre throughout the year as well as technology in-service on demand. With a substantial amount of money already invested in purchasing and training in the software, looking at another similar grading software was out of the question. Mr. G. referred this problem to Mrs. M., the district principal of instructional services. Ms. M. called in KPC Group, with Mr. K as the lead performance consultant, to do an assessment of the situation and provide recommendations on how to implement an effective grading software-training program.

Performance Improvement Process

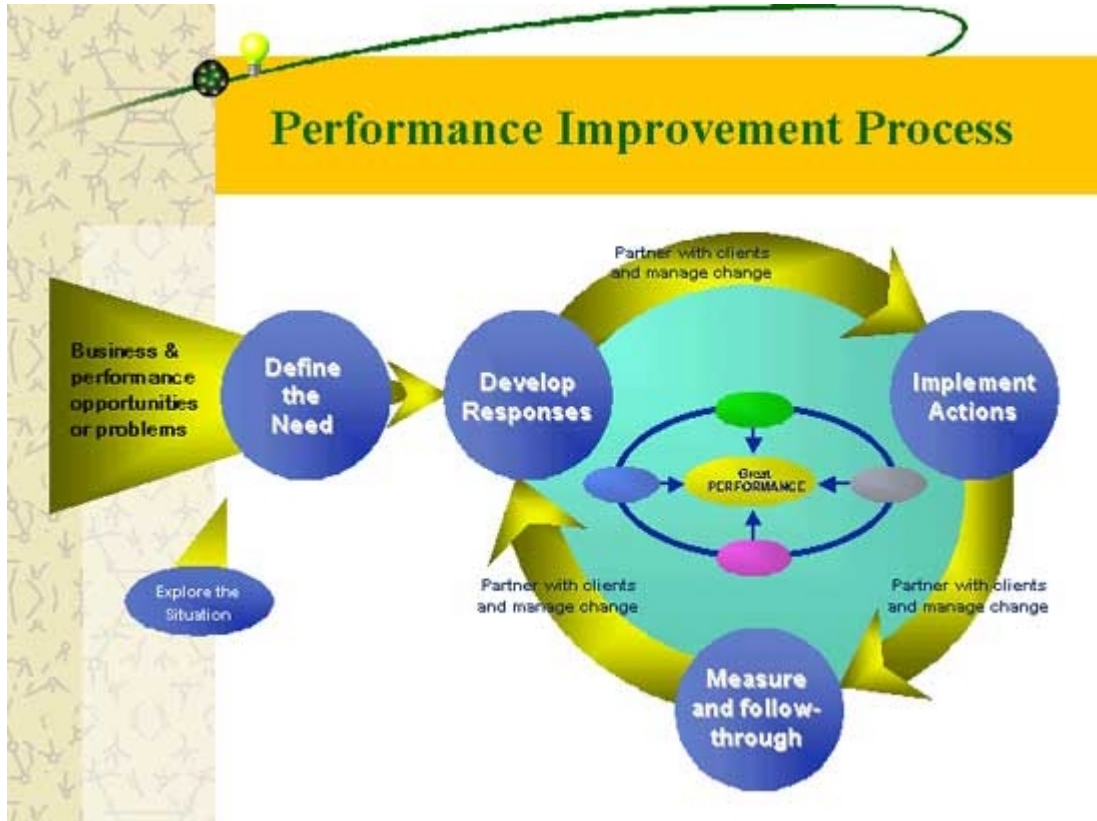


Figure 1 - Performance Improvement Process

Explore the Situation

In the initial meeting with Mrs. M., we conducted an initial scoping of the situation. Within this process, we built up a partnership and proactively identified business and performance improvement opportunities. From the questions that were asked of her, we found out that the District of Brainy Bunch is a small district with a full time student enrolment of 6,511 drawn from a population of approximately 45,000. Of that 440 are international students. 343 full time teachers and 34 administrators work at the three secondary and thirteen elementary schools. It was also noted that the District of Brainy Bunch ranks as one of the wealthiest areas in Canada. Male residents make an average of \$126,880 while female residents earn an average of \$57,345. The earning of an average man in all the other districts is only \$38,809.

Brainy Bunch residents believe in the value of education. Grades play an important part in their expectations for their children. Accurate and accountable grading practices must also be part of this quality service rendered by the teachers. Brainy Bunch High has 950 students, fifty-five staff members, and two administrators. It is the second largest of the three high schools in the District of Brainy Bunch. All high schools and the intermediate grades (5 to 7) in the District of Brainy Bunch use the Chancery E-Class Grades software. The primary grades (K to 4) are on an anecdotal reporting system. This belief of excellence is also supported by the high school graduation rate of Brainy Bunch residents. 82% of adult District of Brainy Bunch residents have achieved high school graduation, compared to 70% in all other districts. Moreover, 33% have at least one university degree, compared with 14% in all other districts.

From the conversation, Mrs. M. was particular in finding a more effective training program for the grading software than the one that existed currently. The district offered in-house training on demand as well as off-site training at the district curriculum centre. The in-house training was free; however, the off-site training required a deposit of \$20, which was refunded upon being present at the training session. Currently, the participation rate for both programs was rather low. We questioned Mrs. M. if it was really a training program that she was after or was it an issue with the software in question, time constrictions on the teachers, or morale problems at Brainy Bunch High. She did not know the answers to the time constrictions or morale problems, but did offer her opinion on the training program and software. She acknowledged that the training program offered was mostly for incoming teachers who were new to the district and the in-house training was targeted mostly to the teachers who are in the system currently and needed a refresher. There was some funding which provided release time for the new teachers to attend the training sessions. As for the time constrictions or morale problems, she was helpful in giving us a contact person namely the principal at Brainy Bunch High to follow up with. We also asked if the other two high schools were seeing similar problems and the answer seemed to follow the same pattern. It saw teachers asking for help, but no one showing up. Moreover, the accuracy rate of the report cards was also very low. It was apparent that the true client in this problem would be a higher presence in the hierarchy so we requested another meeting with the superintendent and the other stakeholders, which included the principals of all three high schools, the head teachers of each high school, and the district principal and vice principal of instructional services. Mrs. M. agreed that it was a bigger issue than she first thought.

We laid out the issues at the next meeting with all the stakeholders in attendance. We identified the improvement opportunities and reframed the needs into business and performance language. Mr. J., Superintendent of Schools District of Brainy Bunch, was in agreement that this performance assessment should be a district initiative. This is where the 'Great Performance' model was used to illustrate our point. This model conveyed to our client what the situation would look like in a perfect world (see Figure 2).

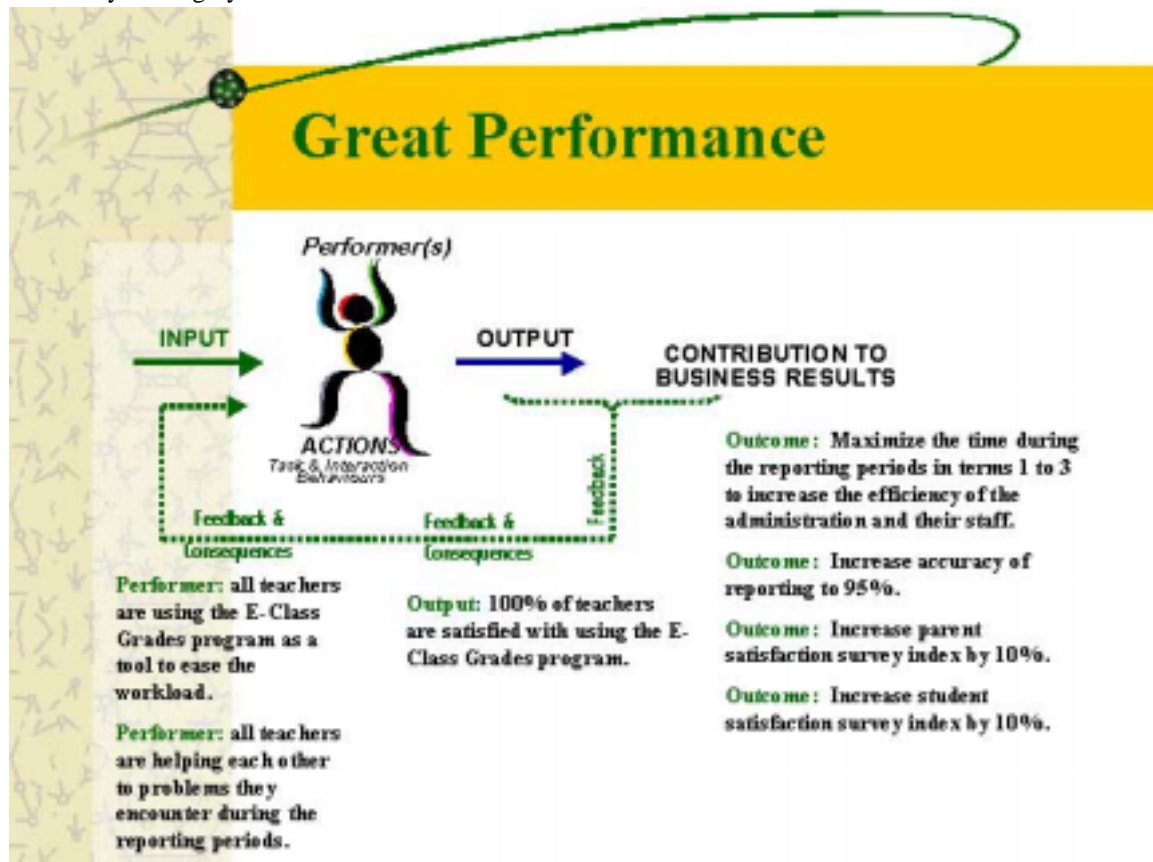


Figure 2 - Great Performance Model

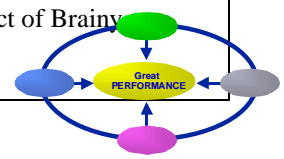
The teachers needed to improve their performance in using the E-Class Grade program to ease their workload, not add to it with frustration or stress. The actions/best practice would be to have a system in place so that the teachers can help each other out without relying on outside help. The outcome would be that 100% of the teachers would be satisfied in using the E-Class Grade program. As for the business results, the schools would be more efficient during the reporting periods with 95% accuracy in grading. As well, there would be an increase in satisfaction from both the parents and students. This would ultimately boost enrolment and funding in the district. Once this model was defined for the stakeholders, an agreement was put into place to conduct a performance needs assessment. We also outlined our need in gaining access to the appropriate people. They welcomed our request.

Define the Need

KPC Group met as a team to devise a plan of action to scope the performance assessment of Brainy Bunch School District. In doing so, we **identified all stakeholders, defined data collection sources and methods, identified the performance gaps and causes using a should/is/cause analysis, analyzed the data, provided a cost/benefit projection, and shared the findings.** From there depending if the client agreed on the actions, we would develop a set of responses that would be used in the implementation stage. The follow through and the measurement would be part and parcel of this implementation stage. Using the should/if/cause analysis, we found out the following.

Performance Relationship Map

Business Need: Maximize opportunity to increase enrolment and funding in the District of Brainy Bunch.



Performer Group or Job: Teachers

On-job Performance

SHOULD

- Use the E-Class Grades program as a tool to ease the workload.
 - Identify what software can and can't do.
 - Create a school culture that promotes 'lifelong learning'.
 - Create a template that is easy to access and follow.
- Help each other with problems encountered during the reporting periods.
 - Identify experts in the schools.
 - More recognition for those who help.
 - Incorporate time during the school day for professional development.
 - Start professional development early in school year not during reporting period.
 - Retrain on recurrent problems after 30 days.
 - Assign personal coaches.
 - Create a system of support for 'Just in Time' help.
- Identify the best practices in grade reporting.
 - Survey level of needs of teachers.
 - Identify and categorize errors found in reports.
 - Create commonly asked questions in the form of an FAQ in print or online.
 - Create a step-by-step procedural manual in print or online.

IS

- Teachers are stressed and unhappy during the reporting periods.
- Teachers are not taking advantage of the training sessions.
- Teachers submitting reports late and with errors.
- No clear technology support in place.
- No clear idea of what the recurrent

Causal Link

Operational Results

SHOULD

- Maximize opportunity to increase enrolment and funding in the District of Brainy Bunch.
- Maximize the time during the reporting periods in terms 1 to 3 to increase the efficiency of the administration and their staff.
- Increase accuracy of reporting to 95%.
- Increase parent satisfaction survey index by 10% within 3 years.
- Increase student satisfaction survey index by 10% within 3 years.

IS

- Opportunity to maximize time during reporting periods.
- 25% of reports submitted have errors.
- Parent satisfaction survey index at 70%.
- Student satisfaction survey index at 75%.

- problems are.
- Teachers are not buying in. They see no value in the software and are using other software for reporting only resorting to E-Class Grades for exporting the grades.
 - Teachers do not see cost/benefit advantage of using the software.

Internal?

CAUSE
Factors driving the performance gap

External?

KNOW – no idea of cost benefit of new grading software.

ABLE – no idea of best practices.

EQUIPPED – no technology support in place.

WANT – no rewards or recognition for those who help others or for those who submit reports with no errors.

- Decreased provincial funding makes it difficult to change software at the present time.
- Substantial amount of money already invested in E-Class Grades.
- Increased competition from the private schools in the District of Brainy Bunch.

It is clear from the should/is/cause analysis that there are gaps present. These gaps will be expanded on in the Performance Maximizer (Know/Able/Equipped/Want). Also in the analysis, there is a column for on-job performance and a column for operational results. Comparing what we are striving for, 'should', and comparing it to what the reality 'is' allows us to find the root causes that are impeding great performance. For each of the goals, we also expanded into some activities that would enable these goals. These enablers are indented as part of the goal.

As part of this gap analysis, we investigated into who the sources of the information will come from and the methods in which they will be gathered. This is also categorized into the performer and the operational results. Here is what we found.

Operational Results		
Data Collection Purposes	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods
<p>Should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximize opportunity to increase enrolment and funding in the District of Brainy Bunch. • Maximize the time during the reporting periods in terms 1 to 3 to increase the efficiency of the administration and their staff. • Increase accuracy of reporting to 95%. • Increase parent satisfaction survey index by 10% within 3 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client • Administration • Administrative Assistants • Parent satisfaction surveys • Student satisfaction surveys • Report cards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview (Meeting) • Documentation review • Feedback forms

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase student satisfaction survey index by 10% within 3 years. 		
Is/Actual: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to maximize time during reporting periods. • 25% of reports submitted have errors. • Parent satisfaction survey index at 70% • Student satisfaction survey index at 75%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical performers (teachers) • Managers of typical performers (administration) • Operational data • Parent satisfaction surveys • Student satisfaction surveys • Report cards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Documentation review
Cause: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased provincial funding makes it difficult to change software at the present time. • Substantial amount of money already invested in E-Class Grades. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview

On-Job Performance		
Data Collection Purposes	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods
Should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the E-Class Grades program as a tool to ease the workload. • Help each other with problems encountered during the reporting periods. • Identify the best practices in grade reporting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemplary performers (i.e. teachers who hand it thing on time and error free). • Best assessment practices in literature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Observe exemplary performers • Document review (i.e. report cards) • Online search
Is/Actual: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are stressed and unhappy during the reporting periods. • Teachers are not taking advantage of the training sessions. • Teachers submitting reports late and with errors. • No clear technology support in place. • No clear idea of what the recurrent problems are. • Teachers are not buying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical performers (teachers) • Managers of typical performers (administration) • Administrative Assistants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Focus Group • Questionnaire (i.e. level of difficulty in using software, amount of time spent using/understanding software, recurrent problems, etc...)

<p>in. They see no value in the software and are using other software for reporting only resorting to E-Class Grades for exporting the grades.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers do not see cost/benefit advantage of using the software. 		
<p>Cause:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> See the Performance Maximizer for a more detailed analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Client Performance Maximizer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview Data

Using the data collected, we are able draw a clearer idea of what the work environment needs as well as the capability needs of the organization. Next, we will outline the root causes found and recommend actions that needs to be taken using the Performance Maximizer (see Figure 3).

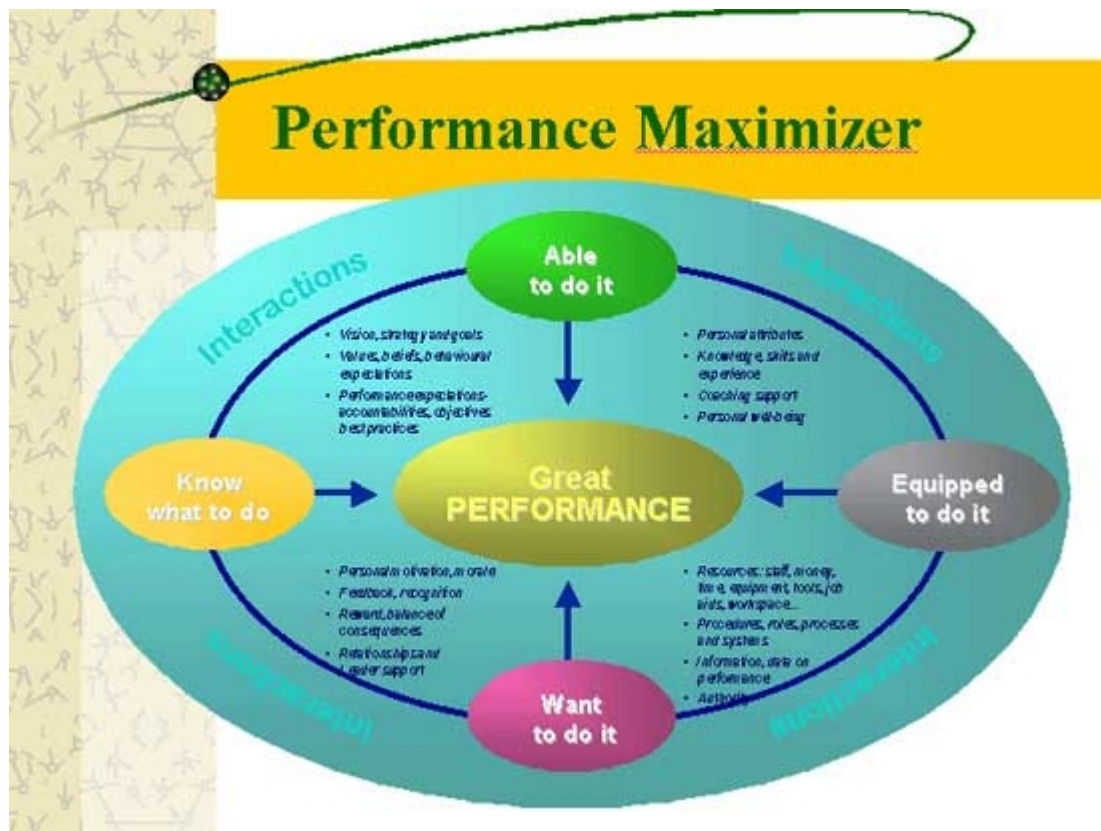


Figure 3 - Performance Maximizer

	Probable CAUSE for gap	Consider these ACTIONS
KNOW what to do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of clarity on performance expectations. Lack clarity on best practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish performance expectations. Produce and communicate best practice.

ABLE to do it

- Lack clarity on how reporting supports the direction and goals of the organization.
- Lack of appropriate personal attributes for the work
- Insufficient on-job learning support
- Emotional or psychological issues that impede normal performance.
- Have management communicate visions, goals, and strategies. (i.e. cost benefit analysis)
- Hire qualified teachers with technology skills.
- Use personal coaching, 'just in time' support, in-house training with a refresher course completed within 30 days, incorporate time during the school day for training.
- Start training early in the year and continue throughout term, not just during the end of the reporting period.
- Facilitators should maintain communication with the trainees to gauge progress.

EQUIPPED to do it

- Lack of readily available information about work procedures.
- Lack of time to commit to in-house training.
- No access to materials and tools including computers and software.
- Teachers using other software to do the grading.
- Provide print /online FAQ's.
- Create smart tutors that will elicit information from the problem seeker and find the appropriate solution from a database of FAQ's.
- Create a step-by-step procedural manual.
- Create an online discussion component to allow teachers to work together in a community of learners.
- Form a student committee for 'just in time' help
- Provide software and laptops for teacher to use and practice at home.

WANT to do it

- Not accepting responsibility; self-imposed limitations and fear; resistance to change.
- No meaningful rewards and/or perceived equity in rewards systems.
- Little or no acknowledgement or
- Create a school culture that promotes 'lifelong learning'.
- Identify what software can and can't do.
- Create a template that is easy to access and follow.
- Give group merits or awards.

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| | recognition of successful performance. | • Publish names of exemplary leaders in newsletter. |
| • Little or no reinforcement of desired on-job performance. | | • Upgrade leadership practices to focus on performance support. |

The Final Steps

The other steps that have to be negotiated once the performance needs are assessed are to develop a set of responses to show cost/benefit to the school district, develop an implementation plan to eliminate the barriers to great performance, and finally develop a measurement plan to gauge the progress in closing the performance gaps. During this process, a partnership must be maintained and communication established to manage the change. We must also remember to celebrate progress and accomplishments along the way.

Conclusion - Performance Consulting Issues

Training is often a knee jerk reaction to something that is less apparent. Performance is often the culprit that is overshadowed by the need to train and re-train. In this scenario, it is more of an organizational than a training issue. Most often though, the biggest issue in introducing new ideas is the ‘buy in’. This is more apparent in crisis-based situations than in proactive situations. There will always be the political battles that see one group facing another in protection of the status quo. It is imperative that the teachers see the cost/benefit advantages in using E-Class Grades software in terms of the overall operation results. Happy parents and students build strong programs that in turn increase student enrolment and funding. Since competition for students is a big issue in the District of Brainy Bunch, keeping parents and students happy is a top priority. In a broader perspective, the teachers’ jobs are on the line. The promotion of lifelong learning, which should be part of school culture, is imperative in creating students and teachers who take responsibility for their own learning. Finding a way to use E-Class Grades effectively is part of this responsibility that teachers have.

The district has the responsibility to provide the resources necessary to achieve great performance on the part of the teachers. District protocols must be established on reporting practices. This should be uniform throughout the district to avoid misunderstanding. Inherent to this protocol is the introduction of the best practices in reporting. Essentially what this means is to have each department set up their grading templates according to the IRP (Integrated Resource Plan – outline of the curriculum goals for teachers). These grading templates are established to provide a framework for those new to the district or those new to the technology to work from. This should ease the stress of building a grading report from scratch.

The development of in-house learning communities helps establish collaboration and collegiality among the teachers. Collaboration by invitation is ineffective. Collaboration that is meaningful requires weaving it into the school schedule. This mean the district

needs to provide release time so that teachers have time to share and work on common problems in grading not just during the reporting periods. Moreover, training should start early in the year and continue until the end of the school year. Teachers must also be trained and supported in their efforts to become effective collaborators since collaboration is not inherent to everyone. In addition, the purpose of collaboration must be made explicit and a structure be provided to facilitate this process. Since time is always a major issue with teachers, the district must make collaboration mandatory, meaning having certain departments meet during schools hours on certain blocks to go through the best practices. The structure of the facilitation process must be made so that it is meaningful to how teachers go about doing their reports.

Developing an online component will allow teachers to solidify their knowledge in a community of learners within the school district. It creates more collegiality among teachers in the district while at the same time allows teachers to help each other out in some of their grading dilemmas. This collaboration can be in synchronous (live chat) or asynchronous form (WebCT, Blackboard, Manhattan). However, this would mean buying extra licenses and leasing laptops to encourage teachers with different learning styles to extend their learning away from the hectic schedule of everyday school life. This undoubtedly will make learning more fun and will give more of a 'just in time' feel to it. If the technology is available, 'Smart Tutors', which have the capability to elicit information from the problem seeker and to find the appropriate solution from a database of FAQ's, can be deployed. This allows for around the clock help.

A common barrier seen in schools that embark on new technology is that the technology teacher or those teachers with higher technology skills take on more of a role of a teacher than a learner. Although teachers should accept their individual and collective responsibilities for working together as true professional colleagues, having no meaningful reward system or recognition for their efforts in place only exacerbates the situation. The feeling of being taken advantage of with the constant barrage of requests only demoralizes an individual. However, creating a climate of collegiality and pride will often bring out the experts who would be more than willing to volunteer their time. Developing a system of personal coaches adds a humanistic side to learning. Similarly, setting up a committee of student to help out with 'just in time' learning will also build a school culture of caring and sharing.

From the performance consultant's view, these recommendations should plant the seed from which the District of Brainy Bunch can take action. Success often creates critical mass, bringing more people on board in fulfilling the organizational goals. The building of a partnership from the initial process of exploration to the implementation component allows for a deeper insight into the organization. Knowing who's who within an organization allows for a more expedient approach to finalizing solutions. This case study might be familiar to many organizations that incorporate new technology into existing culture. The fear that usually arises will not be the only obstacle that an organization will be faced with. It is how an organization chooses to handle this crisis that will determine how great the performers will be. Using the GAPS formula will build

stronger individual and team performance. Essentially, this is the crux of what makes a successful organization.

Go for the ‘SHOULD’S’

Analyze the ‘IS’

Pin down the ‘CAUSES’

Select the right ‘SOLUTIONS’

Resources

Blanchard, K. & Robinson, D. & Robinson, J. (2003). *Zap the Gaps: Target Higher Performance and Achieve It!* New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

Roithmayr, T. (2000). *Hooked on Performance: Introduction to Performance Consulting*. Calgary: Performance by Design.