

CASE STUDY | “This Software Sucks!”

Situation

- A logistics and distribution company contracted an IT firm to implement a new software program in one of the company's facilities. The software program was an industry standard program, successfully used by several competitors.
- The targeted facility had historically underperformed against competitors in comparison to other sites within the company. Management believed the new software would improve their competitive position.
- The bidding process was highly competitive, lengthy and arduous. The winning bid came with very tight margins. The IT firm staffed the project as lean as possible. The company told the IT firm the software implementation was a routine and relatively simple process needing only a few hardware upgrades.
- The company dangled a prize before the IT firm—a veiled promise to implement the same software program at their other facilities if “everything goes well.”

Problems

- The IT firm was able to complete the hardware upgrades without issues, although the onsite IT technicians commented on the how the company staff were “unfriendly.”
- The software was installed, staff training was provided, and a “go live” date was set, all well within the project timelines. So far, so good.
- On “go live” day, “problems” began flooding in. The two onsite IT techs were quickly overwhelmed with an onslaught of *angry* employee complaints. Strangely, most complaints required very simple corrections to minor issues. It appeared that employees were fixating on problems so they could reject the software.
- A stalemate developed over the first week. The IT firm knew that the software was good and would work properly if given a chance, yet staff was almost refusing to use it! Company management was brought in to get their employees moving and they got nowhere.
- Yikes! Now what?

Solutions and Results

- One year prior, we (tGCP) had conducted a successful Executive Coaching project with a Corporate VP. Site management was involved and remembered we dealt with “soft and squishy” people issues. They didn’t know where else to turn.
- We parachuted in and interviewed management and staff to get a broad and deep view on what was going on within the organization (in unexplainable situations like this the presenting problem is camouflage; the real problem is always about the organization).
- The interviews quickly generated a clear theme—staff, over time, had become mistrustful of management. Frustration was high as many staff members complained that management did a lousy job of listening to them. They felt condescended in their efforts and suggestions for improvements. To staff, this software implementation was the latest evidence of management’s indifference and insensitivity to their legitimate needs. Staff frustration morphed into covert rebellion.
- Once the management team heard their staff’s frustrations they, with our guidance and prodding, used the interview information to publicly make simple, staff suggested changes which increased collaboration and moral.
- We made sure the IT firm was involved every step of the way. They mirrored our process of carefully listening to the people who were going to use the software in the context of their company system. A new team of IT techs and staff members (no management, please) made some relatively painless, both practical and symbolic improvements to the software.
- Once staff engaged to the point of buy in, the software proved, as predicted, a great idea. It made life easier for all. Everyone felt like a winner. The IT firm gained a better feel for the company culture and was retained to implement the software in the other facilities. In only one other case was tGCP called upon to assist, and only in the preemptive prevention of a perceived problem.