






## MANAGERS' GUIDE TO EARLY WINS

*Jumpstarting Organizational Enhancements in Trust,  
Listening and Support - May 2008*

### Key Areas Addressed

This guide serves as a resource for all organizations within NASA looking for additional techniques to connect with employees, build management credibility, improve upward communication and boost organizational support for getting the job done. Its content is the result of secondary research and reasonable intuitive analysis of internal data collected by members of the 2007 NASA Culture Team.

Although there is no "one best way" to go about selecting which solutions can best address the complex of communication and relational issues inherent in every work environment, the following promising solutions merit consideration in any informed decision-making process:

-  **Managing by walking around**
-  **Giving frequent and sincere appreciation**
-  **Involving employees in prioritizing solutions**
-  **Developing effective communication skills**
-  **Discovering entirely new solutions**

### KEY AUDIENCES

Organization Development  
and Employee Relations  
Specialists

Executives and  
Managers

### ANALYTIC PROCESS

Reviewed literature and  
internal sources

Focused solutions around  
a "go to" organizational  
goal

Established pre-conditions  
for moving toward this goal

## What's in your organization's wallet?

Whether an organization is trying to get off its knees, or is doing well and wants to step up to become one of the premier organizations, or wants to remain on the cutting edge of the spectrum, such achievement requires a sense of urgency and great cooperation. Table 1 shows four NASA organizations across this spectrum regarding the employees' sense of key management practices. Quoting from the Administrator's All Hands session (March 24, 2008) about making such changes across the agency, he stated, "If you see where the organization can be better, then help us make it so."

<b>Table 1: The Organization's Wallet</b>	<b>Four Organizations</b>			
<i>Percent saying "Yes" to . . .</i>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT HONESTY</b>				
Executives and managers ensure people are clear about what's communicated	80%	74%	53%	33%
Management is seen as honest	73%	64%	54%	20%
Employees receive sufficiently thorough and unfiltered communication	72%	67%	68%	36%
Management takes the time to talk informally with employees	61%	73%	38%	42%
<b>UPWARD COMMUNICATION</b>				
Executives and managers seek and act on feedback from others	84%	75%	60%	39%
The process for sending issues up the chain is effective	74%	68%	60%	34%
The full weight of my messages reaches decision makers with additional input being requested	74%	55%	50%	30%
One can raise dissenting opinions without fear of a negative impact on one's career	73%	60%	58%	44%
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT</b>				
NASA management helps me get my job done well	73%	62%	46%	16%
Executives and managers remove organizational barriers to performance	70%	60%	43%	22%
Administrative processes run smoothly	61%	51%	33%	11%
Employees frequently receive recognition or praise for doing good work	57%	56%	52%	33%

## What success looks like?

Although not perfect, Organization A could be a contender. These high favorable response rates also reflect extremely low negative response rates, and in some cases, no one expressed any disagreement. Because this is an actual organization, it serves as a realistic model of what a successful organization may look like.

The aspects of what a successful organization looks like were underscored in the Administrator's message to the workforce, *A Day of Remembrance (January 28, 2008)*, in which he articulated everyone's responsibility for building trust and open communication. As one Center Director stated, "If you just tell people where we are going, they will do what they can to get there." A complete description of this "go to" organization goal is presented in the following matrix.

**Table 2:** The “Go To” organization would exhibit these characteristics

	<b>MANAGEMENT HONESTY</b>	<b>UPWARD COMMUNICATION</b>	<b>ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT</b>
<b>Focus</b>	Employees can rely on management to be honest and to do the right thing.	Management is effective at encouraging innovation and taking employee issues up the chain of command.	Management helps with pressures affecting employees’ capacity to get their jobs done.
<b>Skills</b>	Ensuring people are clear about the information being communicated.	Seeking and acting on feedback from others.	Removing organizational obstacles to performance.
<b>Results</b>	Employees receive sufficiently thorough and direct communication on issues that are important to them.	Employees feel free to fully raise and debate their opinions without a concern that it impacts their career.	Smooth running processes and personal recognition help employees get their jobs done well.

**Becoming the model**

What would it take for us all to become model practitioners? Although there is no “one-best-way” to go about creating early wins for such a social change effort, most successful approaches have the following preconditions:

- Executives and managers in the organization have analyzed relevant aspects in their work environment and sufficiently discussed their shared understanding of a future goal state.
- The organization has access to external and in-house organizational development capability to provide requested assistance in these analyses and discussions.
- Various solutions are generated and taken into action.

This point about generating potential solutions is the primary purpose of this guide. Based on their research and internal assessments by the 2007 NASA Culture Team, five solutions were identified as prospective actions for enhancing credibility, open communications and job support. Collectively, these solutions are about building the capacity to connect with and engage employees in the office and are a mixture of techniques for accomplishing this and tools for personal development that support those techniques: solutions 1 (management by walking around) and 3 (involving employees in prioritizing solutions) are largely about techniques; solution 4 (effective communication skills) is about personal development; and the remaining two solutions are a mixture of techniques and personal development.

By the way, these solutions can be reviewed and considered in any order:

*Solution #1: Managing by walking around . . . . . page 4*

*Solution #2: Giving frequent and sincere appreciation . . . . . page 7*

*Solution #3: Involving employees in prioritizing solutions . . . . . page 9*

*Solution #4: Developing effective communication skills . . . . . page 12*

*Solution #5: Discovering entirely new solutions . . . . . page 14*

## Solution #1: Managing by Walking Around

If the saying is true that only the loudest voice heard in the room gets the attention, is the same true within an organization? If so, what happens to the voices that get drowned out? Even in the presence of an “open-door policy” that promotes conversation with a manager, only a portion of the employees take advantage of such a policy and build a relationship with their managers. Although this information exchange is helpful, it can be one-sided because the manager is not connecting with or getting the same degree of information from other employees.

The solution is to manage by walking around. This is an unstructured approach to hands-on, direct participation by managers in the work-related affairs of their subordinates that fosters improved relationships between employee and manager. It is built on a foundation of open communication and genuine interest. Unlike more rigid and distant management, face-to-face communication and the willingness of a manager to be visible within his/her organization are quintessential to gaining insight about a critical resource that a manager has – information.

When implemented effectively, Management by Walking Around (MBWA) keeps managers informed and provides insight about what employees are thinking. This is important to managers given their position to influence and affects change within the organization. However, this is no small feat. Managers must be genuine. If the manager’s efforts are perceived as less than genuine or seen as a way of being overbearing or micromanaging, employee suspicion will arise, thus presenting obstacles to open communication.

### Benefits

The MBWA style of management has powerful benefits, in particular, the increase in office communications, employee trust, interpersonal relationships, and real-time knowledge sharing. These factors are credited with presenting the changes in organization culture that influence an employee’s buy in, commitment, and desire to go the extra mile to fulfill the organization’s mission.

Industry leaders have found MBWA to be a proven way of interacting with and learning from employees in order to improve organizational processes that increase profits and productivity. NASA has found success with the MBWA techniques as well. The managers practicing MBWA within NASA have one thing in common with their counterparts – they all have much to do in their offices. However, by being out and about, talking with and getting to know the men and women tasked with fulfilling NASA’s strategic goals, the managers report that doing so has increased their knowledge of the inner workings of the organization and the number of management problems they were able to resolve simply by engaging with employees at all levels..

Managers and executives at a number of NASA centers are currently applying MBWA principles as a way to connect with employees at various levels.

- ✓ The “Can We Talk” lecture series, informal “Center Visits”, “Lunch with the Director” and “Town Hall” meetings are among the most popular MBWA applications documented within NASA.
- ✓ For example, in the Engineering Development Directorate at the Kennedy Space Center, the Deputy Director for Engineering frequently meets with employees in their offices, as well as engaging them in hallway conversations. He believes that effective communication is best done in person, as opposed to merely firing off an email. In spite of the demanding nature of his position, he still finds time for personal contacts. Employees are pleased to see that he takes an interest in their work, and as a result, a considerable amount of technical information

is exchanged outside of the traditional meetings and design reviews. In addition, employees feel free to express honest opinions to senior management in a relaxed, informal setting.

### **Practical applications**

MBWA has many practical applications and is appropriate for organizations of any size. Because its foundation is **communication** through **connection**, it is important that both be present and used effectively when applied. Although the term MBWA suggests this concept be used by managers, it is also relevant to those without formal management positions, such as team leads, due to the fact that communication and connection are essential at every level within an organization.

When applying MBWA remember to:

- ✓ **Be visible.** Make a personal commitment to be where the action is. Have a reason for being there.
- ✓ **Be conversational.** Use conversation to build the relationship and trust that leads to increased open communication and substantial knowledge sharing. Balance the amount of time you talk about work. Focusing on matters that have nothing to do with your organization or project will help you to get to know your team members personally.
- ✓ **Be sincere.** Employees can sense falseness a mile away. Make sure you are genuine in your approach. If the relationship is genuinely established, it may be the right time then to put your expectations out in the open and ask the employee for suggestions as to how the two of you can build upon the existing relationship. In other words, if you sense the employee has anxiety or reservations about your intentions or even your presence, he/she probably does. Make it known that you have an honest desire to exchange ideas and are sincerely interested in just that.
- ✓ **Be quiet.** Show your personal involvement through listening actively and asking questions that clarify or require greater detail of what's already been said. Look and listen
- ✓ **Be consistent.** Don't do it once and quit. Do it often. If necessary, put it on your schedule. Consider it as an information meeting with your employees. If you would not miss an important out-brief, don't miss the opportunity to get valuable information directly from the source – your employees. Follow through.
- ✓ **Be open.** Approach the conversation as if you are coming to learn, not teach. Don't direct the conversation, let it evolve and go wherever it goes. Make space for the employee to talk without fear of retribution. Lead with questions not answers.
- ✓ **Be fair.** Make it a point to visit every employee – no favoritism.
- ✓ **Be responsive.** Selectively follow up with employees to make sure they knew what happened to the information they shared. Did it solve an issue? Provide another perspective? Did it make it into a decision? This is an end result of the MBWA process and lets employees know they were heard.

### **Virtual management by walking around**

For managers who manage employees in remote locations, MBWA is conducted differently. Although the objective remains the same – that is, connecting with employees as a means of building relationships and staying informed – the techniques differ. Managers faced with this challenge can depend upon alternate forms of communication to reach out to employees as follows:

- ✓ ***Use more care in crafting electronic messages.*** Interaction via electronic communication (email and other electronic media) is a widely-used and acceptable way of communicating with others at remote organizations. It allows people to share information rapidly and with multiple people at once. However, broadcast email messages that are not well thought out, are sporadic in a nature or do not address the true issues or interests of employees, will do little or nothing to increase communications as intended by the MBWA construct.
- ✓ ***Write with more of a personal touch.*** Another thing about managing employees remotely is that electronic communications must exhibit a personal communication style – a personal style of communicating is a key part of the MBWA strategy. An occasional message tailored by adding a personal sentence or two at the start or the end and sent to only one recipient will help to reinforce the personal connections lost through distance. This tactic, although not certain, is bound to get the employee’s attention and is more likely to be read than impersonal broadcast messages. It does take more time to personalize each email, but that is as true if you were visiting each employee when co-located.
- ✓ ***Plan for face-to-face dialogue.*** Although high quality electronic communication serves a purpose for managers that conduct MBWA remotely, it should not be used alone. Why? This form of communication fails to invite the feedback that is an essential part of the dialogue. If a manager must communicate with employees through written communication or a large broadcast that is complex or has negative connotations, there must also be an effort to follow up with employees in a way that guarantees that the message was interpreted appropriately. This can be accomplished by having a conversation first and then following up with a written confirmation. This enhances the receiver’s understanding of the message and encourages the dialogue at the time it is most effective.

### **Measures of Success**

How will you know if you are executing the MBWA concept effectively? MBWA is not scientific. There’s no formula. Managers can achieve their goal by internalizing and acting on the principles of MBWA. Keep in mind that any motive to keep tabs or direct employees under the guise of MBWA will likely put a stop to any chances you had of gaining valuable information from your employees and possibly ruin your credibility. This will cause you to lose out on valuable communication and communication that can only come from those working directly on the project or task at hand.

Your motives will ultimately determine your actions. Keep in mind the ideal organization that you are helping to create is one that seeks to foster management credibility, upward communication, and organizational support. Let that be your guide as you enact MBWA.

### **Sources on managing by walking around**

- *Leadership Skills for Managers* (2004), by C. Cadwell, 4th edition, New York, Amacom
- *Next Generation Business Handbook: New Strategies from Tomorrow’s Thought Leaders* (2004), by S. Chowdhury, Hoboken, N.J., Wiley

## Solution #2: Giving Frequent and Sincere Appreciation

Positive feedback is a logical motivator for open communications and support in getting our jobs done well. Maybe you are already doing all you can to “catch people doing good things.” Maybe you could do more to routinely appreciate and recognize employees effectively.

### Your business management case <sup>1</sup>

A Gallup study found that it was not uncommon to find between one-fifth and one-third of people feeling that they had not recently received recognition or praise for doing good work, as if to say, “Not only have I not received any praise recently; my best efforts are routinely ignored.” This study also discovered that

“Because of its power, ridiculously low cost, and rarity, frequent recognition and praise is a great opportunity.”

Variations in how employees perceive this support can account for productivity losses of 10 to 20%, and that these linkages hold true regardless of the type of industry or culture.

### Balancing praise and problems <sup>1</sup>

The linkage between personal appreciation and organizational performance is both subtle and powerful. Organizations and teams that use more positive than negative comments, a ratio of 4-to-1 let’s say, perform better. They create a culture of openness and expansive thinking with interactions that are viewed as supportive, encouraging, appreciative, inquiring, and focused on others. It was not that the best teams brooked no criticism. They did discuss problems, but in a larger context of reassurance and appreciation. In a fast-paced work environment, there is the potential for many problems, and our attention is automatically drawn to negative information more strongly than it is automatically drawn to positive information. Without a conscious effort to maintain appreciation, these negative events will continually jump in line before the positive ones. Don’t let that happen with you!

Recognition and praise is also crucial to learning by creating a positive loop for repeating behaviors.

### Some remedies <sup>2</sup>

- ✓ Give appreciation to your employees for their everyday work. You may think that the annual performance award is ample incentive and recognition for work well done. Or you may be parsimonious with praise and tell employees that if they don’t hear anything, they should know they are doing a good job. However, your employees may see this differently.
- ✓ Ask each employee what kind of recognition they most appreciate and reward them according to individual needs and wants. The emphasis here is not on the formal forms of recognition (performance awards, honoraria, on-the-spot awards, plaques for the wall, a day off, etc.), although they are important motivators in their own right as long as they are neither used nor seen as being expected. But rather, more informal forms of recognition are worth consideration. Catch people doing something right and thank them then and there. Write a personal note of thanks or go to your employee’s office to give a personal thank-you. Praise an employee in the presence of others. Send a note to your boss about your employee’s excellent performance. Recognition from a supervisor at two levels above the employee also makes a meaningful engaging difference to an employee’s future commitment. Remember that praise works for everybody as long as it’s sincere and specific rather than generic.

- ✓ Some employees, perhaps our new generation of hires especially, may see recognition less as "I appreciate what you're doing." and more as "What do you think about this?" That way, the connection comes from the acknowledgement that everyone's opinion should be heard and that the culture of openness and expansive thinking is encouraged. Pay attention to the various ways you can show your appreciation, and you will increase the organization's capacity to get the job done well.

We don't care as much about a pat on the back as much as we care about being a part of the discussion. *(A gen-Y employee)*

### For your personal improvement <sup>3</sup>

Take an honest look at how you are appreciating and recognizing your employees. How do you know that it is effective? Do you know what motivates others and how to use it?

- ✓ Think of three accomplishments you're proud of, and then ask yourself how motivated you were to accomplish them. Similarly, if you can figure out what motivates others, their accomplishments and yours will be greater. To better figure out what drives others, look to what they do first, what do they emphasize in their speech, what do they display passion around and what values play out for them. *(See insert)*. Once you have this basic understanding, apply it to the remedies for motivating others covered in the above section.

#### First Things

Does the person go to others first, hole up and study, complain, discuss feelings, or take action? Use these in your praise and to motivate.

#### Speech Content

Does the person focus on details, concepts, feelings or other people in their speech? Mirror their speech emphasis to appeal to them.

#### Emotion

What turns up the volume for the person -- either literally or what they're concerned about. You need to know this, because one mistake can get you labeled as insensitive with some people.

#### Values

Does the person talk about money, recognition, integrity, learning, or efficiency in their normal work conversation? How do you relate to their values?

- ✓ Sometimes it is easier to build a skill when you have others working with you. A technique for this was employed by a program director at a NASA Space Center by using his weekly staff meetings to cover each chapter in *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em*.<sup>2</sup> You can pick a different book on the subject that seems to be right for you. Use the book discussion to answer the following questions: What's the research on this solution or technique? How is it best learned? What can we try doing now to get started?

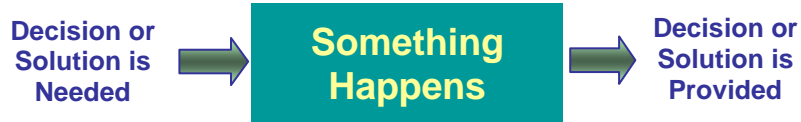
### Sources for giving frequent and sincere appreciation

- <sup>1</sup> *The Fourth Element of Great Managing* (2007), by Rodd Wagner and James Harter, <http:gmj.gallup.com> or contact the Gallup Management Journal
  - <sup>2</sup> *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em* (1999), by Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans (*both married to engineers*) Chapter 18, Provide Recognition
  - <sup>3</sup> *For Your Improvement* (2006), by Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Chapter 36 Motivating Others
- *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*, by Bob Nelson, Ken Blanchard and Stephen Schudlich



### Solution #3: Involving Employees in Prioritizing Solutions

Employee involvement in the workplace is an environment in which people have an impact on decisions and actions that affect their jobs. Employee involvement is a management and leadership philosophy about how people are most enabled to contribute to continuous improvement and the ongoing success of their work organization.<sup>1</sup>



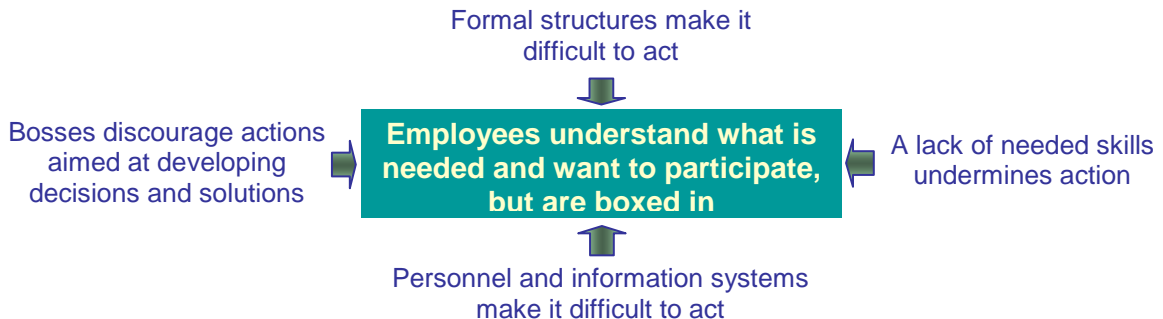
A great deal must occur between the time that it is recognized that a decision or solution is needed and the point at which the decision or solution is provided. Primarily, information must be gathered and evaluated in order to arrive at an optimal decision or solution.

Historically, the decision-making/ problem-solving process has been limited to an individual manager or a functional/technical expert, often with little input from anyone else. While this method is the quickest way to make decisions, it is rarely the best way. The reality is that one person cannot possibly be aware of all the information needed or all of the ramifications that can result from implemented decisions or solutions. Steps for engaging employees in the decision-making or problem solving process include:

- ✓ **Help employees to see the big picture.** Help your employees to see the big picture and how they contribute to a functioning whole. Communicate how your organization is really doing on a periodic basis. Give your employees information to understand shifts in corporate policy due to the budgetary, congressional or agency leadership environment. This will empower employees to solve problems and make decisions.<sup>2</sup>
- ✓ **Develop a team environment.** Develop processes designed to fully integrate employees into the organization in a positive way by sharing ideas and suggestions, recognizing people's contributions, and creating a culture where everyone feels they will be heard.
- ✓ **Support employees' needs to develop requisite skills.** At times, employees may need help with problem-solving skills, tactics for handling difficult situations, or expressing their personal feelings.<sup>3</sup>
- ✓ **Promote two-way communication.** This requires clear communication of organization goals and needs, being open to change, and listening fully to everyone's concerns and inputs.<sup>3</sup>

#### Barriers to engagement

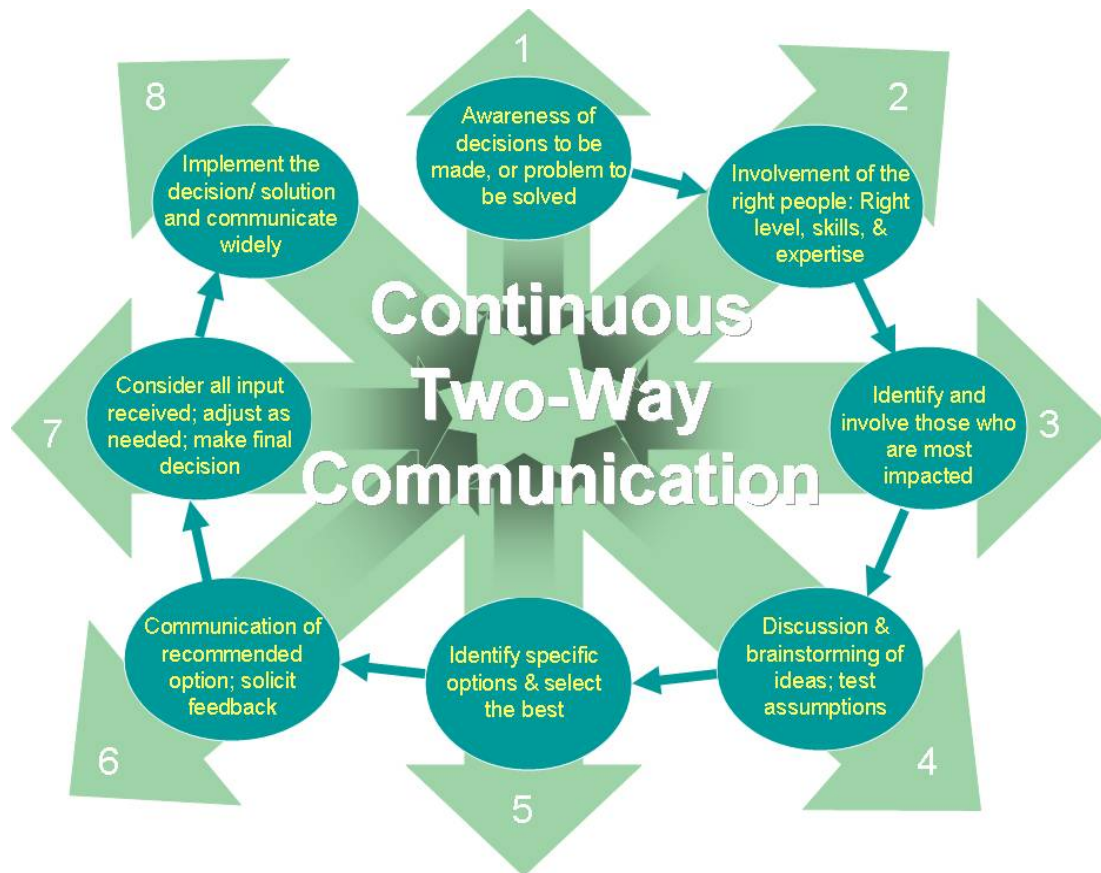
Employees very often want to fully participate in decision-making and problem solving, but are prevented from doing so because they feel powerless to overcome obstacles in their own way. These obstacles include structures, skills, systems, and supervision as shown in the following diagram.<sup>4</sup>



This solution unabashedly emphasizes the supervisor's role in removing obstacles. Sure, the employee has a role in solving problems and raising questions. Wayne Hale's article<sup>5</sup> in Academy Knowledge Sharing (Winter 2008) attests to that fact. Nevertheless, the primary purpose of this solution is to engage a broad base of people in the organization by removing as many barriers to their engagement as possible.

### An example

During an organizational retreat in February 2008, employees of the NASA Dryden Office of the Chief Financial Officer discussed the issues and barriers that prevented them from participating in the problem-solving and decision-making processes that directly affected them in their jobs. This group developed the following 8-step model for involving employees in prioritizing solutions and making decisions:



1. There must be an awareness of the decisions to be made or problem to be solved.
2. A group of the right people must come together, based on the authority level, skills, and expertise that is needed.
3. Those that will be impacted by the group's decision must be involved.
4. The group discusses the issues, brainstorms ideas, and tests assumptions.
5. The group identifies specific options and selects the best possible option.
6. Communication of the recommended solution is made to all concerned.
7. Feedback from affected parties is solicited and considered. Adjustments are made as needed before the final decision or solution is made.
8. The decision or solution is widely communicated and implemented.

This model encourages the communication and openness necessary for a manager's responsibility and accountability to make the final decision. The participants strongly believe that the most important element in employee involvement is continuous two-way communication. It is not just the responsibility of managers to make employees aware of the decisions that need to be made or the problems that need to be solved. It is just as important for employees to be proactive in seeing what is going on around them, and asking questions about what is going on.

Later this summer, the office management intends to begin the implementation of this employee involvement model by presenting the complete approach at an all-hands meeting in July, including specifics on whom and when for each step.

### **Another example**

Another example of involving employees was employed in the survey-based organization development process used for the Ares CLV survey of about 3600 employees including contractors. After the base line survey in 2006, work sessions of 30-60 employees in the populations were asked to review the overall results, key on low scoring areas, and brainstorm solutions. These recommendations were presented to the management team at the conclusion of the sessions. The management team discussed the solutions along with other possibilities and prioritized implementation of 3-5 organization building initiatives.

A year later, a follow-up survey revealed two lessons. First, the survey scores in those areas addressed by the solutions improved significantly. These improvements related to: integration, communication and reducing bureaucracy. Second, the survey response rate doubled. Both lessons were largely attributed to effectively involving employees in the entire process, including developing solutions.

### **Sources for involving employees in prioritizing solutions**

- <sup>1</sup> *Employee Involvement and Employee Satisfaction*, by Susan M. Heathfield, [www.humanresources.about.com/od/employeeinvolvement](http://www.humanresources.about.com/od/employeeinvolvement)
- <sup>2</sup> *Introduction to Employee Involvement* (2003), by J. Schwarz, EIA Conference
- <sup>3</sup> *Top Eleven Ways to Increase Employee Loyalty*, Allegiance, Inc., <http://www.allegiance.com/11ways>
- <sup>4</sup> *Leading Change* (1996), by John H. Kotter, Harvard Business School Press
- <sup>5</sup> *Leading Your Leaders*, (Winter 2008), by Wayne Hale Jr., ASK Magazine, NASA

## **Solution #4: Developing Effective Communication Skills**

Communication is critical in any organization, and employees expect their managers to both share information and to listen to their concerns and issues. When managers don't disclose information as directly and as soon as possible, employees can become anxious, which in the worst case can lead to gossip and animosity among colleagues.

In addition to properly conveying information downward, it is also crucial that employees feel empowered to communicate their issues and concerns upward, and trust that those concerns will be listened to. People want to be heard regarding their jobs in general, their current projects, and the organization's goals and strategies. As a manager, you need to ask for that input. Employees who feel heard and understood will stay engaged and on your team.

### **The first step is an honest self-assessment**

There are a number of ways to take an honest look at where you stand in your ability to communicate with your employees in an open and trusting relationship.

The most direct source of information about how you're doing in your communications with your employees is, of course, your employees themselves. By seeking honest input, a leader can become more effective, as well as serving as a model to his or her employees of how to give and receive constructive feedback. This also fosters an environment where truth is welcomed.

Objective survey assessments of leadership competencies are also available. A useful first step in determining the areas you'd like to improve in is the Agency's leadership and management development website at <http://leadership.nasa.gov>. Here you will find information on the NASA Leadership Model, the set of competencies that NASA holds as being essential for effective leadership, and an online self-assessment based on these competencies.

Other useful tools that allow you to get feedback from your employees, your supervisor, and your peers are survey assessments. The 540 assessment is one such survey offered by the Agency that is based on the NASA Leadership Model. Ask your human resources office if you're interested in the 540 or other similar feedback assessments.

### **Becoming a better communicator**

Once you have a clearer understanding of what your personal strengths and weaknesses are with regard to communication, you can begin to work on the areas you'd like to improve by leveraging your strengths, maintaining a conscious awareness of how you normally communicate with and listen to your employees, as well as acknowledging and responding appropriately to the variations in their own communication styles. There are also a number of specific actions you can take and behaviors to practice, both at work and beyond, that can help you develop your communication and listening skills:

- ✓ Collaborate on a project with a person known for his or her ability to empower others.
- ✓ Teach someone a complex skill that you have mastered.
- ✓ Attend a play by Shakespeare to practice your acute listening skills.
- ✓ Coach a sports team.
- ✓ Invite employees you don't know well to lunch. Ask about them about their interests.
- ✓ Act on ideas your employees bring you. When they see that you have implemented one of their ideas, they will feel heard and be more likely to bring ideas to you in the future.

- ✓ Share information face-to-face, especially if it's difficult to deliver or will affect your employees significantly.
- ✓ Communicate with your staff and create a shared understanding of your organization's goal regarding the openness of communications.

### **You don't have to go it alone**

By this point in your reading, you may start to feel a bit daunted by how much more there is to managing beyond knowing your technical area. This is especially true for those who have personally accepted a need or limitation for development, and want to take responsibility to do something about it. You don't have to go it alone.

You can talk to your human resources and development councilor about helpful training opportunities that may be available to you, such as seminars or one-on-one coaching. If you have a mentor or there is a managerial support group at your Center, you can ask how they have or might approach similar needs. Or you may want to read more about communication, such as the references in the following section

Whatever your plans for proceeding, don't overlook the resources and help available to you.

### **Recommended reading**

- *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*, by James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner. Jossey-Bass.
- *The Accountable Organization: Reclaiming Integrity, Restoring Trust*, by John Marchica. Davies-Black Publishing.
- *73 Ways to Improve Your Employee Communication Program*, by Jane Shannon. Davis & Company.
- *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*, by Kerry Patterson, et al. McGraw-Hill.
- *Leading Out Loud: Inspiring Change Through Authentic Communications*, by Terry Pearce. Jossey-Bass.
- *The Southwest Airlines Way: Using the Power of Relationships to Achieve High Performance*, by Jody H. Gittel. McGraw-Hill.

### **Sources for developing effective communication skills**

- NASA's *Leadership and Management Development* website, <http://leadership.nasa.gov>
- *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em* (1999), by Beverly Kaye & Sharon Jordan-Evans, Berrett-Koehler Publishers

## **Solution #5: Discovering Entirely New Solutions**

The greatest form of enlightenment is discovery, particularly when you are the discoverer. Uncovering new solutions at work can be a refreshing way to address complex projects, re-energize the workforce, communicate across organizational boundaries, or simply to complete an assignment. It is through discovery that we unravel the mysteries of space, as well as the nature of our work climate and cultural practices within organizations.

Thus far, this guide has focused on the concepts of managing by walking around, giving frequent recognition and praise, involving employees in prioritizing solutions, and developing one's communication skills. A deficit in any one of these areas can impact an organization's culture and overall performance. NASA's leaders can use tried and true methods to drive for success and for building competencies in these areas. But discovering entirely new solutions to existing situations or problems is a way to create new learning and methods for improvement.

### **The discovery process**

The process of discovering new solutions is a joint and collaborative effort that actively enrolls employees, leaders and organizations, alike. Leaders can understand and use a variety of techniques that lead to helping employees and teams to discover new solutions. Everything considered, the discovering process encompasses the following:

- openness,
- creativity,
- innovation,
- acceptance of diverse ideas, and the
- courage to approach matters differently.

A significant characteristic of the discovery thought process is that it does not follow the formal rules of logic where one uses cause and effect to prove or solve something. Thus, "instant and early conclusions and how we solved something in the past are the enemies of creativity. Studies show that defining the problem and taking action occur almost simultaneously for most people"<sup>1</sup> yet "the most creative solutions are somewhere between the second and third one generated. So if you tend to grab the first one, slow down."<sup>1</sup>

Although discovery relies on this freedom early, it requires structure later. "Once your solution has been identified, subject it to all the logical tests and critical analysis. Perform quick experiments, tests and trials of the solution to discover what works, or not. Modify the solution based upon what you learned. Although the bottom line on discovery and change is a 95% failure rate, the most successful innovators try lots of quick inexpensive tests to increase the chances of success."<sup>1</sup>

### **The discovery skills and techniques**

It is not necessary to "change who you are or what you are comfortable with" whenever there is a need to be creative. However, you must understand and be able to effectively manage the discovery process with individuals and within teams. Table 1 on the following page provides the basic techniques and some readings that can help you understand, and perhaps develop, the discovery process.



Table 1: Discovery Skills and Techniques<sup>1</sup>

Skills	Techniques	Readings
<p><u>Openness</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open to change; non-judgmental</li> <li>• Enjoys the challenge of unfamiliar tasks</li> <li>• Analyzes both successes and failure for clues to improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freely explore diverse ideas being careful of making assumptions or drawing instant conclusions about a particular matter</li> <li>• Ask numerous questions, including “What’s missing?”, to help people re-think the problem to come to more and different solutions</li> <li>• Determine what is getting in the way and preventing the desired outcome</li> <li>• Learn from failures and mistakes, looking for something that is common to each failure that is never present when there is success</li> </ul>	<p>To better understand new and difficult learning, read <i>The Future of Leadership</i> by White, Hodgson and Crainer</p>
<p><u>Creativity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comes up with a lot of new and unique ideas</li> <li>• Easily makes connections among previously unrelated notions</li> <li>• Seen as value-laden in brainstorming settings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be creative and let your thoughts and ideas freely flow through brainstorming or analytic techniques</li> <li>• When confronting the problem, change the original concept, think in opposite cases, ask “What is the least likely thing it could be?”</li> <li>• One way to generate great ideas is to take an existing approach and flip it around (<i>see Parade article</i>)</li> <li>• Identify <i>at least</i> three solutions prior to selecting one</li> <li>• Avoid searching only in parallel organizations due to the flawed assumption that “Only they would know”</li> </ul>	<p>For more on searching distant parallels, an interesting and fun book is <i>Take the Road to Creativity and Get Off Your Dead End</i> by David Campbell or the article, <i>Do you have a better idea</i> in Parade, March 25, 2008</p>
<p><u>Innovation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a sense about managing the creative process of others</li> <li>• Able to select from many possible creative ideas or solutions that have the highest likelihood of success for the organization.</li> <li>• Is good at bringing the creative ideas of others to fruition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buffer creative people from the normal processes and procedures of the organization</li> <li>• Carve out undisturbed time to study problems deeply, talk with others, look for parallels in other organizations and in remote areas outside the field</li> <li>• Once an idea is selected, manage it through the organization looking to principles of TQM, ISO and Six Sigma – although you don’t have to create these as programs in name</li> </ul>	<p>Watch several episodes of <i>Modern Marvels</i>, on the History channel which answers the question, “How did they do that?”</p>
<p><u>Acceptance of diverse ideas</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledges other people’s perspectives</li> <li>• A relentless and versatile learner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solicit input from others; pull in customers, colleagues and individuals from other organizations to generate fresh ideas and approaches</li> <li>• Have the team work with you to design the best way to move an idea through the organization.</li> <li>• Consider new techniques or ideas without justifying the change</li> </ul>	<p>For more techniques, read <i>The Art of Problem Solving</i> by Russell Ackoff</p>
<p><u>Courage to approach matters differently</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiments and will try anything to improve solutions</li> <li>• Is not afraid to take negative action when necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not continually harp on how it was done in the past; focus on what could be done better or differently for effectiveness purposes</li> <li>• Pause periodically to redefine the situation, problem or focus area better</li> <li>• Creative thought processes involve challenging the status quo, jumping from one idea to another without justifying the jump, and looking for the least likely</li> </ul>	<p>Read <i>First, Break All the Rules, What the World’s Greatest Managers Do Differently</i> by Buckingham and Coffman</p>

## **An example**

The following scenario occurred at a NASA center in the 1960's. It shows how doing something for one purpose can lead to the discovery of an entirely unexpected benefit. A researcher interviewed engineers at the Marshall Space Flight Center when Werner von Braun was its director. Repeatedly, people told him that the communication device that worked best was the Monday Notes. This referred to a practice that had sprung up when von Braun asked 24 key managers across several units to send him a one-page memo every Monday morning in which they described the preceding week's progress and problems. Von Braun read their comments, initialed them, and added his own questions, suggestions and praise. The collected notes were then arranged in order of the authors' names and returned as a package to all contributors.

Closer investigation discovered that the key managers involved had compiled their own Monday notes by asking their direct reports for a Friday report about their activities. Some of them even organized meetings to gather the required information. Many of them also circulated von Braun's eventual report back down the line. In short, a simple request had triggered a robust mechanism for the transmission of information and ensured that whatever was contained in the Monday notes was acted upon rather than ignored.

## **A discovery challenge**

Now consider a recent scenario at a NASA center around the need to discover a solution for an ageless issue that many organizations continue to face today. The senior management team at this Center was briefed on the results of their focus groups related to employee attitudes toward open communications and other management practices. A number of times, employees had misinformation or lacked information that had been communicated through the organization's series of weekly staff meetings.

At the end of the briefing, the Center Associate Director asked how one can ensure that the cascading chain of staff meetings is effective at relaying information to employees. The initial reaction was the option of preparing briefing charts to communicate information at these staff meetings, but this was considered impractical to do on a weekly basis.

During a follow-on discussion, two Culture Study Team members shared first-hand experience that this communication hitch was also the case at their Centers. Seeking a better and more convenient way to ensure this communication vehicle works more effectively is the next step in the discovery process. When that process proves successful, you certainly will hear about it.

## **Sources for discovering entirely new solutions**

<sup>1</sup> *For Your Improvement* (2006), by Michael Lombardo and Robert Eicheinger, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Chapters 14 (Creativity), 28 (Innovation Management), and 32 (Learning on the Fly)

- *Critical upward communication: Ten commandments for improving strategy and decision-making* (2005), by Touresh, D., Long Range Planning: International Journal of Strategic Planning, 38, pp 485-503
- *Leadership and the Fate of Organizations* Kaiser (2008), by R. B., Hogan, R. and Craig, S. B., Journal of the American Psychological Association, American Psychologist, 63, pp. 96-107