



# S2 LEARNING

S E R I O U S L Y S M A R T

## Consulting Case Study: The ABC Initiative

### ABC INITIATIVE: OVERVIEW

**PROBLEM:** The client needed guidance in how to systematically engage its workforce with a process that would result in information that could drive a grassroots change initiative.

**SOLUTION:** S2 Learning designed a “toolkit” that guided managers through a performance-focused meeting where actionable ideas were collected from every employee in the

**OUTCOME:** Employees were engaged, and over 1,840 actionable ideas were generated. Instead of having meetings that collected opinions that then had to be translated into actionable statements, the meetings collected practical, actionable ideas directly from the employees. The employees were able to immediately take part in the ABC initiative and, in turn, the organization immediately began to realize ABC’s impact.

### The Story

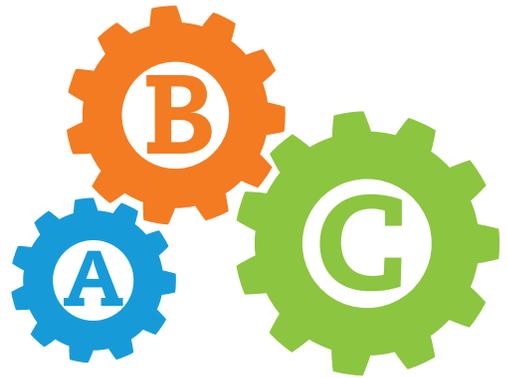
In 2011, S2 Learning was approached by one of the world’s largest human resources consulting firms to review a new initiative designed to help employees throughout the organization engage in the continuous improvement process. S2 Learning helped to form the successful strategy for the initiative and supported the initiative by producing materials for both the implementation and assessment of the program.

The continuous improvement effort, known as ABC, was designed to help employees become more “**adaptable, business-oriented and client-centric.**”

A key aspect of ABC was to engage the organization on all levels. Unlike some other continuous improvement methods, leadership did not want ABC to be a program that was at the top and driven down. Instead, they wanted to gather the input and inspire employees to participate throughout the organization. The ABC leadership team decided that they wanted managers throughout the organization to lead meetings focused on engaging employees in the process. But, they were not sure what should occur during the meetings, nor were they sure what the desired outcomes of the meetings should be. They considered surveying employees or asking employees to rate the organization on relevant attributes, but were not satisfied that either of these options would ultimately have enough impact.

S2 Learning reviewed the materials that the ABC team had produced and informally interviewed the leadership team to determine the leaders’ vision for ABC and

the specific objectives for the initiative. As a result of the interviews, it was clear that the leadership team wanted the manager’s meetings to legitimately engage and empower all employees to take an active role in making the organization



*Adaptable. Business-oriented. Client-centric.*

more adaptable, business-oriented and client-centric (i.e., the ABCs). It was also clear that the leadership team did not want the ABCs to be merely discussion points, but instead, wanted employees and managers to have next steps and measurable actions as a result of the ABC meetings.

S2 Learning consultants quickly recognized that for the leadership’s goals to be met, the manager’s meetings needed to be practical with measurable actions that would help participants integrate the ABC initiative in whatever part of the organization they worked on a day-to-day basis. While this seems simple, S2 realized that ABC meeting facilitators had to help the participants carefully craft those practical actions so that they would be clear enough to illicit consistent behavior across the organization.

### **Manager’s Meeting Toolkit**

In order to help managers best craft clear

ABC actions, S2 Learning helped design and produce the **“ABC Manager’s Meeting Toolkit”** which provided a framework to help managers as they led meetings on defining the ABCs, discussing the ABCs, and then turning the ABC discussion into practical action points. That is, the managers were taught how to guide participants to define their ideas for change in ways that could be observed and measured. Additionally, S2 Learning outlined a process for collecting each participant’s ideas and then having each participant rank-order the ideas according to predicted feasibility and impact. Finally, S2 Learning also suggested limiting the size of the meeting to approximately 15 individuals to provide the opportunity for all the participants to engage equally in the ABC idea collecting process.

#### **ABC Manager’s Meetings**

For the initial round of manager’s meetings, senior managers conducted meetings where other senior managers and middle managers were participants. Then, managers who had been participants were asked to facilitate their own meetings with their direct reports. This pattern continued with managers participating in meetings before they were asked to lead meetings until the process had cascaded throughout the entire organization.

#### **Results**

A total of 98 meetings were conducted globally with approximately 1,285 participants. These meetings generated 1,847 actionable ideas for how the ABCs could be expressed throughout the entire organization. Of the ideas generated, approximately 30% were deemed to be **“Quick Wins”** (i.e., ideas that could be implemented immediately at the department level). An example of a Quick Win was creating a Microsoft Excel macro to modify a process checklist so that it only included items required for specific client work (instead of containing a long list of

tasks that did not apply to every situation). The majority of the ideas (i.e., 65%) were **“Improvement Projects”** requiring larger scale change that would involve additional planning across multiple departments. For example, a vendor invoice review process that had been conducted using “sticky notes” was automated using a database. Finally, approximately 5% of the ideas were **“Capital Projects”** that would require both planning across multiple departments and capital investment. These projects included building new product capabilities, web interface redesigns/upgrades, and internal system feature upgrades.

The Quick Win ideas enabled the organization to engage ABC immediately by empowering individuals and departments to implement changes independently. Quick Wins, by definition, are designed to demonstrate that process improvement is not always a management responsibility. For a business to be truly successful, individuals at every level must be involved in improving the organization. Over 50 Quick Wins were implemented within the first 3 months of the program, which clearly demonstrates that Quick Wins collectively have the potential to move the organization forward rapidly, without major investment. Improvement and Capital projects have the potential to impact the organization in a more substantive way, but require more effort and investment. Therefore, these projects are being prioritized and have to be accomplished over time. ♦

## **ABOUT S2 LEARNING**

S2 Learning is a training and performance services company headquartered in Belpre, Ohio. S2’s consulting services include learning assessment, instructional design, curriculum development, safety and performance improvement. S2’s production services include the development of instructor led, computer/internet based and blended curricula. Curricula created by S2 are “turnkey” and include all instructional, multimedia, and assessment elements. Finally, S2 supports a number of technologies that allow it to host and disseminate content for clients in customized environments that track and manage learning.

S2’s professionals have completed projects encompassing a wide range of topics including: manufacturing, safety, compliance, retirement, insurance, financial, technical, sales and marketing. These projects have been undertaken for companies as diverse as the topics themselves, including companies operating in the following markets: financial, insurance, food manufacturing, equipment manufacturing, pharmaceutical, higher education, retail and human resources. S2’s main objective is to partner with our clients to provide creative learning services that demonstrate an appropriate balance between cost and effectiveness.

S2 Learning maintains productive, long-lasting partnerships with companies around the world.

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