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PARTICIPATIVE PRODUCTIVITY AND QUALITY OF WORK LIFE

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PREFACE

Some years ago, because of a genuine dissatisfaction with most business practices and published material dealing with cost reduction, motion and time study, and other approaches to productivity improvement, I wrote the book *Work Simplification: Creative Thinking About Work Problems*. My concern was that these approaches were viewed as exploitative all too frequently by both those being improved and those doing the improvement. I advocated a more constructive and participative approach. The book was well-received, went through many printings, was translated in Japanese, Portuguese, and Croatian-Serbian editions, and remained in print for more than 20 years.

The present book was originally intended to be a revision of *Work Simplification*. However, as I got into the project it became obvious that a broader treatment of participative approaches to work problems was needed. Therefore, I have widened my approach, using much of the philosophy and content of the earlier book as a springboard for developing a more modern and comprehensive treatment of participative approaches to productivity and the quality of work life.

The book is intended to provide an understanding and background of participative approaches sufficient to equip readers with the tools they will need to initiate and/or extend their own efforts in this direction.

I wish I could identify and properly acknowledge the many individuals who have influenced and contributed to my views of the subject. But, I cannot. A few of the principal ones are mentioned in Chapter 1. The balance must remain unnamed, but not unthanked.

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SOLVING WORK PROBLEMS

It is being recognized throughout the world that productivity and quality of work life can both be enhanced by involving those who do work in solving problems associated with their work. This is called *participation* for enhancing productivity and the quality of work life. It is *creative thinking* about work problems. For many organizations it has gone by the designation *work simplification*.

These participative or involvement approaches are also referred to by many other names: labor/management committees, joint problem solving, quality circles, group technology, improvement through involvement, participative problem solving, employee participation groups, work improvement teams, etc. For simplicity we will use the designation *work simplification* for the entire range of participative approaches, for *participational* work simplification was the earliest formalized approach to meaningful participation by those who do work in solving problems associated with their own work. This was done by providing these individuals with the basic tools for analyzing their own work problems—teaching people to be their own efficiency experts—and providing them time and opportunity to develop better work methods for themselves.

Participative work simplification has been around for a number of years, and continues to achieve useful results. However, the name may be interpreted narrowly by some, who may restrict it to job method changes, often without a strong participative element. This is not our intent for the term. Our use will cover the broad range of participative approaches to solving work problems.

Experience has shown that involvement in solving one's own work problems not only achieves enhanced individual productivity but produces improved quality of work life as well.

Therefore, we are concerned throughout the book with work problems, creative thinking in regard to them, and participative approaches to enhancing productivity *and* the quality of work life.

SHOULD YOU BE INTERESTED?

Why should you, the reader, be interested in work simplification? Chances are that you have work problems that need solving, and you hope work simplification will help you. It will. This book has been written for you—the person on the job, the supervisor, the student, the manager, the businessperson, the accountant, the engineer—to help you solve your work problems successfully. Throughout the book, we shall stress the creative use of human abilities for the utmost benefit to humanity. We shall also stress the use of a logical, systematic, and creative approach to work problems.

Let me start by telling you a bit about myself, and then lead you into the meat of my material. I am an engineer. As such, I am a problem solver. But I am a special type of problem solver, for I am an industrial engineer. I deal with problems of getting work done—producing goods and services—through the design and improvement of systems of people, equipment, and materials. I deal with many technical factors in my design work, and I recognize fully their importance. However, I have come to realize also the tremendous potential forces implicit in every work system which are frequently overlooked in engineering design work. These are forces of the individual. They are also forces of the group. They are the human and humane aspects of work systems. These aspects can be included in engineering design, and, if they are directed toward useful purposes, can achieve outstanding results. They are concepts that can be used by anyone who has the desire to improve the effectiveness of his or her own work efforts or of the work efforts of others. They can be applied by independent individual effort, or as part of an organizational improvement effort. This is the message underlying what I term *creative thinking about work problems*.

CREATIVE THINKING

The use of creative thinking in business and industry has received wide acclaim. Its formal consideration represents a departure from tradition and habit. It yields a new and refreshing view of old problems and encourages the use of imagination. Nearly everyone has a great deal more creative ability than is generally acknowledged. Our traditional

preoccupation with the practical side of life has stifled the development of ideas. New ways of meeting problems are rarely thought of or, if suggested, are not favorably received. This need not be so, for good ideas can be developed along practical lines for almost any problem if creative thinking is systematically used. The methods have been developed and tested.

Popular usage of the term *creative thinking* usually implies “brainstorming,” or “freewheeling” to generate creative ideas. This is an important part of the creative thinking pattern. But creative thinking is also involved in the entire problem solving method, from the identification of problems or opportunities for improvement to the actual application of the solution. The complete logical pattern is essential to insure a desirable balance between the development of ideas and the useful application of these ideas to solve real problems.

In addition to developing practical answers to real problems, creative thinking produces valuable byproducts. The participation in group activity usually associated with brainstorming can increase morale and enthusiasm. Group dynamics can materially add to the dignity of work and the challenge that is inherent in every job. However, creative thinking can also be an individual matter and need not be done in a group setting. Even when creative problem solving is done by the individual, as contrasted with the group problem solving approach, many of the same side benefits usually develop.

The concepts of creativity and problem solving will be more fully developed in later chapters.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

Work simplification has to do with finding easier, quicker, and cheaper ways to perform work and to solve work problems. The benefits to business are obvious—improved productivity and quality of working life, lower costs, and improved profit potential. But the benefits of solving work problems and developing better work methods do not stop at this point. They reach out to affect beneficially the person on the job, fellow employees, the supervisor, customers, and society in general. These benefits are material, and they are of substantial magnitude. However, the material benefits are only a part of the story. By themselves they are only a small part, for when our work problems are studied in their true nature and our creative abilities are fully utilized, an extra dimension is added. The nonmaterial aspects of work problems—those things having to do with basic human values—are recognized as an important part of what should be built into every job. And when this recognition is applied to work problems, the increased material benefits follow as a natural complement.