

### ***Thinning the Clay***

Organic growth usually leads to a 'layer of clay'\*. The centre of the organisation remains under the strong control of the leaders. We trust them. They have delivered. They reach out to their own Direct Reports with ease. It is the next layer down that becomes infused with clay - aka politics.

The organisation's real results are invisible. Poor accountability leads to reliance on informal relationships which become more and more important; senior managers have to trust someone. Trusted lieutenants and specialists gain influence and prove invaluable.

At the same time, and for the same reason of invisibility, operational staff can find no voice. There is probably no pure or effective mechanism to reach the leaders. How many times have you heard simple effective options from those 'on the ground' that (much) later are adopted following expensive advice, or perhaps it becomes altogether too late? And, the connection to customer is missing, presumed dead. Who are they? Do they support us? What do they need?

We can connect these failings and thin out the layer of clay. It is hard but it is certainly achievable.

A Closed Loop Management System will reduce the need at the top to trust few individuals by bringing clarity on who is accountable for delivery, how we measure it and what consequences are in place for either success or for failure. This framework brings strategy to operations and includes these, and other, elements:

- Well planned meetings are divided between strategy and operations, review and planning.
- Improvement projects are selected based on data telling where it matters to customers and where quality of operations is poor. In house experts are grown to deliver sustained change.
- From the outside and at the coal face, a *Feedback System* for customers and staff provides an open channel to identify external supporters or detractors and also a way to reward and act on astute internal observations and recommendations from your own staff.
- Staff training on *big picture* challenges, supply chains and process streams enables understanding of the consequence of poor local quality.

The clay begins to melt, motivation improves and some of the nimbleness and clarity of action from '*when things were better*' can return to decision making.

I have seen and had the pleasure of supporting the implementation of these activities great effect. The satisfaction that follows the success can be tremendously fulfilling for staff, owners and for us consultants! This progress is hard won, but is achievable.

*\*Thanks to Mark Bracey for this phrase*

#### **About the author**



**Name:** Ian Pinches

**Position:** Managing Director, Morpheus Consulting

**Background:** Ian is a certified Lean Six Sigma Programme Manager, PRINCE2 Practitioner and CCAB Chartered Accountant with an exceptional track record of delivery in diverse business cultures.

He has 12 years of successful project and programme delivery experience including such roles as: GE Capital Master Black Belt, AXA Life Joint Six Sigma Programme Manager (UK), Microsoft Senior Six Sigma Programme Manager (EMEA), Lloyd's Register Mentor to the Group Director of Business Assurance, Work Stream Leader and Programme Resource Supplier (Global) and Health and Safety Executive Managing Consultant for Process Excellence.

The work under Ian's leadership was recognised in the 2009 IQPC European Awards, UK Management Consultancies Association Awards and the British Quality Foundation Awards - being short listed and winning in a number of categories, including winning Best Start Up Programme in Europe for Lloyd's Register.

**Approach:** As Managing Director of Morpheus Consulting Ian works closely with his Clients to build and assure customised programmes of work. Ian partners with senior managers to identify and agree realistic and attainable programme deliverables. Ian then maintains a close working relationship to assure the quality of delivery throughout the programme of work and beyond.