

BOLTing for the Best

The Boeing Operations Leadership Team is a key part of ensuring functional excellence throughout the enterprise.

The 737 moving line in Renton, Wash., has become a Boeing model for production efficiency.



One company. Common metrics, systems and processes. Replication of best practices. These are terms that one will hear often in meetings of the Boeing Operations Leadership Team, known affectionately by its members as the BOLT.



John Van Gels: IDS vice president of Operations and Supplier Management.

Derived from an earlier Boeing Operations Council, the BOLT has been meeting quarterly for about a year and is charged with the mission of ensuring functional discipline and functional excellence throughout Boeing.

John Van Gels, Integrated Defense Systems vice president of Operations and Supplier Management, is the current chairman of the BOLT. The BOLT's executive sponsor is John Tracy, senior vice president of Engineering, Operations & Technology. BOLT members represent Commercial Airplanes Operations and IDS Operations, Phantom Works, SSG Workplace Services, Quality, the Development Process Initiative, and the initiatives of Global Sourcing Effectiveness and Lean+.

The BOLT's main instruments of ensuring functional excellence are Process Action Teams. These teams, composed of representatives from both Boeing Commercial Airplanes and Integrated Defense Systems, find out about best practices that produce significant savings and work to spread those practices elsewhere in the company. They also look at how to reduce

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– Barbara O’Dell

the cost of information systems by making these systems more common with each other.

“The Process Action Teams (PATs) have been around a long time and their focus has always been to generate best practices, ideas and systems – then work the issues together and share data,” says Van Gels. “Now they are continuing to work on replicating good ideas throughout the company. What the PATs receive from us on the BOLT are champions for those efforts.”

Leaders of Process Action Teams update the BOLT during quarterly BOLT meetings. They talk about their successes, their setbacks, the amount of money they’ve saved the company, and indicate whether or not they need help. If a Process Action Team needs help, the BOLT will take action to provide it.

“The BOLT is a key tool for how we’re working improve-

ments across the enterprise,” says Van Gels.

There are 18 Process Action Teams, arranged under three categories – commodities, assembly, and support. The commodities teams deal with composites, electrical and electronics operations, tubes and ducts, machining and advanced metal structures, chemical processing standards, and tooling. The assembly teams are for structure/join, system/integration/test, and field/ramp operations. Support teams deal with tooling services, lean, production control and material management, metrology, SHEA (Safety, Health and Environmental Affairs), industrial engineering, manufacturing engineering, distribution, and procurement.



Barbara O’Dell: BCA vice president of Manufacturing.

Process action teams have saved Boeing Operations a considerable amount of money since the first PATs were formed in 1998. The cumulative total savings through the end of 2006 (nine years) is just over \$1.1 billion. In 2006, PAT savings amounted to \$209.4 million.

One of the first things the BOLT decided to do in fulfilling its mission toward functional excellence was to continue the PATs as key players in adding improvement ideas to the initiative data base and replicating ideas across Boeing. The PATs also have a major role in helping the BOLT meet its other objectives toward functional excellence – striving for commonality between BCA and IDS, executing on cost reduction challenges, ensuring functional discipline through reasonable program targets and helping to ensure that programs use processes and tools that are provided.

“The PATs assist programs and functions almost like a 1-800 number,” says Steve Detter, who leads coordination and staff support for the BOLT. “They may not have all the answers, but they know where to go. They can pull in personnel from other functions to help out a program. An example is the composites PAT, which provided significant support to the 787 program.”

The PATs, through their efforts to replicate best practices and ideas, are helping the company achieve the kind of commonality – through processes, metrics and systems – that will make it easier for programs in different business units and locations to assist each other when needs arise, says Barbara O’Dell, BCA vice president of Manufacturing.

“We’ve been on a process management journey for some time,” she says. “It used to be that we had many processes intended to meet the same requirements. By focusing on process commonality, we’ve been concentrating our process improvement energy to produce one best way that is better understood and widely shared.”

“Being better understood means we make fewer mistakes, and that improves productivity,” O’Dell emphasizes. “Making these processes widely shared means we can maximize our investment in computing systems, documentation and training. The PATs have made outstanding contributions to process improvement and are now bringing that same knowledge and energy to commonality of documents and systems. They really demonstrate the power of being one company.” ■