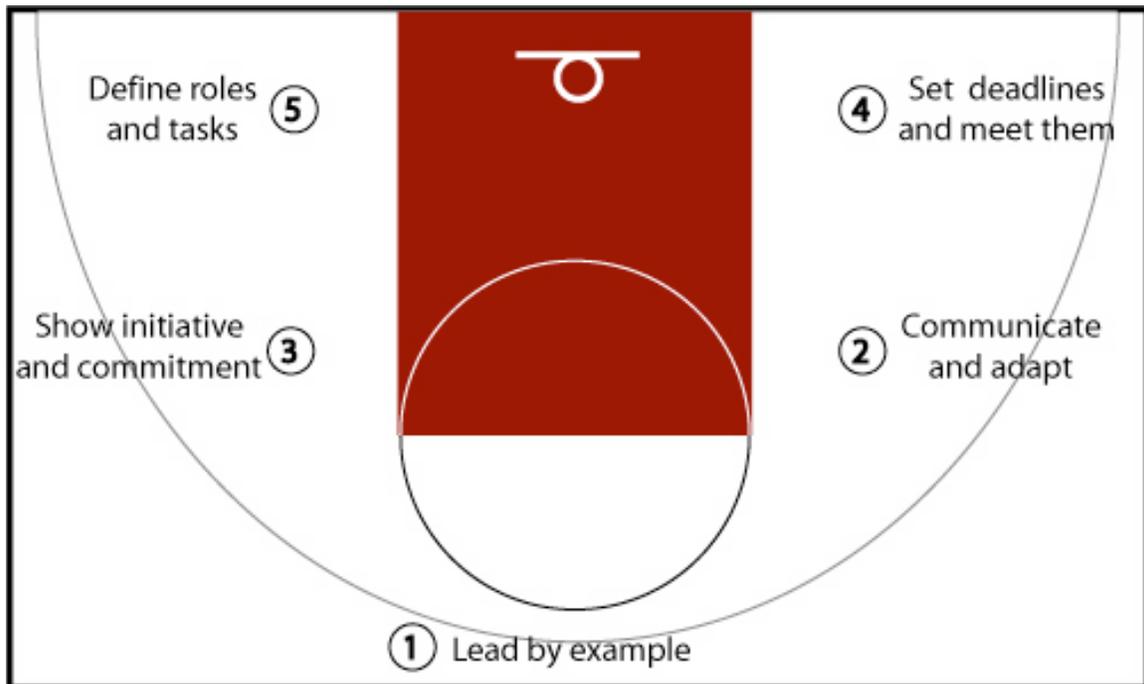


GETTING THINGS DONE

A lot of process improvement projects drag on for months with no clear direction or outcome, thus wasting organizational resources and damaging group morale. They fail not because of lack of innovation or managerial support, but because of *poor execution*.

The world of sports can teach us a lot about how to translate ideas into action. In basketball, for example, athletes and teams spend countless hours practicing and conditioning themselves to execute the right plays at the right time to win games. We can use this as a powerful metaphor to extract key principles on how to get things done.

What happens *off* the court – during timeouts and half-time breaks, – and *on* the court, both have a bearing on how well a team executes during a given game. Meetings and planning sessions are the off-court activities that need to be productive in order for a change team’s “on-court” performance to be well-executed.



GETTING THINGS DONE: EXECUTING THE PLAY

⑤ THE PLAYBOOK: DEFINE ROLES & TASKS

Well-executed plays require players who know their *roles* and carry out their *tasks* – whether it's dribbling, passing, screening teammates, positioning for a rebound, or shooting the ball – in a *clear, well-defined manner*. Everyone moves with a *purpose*.

This is the value of having a proverbial *playbook* in any process improvement effort – it should provide the *detailed actionable items* and *measurable outcomes* of any change initiative. *Matching* the right people with the right tasks is of critical importance: if people do not have the appropriate skills, knowledge, or courage to do what is asked of them, the team will flounder. Each member of a team should know exactly what their role is, as well as the tasks that they need to perform – even if they are just “sitting on the bench”. At some point, they can – and *should* – be involved in getting things done.

④ THE 24-SECOND SHOT CLOCK: SET DEADLINES AND MEET THEM

Each time a team has the ball, they have exactly 24 seconds to attempt a valid shot. Unless players are oblivious to this “shot clock”, they will at least *try* to make a shot, even if they miss the rim of the basket altogether.

Rapid cycle testing is the equivalent of the metaphorical “shot clock”: it guards against not getting anything done. One of the most common pitfalls of change teams is the failure to set deadlines, or to have a “rolling” deadline, because other things are more important. Innovative change then gets watered down or does not materialize altogether, which is why some change projects are still in progress a year after they began.

One concrete yardstick for successful process improvement initiatives is that **every change team member should have a good sense of *who does what by when* in any change initiative**. Meetings should thus be used efficiently to define roles, tasks, and deadlines. To the extent possible, change teams should avoid the creation of sub-committees, which take even more time and resources, and reflect a lack of detailed planning.

③ MOVING WITHOUT THE BALL: INITIATIVE AND COMMITMENT

One of the fundamental skills in a “motion offense” is effective player movement *without* the ball – that means, getting oneself free to make a shot, helping a teammate get free, creating mismatches in the defense, positioning for a rebound, and so on – since most players don't have the ball 70-80% of the time. A player who just stands around is useless, and in many ways is a liability to the team.

It is a common experience to see change team members *wait* for their colleagues to finish certain tasks. That way, they don't have to begin doing their tasks earlier than they should, and if things are running late, they don't necessarily take the blame. By showing commitment and initiative, however – helping out team

members when they're in a bind, meeting deadlines earlier, or taking on additional tasks beyond expectations – teams can get things done faster, and perhaps better. Moreover, initiative and commitment can be infectious – that's why some change teams seem to do phenomenal, productive work. This is sometimes called "*emergent behavior*" - or in other words, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

● IN THE GAME: COMMUNICATE AND ADAPT

Any play, no matter how complex and innovative, does not ever go smoothly when executed. This is because a game is fluid and dynamic, subject to a thousand possible sources of variation. This is the reason why players *communicate* throughout the game – calling out plays, using hand and eye signals, reading one another's body movements – and adapt their strategy in accord.

Change teams need to establish a *transparent* and *efficient* channel of communication – whether thru old-fashioned meetings and memos, or phone, e-mail, instant messaging, internal weblogs, and other modes of communication. The more *dense* the communication network is – that is, the more direct connections between individuals that exist – the faster messages travel, and the less likely they are to be misinterpreted. Change teams should also learn to be agile enough to have impromptu meetings to assess project status and perhaps change strategies, which is not unlike quick 20-second timeouts during real basketball games.

● THE PLAYMAKER: LEAD BY EXAMPLE

A team's point guard arguably has the most difficult job, because he/she has to assess players' health and morale, orchestrate the appropriate plays, test the opponent's weak spots, and if needs be, take the shot himself/herself.

Good playmakers know their teammates' strengths and weaknesses, put them in positions where they can contribute the most, and help them expand their abilities and raise their confidence. They are detail-oriented, and have an intimate knowledge of the playbook. They trust their teammates, are decisive on tough game situations, and always follow through.

A change leaders's job is no different. The team's energy, motivation, and productivity is directly correlated with its leaders. Whatever behavior leaders exhibit, promote, or tolerate, so too will his/her teammates.