

TURNING BRONZE INTO GOLD - EMBEDDING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit" – so said Aristotle. Various organisations, including manufacturing and public sector bodies such as councils, have discovered how the Burge Hughes Walsh 'Bronze Silver Gold System' (BSG) creates a culture of workplace continuous improvement, successfully transforming people and organisations, where the alchemists only dreamed of transmuting metal.

The BSG is predicated on two mechanisms – project-based activity and self-assessment against a predefined set of performance-related behaviours, graded as 'Bronze-Silver-Gold'. 'Bronze' is essentially the *education and culture change* step, following which team members launch into 'Silver', which focuses very strongly on *problem solving and improving performance continuously*.

The aim is to embed Continuous Improvement in the workplace, with the observable outcomes of:

- changed behaviours – a demonstrated culture of Continuous Improvement
- mindset focused on customers and processes
- better operational practices – self-monitored, lean and a benchmark exemplar
- improved performance, i.e.
 - flexible, self-managing workforce
 - increased capacity
 - reduced operating costs
 - better customer satisfaction

How the Bronze-Silver-Gold approach works

In simplistic terms, 'Bronze' level is about *'doing what we are supposed to do well'* and creates a 'quality service' mindset; 'Silver' is about *'improving our processes and quality to better satisfy customers'* and sees the introduction of problem-solving behaviours, tools and techniques to team members; 'Gold' level represents world-class practice as a recognisable description of daily activity in the organisation.

LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT



Figure 1: Schematic of the Bronze-Silver-Gold levels

The 'audit cycle' gives rise to a number of simple actions which are designed to develop the mindset of Continuous Improvement by focusing on the five Bronze Qualifying Requirements, namely:

- Workplace – how we take pride in our working environment
- Our role – how we contribute to service provision
- Performance – how well we perform
- Flexibility – how we work flexibly
- Procedures – how we do our work

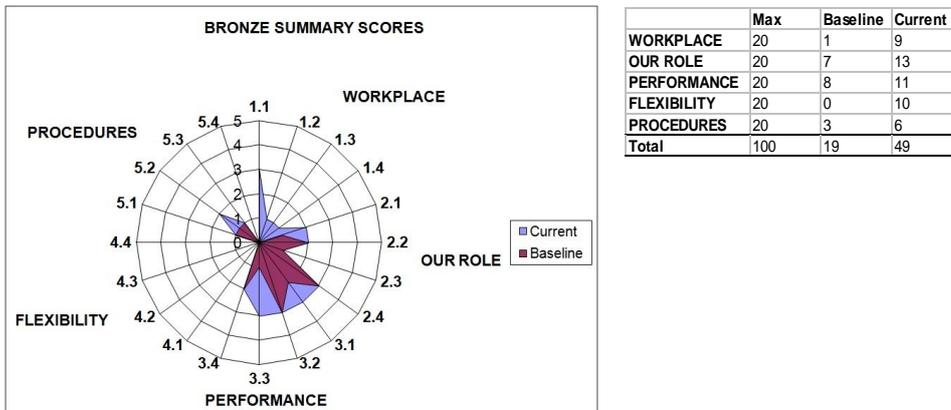


Figure 2: audit results – a typical radar chart

The actions are executed by the team members and the resulting progress charted (figure 2). During the Bronze phase, the company's Continuous Improvement agents conduct a series of workshops with the team members. This combination of audit-workshop-action is what affects a change in the cultural mindset of the people.

Bronze workshops include:

- Vision workshop to develop a local vision that aligns with the corporate goals
- 5S workshop to create an organised workplace
- NVA workshop to identify and eliminate wasteful activities
- Procedures workshop to establish standards
- Metrics workshop to develop self-monitoring of performance
- Skills and training matrix development to build a robust team

'Silver' is a *transformation* phase. The Qualifying Requirements of Silver address the shifting of effort from '*do it right*' ('Bronze' Level) to '*do it better*'. Emphasis is upon developing planning and problem-solving behaviours and team working, including the attitudes and practices of leaders towards an empowered workforce, in which the management role is to enable self-managing teams.

The attainment of 'Silver' is a longer term continuous improvement journey and one should think in terms of many months, not weeks. A year would not be untypical and it should be appreciated that this is not a race (despite the Olympic analogy) but an attainment of a performance improving/problem solving culture – and in any case, the 'Gold finish line' that is *World Class Standard* is constantly moving away from the runners.

An alternative analogy for the 'Bronze-Silver-Gold' metaphor would be that of precious metal mining, where the greater rewards lie deep in the ground, waiting to be unearthed and requiring some effort to attain.

But effort brings reward – engaged people, better performance and happier customers.

See also:

Case studies on this website: example 7 - Aberdeenshire Council; example 10 - Cooper Roller Bearings; article 'Changing Mindsets'

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