Improving New Products Launch
A Case Example by Michael Goodman

Background

A California-based software firm wanted help with problems related to the roll out of their new software products and poor sales performance of these products. They were asking **"Why has the rollout of our new products failed to meet forecasted expectations?"**
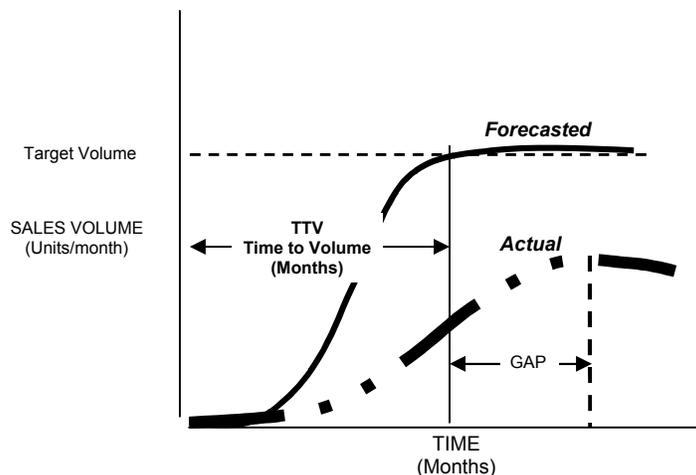
The executive VP was convinced their sales problem was systemic in nature and required a new and different approach for its ultimate resolution. He also felt that the field (sales, marketing, and service) and the "factory" (software developers) needed to work together efficiently and leverage their resources if the issue was to be resolved. There was a lot of blame and finger pointing going on between the two groups.

Systemic Analysis

After an initial gathering of all the top leaders in the organization (60 people) and the launching of a cross-functional team, a set of systems maps was generated that revealed what was driving the launch

problem. An example of one of the stories is shown in the diagram below and focuses on how the "The Field Isolates the Factory." The bottom line: The more the field tried to deal unilaterally with what they thought were quality and fit problems, the more likely the software developers (factory) would continue to develop "questionable" software products. This example represents a classic story or archetype in systems thinking which we call Fixes the Backfire.

Systems Diagram
Field Isolates the Factory

Outcomes

A critical part of the whole process was that "undiscussables" and "sacred cows" were finally surfaced publicly. The use of loops and archetypes made it safe for "difficult" stories and "truths" to be shared without the typical finger pointing or defensiveness that often happens around high stake issues. The bottom line was that there was a significant shift within the company from "who is responsible for this?" to "how are we all contributing to the problem?" The cross-functional team was able to identify a number of tactical and

strategic recommendations including an early warning and measurement system around their new software launches that were readily supported by all the senior managers.

A complete description of this case example, is available at

Using Systems Thinking to Facilitate New Product Launch