

Achieving Breakthrough Results Through Global Action Sprints

by John Tucci, Leap Technologies, Inc.

The strike-threatened baseball season in the U.S. is winding down and there's talk in every ballpark about pitchers who consistently find the "strike zone" and hitters who put the bat's "sweet spot" on the ball.

Strike zones and sweet spots are among the best practices that separate All-Star players from the rest. That's how you get to the World Series.

Mastering and deploying best practices is just as important to business success, but finding business strike zones and sweet spots is often slow and inexact.

Over the past two years, we've helped several CEOs and their organizations escape this trap and achieve remarkable improvement at the bottom line. It's been made possible by an innovative application of the Action Workout™ System we call **Global Action Sprints**.

Finding the Sweet Spot for Rapid Business Improvement

When rapid improvement is critical on key goals and initiatives, many CEOs and their leadership teams strike out with poor judgment at the plate.

In some cases, they swing for the fences, trying to re-engineer or implement new technology. Statistics show the probability for hitting a home run (*getting a return on these projects in time to make a difference*) is low, usually not better than 30 percent.

Re-engineering and new technology investment have their places in business improvement, but not as the lead strategy if quick results (*without downsizing or restructuring the organization*) is the goal.

The other common mistake is failing to swing at all. This mistake shows up in improvement efforts that leave too much freedom to mid-level managers to either make changes or just sit tight.

A more effective approach to rapid business improvement is to identify and then exploit "sweet spots," where a common improvement need is intersected by a known best practice.

As shown to the right, these sweet spots exploit opportunities where existing know-how can be used in multiple sites to quickly produce a large cumulative result.

Exploiting these sweet spots requires a highly disciplined and cost-effective approach to business improvement. Global Action Sprints, using the

Action Workout System as a platform, provide a way to do it fast and economically.

Global Best Practices with Local Execution

The fastest path to improvement is to get more people improving what they already do well. This is the essence of the popular strategy called Best Practices Deployment.

But deploying best practices is always easier to say than do. There are two big barriers to execution:

- First, how do you define a best practice? And, more importantly, how do you get leaders aligned to support its use?
- Second, how do you overcome the natural resistance to conformance of frontline managers and employees (*who do the real work*) – particularly when driven from on high.

Based on our experience in more than 4,000 change efforts, we know that engagement drives commitment to change. Getting people involved is the key.

At every level, when people are invited to participate in business improvement efforts and shape execution, resistance decreases and execution accelerates.

Engagement begins with leadership. A critical mass of leaders must identify best practices and then link them to business goals. This upfront investment avoids "optionalism": Leaders selectively deciding what to do based on personal biases.

At the frontlines of the organization, the key is engaging managers and employees to tailor best practices to fit their own work environments. This "localization" process is where the logic of best practices and human motivation to change meet.

The Fast Track for Global Action

The Action Workout System provides a fast track for both aligning leaders on global best practices and then, quickly engaging frontline employees in local execution. The typical Global Action Sprint works over a 60-day fast track, driven by four key events:

1. Leadership Jumpstart Event

This two to three-day event brings together key senior leaders with operational responsibility and high performers with experience on the goals for improvement. The Jumpstart Event allows the senior sponsor of the sprint (*usually the CEO or equivalent*) to outline specific goals and metrics to measure success. The Jumpstart Event is where best practice roadmaps for guiding improvement at the local level are developed.

2. Team Sponsor and Leader Workshop

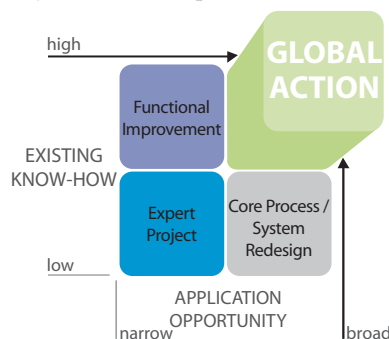
This one to two-day workshop gets local leaders prepared to lead Workout Teams that will implement the best practice roadmaps.

3. Workout Team Deployment

Workout Teams, made up of five to seven employees, sprint into action to localize best practices and run for 30 to 45 days, using the discipline of Action Workout's weekly meetings and "idea-to-action" tools.

4. Listen, Learn and Leverage (L3) Meeting

Every Global Action Sprint concludes with reporting results from each Workout Team, along with sharing lessons learned and recommendations for executive action.



Global Action Sprints “In Action”

Two recent client experiences illustrate Global Action Sprints driving rapid improvement.

Alliant Foodservices, Inc. – one of the nation’s largest wholesale food distributors – recently used a Global Action Sprint to lift profits by more than \$10 million per year.

This Global Action Sprint was sponsored by the company’s CEO and led by field managers across Alliant’s 45 sales and distribution centers. A key aspect of this sprint was the participation of 60 Alliant executives, managers and high-potential employees in a three-day Jumpstart Event.

This was a defining moment for confronting the company’s profit shortfall and shifting from making excuses to fixing the problem. The group broke into working teams to define best practice roadmaps on key profit drivers that ultimately powered the overall success.

ATC, a national public transportation company, is currently in the “third wave” of a year-long Global Action Sprint designed to help execute its “Get Better, Faster” strategy.

Jim Long, ATC’s CEO, was attracted to Action Workout and the Global Action Sprint concept because of ATC’s highly dispersed organization (*operations in 24 states*) and the big impact of local practices on company profitability.

In ATC’s case, the game plan was to run four sprints, one per quarter, with Action Workout Teams launched in every branch operation. Each Workout Team worked with one key profitability driver

such as accident reduction, overtime rates and maintenance costs.

In its first two sprints, ATC has deployed 45 Workout Teams, implemented more than 325 improvement solutions and generated close to \$3 million in savings.

Why it Works

Here are the keys to great results from Global Action Sprints:

1. Engage leaders upfront in a Jumpstart Event. Every leader has a role to sponsor or lead a Workout Team.
2. Create best practice roadmaps to provide a tight focus on what to improve but a loose rein on how to do it.
3. Use structured meetings and weekly reporting mechanisms, such as the one built into the Workout Team Process, to maximize productivity.
4. Use Listen, Learn, and Leverage Meetings to shorten the cycle of learning and ensure continuous improvement.

Unlike baseball, running a business lasts 12 months a year. Over this long haul, companies that find the sweet spot for rapid improvement will consistently win.

Action Workout, and its Global Action Sprint application, is a fast track for throwing more strikes and getting more hits in the game of business improvement.

(Give us a call at 1.800.254.6805 to learn more about Global Action Sprints and explore applications for your organization.)