

Precision Q+A Improves Execution

In the early 1990's Cypress Semiconductor created a strategy to transfer cutting-edge fabrication processes at its R&D site directly to manufacturing sites. The company's ability to fill orders for next-generation products depended on flawless execution of these site-to-site handoffs. Tony Alvarez, Vice President of Research & Development at the time, comments: "In 1995, when we jumped to our next generation of technology, the sudden growth in complexity almost ate us alive." Teams began to slip on milestones; executives weren't getting the answers they wanted; morale was sagging.

PRECISION Q+A ALIGNS THE FRONT LINE WITH MANAGEMENT

Cypress invested in Precision Q+A as a key tool in the jump to its next-generation technology. Engineers and project leaders were integrating knowledge from diverse fields such as R&D, product planning, and project management, and condensing at each level. For executives, understanding the right questions and knowing how to ask them was an essential component of communicating what they wanted as well as uncovering any risks buried in a team's assumptions.

"When things aren't going well, it's natural for someone to feel uncomfortable when they are being asked hard questions by their managers and even their peers," Tony emphasizes, "but that's when Precision Q+A matters most. Employees' initial discomfort goes away once people are aware that direct questioning and answering is part of a company-wide philosophy and another tool for helping us work efficiently. The shared language and methodology of Precision Q+A creates better communication and tighter alignment between company executives, senior managers, and the working teams that construct and implement solutions."

Clear communication and tighter alignment between the front line, management, and senior executives benefits the entire organization. "Once Precision Questioning became

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a shared vocabulary and everyone learned the basics of Precision Answering, the front line finally felt they could communicate effectively with management and deliver what the executives wanted."

PRECISION Q+A REDUCES SCHEDULE SLIPS

"Our first signs of success occurred in project reviews. We started hitting our targets more often," Tony says. "When you use Precision Q+A to examine your goals and milestones, your accuracy improves." Precision Q+A permeated the culture of the company, driving better questioning at every level. "We realized right away that Precision Q+A could help us get through problems more quickly by building teams that are highly question-driven. Because people had a clearer understanding of executive standards, they began having higher expectations of one another." Asking better questions clarifies goals and methods and helps teams make better decisions.

Tony explains, "Traditional approaches often result in slow decision making. With Precision Q+A, weak points in thinking can be located quickly. When you're on the wrong track, you make corrections sooner rather than later. The Precision Q+A Toolkit can be used to attack a problem from many different angles."

CRITICAL THINKING AS A WAY OF LIFE

The 1995 crisis marked a turning point in Cypress history. At a critical growth phase, Precision Q+A became an organization-wide tool that helped take Cypress to the next level of competition. Tony says, "Precision Q+A makes you conscious of the questions you're not asking yourself. That's especially helpful when you're stuck."

Alvarez, now President and CEO of Leadis Technology, still believes that Precision Q+A is an essential component of drive and efficiency. "All education takes time to yield dividends, but if someone wants quick results, I'd challenge them to show me a course that can do it better for them. They'd be hard pressed to do so."