

POWR: People Oriented Work Redesign

A dynamic method of increasing productivity, inspiring creativity and optimizing work time



Making IBM a greater place to work

“[We] identified issues we have been aware of but have not taken the time to address...in a matter of four hours, we can fix 50% of them...[POWR] provides a way to present the ideas you have every day.” –IBM employee, Mexico City, Mexico (LA)





Why is IBM focusing on POWR?

IBM uses POWR to improve and reduce low value work. By using this new process, we can make IBM an even greater place to work. IBM continues to listen to our employees and customers. Here's what they are telling us:

- Difficulties with workload and work/life balance have been reported in every IBM geography
- While employees are committed to achieving company and customer goals, one third of IBM workers say they spend at least fifteen percent of their time on unnecessary work
- Most often, employees cite inefficient processes, technology and lack of planning as the major inhibitors

What does this mean for IBM? First, wasted time and inefficiency inhibit our ability to provide quality customer service. Second, employees work longer than they should to accomplish their goals and may have less time to pursue their interests outside of work. Ultimately, employee dissatisfaction poses a serious threat to retention.

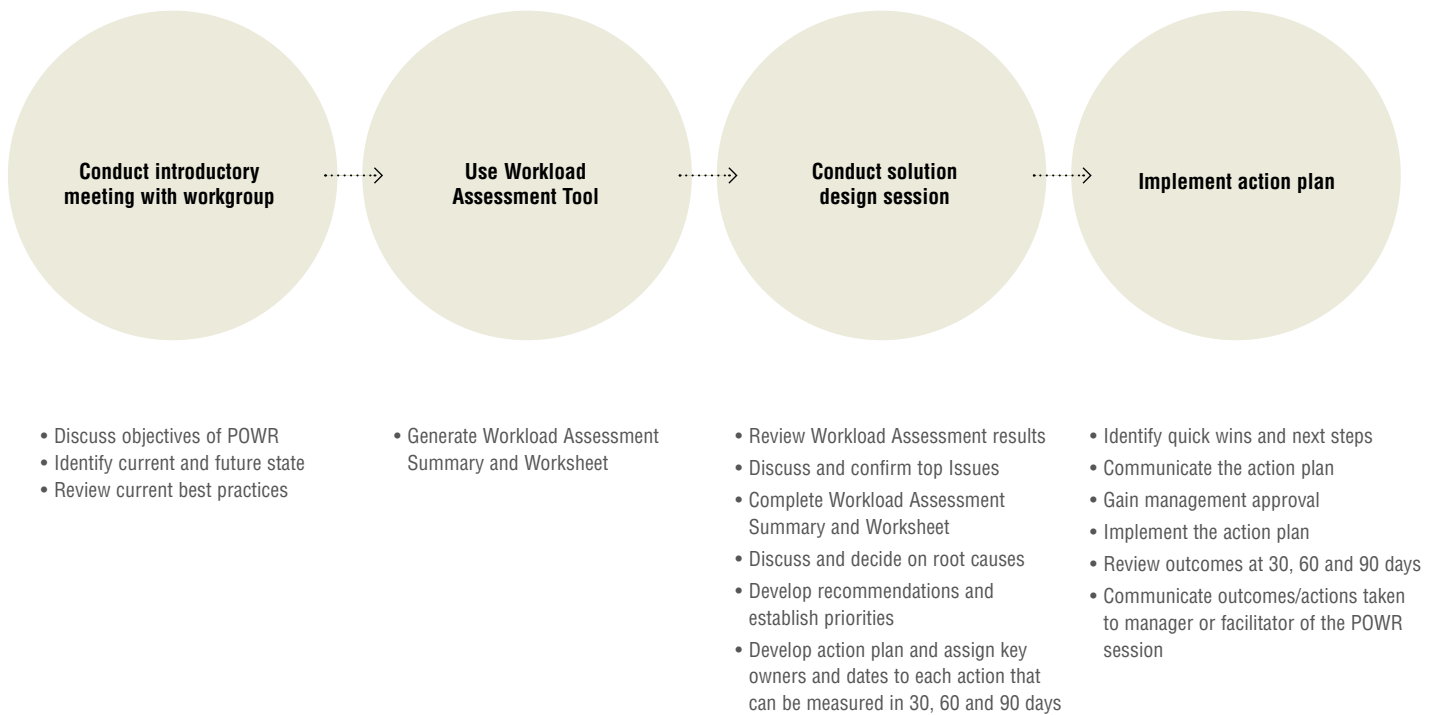
But even if employees are not unhappy enough to leave IBM, inefficient processes, bureaucracy and spending excessive time on low-value work drain employees' energy. All of these things hinder creativity and block innovative efforts, which is unacceptable in a dynamic, world-class on demand organization. Fortunately, this is where POWR can step in and provide innovation that matters for our company.

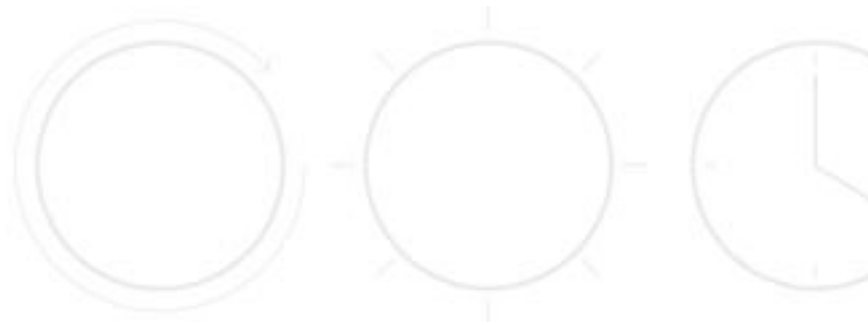
“[POWR] forces us to step back and evaluate where we are and what to do to get better...[we're] absolutely optimistic we will see a difference.” –IBM employee, Somers, NY (US)

What is POWR?

POWR is a process designed to achieve both business and personal payoff by reducing unnecessary work, thus relieving some of the time pressure that employees feel. It helps identify inefficient processes and practices at the workgroup level, and then identifies and implements solutions that improve the workload situation. POWR can help employees across IBM to lessen or eliminate low-value work. It is also a way to improve the climate and work/life balance, freeing time for creative work and innovative thinking.

POWR uses a replicable online Workload Assessment Tool, which allows ongoing assessment and improvement of workload and processes. Participants in the POWR process complete the Assessment Tool as part of an introductory meeting that examines the POWR objectives, purpose and process (see figure).





How does POWR determine and implement a course of action?

Finding the main areas of inefficiency and workload imbalance is only part of the POWR process. After confirming the most crucial issues, participants then complete the worksheet section of the Workload Assessment Summary. This helps to determine the root causes of the problems. The participants discuss and reach agreement on root causes of the problems, then develop recommendations and establish priorities for addressing the inhibitors.

Next, it's time to begin turning the recommendations into solutions. The first step is developing an action plan and the key measures within the plan. The next step in POWR

is implementing the action plan, which begins with identifying “quick wins”—problems that can be solved with minimal time and effort. Then, the managers or facilitators will work with the participants to set up the next steps that will make the plan a reality. Finally, the team agrees to implement the action plan with specific dates.

The purpose behind POWR is to offer employees, workgroups and organizations an easy, replicable way to improve their workload. This brochure examines the way that POWR accomplishes this.



What POWR is :

- A participative, ongoing approach
- A way to identify and sustain process improvements and work innovation
- A forum for examining and challenging assumptions
- A way of addressing problems within the workgroup's control
- A method of achieving both business and personal benefit
- An effective process for addressing ineffective management and employee practices
- An opportunity to experiment with new, flexible ways of working

What POWR is not :

- A solution to problems with global, corporate processes
- A one-time activity to establish new “rules” for the business
- A way to simply squeeze out more work with fewer resources
- An opportunity to identify ways to eliminate jobs
- An approach exclusively focused on process reengineering

“[POWR provides] common awareness of problems... overall, POWR is a great tool. It helps a workgroup focus, discuss and prioritize their current inefficient processes .”

—IBM employee, Singapore (AP)

What is the introductory meeting?

At the beginning of the POWR process, a manager or facilitator explains the POWR process and discusses its objectives. Participants find out why they should use POWR and discover what POWR is... and isn't. They learn about the “chain reaction” in which inefficient processes and bureaucracy lead to excessive time spent on low-value work—which in turn produces inferior customer service and overworked, unhappy employees.

Typically, participants discuss the current workload situation and the desired future outcome. A short exercise encourages them to ask questions such as:

- What would be improvements in the desired work environment three to six months from now?

- If the POWR process is successful, what changes would you like to see in your work or personal life?
- What changes would allow employees to achieve their work objectives and their personal priorities?

Those in the workgroup also share their personal preferences for the work environment, such as reduced overtime, less e-mail or more time with their families. Next, they review best practices that are already active in the company and record those that may help their work group achieve positive future outcomes or their desired state within six months of participating in a POWR session. Some examples of current best practices are:

- Workgroup's willingness to support each other
- Good customer relationships
- Manager's openness to change

How is the Workload Assessment Tool administered?

The manager or facilitator introduces the online Workload Assessment Tool. The participants of the workgroup take a short and simple survey designed to identify the top contributing factors to inefficiency—and determine where low-value work occurs within their work group.

1. The manager or facilitator sends an e-mail invitation, along with instructions for using the tool and a deadline for responding to survey
2. The workgroup members take the survey
3. They send their confidential responses by the predetermined deadline
4. The workload assessment survey input is consolidated and sent to the facilitator or manager conducting the POWR session
5. The facilitator shows the results in the solution meeting, in aggregate form, to the work group



What is the POWR Solution Design Session?

The Solution Design Session is the heart of the POWR process. It picks up where the introductory meeting left off, as the workgroup reviews the results of the Workload Assessment Summary and Worksheet. This review consists of:

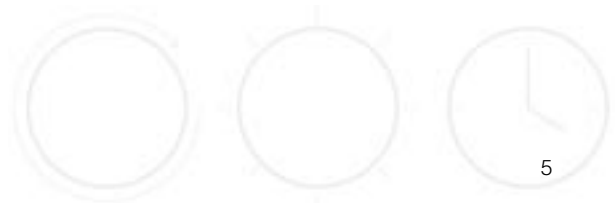
- Identifying the top three to five issues from the chart provided with the summary and worksheet
- Focusing on the issues with the most negative or least positive results in the workplace and within their workgroup
- Concentrating on the issues where the workgroup can have the most impact for change

There are several steps to the Solution Design Session. These include:

Reviewing the results of the Workload Assessment Summary and Worksheet

Participants discuss and decide whether combining two or more of the top issues would help to address them better. They also decide whether there are any issues not identified by the Workload Assessment Tool that need to be addressed. If there are any top issues that the group can't address, the group must decide which issues should be eliminated from the list.

“The POWR tool has a great methodology... we were able to come up with a great set of solutions... it was good to see management willing to help us... and we learned what key issues to tackle.” –IBM employee, Madrid, Spain (EMEA)





Completing Root Cause Analysis

POWR workgroup participants usually find that problem situations happen repeatedly. To break this pattern, it is beneficial to determine what's really causing the problem to occur—and find a way to ensure that they don't happen again. This is Root Cause Analysis, which means finding the real cause of the problem and dealing with it. Without effective Root Cause Analysis, the workgroup will continue to deal with symptoms.

In this process, the workgroup might ask questions such as:

- What is the problem, and why is it a problem?
- What is the true cause of the problem?
- What creates and feeds the problem?
- Why does the problem keep occurring?

Within the Workload Assessment Worksheet section, there is a place for the workgroup participants to write down responses to several questions. During this time, workgroup participants will be asked to think and write quickly, spending five minutes or less on each issue. The participants must be prepared to share their root causes with the overall group and record the root causes for each issue on a flip chart.

Developing recommendations

During this part of the process, the workgroup participants think about the root causes and potential solutions for each issue. They complete the Recommendations and Solutions section from the Worksheet, performing the following steps:

1. They focus on the “What can my workgroup do?” column first
2. Write down their recommendations to each of the top issues ... they have to think and write quickly—they shouldn't spend more than five minutes on each issue
3. If time permits, they complete the “What can I do individually” and “What must be addressed outside the group” sections

Developing recommendations helps to generate and clarify ideas for solutions to the root causes of the problems. Now it's time to design a solution to help remedy the workgroup inefficiencies.



Examples of problems and root causes

Problem: Workers spend too much time in meetings and can't get work done during regular hours

Root cause: Inefficient, overly long meetings without proper agendas

Problem: Servers perform slowly and e-mails clog the inboxes

Root cause: Too many people are being copied on e-mails

Problem: Workers waste time trying to track down information needed to complete projects

Root cause: No procedure is set up to direct workers to the person or place to find this information



The Recommendation exercise

This is where participants begin turning the recommendations into viable solutions. They start by writing the top recommendations on index cards. They write only one recommendation per card—They may write either all recommendations on one issue, or recommendations spread across several of the top issues. Next, the individuals in the workgroup share their recommendations. One at a time, workgroup participants:

1. Bring their index cards forward
2. Explain the issues and their recommended solutions
3. Place their cards on the wall alongside the appropriate “issue” sheet, with duplicate recommendations overlapped or placed together

The participants need to make sure that their recommendations include changes to management and employee practices as well as work processes.

Prioritizing recommendations

Now that the workgroup has identified several recommendations, it's time to prioritize the recommendations in order of viability. First, the manager or facilitator distributes several red voting dots to all workgroup participants. After the participants read and review the recommendations, each participant places a red dot, which constitutes a vote on each card or cluster of cards with their favorite recommendation.

“Excellent opportunity to hear issues that are ‘top of mind’ and improve them. [The] number of our team’s e-mails reduced drastically.” –IBM employee, Toronto, Canada (Americas)



Developing an action plan


The next step is turning the most popular recommendations into targets for developing the action. To begin, the manager or facilitator:

- Counts the red dots to identify the top-priority recommendations
- Records top recommendations on a flip chart
- Identifies short-term solutions, or quick wins, and long-term solutions

After determining which recommendations can be implemented quickly and actions that should be addressed outside the workgroup, participants focus on:

- Deciding how to bring these results to the attention of senior management
- Making a commitment to update the workgroup on the progress of implementation
- Developing an action plan for implementing the top solutions
- Assigning responsibilities to action owners and making a timeline
- Establishing the next meeting, conference call or TeamRoom update to discuss progress and other next steps

Now, all that remains to complete the POWR process is to implement the plan.



“POWR is a way to improve employees’ overall work climate, flexibility, work/life balance and allows more time for creative work and innovative thinking.”

–IBM employee, Armonk, NY (US)

How is the plan implemented?

After the Solution Design Session is completed, it’s time to implement the action plan. Typical steps in an effective action plan include:

Gaining management approval and buy-in. Any change is destined for failure without the support of upper management, so this is an important first step.

Communicating the action plan. The workgroup must ensure that everyone in the organization who is affected knows about the plan. They must see that every person who has an active role in the plan’s implementation is certain of his or her responsibilities.

Implementing the action plan. The workgroup takes actions on what they have agreed upon, then converts the plan into actual measurable actions with assigned owners and dates of anticipated completion.

Review outcomes at 30, 60 and 90 days. This ensures that the plan is still on track and that the implementation is working as expected. Reviewing the agreed-upon actions at 30-day intervals allows the action owner time to make adjustments if the plan is not working as expected.

Communicate the outcomes. Everyone on the implementation team, plus management and affected people in the organization, should be informed of the POWR action plan status and how it is taking shape.

What have you learned about the POWR process?

This brochure has detailed how you can use the POWR process to increase the amount of high-value work and get better results in your organization. Using POWR, you can increase flexibility, creativity and innovation in your daily work life, while integrating business and personal priorities to achieve work/life balance.

The POWR tool has been designed to be used with work groups of nearly any size.

Frequently Asked Questions

What action should be taken after the POWR meetings?

No formal steps need to be taken after the completion of the Solution Design Session. However, the action plan you leave the session with must be complete—with assigned responsibilities, a timeframe and checkpoints. If not, the action plan should be completed at a short follow-on meeting or at your next department meeting.

POWR won't be effective unless the agreed-upon actions are actually taken. You may need to schedule 15-, 30-, and 45-day checkpoints to ensure activities stay on track.

What should I do about workgroup cynicism when I begin the POWR process with my department?

Experience reveals that many work groups will initially be cynical when beginning the POWR work. They may feel that:

- It is a management responsibility to identify and resolve work-related issues
- They have tried to resolve such issues before without success, or
- Funding or senior management support will not be forthcoming

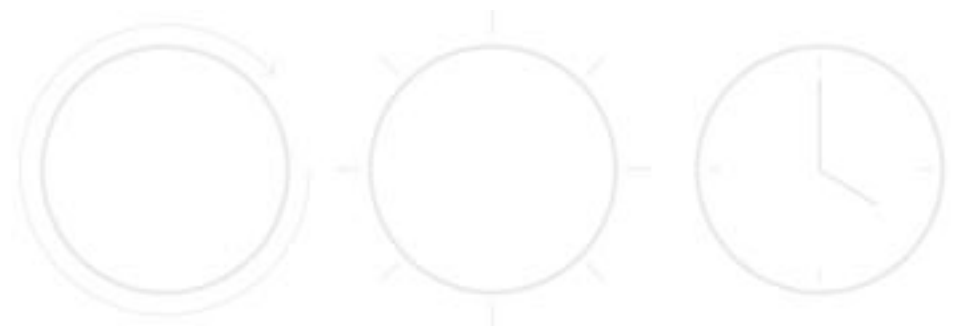
Review the objectives of the POWR process, stress that it is not a solution to all the department's problems, but let them know you are confident they will feel it is time well spent if they work through the process.

I'm afraid the discussion of ineffective work practices may lead to blaming others for inefficiencies, or criticism of my managerial abilities. How should I handle this?

Sometimes ineffective practices may be the result of a managerial style or behavior of an individual. However, the Workload Assessment Tool and the structured exercises help keep the discussion focused on the process and general practices rather than on individuals. It's important to remain focused on the business processes and their improvement, and for the entire workgroup to keep an open mind about issues that surface as potential problems and to be creative in finding effective solutions.

Where can I go to get help in facilitating this session?

The POWR tool was designed to be used by managers and their departments on an independent basis without professional facilitation. If you feel you need assistance, your local HR support team or local ACT facilitators may be able to help. For additional comments, or questions, please consult the POWR QuickView at w3.ibm.com/manager/quickview, then select *POWR: People Oriented Work Redesign* from the QuickViews by topic drop down menu. You can also send a detailed e-mail to POWR/Augusta/IBM.





How does the POWR process compare to the ACT process?

Accelerate Change Together (or ACT) is IBM's premier problem-solving methodology that has been used successfully to address a variety of problems, including the problem of workload elimination. It uses trained business consultants to facilitate multi-day group problem-solving sessions and assembles cross-functional groups to analyze the problem, develop solutions and structure action plans in response to complex business challenges involving key company processes and procedures.

POWR uses standard problem-solving techniques in a self-administered way. Individual managers and their departments can easily and quickly identify their flawed processes from an inventory developed from IBM organizations around the world. Each department develops its own unique list of top issues, then develops and implements specific action plans to reduce the time spent on unnecessary work. POWR sessions can be conducted with or without professional facilitation. Sessions can be repeated periodically for continuous improvement at the department's convenience.

How does POWR relate to the Ideas Program?

Every day, employees suggest good ideas to improve the way they work, and take the steps necessary to get them implemented. The IBM Ideas Program (formerly called the *Suggestion Plan*) is designed to make it easy to evaluate and implement new ideas. All IBM employees in the United States can submit ideas online on virtually any subject (except for ideas pertaining to software).

Ideas developed during the POWR process may be eligible for awards. The easy-to-use online application routes ideas to the IBM Ideas department. Employees whose ideas are implemented can receive awards ranging from \$50 to \$5000.

What are the primary causes of work inefficiencies at IBM?

ACT and Workload Solution Sessions in the US, E/ME/A and Latin America have documented the primary drivers of work inefficiencies at IBM. See Facilitator's Tips and Traps in the POWR QuickView for some examples (w3.ibm.com/hr/global/diversity/flexibility/index.shtml) and click on POWR QuickView).



Is POWR better for large or small groups?

The POWR tool has been designed to be used with work groups of nearly any size. If the workgroup is so large that effective discussion is inhibited, the manager or facilitator may wish to break up the department into pairs or smaller groups to better facilitate the exchange of ideas.

Can remote employees participate?

Department members who work remotely should be included in the POWR process via teleconference or in team meetings, if available. They should have copies of all relevant materials beforehand. During the Solution Design Session, their input on root causes, recommendations and prioritization should be solicited. It may be effective to have another team member assigned to record the remote employee's input on cards and charts and to "vote" their positions. Encourage the remote employees to take notes.

Can temporary/contract employees participate?

Because the POWR process focuses on the department's work, processes, and procedures, it would be acceptable to include temporary or contract employees. Any questions and concerns should be referred to those providing your local HR support.

How can we address the issues that were not identified as among the "top" ones?

Ideally, you will use POWR on an ongoing basis. You may find it helpful to link it to other business processes, such as the Fall Plan process or PBC objective setting. In this way, items that don't receive priority during one year may get attention later. Interested department members may take responsibility for pursuing particular issues.



“POWR was a valuable program that employees are active in identifying shortfalls and enables to provide the solutions and resolution to utilise limited resources—particularly working hours. We have all greatly benefited from the POWR session and would recommend the program to others.” –IBM employee, Australia, (AP)

Can I include other departments we work with in my workgroup's POWR sessions?

Best to use the POWR tool with only your department. This will keep you focussed on the issues and solutions specific to your department. Other groups—those your department works with—may have similar issues. You might recommend to such colleagues that they use the POWR tool with their departments. The results can be shared among managers, or a larger group meeting can be conducted to share the results of the individual meetings.

Is the POWR process inappropriate if our department is going through a resource action?

Not at all. In fact, workgroups that have been directly impacted by recent workforce actions have found the POWR process effective in pulling the team together to focus on how to redistribute work, reduce inefficiencies and improve communication and teamwork. Engaging the team in this process can be a morale-booster in a challenging, stressful work climate.

Realistically, how effective is POWR likely to be in solving the problem of low-value work in my department?

POWR has proven to be effective—with a minimal investment of time. It is not a “silver bullet,” but it can provide useful insights into changes needed. Periodically using POWR to examine your processes will assure the continuous improvement of your work efficiencies and work and life balance.



To learn more about POWR, visit the Flexibility@Work Overview Web site at w3.ibm.com/hr/global/diversity/flexibility. Under "additional resources," select **POWR QuickView**. For inquiries, send an e-mail to POWR/Augusta/IBM

© Copyright IBM Corporation 2005

IBM Workforce Diversity
North Castle Drive
Armonk, NY 10504-1785
U.S.A.

01/05

All rights reserved.

IBM and the IBM logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of the International Business Machines Corporation in the United States, other countries or both.

Any other trademarks, registered trademarks, company, product or service names may be trademarks, registered trademarks or service marks of others.

