

Let's SPOC it....

“SPOC” is a term I learned from Glamox (<http://www.glamox.com/>), a Norwegian manufacturer of industrial lighting for offices, factories, ships and oil platforms. The company is a successful turnaround story and the concept of SPOC was central to the vision that formed the basis for the new company.

SPOC means *Single Point of Contact* and at Glamox, this refers to physical locations, one for each of the company's two lines of business. Glamox used to be a jumble of production and sales units, a result of aggressive acquisitions without matching aggressive integration. This resulted in a mess wherein each sales representative was forced to call around the whole company to put orders together.

From 1997 to 1999, the company completely reengineered itself, based on a vision of the mobile sales rep, with laptop and software for developing and ordering the complex lighting solutions the company sells. Once the order is signed, responsibility for its fulfillment goes to the SPOC center. Each SPOC center consists of a trading desk where people are assigned responsibilities for each order as it comes in. The center is manned by experienced reps who know the business and the individual customers and have information technology to track inventory levels, production schedules, payments and service personnel.

The trading desk analogy is intentional – the tempo at the SPOC is high and the people manning the desks, though having regional or business-line responsibilities, can and will help each other out. Customers can call in, but most calls are from sales people. At night, the center is staffed by students from a local college, who do overflow work, learn about the business and are excellent candidates for recruiting.

Many companies have call centers – large facilities aimed at simple customer interactions such as billing inquiries, orders or reservations, or other forms of customer support. Often these centers are outsourced and far from the headquarters location. At Glamox, the SPOC is the heart of the company, where it all comes together. If you want to know how the business is, walk over to the SPOC and see the action.

I like this idea – especially in companies that are virtual and knowledge-based, such as consulting firms and academic institutions. When an organization consists of many knowledge workers, each running around like his or her own little company, there needs to be some place that physically is the company – and that something better be valuable to the company and its employees and the customers. Furthermore, for a SPOC center to work, heavy investment in information technology and processes is necessary – but as a manager, you will know that if the SPOC is working well, there is a very good chance that the rest of the organization is, too.

Enough of this, time to send this one off to the Concours SPOC....

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