

Critical Success Factors for Successful Process Improvement

The success of any form of Process Improvement (PI) is heavily dependent on the factors outlined below.

1 Process Improvement is Hard

First is to realise that process improvement is hard! It requires commitment and it won't happen on its own. All of the success factors outlined here are equally important and every effort should be made to ensure that they given adequate consideration.

2 Management Sponsorship and Commitment

Process Improvement typically involves change – change to your processes, technology, job roles and/or culture. Changing any of these requires senior management sponsorship and commitment including:

- The development of organisational policies and providing guidance at a high level for the implementation of all improvements
- Ensuring that the organisations processes reflect your business goals
- The provision of adequate resources and funding for carrying out improvement activities
- Carrying out reviews on the activities on a periodic basis – i.e. get involved and stay involved!
- Establishing strategies for managing and implementing improvement activities
- Making PI visible and showing that it is important to you. It will become important to other people, too.
- Talking about PI in your staff meetings. When you ask about the status of projects, include questions about how well people are following the new processes
- Ensuring that improvement projects get high visibility in the organisation, with the customers, with anyone involved with the company through easily seen schedules for improvement, metrics showing falling defects or other commitment to PI
- Providing support to '*keep going when going gets tough!*'

3 Process Improvement Goals

It is important to have clearly defined Process Improvement goals that are clearly aligned to the business objectives and strategic direction of your organisation. They should be written in a way that every one understands *and understands what would be different if they were met:*

- Finding out why you want to improve first before you change things
- Having a good vision of the completed solution i.e. knowing what you want to achieve
- Being able to quantify your goals from the perspective of financial performance, quality, customer service and employee satisfaction
- Continually reminding people of why they are doing this and how improvements will help them
- Keeping your goals visible and active for everyone in the organisation

4 Right Motivations

Ensure you are making improvements for the right reasons. Basic motivation should be to remove some of the issues/pain you experience on a regular basis.

Examples of wrong motivations!!

- customers demand that you must be maturity level x
- a senior manager decides it'd be good for the company to have a certificate on the wall etc.

5 Cultural Issues

Success is dependent on obtaining a high level of awareness and buy-in from all members of your organisation. In particular:

- Ensuring all members of the organisation are aware of management's commitment to the success of the process improvement
- Making everyone aware of the processes, standards and procedures that are available for use
- Providing training in the processes, standards and procedures that are relevant to each individual
- Designating an owner to each process, or set of related procedures. The person acting as the owner should have the appropriate skills to develop and implement the processes and procedures
- Providing all staff with the opportunity to contribute to the development of the processes, standards and procedures
- Ensuring all staff are provided with an opportunity to raise change requests to improve the processes, standards and procedures in use in the organisation
- Continually improving existing processes to reflect changing business goals, changing technologies etc.

6 Provision of Adequate Resources and Funding

Adequate resources and funding should be provided to carry out PI activities. In particular:

- Establishing the required infrastructure for implementing improvements – for example a sponsor, steering group, project manager, improvement groups etc.
- Appointing a resource to drive the PI programme and to co-ordinate PI activities – this person acts as the 'Project Manager' for your improvement project.
- Ensuring that representatives from all parts of your organisation are involved as necessary, for example project managers, business representatives, technical staff and customers
- Scheduling sufficient time for staff assigned PI to carry out PI activities including the development of new standards, familiarisation with existing standards etc.
- Ensuring that every project schedule has time built into it for all team members for training on new processes, monitoring and review activities and other quality checks. If

this means that part of the schedule is paid for by the customer and part is paid for by the company, then so be it.

- Working with your resources to find the best way to use the time dedicated to PI. There is no right way or wrong way, only your way.
- Assigning responsibilities and giving people the authority needed to make things happen.
- Building process improvement responsibilities into job descriptions, performance reviews, and project assignments. Then be sure to pay whatever costs are associated with this, whether they are time or money.

7 Availability of Standards & Procedures

- Ensuring a suitable infrastructure e.g. the development of a local intranet is implemented and used to ensure that existing standards and procedures are available from a central point.
- Training and orientation should be provided in the use of the organisation's standards and procedures.
- Providing an induction course to all new employees which includes an overview of the organisation's standards and procedures.
- Communicating details of any new standards or changes to standards to staff