

Training alone is not enough

While, many companies start the process excellence journey with a bang many will start but fail to deliver the expected benefits or even worse never take off at all!

Our article looks at some of the common causes of failure along with the characteristics of our approach to mitigating these and to developing an effective improvement culture.

It's not just about projects

The problem with a lot of organisations is that operational improvement is perceived as just about doing projects, when what is really needed is a more rigorous organisation wide approach. Many businesses start the operational excellence journey with the intention of deploying Lean or Six Sigma or even a combination of both (Lean Sigma), then after a period of time the initiative loses steam. This tends to happen when the primary focus is on tools and methods only, rather than on the underlying management thinking, routine and culture of the organisation.

The fact is that training alone is not enough!

Don't be mistaken into thinking that by simply training staff and teams to be Lean Practitioners, Green Belts or Black Belts that they will then go on to identify improvement opportunities. Equipping people with improvement tools and techniques alone does not necessarily enable them to create business improvements and deliver the benefits you require.

Staff need to be supported with identifying projects and coached in the application of appropriate tools and techniques.



Our approach

When our clients ask us to help them to make their business better, our typical proven approach includes the following steps.



Understand



Collaborate



Improve



Sustain

Step 1 – Understand

It is important to invest valuable time and energy upfront to understand:

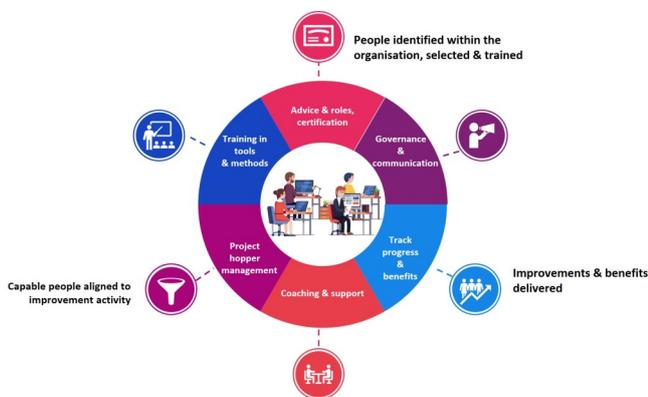
1. **Where are you now?** – What is your current culture and how ready are you for change.
2. **Where do you want to be?** – What are your future state requirements and what should your organisation look like after the initiative has been successfully implemented.
3. **Are you all agreed?** – Who are your key stakeholders and what level of commitment currently exists for the change programme.
4. **How do you get started?** – Who does what, what methodologies will you adopt, where in your business will you focus our attention and when will you do it.

Create a deployment office

This will provide a hub from where the team deployed can drive, facilitate and manage the implementation process. The hub is a central place where your team will:

- Identify improvement opportunities
- Train and develop staff
- Promote a continuous improvement culture within the organisation
- Deliver improvement projects and associated tangible benefits
- Track and report on benefits achieved
- Manage and prioritise potential improvement opportunities
- Provide project support and guidance
- Transfer Knowledge

The diagram below illustrates the typical different functions of the Deployment Office:



Step 2 – Collaborate

Senior Management Engagement – amongst the potential barriers to success are organisational culture, change resistance and employee engagement. It's essential to the success of your programme to establish strong leadership by securing commitment from senior managers and other key stakeholders throughout the organisation.

Key Stakeholders should be identified early in the programme. Members of the Deployment Office should meet with Key Stakeholders with the initial purpose of:

- Explaining the philosophy and how it can be applied to their part of the organisation
- Understanding their needs and how they align to the Deployment Strategy.
- Helping to generate understanding and gain commitment to the Deployment programme
- Helping to identify and prioritise potential areas of the business that would benefit from the improvement activity
- Establishing an agreed definition of the desired 'future state' of the organisation
- Gaining support and commitment to the deployment programme.

Raising Awareness – a vital element of a change programme is the commitment of key people to the deployment programme. To initiate the change in culture needed to deliver efficiency savings across the organisation, it is essential that key people understand and buy-in to the concept and direction of the deployment programme.

A great way of gaining buy-in is to hold a series of senior management workshop sessions held at key stages in the improvement programme, they help to:

- Build understanding and commitment
- Explain the philosophy and how it applies to the organisation
- Generate understanding of and commitment to the continuous improvement programme.
- Help ensure participants are fully engaged in and committed to the programme.
- Enable managers to start to champion the programme and offer direction and leadership to project teams and the organisation as a whole.

Step 3 – Improve

Building the capability of leaders, teams and individuals is a key ingredient in ensuring the required growth rate and benefits realisation are achieved. Being self-sufficient will enable ongoing development and sustainable change to become a reality.

The process should involve technical development to help teams manage new processes, tools and techniques. It should also provide a development plan that improves individual performance and encourages the behaviours needed to support and sustain change, including the development of:

- Leaders in promoting/driving change and sustaining performance.
- Teams in improving effectiveness and efficiency
- Individuals in new ways of working, using tools and techniques such as:
 - change management
 - tools and techniques
 - improvement methodologies

Step 4 – Sustain

Training & Development – Helping individuals to learn and develop new skills and behaviours will transform their performance. As people take on new roles and new ways of working, they may need support to make sure they can adapt and thrive, the matrix below offers an example of the typical training requirements for each different role involved within the business.

	Basic Awareness	Simple Tools & Methodologies	Intermediate Tools & Methodologies	Advanced Tools & Methodologies	Facilitation	Change Management	Train The Trainer
Board Directors	✓						
Senior Managers & Department Managers	✓						
Project Champions	✓	✓				✓	
Team Members	✓	✓					
Project Leaders	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Process Improvement Leaders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ <i>PI&S only</i>
Technical Managers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Conclusion

An organisation needs a structured approach and clear strategy. If the focus of your process improvement program is tool and method based alone then you are at risk of only ‘removing the weeds’ rather than the overall objective of ‘growing corn’.

True, you may have isolated successes but, if not enough effort is put in to changing the underlying management thinking and culture there’s a very high chance that the corn you’ve grown will die when you’re not around to pull up the weeds!

For a successful and sustainable operational improvement journey an organisation must have:

- Committed Leaders who are proactively engaged in supporting improvement activities.
- Employees across the business holding the values of Continuous Improvement thinking, actively solving day to day issues and identifying opportunity for improvement.
- An agreed strategy and set of goals for deploying and sustaining an effective Continuous improvement programme.
- Improvements focused on management thinking, routines and culture, not just tools and techniques.
- Enough practicing change agents across the organisation with competencies in Lean, Six Sigma, basic problem solving, etc.
- A team approach to operational Improvement across all levels of the business (bottom, middle and top).
- Operational Improvement should be part of your leadership development.

Applying the above will create an approach with a sustainable systemic impact on the business.

If you have a question about something in this article, or if you’re looking for support with another situation, feel free to get in touch on 01926 633333 alternatively you can email us at info@bourton.co.uk.