

Article

Continuous Improvement Feedback Systems

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Developing and implementing a system for the submittal, processing and turnaround of employee improvement suggestions can be one of the most positive morale boosters in your organization. In order to develop an effective system there are variables that you will need to explore further to arrive at the best conclusion. Some questions you should ask yourself are:

1. Does your organization have a Human Resource-based performance recognition award system?
2. Does your organization have an infrastructure built that will support a database to facilitate the collection of improvement opportunities?
3. Is your organization currently in the mindset that improvement ideas are a way of doing business and that recognition for them is a standard behavioral norm?
4. Does your company currently recognize employee-based improvement via financial, job-based or corporate communications rewards?



These questions should provoke discussion between you and your project team to establish the realities of not just implementing, but recognizing value from the outcome of this program.

You may also want to explore some of the existing rewards and recognition programs in the marketplace. You'll find that several companies offer software, infrastructure and processes to support rewards that are built around the variables you wish to measure. Some organizations utilize them from a human resource standpoint, others use them from a production or productivity standpoint, and many use them to recognize improvements that are made within a process.

It may also behoove you to read up on the Japanese principle known as Kaizen. Kaizen means small incremental improvements. Many U.S. and international companies adopt this method. Its premise is that small incremental improvements made by each employee will inevitably add up to a greater organizational sum.

Regarding the build out of a system, we have seen some organizations simply implement a database which is managed and observed by a Continuous Improvement Committee. That committee prioritizes it, and then presents it to a Steering Committee that allows management and executives to evaluate the potential improvement opportunities and set projects in place.

In my opinion, this approach to continuous improvement is the most efficient, because your organization will have bought into a homegrown solution to improving the business.

Attaching a rewards and recognition system to this type of program can be done simply by a column in the corporate newsletter, postings on the bulletin board or sending an e-mail to acknowledge receipt of an individual's suggestion and whether or not it was accepted and implemented. Once a program like this has been implemented for a period of time, you will begin to see morale shift, and individuals take a more entrepreneurial and inclusive approach to participation. It is also beneficial to have more detailed quarterly follow-ups on the portfolio of improvement projects to expose your organization to the outcome.

In terms of possible companies to benchmark, organizations like General Electric who practice advanced quality methods including Six Sigma would probably not be opposed to hearing from you. Other organizations that do an excellent job of responding to quality requests and initiatives are Ford Motor Company, Motorola and Federal Express.

In closing, the best continuous improvement programs are internally built, open, allow for creativity, and most importantly, have the organization responding to the participants. Your next step might be evaluating what the cultural norms are within the organization, and ensuring that they represent, or will accept, the mindset of excellence.