

Article

Process Quality Improvement

Written by: *Phil Ventresca, MBA*

Progress, according to Webster, is defined as a natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes that lead toward a particular result: a natural continuing activity or a series of actions or operations conducing to an end. Quality is defined as an inherent feature, having a degree of excellence, possessing a distinguishing attribute and superiority in kind. Now, that all sounds nice, but what does it really mean? How can it help the processes you deal with on a daily basis reach a new level, without reorganizing your entire organization?



There are many benefits to re-evaluating processes. Some of those benefits are:

- A decrease in the amount of time it takes an employee to complete the process
- A decrease in the cost of your employees' time working on a specific process
- A decrease in the amount of time it takes to complete the entire process
- A decrease in the cost of the entire process
- Improvement of external customer satisfaction
- Improvement of internal customer satisfaction

Try this five-step procedure to determine if your processes are hitting the mark:

- Determine the outcome of the process.
- Map out the process.
- Establish critical points within the process.
- Set up measurement criteria and a monitoring system to determine if the measurement is within variance.
- Continually monitor the process and make any changes on the spot to keep the process within the measurement criteria.

Determine the outcome of the process. When evaluating or starting a new process, look at your end result first. What exactly should this process be accomplishing? How do you determine what the end result should be? Ask your team, your employees and possibly, if it is an external process, your customers, what exactly does the outcome need to be? What does the end result you are trying to achieve look like? Examples of this could be things like resolving a customer's issue within 24 hours or payment of an expense voucher within 5 working days.

Map out the process. This is where you would simply make a flow chart of each step the process needs to go through. Design the flow exactly as the steps occur. Try to avoid doing things the same old way. Look for new, quicker, more streamlined ways of doing things. This can be accomplished by simply listing out all of the steps in the process or by using flow chart software. All of these steps can be as simple or as complex as you want to make them.

Establish critical points within the process. Now look at each step in the process flow. Determine where one or more critical points are in the process. In other words, it is considered a critical point if something were to go wrong at one of the steps and the process could not continue. For example, if one person is assigned to handle some type of paperwork within a certain time period, and that person is on vacation or is out ill that would be considered a critical point. Some type of alternative or work around would need to be included in the process.

Advanced Management Services, Inc (AMS)
960 Turnpike Street • Suite 2A • Canton, MA 02021
Phone: (781) 828-8210 • Fax: (781) 828-8216
E-Mail: info@amsconsulting.com • Web: www.amsconsulting.com

© Advanced Management Services, Inc. (AMS)



Management Consultants



Advanced Management Services

Set up measurement criteria and a monitoring system to determine if the measurement is within variance. Once the process is mapped out, determine what measurement is going to be used to establish if the critical points were accomplished. This can be anything from the number of rings of a telephone before the customer service representative picks up the phone, to the number of days it should take to open a new account, or to the number of hours or days to get a letter or payment out to a customer. It seems that this step is the most often missed when reviewing processes. You may know what the process is supposed to do, but the organization doesn't have a clear measure of success.

Some examples of process and measurements are listed below. When process improvement is first started, don't be limited by the possible measurements. Look for the obvious as well as the non-obvious.

Process	Possible Measurement(s)
Submitting an expense voucher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turnaround time • Total days for the process to occur • Number of signatures required • Number of people authorized to perform that task
Answering the telephone in a call center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of rings • Total time on the phone • Number of times the customer calls
Resolution of an issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of the resolution • Time it took to resolve • Customer satisfaction • Number of people involved in the resolution
Opening a new account in a bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total turnaround time • Customer satisfaction • Number of fraudulent accounts • Cost of opening a new account

Continually monitor the process and make any changes on the spot to keep the process within the measurement criteria. Finally, communicate the process to all the people involved. Write up the process and include it in your procedure or process manual. Get buy-in throughout the process and continually re-evaluate the process. Each time the process is completed, ask if it is the best it can be. By following these five steps, you will decrease your cost, improve efficiency, your processes will flow better and you will be able to measure their results.