

SECTION 6

Checklist 4: How to implement improvements

Avoid wasting your time and money implementing important improvements in a careless way. Even simple improvements often fail because of lack of foresight and planning. This guide gives five simple rules that will help you to be successful. In addition, they will help you to make improvements happen frequently instead of stopping after three or four have been completed. Remember: Continuous improvement is the road to survival and growth.

DEVELOP A COMPLETE SOLUTION

Improvements sometimes don't work because they are incomplete. For example, if you want to use carts, you should take a look at the shop-floor. Will additional changes be necessary to make the improvement work well:

in materials storage and handling?

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in workstation design?

in productive machine safety, maintenance and environmental control?

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in lighting?

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in welfare facilities?

in premises?

in work organization?

MAKE SURE IDEAS WILL WORK

Very often, even improvements which seem simple do not meet your expectations in practice. Anticipate design problems and make sure that all important factors have been taken into account. Ask yourself what makes you believe that this improvement will work well:

because you have tried out different ways of solving the same problem and this one works best

because you have tried it out in a small way and it works well

because you have seen it work under the same conditions in another enterprise

because you have the advice of someone who has done the same thing

because:

If you are not sure that this idea for improvement will work best, what steps will you take to find out?

MOBILIZE WORKER SUPPORT

Your programme of improvements will fulfil your expectations only with the good will and support of those who are directly affected by the changes. Your workers will be on your side if they fully understand that the changes are in their interests as well as yours.

Are you sure that the improvement will not cause any problems for your workers? Ask yourself:

Who will be directly affected by the change?

In what way will they be affected?

Positively? Negatively?

What will you do to eliminate or reduce negative effects?

In order for workers to support your plans for change, they need to understand your intentions. They may think that the changes will affect their job security or pay or make their work more difficult.

What techniques will you use to make sure that your workers are ready for the change and that they give you credit for what you are doing?

- prior explanation and discussion
- involving workers in the design and introduction of the improvement
- showing how this innovation works in another shop or factory
- provision of additional training
- financial rewards.

MAKE IMPROVEMENTS THAT WILL LAST

Four innovations out of five eventually disappear because no specific actions were taken to make them last. There are two main strategies which will help to counteract this:

- change people's habits and behaviour
- build the change into equipment and facilities.

For most changes you will need to do both to be successful.

If you follow this method carefully and involve workers fully, you should make much progress in changing workers' habits and motivation. However, if the improvement is fully dependent on the behaviour of the worker (for example, preventing the cluttering of passageways), it is very likely that it will not last long. Old habits are hard to change. To prevent this, you have to find ways of incorporating change into machines and facilities, so that the new organizational process makes the old routine impossible (for example, provide storage racks and bins, or clearly mark passageways).

Which steps will you take to make the change last by incorporating it into your plant and equipment?

- remove any tools or equipment which make it possible or easier to return to the old situation
- build the improvement into machines or workstations so that it cannot be removed
- design new or modify existing equipment so that it is easier to use and maintain in the new way
- provide barriers, painted lines, bins, or make other changes which make the improvement easily visible and natural to follow.

MANAGE CHANGE

Be sure that changes will be effectively implemented. Foresee the following steps:

- establish a firm deadline
- make someone responsible for implementation
- allocate adequate resources (time, materials, money)
- request regular reports on progress

check that the implemented improvement works well, is accepted by the workers and has no unexpected results

make sure that you and your supervisors lead the way by following rules and by frequently praising workers who respond correctly to the improvement.

An important management responsibility is to make sure that the improvement becomes a permanent part of the way work is carried out. Ask yourself:

do you receive a constant flow of ideas from your staff and workers?

is everyone in search of ways for more productive or higher quality work?

The following steps will help to make your enterprise more dynamic:

a regular suggestion scheme with rewards for the best ideas

regular meetings at which workers are encouraged to explain their problems and give their ideas

an exercise in which groups of workers use the checklist and make proposals to you

organize a core group for taking care of changes.

