



“Starts Control”

It was great to see people returning to trade shows by attending the Label Congress 21 in Chicago. The event proved to be a great kick-off to the trade show season. I was able to visit with converters in this market segment and found them eager to jump-start their list of improvement projects previously held up by their supply chain distractions and activity from COVID response. These leaders reported "starting" journeys of continuous improvement, but were troubled because their efforts stalled after about 45 to 60 days into their focus. Their management teams hit a wall grinding projected improvements to a stop failing to achieve planned improvement due to the weight of changing priorities and resource constraints. The recognition, by these leaders, to implement improvement projects across their company has never been greater. My friends told me their teams have serious problems managing improvement-focused project priorities due to distractions from raw material supplier reschedules, employee attendance, internal process inconsistencies, and conflicting resource demands.

I explained, many business leaders have no problem starting projects. They all share the same problem with an inability to complete projects. The complaint registered included a long list of projects and a lack of available resources to assign to the tasks. I acknowledged this as a common problem and I asked them for latitude telling a story. I had just returned from a facility in Illinois where the need for sustained improvement focus is prevalent. The same with a facility in Missouri, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and California. Picking any one of the areas and the situation is the same. I explained one facility had 37 improvement initiatives underway not counting the 17 requests for IT to modify information reports from their ERP systems. In one example discussed the IT group complained each week requests for report modifications were growing significantly. The new requests forced weekly reprioritized and a growing backlog of requests. IT groups feel the stress of starting new projects more than many departments as managers look for their ERP systems to provide solutions to many problems. The complaint in production departments, development departments and IT departments, is always about not being allowed to finish actions before having to move to another priority.

The art and science of prioritization are not new and, in my executive coaching sessions, I ask the leadership teams to understand if time is of the essence, then time needs to be treated as a driving metric to performance. If we want to see projects completed timely, then we have to understand a very straightforward mathematical approach to how many projects should start. I sketched out the equation

$$DCT = AIP's/Outs$$

Dynamic Cycle Time =
Actions in process/capacity output

(FIG 1 Dynamic Cycle Time Equation)



Most of the leaders remind me how they hate math so I keep it simple. The dynamic cycle time (DCT) is a result of a collection of all the active improvement projects (AIP's) versus the resource set (capacity) defined to complete the projects. I ask the leaders to understand a couple of premises and insist they keep an open mind. First, project resources are not always finite. Second, if we can reduce the numerator (number of active projects) and hold the denominator (resource set) steady we will see the cycle time of the project reduced. If we can consolidate resources from projects by backlogging the project for later, we can take resources from the backlogged projects and dramatically influence the time to completion, positively. The concept is not new but many leaders lose sight of the discipline to control starts not realizing the impact on the cycle time of the projects. I think the simple equation gets their attention.

Part of the issue of the project list is that the projects lack definition. This uncertainty leads to an unwillingness to commit resources fully for fear the activity will be a constant time drain and not provide the benefit anticipated. The change to this thought process begins by drafting a project scope statement so that a team understands there are limits to their focus. I call this written statement is the charter. In IT departments and product development groups, the charter concept is called a "statement of work". At a high level, with an approved scope of work, the leadership team manages how many of these projects get started and assigns a heavier concentration of resources with a limited time to completion. This is also easily applied to a company using kaizen and can be applied throughout the company.

After reviewing a company's list of active or soon to be active projects, I suggest leaders place all projects on hold. I coach executive teams to build a charter of the most critically needed projects immediately and backlog all the rest. The backlog list should be maintained visually and the list should include active and completed projects as well. If a clear charter cannot be defined, then the projects will die of their weight perhaps leading to a simplification of the demand. Just listing the projects can lead to a discussion of the potential impact and degree of difficulty of the projects being proposed. I suggest working on a mixture of easy and difficult problems but limit the scope of the task for quicker advancement and recognize success. Using these methods, most companies quickly recognized they have too many projects started without crisp definitions of focus and crisp completion expectations. I encourage leadership teams to activate no more than three projects for each macro business process and only activate another when one of the previous projects was completed. No kaizen event or improvement project should begin without a firm charter defining the focus. Companies that understand this process assign resources more definitively and this leads to working on fewer projects with better-equipped people driving a quicker response time. With this focus, you not only recognize faster completion of projects and great progress to the stated objectives but also have highly satisfied teams.



Improvement Project Charter

Team Name:

Start Date:

Team Participants:

Complete Date:

Proposed Vision of Entitlement: (Project Functionality)

Describe the project and what you expect the future state to look like. How will the company benefit once the project is implemented? Do not solve the problem – communicate the problem to be solved.

Proposed Objectives: (Detail what you think has to occur)

Describe what you think the solution is based on interviews with the internal or external process customers.

Market Opportunity:

Describe the market potential.

To be filled out by project leader

Straw Man Implementation Plan:

1. Determine functional specifications required
2. Highlight critical attributes
3. Determine the resource requirements (capability)
4. Estimate length of project (engineering hours)
5. Establish the project milestones and put in que
6. Publish the proposed schedule
7. Design
8. Validate design
9. Beta sight feedback
10. Finish design and ready for product launch

Validate - Benefit / Impact:

*Achieve GM%
Cost \$
Best Use Applications/*

FIG 2 (Sample Charter)

Respecting Time:

Building on a reduced active list we can now focus our project charters with details that often go overlooked. A charter identifies who will take responsibility for the implementation of the project and is used to set expectations including a start date and expected completion date. It requires planning and thought purposefully to avoid a false start and waste of time with the group. I've emphasized a time focus is critical to the success of all continuous improvement initiatives. Sticking to the use of the structural tools being discussed also leads to supporting a philosophy that acknowledges respect for people's time. Several articles and reports speaking to the reason employees leave companies and we've also seen reports about company's inability to find good people. With our continuous improvement disciplines, we acknowledge that good people are already working in your company. We work to involve these people purposefully and in measured ways to solve both problems of constraint and employees involvement. The current employees provide subject matter experts at every level of the organization and engaging them for their knowledge of the process emphasizes their importance to the organization. This just does not happen automatically and the charter provides communication for a team to build consensus, rally commitment with an understanding of success. It also demonstrates involvement leading to buy-in and stimulates conversations around improvement initiatives.



It is exciting to start a chartered improvement project in one area of a company and see how it resonates in other areas of the company. Just recently I completed a 5S project in one press work cell and when I came into the facility the next day, two other cell leaders had already reviewed the charter, developed an action plan, and wanted input on what to focus on so they could improve their cell as well. The goals clearly understood and focused on time, drove a contagious behavior change. I believe the discipline and focus filled a void the employees were craving as part of their workday. The response and resource focus did not take away from output but rather incited current resource levels to expand their actions solving problems. The common link was a smaller defined project with known success. An outcome was the opportunity to demonstrate respect for the operator's knowledge, time, and work.

Pushing the concept, executing a project properly requires a leader to gain input from his improvement team, and together they complete the definition of what the future state looks like as a result of the project being implemented. Being visual with these efforts provides communication, expectations, and identification of results within the group. Every team performs better with defined expectations. The company leadership including team leaders must have enough emotional intelligence to understand that a team member is providing their expertise and extra time solving a problem and this garners respect.

Diving deeper into the details of project management we increase visibility to accomplishment by noting the actions needed, the responsible person, and expected completion timeline. This commitment is capture in the form of a dot matrix or 3W action plan. (3W = Who, What, and When). In a visual factory, this is usually a dot matrix format about the size of an easel pad. This visual commitment demonstrates to the rest of the team, not only a commitment to the action but a commitment from team members to their team. Completing the tasks demonstrates respect for the team's time. No one wants to miss a commitment date when it means it will hold up progress to other actions depending on the outcome.



Capital Labels and Packaging									
Project Name: Operational set up steps									
Team Leader: Paul									
								Last Updated: 14-Oct-21	
Ref	Action	Responsible	A = Active B = Backlog C = Complete	Planned Completion Date	Actual Completion	Progress	Status	Comments and Status	
5	Order Entry Process Flow and Procedure Written	Lindsey	A	3/15/2021	4/1/2021	Complete	●	Operators are all trained to the same procedure. Audit will be conducted in 3 weeks	
6	Configuration Engineering process	Lindsey	C	2/26/2021	2/26/2021	Complete	●	Lindsey published document -- nice work	
Operations									
7	Procurement Process Documented to ISO Compliance	Gabe	C	2/19/2021	2/19/2021	Complete	●	Process is working and is tied to receiving. Formal procedure write audited in 30 days	
8	Production Status (Board is current)/Demo Board	Gabe	A	3/31/2021	3/31/2021	Complete	●	This is just about getting into a good habit. We've had different status of projects and becoming consistent with these variations has been difficult - better every day - tighten up in March	
9	Quality Audit is documented and complete pre-shipment	George	A	3/31/2021	3/31/2021	Complete	●	Operator confusion on quality level and deviation process needs attention.	
10	Packing and shipping instructions not clear	John	A	3/31/2021	Open Audit Required	Late	◐	Shipping prices reviewed, proposal being submitted to CL 3/27/21. Packing instructions will be added to Label Train documents	
11	Job Packing Review	John	A	3/31/2021	5/31/2021	On-Track	◐	Inconsistent with needs definition for Pre Order with regard to job packet. Resolve confusion and develop handoff (Audit for reulists)	
5S Implemented									
12	5S Kaizen completed	Gabe	A	5/31/2021	6/1/2021	Complete	●	Kaizen report out complete. Good Job team.	
13	5S Score added to Daily Production Board	Gabe	A	6/1/2021	6/1/2021	Complete	●	5S review will be covered weekly in GEMBA walk	
14	Red Tag Area Procedure development	Gabe	A	11/12/2021		on-Track	◐	Clean out area by end of third quarter	
15	Audit Program and Zone assignments complete	Gabe	A	11/15/2021		on-Track	◐	Process is working	

FIG 3 (Dot Matrix of Improvement Team)

The ability to demonstrate closed actions in support of a team provides a sense of accomplishment that is also infectious. This is the genesis of positive momentum and drives new conversation and commitment from within. This is how companies drive involvement, create a positive culture that resonates with their employees. I can promise a significant increase in the number of projects completed without hiring new employees. The talent is within your walls today and the leadership team focused on a culture of excellence will find this windfall of capability that will drive competitiveness by, reducing response time, eliminating quality bottlenecks, resolving the old issue, and elimination of process waste will yield overall reduced cycle times. Leadership commitment to continuous improvement provides a competitive advantage immediately in an environment that fosters a winning feeling. Your employees go to work knowing they are recognized for their contribution to positive results. Winning in this environment is fun!

Paul Brauss
October 18, 2021