HOW TO IMPLEMENT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN YOUR ORGANISATION?

The practical guide



Editorial

"It is not the strongest or the most intelligent of the species that survives. It is the one who can best adapt to change" Charles Darwin

This quote perfectly illustrates what continuous improvement is: a series of changes implemented to improve a situation.

In our daily lives, would we leave a piece of furniture wobbly without trying to prop it up, or would we keep a faulty piece of equipment without trying to repair it?

So why do we accept in our company that everyday problems are not solved? We all make excuses, good and bad: "I don't have time", "it's not my responsibility", "it's not my job to solve problems" etc.

However, continuous improvement is everyone's business, individually and collectively. Individually, we must be able to propose improvements and ensure that as many people as possible benefit from them. Collectively, management must enable this approach, make it part of the organisation's culture, and ensure that it becomes an integral part of the way we work on a daily basis.



Lionel Pasco - CEO of Perfony



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What is continuous improvement?



Continuous improvement is an approach that consists of a sum of changes in the company, all of which contribute to making it better. These changes are continually tested over time.

When a company engages in continuous improvement, it aims to gradually increase quality, customer satisfaction, and therefore profits.

Improvements are made to services, products and processes with the aim of reducing costs, lead times, inventory and waste.

Feedback comes from employees and customers themselves. Teams are involved in the stages of change. In this sense, a reward system for ideas for progress can make sense.

Why adopt a continuous improvement approach?



For a company to remain competitive and efficient, it must eliminate waste (waiting times, overproduction, defects, irregularity or lack of uniformity in procedures, stress, overwork, etc.).

The company must also initiate new transformations. This means that in its thinking and decisions it must question itself and accept the necessary compromises. In order to make the improvement operational, it must therefore carry out audit reports, take into account the ideas put forward by employees, reduce production costs, etc. This process concerns all departments in the company, from production to administration.

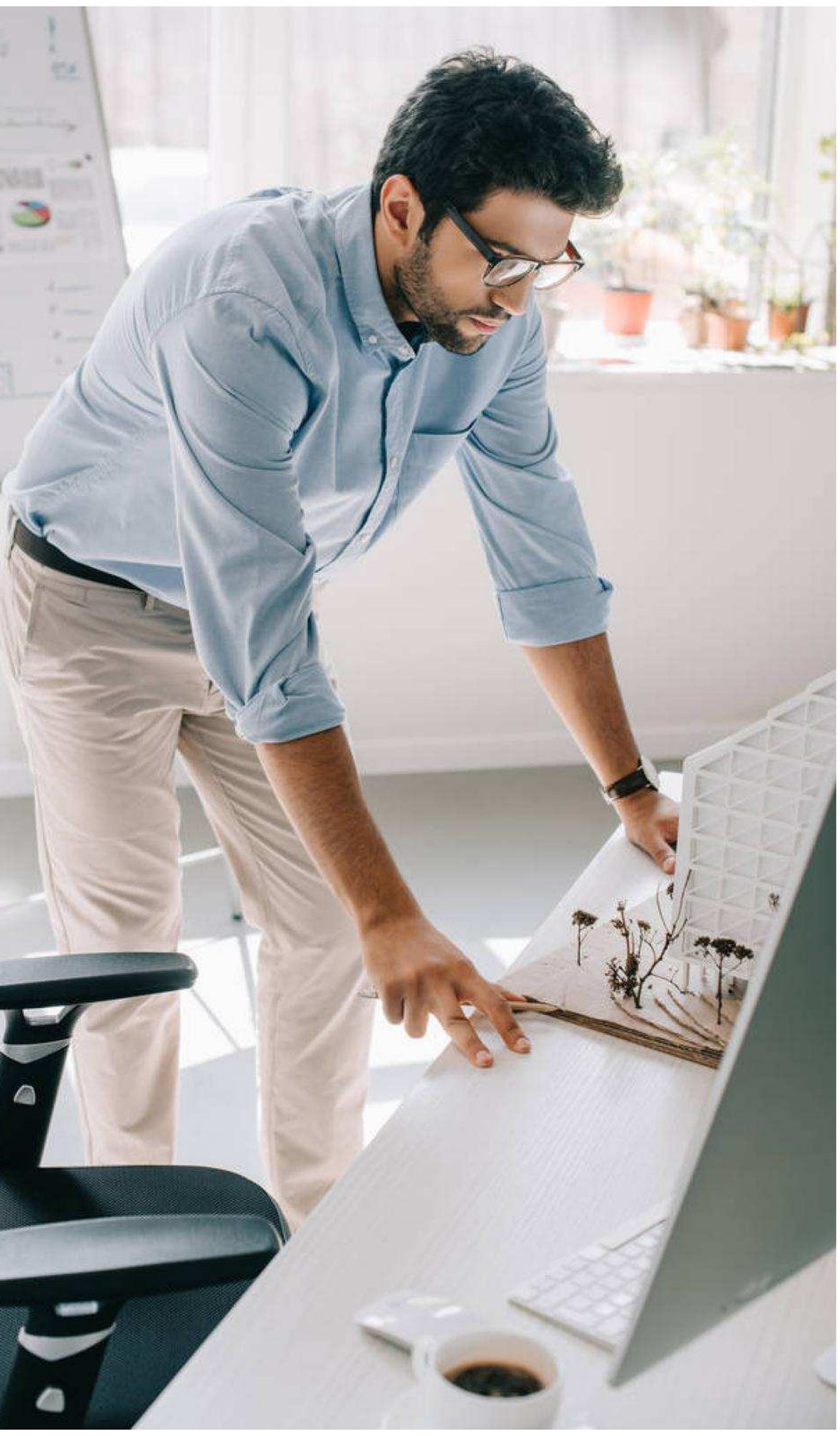
In other words, it is about improving the overall functioning of the whole company. Continuous improvement reduces non-productive activities and minimises waste.

In order to implement continuous improvement, the General Management must be strongly involved. Similarly, all employees must also be involved, as the slightest resistance to change can weaken the continuous improvement approach.

Thus, a seamlessly managed continuous improvement process offers :

- better working conditions for employees;
- more lasting customer loyalty;
- more optimal collaboration with partners.

The tools of continuous improvement



There are many tools and methods for implementing continuous improvement. These include Kaizen, Lean Management, Six Sigma and Kanban. All are principles for increasing productivity.

Continuous improvement tools are used to solve problems in production, waste or process efficiency.

Many of these tools originated in automotive factories and other industries, where speed and just-in-time production are the norm.

In order to increase productivity and quality of work, the methods are applied to all processes in the company, from management to workers, from administrative departments to production lines.

LEAN MANAGEMENT AND KAIZEN METHOD

Lean management

Lean management, despite the use of the Anglo-Saxon term lean, is not a simple cost reduction method, but a continuous improvement process. It is based on the mobilisation of teams to converge in stages towards optimal methods for producing better.

The Kaizen method

In Japan, Kaizen refers to the attitude that an employee should adopt towards his or her performance and production. The method also invites questions about the organisation of the office or workplace, as well as the quality of processes.

Kaizen practitioners are thus convinced that there is always room for improvement and that the context in which we work can be improved. This improvement can take the form of optimisation or even simplification.

Some people consider that Kaizen is more a way of thinking about the world of work than a method or a tool, which is why its principles should be internalised by the various employees of the company. For Masaaki Imai, inventor and founder of Kaizen, not a single day should go by without teams being involved in improvements.

This Japanese term can be broken down into two words meaning respectively "change" (kai) and "better" (zen). From an etymological point of view, it is therefore simply a change for the better! The principle is to involve all the actors in this continuous optimisation of work: each employee thus becomes an actor in the process, instead of being the executor of reforms decided by the management.

This real and effective involvement of all staff is the real driver of success: each employee often knows much more than he or she thinks, and can contribute to good practice. By being willingly involved, they will be more productive and more faithful to what is desired.

HOW KAIZEN WORKS IN PRACTICE

All members of a company, within the teams, have to be directly involved in Kaizen, by investing part of their working time in improvement. The different teams have a specific role.

The management can introduce the basic principle and monitor its implementation. In other words, it is the management's role to create the right conditions and framework. Managers ensure that the principles are respected and that the right mindset is developed. They help their team members to make suggestions. They monitor implementation.

Japanese companies have developed various tools related to Kaizen, often known as the 5S principle. This is a set of rules of conduct.

The 5S refers to Seiri, Seiton, Seiso, Seiketsu and Shisuke. It is about removing unnecessary things from the workspace (similar to the better-known tradition of Feng Shu), putting things in order, keeping the workplace clean, making order the main concern and codifying rules by turning habits into norms.

Although the Kaizen method was originally developed and used in the automotive industry (Toyota Production System) with its typical manufacturing processes and assembly operators, it is perfectly applicable to other sectors, proposing step-by-step improvement and the elimination of waste.

It is also similar to lean. The Kaizen method has now become a universal way of thinking, present in many companies and sectors.

THE PDCA METHOD

Once a strong change has taken place within the company through continuous improvement, it is necessary to make this method sustainable. The principle of the PDCA (Plan Do Check Act) cycle or Deming wheel must therefore be implemented. This wheel enables the company to avoid standing still. The aim is to get the teams or operators to improve with appropriate and evolving processes.

This wheel is represented by a cycle of 4 steps that must be repeated continuously.

Step 1 - Plan: Setting clear and achievable objectives allows you to develop understandable and achievable action plans.

You will probably not be surprised to read that the first of the four phases of the Deming wheel is to establish a situation analysis. This involves clearly identifying the problems you want to solve through such work. In the second phase, precise qualitative objectives should be set. This will be a valuable tool for establishing the resources needed to make the process a success.

Team adhesion is also crucial to the success of the PDCA method. Make the employees who will be involved in the project aware of this as soon as possible. In order to integrate them into the system effectively and to motivate them, communicate the objectives to be achieved in advance. At the same time, start drawing up the specifications. This document should also estimate the financial costs of the project and specify its schedule. Finally, you will need to define performance indicators that will measure the effects of the improvements generated by the new processes.

To succeed in this preparation stage, you will use various specific tools such as brainstorming, CATWOE, 20/80, the Ishikawa diagram (visual tool for managing the causes influencing a situation), the 5 whys or the decision tree and matrix.

Stage 2 - Do (the implementation): the employees must work together in a spirit of shared responsibility and be involved at the same level to achieve the desired productivity.

Once the system has been planned and prepared, it is time for implementation! This involves both employees and management. The manager's job is also to ensure that the provisions listed in the specifications and the timetable are respected.

Don't forget the essential test periods before considering putting the solution into production. The scope of cases to be tested should be as broad as possible in order to reduce possible bugs and other side effects.

THE PDCA METHOD

Step 3 - Check: Continuously evaluating the results obtained gives the opportunity to know the impact of the actions taken.

Start by looking at the results of the tests. Are they in line with the expectations set in the first step? Do they allow you to envisage a large-scale use or even a generalisation of the solution? If at least one answer to these two questions is negative, you will not be able to proceed to the next step. Take the time to understand the reasons for this failure (even partial) in order to learn the necessary lessons, which will undoubtedly enable you to progress later.

Step 4 - Act (improvement): It is necessary to challenge the existing system or update procedures to keep operators performing well. Communication and challenge are key in this continuous improvement process.

Previous successes allow you to roll out the new solution for the benefit of as many people as possible. However, do not think that this is a mere formality. On the contrary, it is a task that requires some organisation.

Depending on the importance of the project's stakes, it may be subject to special budgeting or require different management and staff training. The actions implemented may also sometimes require a reorganisation of departments. To optimise this, it is essential to put in place a genuine change management policy. Do not neglect the importance of updating the documentation of the various procedures affected.

Once the solution is actually deployed, this last stage is not completely finished. The new actions were designed to be long-term. It is therefore necessary to measure their real effectiveness on a regular basis to ensure that the effects are in line with the objectives defined at the start of the project.

If the indicators provide unsatisfactory results, even several months or years after the solution has been implemented, this stage is logically considered a failure.

Lean Office or continuous improvement applied to administrative processes



Lean office is part of the continuous improvement process. It is particularly relevant to employees, as it deals with the processing of information rather than the physical flow of production.

Borrowed from industrial optimisation techniques, the objective of Lean Office is to maximise the performance of administrative processes and service activities.

Waste, **lack of interaction between departments, lack of communication, lack of objectives and company policy** will be eliminated.

Implementing tools such as PDCA or Kaizen allows performance indicators to be obtained. When applied to service activities, these methods give very good results.

The main principles of Lean Office

In order to become more efficient while reducing costs, companies are more than ever obliged to control both their business and the working environment available to their employees. With this in mind, organisation is the key to success at all levels of a company. It is necessary to be able to manage one's time, to define one's priorities in an optimal way and to identify the actions to be taken. It is in this context that the Lean Office is able to provide relevant tools to rationalise the collective organisation of a company and contribute to its development.

Within the company, several advantages of this innovative way of working can be highlighted. First of all, a more efficient organisation is the best way to reduce the transit time in order to be able to invoice a service as soon as possible. It is then possible to minimise structural costs in relation to the cost price, while ensuring rapid delivery to guarantee a high level of customer satisfaction.

These methods seek above all to minimise non-value-added tasks, in order to be able to capitalise on actions that can generate profits for the company. A more rational organisation also allows for less waste, in particular by avoiding the overproduction of documents. Finally, teams will be able to rely on an organised and standardised working environment at all times, while also benefiting from a complete optimisation of document and information flows within the company.

Implementation for business processes

Lean is a relevant way to address recurring problems faced by companies in the service sector. Originally used in industrial production workshops, these concepts can be profitably implemented to ensure administrative activities are carried out with maximum efficiency. These activities involve a set of tasks that are often time-consuming and ultimately do not add value to the business.

However, the day-to-day operations carried out in offices can be governed by standardised operating procedures to be more reliable and efficient. Competitiveness and productivity are now essential in all sectors in the face of increasing competition.

The aim of the Lean Office is to serve the common interests of the company. There are many shared objectives here: reducing costs, facilitating team activity, improving the flow of information between different groups of employees, facilitating field work where necessary, and more broadly contributing to the company's development through better time management and priority setting.

What are the benefits of a continuous improvement approach?



The main advantage of any continuous improvement approach is that errors in operations can be rectified gradually, without having to shake up the entire organisation. It also allows :

• ensure better productivity and efficiency throughout the system ;

• Savings through awareness of problems (which should not be repeated in the future);

• avoid waste and implement improvements to increase satisfaction;

• avoid having to pay for high-cost consultancy, equipment or research, by using the talents and ideas of the existing workforce;

• implement small incremental changes more easily, as the ideas come from the workers themselves;

• get more motivation from employees;

• encourage productive teamwork.

GOOD PRACTICES FOR DEPLOYING A CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROCESS IN YOUR ORGANISATION

Engaging the company in a process of continuous improvement means that it gains in quality and profit, directly induced by the customer satisfaction that results from the methods developed.

You will also have understood that the teams remain at the centre of the improvements in order to carry out the different stages. Applying soft methods of organisation allows employees to be involved in order to get the best out of them.

Here are some examples of good practices for efficient continuous improvement:

- putting teams at the heart of change processes;
- identifying problems ;
- Implementing corrective actions;
- deploy the methods described earlier in this article;
- keep customer satisfaction in focus.

The success of continuous improvement thus depends first of all on a strong will expressed by the company's General Management. Indeed, it would be illusory to think that the goodwill of operational staff is sufficient to implement all the required actions. It is absolutely essential that governance shows its willingness to progress, particularly by freeing up the time needed for employees to invest in a sustainable and effective manner.

Once the company's management is certain of the usefulness of continuous improvement, it is important to convince all employees of the importance of this approach by making them actors in this development. For this, proper communication is crucial.

The success of continuous improvement depends on anticipating and managing resistance to change. If employees have too many fears, they will not see the benefits of the process.

By identifying the source of the greatest resistance, management will be able to communicate more effectively to remove these blockages and share its vision of the future and its enthusiasm with the teams. All employees will then see the importance of change and its capacity to increase customer satisfaction... as well as their own.

Once everyone is involved, you need to think about setting up concrete indicators to measure the effectiveness of the continuous improvement process. Thanks to these quantifiable data and their evolution, your teams will truly see the improvements brought about by the process to which the whole company is committed. This is the only way to adopt good practices in the long term.

PERFONY: THE TOOL FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Continuous improvement: why use Perfony?

- Formalise your meeting minutes in one click
- Reduce the mental burden of following up decisions
- Manage the progress of your progress plans easily
- Measure the impact and results of your action plans
- Identify and share improvement plans with your teams
- Gain mobility with our integration with MS Teams Mobile and O365
- Simplify your project management with a modern tool

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Perfony is a French publisher, born from the meeting of the management consulting and IT worlds, which has set itself the ambitious project of bringing the principles of operational excellence within everyone's reach.

To this end, it proposes a simple tool that improves the efficiency of teamwork:

- follow-up of action plans,
- traceability of decisions,
- production of meeting minutes,
- compliance with quality requirements...

Perfony is the solution that helps you achieve operational excellence.

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