

“There is a direct link between my top business performing teams and how well they embrace continuous improvement”

Senior Leader in large financial services institution

By creating and embedding a continuous improvement culture linked to what drives value for their customers, a large sales team were able to achieve double digit growth in revenue whilst reducing their cost base.

The Problem

After having successfully implemented a significant change programme, the sales distribution business of a division of a large bank was not achieving the desired incremental lift in performance that was required.

A key component of the change programme had included a focus on continuous improvement with staff required to make improvement suggestions as part of their performance measures.

Whilst this led to a lot of ideas, most of the suggestions were adhoc and not linked to business performance. There was very little ownership from staff to get the ideas implemented and it turned into the classic suggestion scheme with both management and staff rapidly losing interest in driving sustainable change.

The Approach

A review of how the business was implementing continuous improvement identified a number of barriers that were preventing a continuous improvement culture being embedded.

- staff didn't see continuous improvement as their responsibility, instead they felt it was the role of "management" to fix all the problems
- when staff did try and fix problems they tended to focus on quick fixes which often addressed

symptoms of the problem rather than the root cause

- suggestions tended to be around hygiene issues rather than addressing business problems linked to customer experience and performance
- the focus was on number of ideas not quality

Solutions

To address the problem, a cultural change programme was deployed across the business which started with understanding what drives value for their customers and then measuring how they were performing against those value drivers. Once the teams understood their performance they then focused on where there was a gap between current performance and what the customer values. This was then the area that continuous improvement efforts were focused on leading the teams to focus their efforts on real business issues rather than on hygiene issues.



Teams were then upskilled on problem solving to build capability in defining the problem, understanding the root cause and then determining the solutions. Business leaders then empowered team members to develop action plans to solve the problems and deploy the solutions.

This problem solving approach was integrated into the daily rhythm of the business with daily team catch ups focused on continuous improvement rather than continuous improvement being an isolated activity. It became integral to their day-to-day business operations.



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Results

The teams that embraced this approach saw incremental improvement in performance with teams working collaboratively to solve problems. The best solutions were applied across the whole business which contributed to an overall lift in performance resulting in double digit lift in revenue growth whilst reducing their cost base with the team who implemented the most continuous improvement ideas also being the top performing business team.

Not a quick fix

Embedding a continuous improvement culture is not a quick fix solution and needs to be underpinned with capability uplift in problem solving and a supportive leadership culture empowering teams to make change.

