



PROCESS IMPROVEMENT TEAMS

A process improvement team is a selected group of people that is challenged to improve a selected process within an organization. and consists of those in the workforce who are involved in some way – directly or indirectly – with the process.

The composition and structure of the project improvement team is instrumental to its success. Here are some tips for fielding a good team:

- Assemble a team that is knowledgeable about the process and diverse in their thinking styles. The team should be comprised of those directly involved in the process being addressed but remember to include representation of those impacted by a change in process.
- Appoint a team leader. The team leader should be familiar with the process and experienced in managing projects and meetings. The team leader also should be familiar with the Six Sigma methodology and the available tools. ¹
- Restrict the team size to a manageable number. A team of more than seven or eight members may limit the ability of individual participation.
- Set up a meeting time that is convenient for all.
- Set up ground rules in the first meeting. Let everyone know what the expectations are for attendance, participation, and time requirements.
- Appoint a team recorder/timekeeper. Do not underestimate the importance of this position. Many good ideas have been lost because they were not recorded.

¹ Most legal aid programs do not have someone on their staff trained in project management or process improvement tools or methodology. If this is the first time a legal aid program has ever undertaken a process improvement project it would be wise for the team leader to attend trainings or have an experienced process improvement and/or project management coach, facilitator, mentor or a pro bono or contract subject matter expert.



One of the key success factors in a process improvement project is the ability to set up and run an interdisciplinary and multi-skilled process improvement team. Like any small team of employees asked to effect change in their organization – the process improvement team is expected to help promote a culture of innovation and spontaneity while working diligently towards quality improvement. This makes it especially important to arm team members with an understanding of the fundamentals of effective teamwork.

The management of the process improvement team

The team is not managed by senior/executive leaders. Use of the appropriate tools and methods gives the team the power to accomplish its task.

Advantages of a workforce-led process

- Suggestions and ideas are submitted from the bottom up. This creates a sense of ownership and enthusiasm in the execution of the initiative.
- Solutions that are easy to implement, or “the low hanging fruit” as they are often called, are quickly identified resulting in immediate savings and process improvements.
- Teamwork is emphasized and employees feel valued.
- The process experts generate the improvements. These are the people working closely with the issues and problems and have a vested interest in seeing the issues resolved.

Disadvantages in a management-led process.

- Those generating ideas and improvements are not close to the process that sometimes results in actions that are directed at perceived issues, not the actual problems.
- The responsibility for successful implementation is shifted down in increments, which add additional workload to the management and supervisory staff.
- Since the workforce and frontline management have no ownership of the initiative, they may be ambivalent to the outcome of the undertaking.
- Lastly, all the handoffs from upper management down create an opportunity for miscommunication and confusion.

The real power of the process improvement team is the enthusiasm and the dedication of the team members. The people who work with the process daily are generating the ideas. They have ownership and pride of the plans that they are initiating, and they are having fun with the new responsibilities that they have acquired.

Excerpted from Process Improvement Teams Power Six Sigma Success
<https://www.isixsigma.com/implementation/teams/process-improvement-teams-power-six-sigma-success>,
then modified slightly, specifically for legal aid use.

