

Data-Driven Improvement

How to excel in process manufacturing



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What's the difference between Continuous and Continual Improvement?

Continuous and Continual Improvement are often used interchangeably. In many contexts, Continuous Improvement seems to be the more popular choice. However, they do differ in meaning.

- Continuous means never-ending and uninterrupted – as in an ever-streaming flow.
- Continual means recurring in rapid succession, leaving time for a reflection period needed in the improvement process.

1. Introduction

As the person responsible for the product quality or the whole manufacturing process, you are fully aware of how successful continual improvement and minimization of variation can reduce waste, increase customer satisfaction, and enhance your competitive edge. That is why you make a constant effort to work on continual improvement of your processes.

Even though you might have all the basics of data-driven continual improvement in place, chances are your current methods are not getting the best out of your data or the capabilities of your people. Numerous companies in processing industries are struggling with the same issues day in and day out:

- Data is searched and collected only after an anomaly has occurred.
- People waste time on manually digging out data for analysis from manual records or disconnected systems.
- Areas for improvement are chosen based on gut feeling, consensus, or best guess.
- The work focuses more on putting out fires than on proactive projects that are correctly targeted for continual improvement.
- The success of an improvement project is unclear because effectiveness is measured sporadically.
- The operators' tacit knowledge cannot be automatically integrated into process data.

At worst, this might lead to a situation where the issue of decreasing profitability is being solved from the wrong end. The company panics and goes into termination negotiations, while the root cause of the profitability issue might be limited to the quality of a certain product on a certain production line.

With the right data tools, you can combine production data and valuable human knowledge in a way that allows you to gain maximum benefit from both as the basis for successful continual improvement.

We put together this guide as a source of information and encouragement for people like you who are ready to take continual improvement to the next level and seek to:

- 1 abandon sporadic development projects and embrace a coherent, continual spiral of improvement
- 2 reduce variation, minimize waste, and increase profitability even more effectively than before
- 3 focus improvement efforts on areas that have the most effect on your profitability
- 4 use information systems wisely to free human resources for more valuable tasks
- 5 monitor the effectiveness of improvement procedures in real time and apply corrective measures immediately
- 6 make continual improvement faster, easier, more automatic, and more proactively.

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