CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN MANUFACTURING: TAKING STOCK OF IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES AND ADVANCING THEM FOR THE FUTURE

IUCG helps a regional games manufacturer reinvigorate their Continuous Improvement program and redesign their internal communication structure.

Client's Challenge

- Inconsistent formal structure for idea sharing
- Company workforce culture lacking motivation or incentive to change
- Difficulty connecting company strategy to everyday activities and work functions
- Unrealized potential of employees due to organizational obstacles

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IUCG's Solutions

- Developed a more comprehensive idea sharing system
    - Formalized process mapping framework shared with managers to facilitate better flow of information
    - Outlines a clear structure and hierarchy for idea flow to ensure the employees know who and where to go to with solutions or new ideas
- Improved existing continuous improvement culture with a top-directed, bottom driven approach
    - Conducted survey research to produce new insights on employee perspective, revealing key motivators and job satisfaction
    - Introduced goal-driven initiative with "cost center audits" enabling supervisors to track progress with continuous improvement
    - Leveraged "town halls" as opportunities for upper management to demonstrate leadership and solidarity with the rest of the company (driven by survey insights)
- Streamlines and reformatted meeting structure for optimized employee understanding of their responsibilities
    - Maintained focus on safety with overarching theme of continuous improvement
    - Utilized monthly team safety meetings as opportunities to provide organized and consistent feedback to employees on a regular basis

Business Impact

- Provide clarity for employees on direct responsibilities and expectations regarding continuous improvement
- Create consistency and commonly understood goals in company-wide continuous improvement initiative
- Use the survey as a tool for tracking progress, effectiveness, and efficiency of the continuous improvement program at the company

Client's Challenge

IUCG spent the Fall 2018 semester working closely with a Massachusetts manufacturing company looking to better their continuous improvement (CI) program. One of the largest obstacles prohibiting successful CI initiatives was an inconsistent structure for idea sharing across different employee levels. This led to a large amount of time and effort being aimed at solving avoidable problems, instead of preventing them in the first place. Current company policies have led to a noticeable lack of motivation for idea sharing in general, which is an imperative part of CI. Communication between top-level management and lower level workers was another area experiencing some challenges due to lack of policy or structure, leading to occasional frustration and redundancies. IUCG also observed some internal resistance to change that was hampering improvement efforts, however, it was clear that potential advancements could be made to help achieve the company's end goals.

IUCG's Solution

In order to better realize the full benefits of each employee's potential at the client's organization, IUCG developed a fully comprehensive idea sharing system. IUCG was able to map out a formalized framework that illustrates the flow of ideas within the company, from front line worker to senior executives. This outline created a clear structure and hierarchy to ensure that all employees know when and who to communicate with about their ideas to solve problems within the company. Furthermore,

the framework provided formal processes for returning feedback from management to frontline workers about why or why not the idea would be implemented, as well as processes to replicate ideas across departments. By taking advantage of underutilized time at meetings already in place, IUCG was able to minimize manpower and resources needed to carry out this system. In addition to the idea sharing system, IUCG helped reinvigorate the CI culture by introducing a CI metric into their quarterly cost center audits and reestablishing company-wide town halls to help emphasize the importance of CI from top management.

Business Impact

After extensive research and analysis, IUCG developed a multi-pronged approach to enhance the overall Continuous Improvement initiative at the manufacturing facility. The immediate impact of the team's recommendations was felt by upper management. The presentation helped to clarify the definition of CI in the context of their company and demystify the process of improving their approach to the initiative. The proposed meeting structure and improvement culture initiatives will help to create consistency across departments, making it easier to gauge progress on a company-wide level. The client can also utilize the survey made during the engagement as a tool for measuring employee sentiment towards existing or new initiatives. Overall, the IUCG's recommendations would lead to a more standardized communication structure that fosters a culture of feedback and growth.