

How a continuous improvement process can benefit you

The continuous improvement process is a modern methodology that relates to making changes in the workplace. This type of process entails constantly tweaking the way things are done, to be faster, better and more efficient.

While continuous improvement process (CIP) models were developed to help improve entire workflows, they can also help you as an individual employee. They can reduce the time it takes you to do something and help you identify areas where you could use upskilling. A CIP can give you an action plan for improving your performance that could potentially lead to raises and promotions – and better job opportunities overall.

In this article, we explain different types of continuous improvement methods and how you can use them to get better at your job.

What is the continuous improvement model?

The concept of the continuous improvement process started out in manufacturing, as a way of making certain processes smoother and more efficient. Today, it's applied across a wide array of industries under different frameworks. Each of these improvement models outlines logical steps to making informed changes that improve workflows or outputs. While a CIP is mainly used to improve organisational efficiency, you can also use a continuous process improvement framework in your own performance plan.

Continuous improvement models commonly uses the following four steps to guide organisations towards specific goals:

- **Plan:** determine the goals of improvement and what needs to be achieved to reach them
- **Do:** execute the plan

- **Check:** validate the plan is being followed and meets expectations
- **Act:** if necessary, make changes to the plan

A continuous improvement model should be:

- **Steady:** small, regular changes rather than big, sporadic changes
- **Evidence-based:** changes are based on data
- **Practical:** the changes are working towards a specific tangible goal
- **Flexible:** the original plan can adapt to new goals

Business continuous improvement models

Different organisations require different continuous process improvement methodologies. Here are some of the most common CIP models.

Kaizen

Kaizen – translating to ‘good change’ or ‘improvement’ – is a continuous process improvement methodology established in Japan in the 1980s. It’s based on the belief that small changes can have a big effect when there’s cooperation and commitment from the top layers of management through to entry-level employees. Under the Kaizen model, anything can be improved.

The seven steps are:

1. Get employees involved, to gain insights from all levels
2. Make a list of problems, to identify areas of improvement
3. Encourage solutions from employees, then choose an idea to test
4. Test the solutions to see if there are any changes in output
5. Regularly measure and analyse the results, to ensure the plan is working
6. If successful, adopt the solution for ongoing improvement
7. Repeat

Kaizen can be highly beneficial in workplaces where [open communication](#) is established, though it may identify more issues than can be resolved before any improvement can be seen. This is why having cooperation from all levels of the business is essential to the success of this model.

Six Sigma

Six Sigma was developed in the U.S. in the 1980s. It's inspired by statistical quality control and aims to improve processes by taking out any elements that cause problems and errors. It's a highly disciplined and data-driven approach that also started out in manufacturing and is now commonly used in project management to improve efficiency.

Those taking a Six Sigma approach to continuous improvement will use two steps:

1. Identify the problem
2. Solve the problem

To do this, there are five key principles:

1. Determine the project goal
2. Measure key aspects of the current process, gathering data on what is preventing the goal or growth
3. Analyse the data to determine areas where there are processes, junk or problems that can be cut or changed
4. Improve the processes
5. Verify and measure the new processes

To use this in your own development, you could look at:

- what performance you want to achieve,
- how you're currently performing,
- things that are preventing you from reaching your ideal performance,
- working on getting rid of those obstacles, and then
- measuring the effectiveness of your plan.

Lean

The Lean continuous improvement methodology is one that constantly looks at ways to cut out inefficiencies. It works by streamlining processes and cutting out all 'waste'. The core principles of the Lean methodology include:

- Identifying the value of streamlining processes
- Mapping where there are bottlenecks of inefficiencies in a process or workflow
- Creating new flows that eliminate waste and bottlenecks
- Only working in areas that provide value
- Seeking perfection and always striving for more

For instance, a workflow might call for two rounds of approval, which creates a bottleneck where managers take too long to respond. This is not only inefficient, but creates stress and is bad for morale. A solution could be to cut out one or both approval rounds.

Agile

The Agile methodology to improvement focuses on short cycles, also known as 'sprints' in a [collaborative environment](#), with the goal of adapting quickly to improve productivity. Where project management is typically rigid and detailed, Agile methodology works on short-term goals that allow people to move forward as needed, to address problems quickly. The basics of the Agile methodology include:

- Prioritising customer satisfaction as the end goal
- Valuing collaboration and open sharing of information, fostering commitment and accountability
- Responding to change rather than following a plan
- Working on solutions over comprehensive documentation

Benefits of continuous improvement for a workplace

Continuous improvement ensures organisations are always operating at their most efficient – and that you as an employee are too. A successful and efficient workplace is one that can offer a high level of job satisfaction and purpose to individual workers. Continuous improvement also often means employees are continually upskilled and stay relevant and competitive in their industry. Here are some of the key benefits of continuous improvement processes to employees.

You'll be more engaged and motivated

When your workplace has a culture of continuous improvement, you might find that you're more motivated to improve as well. Aside from being inspired to do your job well, you may feel more engaged in your role and more valued as an employee.

A better working environment and teamwork

A working environment where improvement is encouraged often also has a supportive and collaborative culture. With continuous improvement processes in place, you and

your team members know you're working towards the same goal, and all have an active role in driving your organisation to success.

Increased innovation

In a workplace where constant changes are being made towards improvement, there's more opportunity for creativity and innovation. Incremental changes, no matter how small, can lead to larger advances that keep an organisation, and its workers, competitive in their industry.

How will continuous improvement process benefit employees?

Adopting continuous improvement methodologies in the workplace can have many benefits for employees and organisations. Some benefits are immediate, while others are long term and can influence the rest of your career. Here are some ways continuous improvement can benefit you.

Prepares you for future trends

Investing in continuous improvement helps you stay up to date with trends and prepare for any changes that may come in the [future](#). By committing to ongoing upskilling and development, you naturally stay informed about any industry shifts, giving you a competitive edge in your role and when you look for new job opportunities.

Increases your confidence

When you're focused on continual development and your skills and performance are constantly improving, you have more confidence both at work and when applying for new roles. You're confident your resumé showcases skills and experience that are relevant and useful, and you feel competent taking on new opportunities.

Makes you adaptable to a changing job market

Adaptability is always [a sought-after skill](#), and one that's use to have as it's transferable to a wide range of different jobs and industries. Being adaptable is an important quality when it comes to future-proofing your career.

Enhances your skill set

Evolving and improving processes means learning new skills and enhancing existing ones. You may need to learn how to use new software, gain additional [technical skills](#), or get up to speed with the latest industry-specific knowledge. By committing to continuous improvement, you'll be able to gain more skills and abilities in your field.

Builds a growth mindset

A growth mindset is when you see setbacks or failures as opportunities to learn and improve. When you start a CIP for yourself, you'll naturally adopt a growth mindset as you look at your own weaknesses and [areas for improvement](#). A growth mindset helps you overcome challenges at work and in your personal life as well.

How to implement continuous improvement as an employee

Whether your workplace is implementing continuous improvement methodologies or not, you can apply them to your own [professional development plan](#). A plan will help you achieve your work goals and stick to a roadmap for reaching your wider aspirations.

1. Define your goals

Before you can work on improving yourself and your performance, you need to know exactly what it is you want to improve. This is where [defining your goals](#) comes into play.

When defining your goals, envision what you would like to be able to do or visualise your ideal future. This could be having less stress at work or moving into a leadership role. Whatever it is, measure where you are at now, set a timeline for [achieving your goal](#), and ensure [your aspirations](#) are realistic and achievable.

2. Choose a continuous improvement model

Next you need to choose how you're going to get to your goal, and find a methodology that will help you on your journey. You may like the flexibility of an Agile methodology that lets you change your plan while it's in action, or you may like the Six Sigma

approach of eliminating waste to streamline your development.

3. Framework development

You may find you like some elements from one method and parts of another.

Developing your own framework can be a solution to ensuring you stay on track with your own continuous improvement. Using the 'plan, do, check and act' framework is a good place to start, then expand on it with elements from other methodologies that you like.

4. Analysis and adaptation

A key characteristic of continuous improvement is that it never stops. So, it's important to set checkpoints in your plan where you analyse your progress and results, and think of any ways you can tweak your goals or your framework.

You may find that things have changed that impact your goals or there are new developments or technology to incorporate into your plan. You may have lifestyle or workplace changes that influence your continuous improvement journey. Be flexible and adapt so you can always continue on your growth plan.

5. Have patience in the process

Personal growth takes time and things won't always go to plan. The important thing is to continue to work towards your goals step by step, adapting when you need to. Setting yourself short- and long-term goals will help you keep focused and motivated to reach your larger aspirations.

Continuous improvement is important for organisations and individuals alike. It helps streamline processes, makes things more efficient and keeps companies and their people competitive in their field. Remember: there are more benefits to continuous improvement than [learning new skills](#) and being more productive for your employer. You also open yourself up to new career pathways and develop a growth mindset that will benefit you in all aspects of life.

FAQs

What is continuous improvement and its benefits to employees?

Continuous improvement is the process of making a workflow more efficient through small, continual changes. A workplace that implements a CIP benefits employees by optimising their productivity and performance. It also empowers employees to make positive changes at work and to invest in their own improvement.

What is continuous improvement and how can you as a worker contribute?

The goal of continuous improvement is to make small, measured increases to engagement, productivity and performance. As a worker, you can contribute by sharing how you feel you can improve and offering specific ways you can do so.

How can continuous improvement help me?

Continuous improvement can help you by:

- providing greater job satisfaction
- producing higher quality work, and
- being open to more opportunities.

It can also help you when you progress your career by motivating you to get valuable new skills.

How do you explain continuous process improvement?

Continuous process improvement is the practice of making incremental changes to workflows to improve efficiency and quality of work or products. A continuous improvement process allows you to find ways to work more efficiently – and can improve company culture and overall happiness at work.