

THE MPG CHRONICLE

Organisational excellence in the public sector



Change management, business and process improvement, service reviews?

The "why, what, where and how" simplified

By Scott Mead

This article aims to give readers an understanding of the fundamentals of these concepts and how to apply them in practice.

Why?

As we are all well aware, in recent years Councils have been presented with the following issues:

- An increase in the range of services provided.
- Increased community expectations for the range and level of services provided.
- Increased devolution of responsibilities from other levels of Government.
- Increased compliance and regulation.
- A decrease in external revenue sources.

COMPLIANCE

REGULATION

**COMMUNITY
EXPECTATIONS**

RESPONSIBILITIES

Given these challenges, Councils need to be effective and efficient in delivering service. They need to understand and make informed decisions with regard to what services are to be delivered and to what standard. They need to maintain operations and provide service levels that are financially sustainable. In order to deliver these outcomes there is a need to be reviewing and improving all aspects of Council operations to ensure best value and quality is delivered.

What?

Change management, business and process improvement, service reviews, etc are names that describe a simple process of improving things by:

1. Establishing how things work at present (current state)
2. Analysing and establishing the positives and negatives of that current state
3. Developing a vision or goal for how we would like the thing to be / work (ideal state)
4. Developing a plan to move from the current to the ideal state
5. Implementing the plan
6. Start again



Whilst this is a simple process, unfortunately we are often confused by new jargon, theories and systems that are designed to put a slightly new slant on old ideas. PDSA (Plan Do, Study, Act), Lean, Kaizen, Six Sigma, Lean–Six Sigma are some of the formalised approaches to making improvement that we are exposed to and are very useful to guide and assist you in improving what you do. Unfortunately being faced with a range of seemingly complicated options can be daunting and off-putting. People can be concerned they may use the wrong approach or do not have the time to become expert in all approaches. The result can then be that the attempt at improvement is not made or a change decision is made in isolation without any structured decision support process.

Critically, making things too complex can take the focus off the fundamental elements of a structured improvement process and have people concentrating on the tools rather than the outcome. It is a bit like mowing the lawn. There are any number of tools you can use to make the job easier for you, but at the end of the day it is about making your grass shorter. So it doesn't matter if you have a ride on mower, mechanical mower, electric mower or even buy a sheep, they will all cut the grass. The main thing is that it suits your needs and works for you. Therefore, if you have an understanding of the basic elements of the process you can choose the tools or approach that suits you and the particular situation you are faced with.



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Where?

Improving things can and should be done in all areas of Council business. Projects may relate to understanding and implementing decisions about service levels and delivery, however they can also address matters such as for example, how Council does its strategic planning, community engagement, compliance, systems, HRM,.....anything. Some projects may include engaging with the community or other Councils, other levels of government or the private sector. In short, anything Council does may be able to be improved, therefore should be subject to review. With limited resources and time, it is however, important that reviews, change or business and process improvement projects be identified and prioritised to ensure the most important areas are addressed and best value is delivered.

How?

The basic steps in doing a project to improve things are as follows:-

- Current analysis
- Future vision
- Implementation plan development
- Be conscious that commitment from Council and senior management is vital.
- Ensure adequate resourcing is available.
- Remember to engage staff and develop ownership by them.
- Establish a plan or overall approach for a change/review/improvement program.
- Prioritise projects to be carried out. (These may not be the high profile or “flashy” projects but the ones that will provide good returns to Council)
- Scoping the project is vital.
- Keeping to tight time frames is important.
- Teams should be made of workers not management.
- Management should be sponsors and supporters of the groups.
- Vision is an important part of the exercise and should be a group's vision of where we are going as a group and team.
- Important not to let individual ideas dictate **of** what should happen.
- Implementation phase is critical.
- Commitment must be maintained.
- Implementation monitored.
- Implementation resourced.

Good luck with your improvement project, whatever title you choose to give it.



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