



Welcome

By Mark Rewhorn

I would like to welcome you to the very first Newsletter from the offices of European Business Improvements.

(www.europeanbusinessimprovements.com)

EBI was started early in 2008 with the express intention of helping the smaller enterprise. Smaller companies make up the backbone of many countries economies, but are often overlooked.

We started by thinking that six sigma was going to be the answer. The magic bullet if you like. We rapidly realised that such things as waste management and the 7 quality tools were far easier to deploy, and gave almost as good results, but at a fraction of the cost. Whilst many companies could ill afford the cost and time (4 weeks to train a black-belt), most were happy to afford a couple of days training on these building blocks.

If the desire or need was there, it would always be possible to move on to six sigma at a later time.

Hence, if you visit our forums you will find more than just six sigma as a tool for improvement.

Visit www.Europeanbusinessimprovements.com and see just what's there. Help yourself to our free downloads. If we don't have what you want, feel free to ask us if we can help.

Visit the forums and ask questions. There are many visitors that have a wealth of knowledge. Perhaps you'd like to answer a few questions yourself? The only rule is that we respect each other's point of view.

Lean in the Office?

By Mark Rewhorn

Is it possible to introduce Lean principles into the office environment? I think an unequivocal yes.

Offices, just like their manufacturing counterparts create waste. The problem is that office waste is usually harder to spot. But think about the hard disk drive on the computer for a moment. How much duplication (waste) is there on that? How many files are kept but never revisited?

Also, think about the processes used. Are they truly streamlined? Are they efficient? Does nobody make mistakes? Again, these are areas that could be looked at and the waste (fat) cut away to make things lean and mean. Look and you will find waste.

Can You Help Us?

David Harris (Haz on our forums) has a burning desire to start creating Job Descriptions for the key players in six sigma. He wants to create actual job descriptions based on real life scenarios, not textbook theories.

"I would like to write a job description and person profile of what we want. It will be based on formal training but more importantly what we have experienced with these roles and people in the past. This will be based on actual experiences of both good and bad, I am sure we have all had bad experiences so we should use that to learn from and write what is really required in practice."

So how about contacting Haz and helping him in his quest? You can reach him publicly via our forums or send him a PM from same.

Auditing Part 1

By David Harris

I would like to share with you my experience involved in audits both as an auditor and auditee. I will be describing the different types of audits and how to maximise their effectiveness to one of a process improvement tool as opposed to a simple compliance tool.

I have asked many times how would you describe as a good audit? I have had many replies;

- 3rd Party audit
- One where you raise 20 Nonconformities
- A compliance audit

There are many more, if I am asked I always say, "A through audit with no NCR's raised but x amount of improvement opportunities noted." This is saying the audit was conducted by an experienced auditor who was very thorough, raised no reports because the systems or processes were part of the daily working practices, but was also able to agree some improvements with the process owner.

An audit is not about raising reports because someone did not tick a box on a document; ask the person a couple of questions.

In my opinion don't use pre written checklists/procedures for internal audits. I have seen examples where checklists are in place and basically the audits are the same; asking the same question, the scope of the audit is the same too. An audit should be used as an improvement tool, it must be live. I like to investigate the process/procedure I am auditing, understand it and then using the documentation available write out a set of live questions. I of course add to them on the audit too, I then start the audit.

I am going to give a series of situations I have been in whilst auditing so you will start to understand the methods I use in using the audit as an improvement tool.

Waste

I have seen an excellent operator doing a fine job, his area was neat and tidy, and he was working to his process instructions and carrying out his quality checks.

I noticed he had a document he was filling in so I asked him why he did this, what was the purpose of the document and what happened to document after he had completed it, here are the answers I was given...

- I am filling in the document because I have been told to and if I don't I will get a formal warning.
- I have not a clue what the purpose of the document is; I think it's to do with that ISO thingy.
- At the end of the shift I put it in that cabinet there.
– Guess what, there were nearly 3 years of documents in that cabinet.

I apologised to the operator and ripped the document up and went and spoke to the line manager. I don't really want to write what my words to him were!

How much waste can we identify here? Lots is the simple answer.

The management system is bolted to the wall; process owners and operators do not know why they are performing tasks.

The sad side of this example is the process had been audited by a senior auditor 4 months prior to me and he had given it a clean bill of health, he was compliance auditing, just ticking boxes what a "WASTE".

Auditing by procedure only

This is another example where people go wrong in my opinion. I fully agree in having an audit scope, but in some cases if the audit trail takes you across a procedure, go for it.

If you are auditing Goods-in and you see a purchase order has not been raised for a product that has been delivered, take a trip into purchasing and ask why?

Why not even take a finished part and then trace it all the way back to design checking all the processes that go into making a final product, try it you will be amazed what you find.

And finally for this letter, be nice. Remember you may be talking to operators who are worried that if they say the wrong thing they will be in trouble. Take this into account.

I was auditing a process which involved a hourly paid young lady, she was so worried she actually said , I don't know, I have never been on this job before, it's my first time! I know a lot of auditors that would have been running to their offices faster than Linford Christie off the blocks to write a noncompliance.

What a waste, go and check the training records. I did and she was fully trained.

More to follow next time...

EBI aims to provoke discussion on the topics that are important to us all as quality professionals. Often we make statements to stimulate debate, not to cause ructions. We never berate anyone and see it as our vocation to help and learn from others. We do not claim to have all the answers, but we do enjoy a good debate and hopefully we can come to consensual agreement on the more interesting topics. Feel free to comment on the thoughts below. Join the debate on our forums.

Brainstorming

By Mark Rewhorn

There are many many tools for process improvement and problem solving. Some require more skill to use than others, though I think we often overlook the more basic tools.

Brainstorming is an incredibly powerful tool if used properly. Sadly it often isn't used at all, or it's used badly. How many brainstorming sessions have you attended where the "man with the pen" forced his ideas through? Who hasn't at some time or other had their ideas ridiculed because they weren't what the "man with the pen" wanted to hear? And of course then you decide to drop out of the exercise, which is a real shame because you actually have many good ideas.

All too common I'm afraid. My thoughts on brainstorming are quite simple. Select a mixed group of experts and operators; then add a couple of people that know nothing about the topic under discussion. These are the "wild cards". They will ask the "silly" questions and come up with ideas that are different because they aren't bound by prior knowledge. You will get good ideas from these people. The other person that you need is an impartial facilitator: someone to run the session and keep control.

Remember that the object of brainstorming is to generate a quantity of ideas. The assessment of quality and suitability or applicability comes later.

Behave Like a Child – enjoy it!

By Mark Rewhorn

As we grow up we lose so much. We lose our innocence and our ability to be creative. We stop asking questions. So many times we're asked to "think out of the box", but we can't because we've forgotten how. Society with its education has stifled us.

I often teach creative thinking to groups, and it can be really hard work.

Whilst studying a problem with a group recently a novel answer was required. "Can't be done," was the consensus of the group. So, as it was a nice sunny day I suggested getting a few cups of tea and coffee and going for a "break" outside.

Once outside, I asked the group when was the last time they'd sat out on a sunny afternoon drinking tea. One of them said, "Not since I was a child." Great, I had my opening.

"Now this problem we have, how would a child solve it? How would your child solve it?" That was it. They were off back to their childhoods, throwing all their baggage to the wind. Just over an hour later we had the answer to the problem that "Couldn't be done."

Sometimes we just need to remember how astute children are and mimic them. According to the BBC, a child can ask "Why" 400 times a day!

Well, that's it for our first edition. If you want to contribute to future newsletters or would like to see anything specific covered please drop us a line. You can contact us from the form on this page, <http://europeanbusinessimprovements.com/contactus.aspx> or post a question on our forums.

Until next time, take care and remember that the only silly question is the one that doesn't get asked.