

An action research to demonstrate the sustainable advantage brought

[Religion](#), [God](#)



This article is mainly talking about an action research that aims to demonstrate the sustainable advantage brought by continuous improvement in the supply chain by analyzing the characteristics of CI programme of two Spanish companies in the food industry. Basic concepts Continuous improvement (CI) - the planned, organized and systematic process of ongoing, incremental and company-wide change of existing practices aimed at improving company performance.

Personnel Participation Systems (PPS) - one practice that aims to implement CI on the shop floor by involving workers into practice in CI activities. COIMPROVE Project (Collaborative Improvement Tool for the Extended Manufacturing Enterprise) - a three-year EU funded research project that aims to develop a tool supporting the implementation and operation of collaborative improvement within the Extended Manufacturing Enterprise (EME).

Concerns of the study Many former references are dealing with implementation of CI in a company, with improvement teams or other PPS. Few references are dealing with CI practices between companies, such as joint problem solving between customer and suppliers, joint management of logistic systems between enterprises, etc. Guided by the COIMPROVE Project, this research is going to explore factors that affect the development of Col (Collaborative Improvement) within an inter-organizational setting.

Research participants and methodology As the basic organizational structure of the improvement process, two teams (the implementation team and the improvement team) are created. The main responsibility of the

implementation team is planning the process and monitoring the achievement of the goals being sought; while the improvement team is responsible for proposing and analyzing problems and implementing improvements that contribute to achieving the desired goal (Jose, 2009).

Both two teams include people from management level, the area/section workers, internal customers of that area/section, suppliers in that area and researchers from research group. The two companies being researched are Bajamar Septima and Agrovic Noroeste. Bajamar Septima, a food company, is specializing in the production and sale of pizzas, pizza bases and dough-based products and has about 100 employees. The other company, Agrovic Noroeste, is devoted to the production of poultry products and also has about 100 employees.

Specifically, for Bajamar Septima, which has had more than 10 years' experience in CI programs with its own PPS, a pilot experience was initiated in the field of cleaning. The improvement team is taking personnel from three companies: four people from Bajamar Septima, two from ISS Unica (a leading supplier of general cleaning services in Spain), and one from Johnson Diversey (a cleaning and hygiene solutions provider).

By collaborating with these suppliers, Bajamar makes decisions and takes measures in rationalizing the cleaning activities and optimizing both internal and external resources. As for Agrovic Noroeste, which has little experience in CI programs besides a suggestions system in the slaughterhouse, a new improvement project that aims to reduce the problems with quality was set

off. The improvement team is comprised of workers, operators and supervisors from Agronic, a transport company (transporting animals to the slaughterhouse) and a loading company (catching chickens). All the participating personnel are given training and they will have meetings involving brainstorming measures to gain improvements in the handling or in the systems and facilities, which may result in less second quality chicken.

Results and discussion

Both of the two actions have demonstrated efficiency. Bajamar Septima has 15% reduction in time spent on cleaning, both in the production and in the maintenance sections. For Agrovic, a reduced number of forklift operators and a cut in operating time are resulted due to the application of a new fowl loading method. Besides these, there are also many other achievements in improving the two companies' productivity and competitiveness.

These two cases emphasize the importance of involving not only company personnel but also their suppliers and customers in the CI process and the quantifiable results have testified this statement. By extending CI throughout the entire supply chain as well as maintaining a concept of collaborative improvement, the company may find out more efficient ways to improve quality, service and product costs, and finally improve competitiveness. Finally, as the article mentions, working at inter-company level is more complicated than doing so internally. The author of the article calls on more studies on exploring CI knowledge and discovering a series of organizational factors that might influence it.