

# MEASURING THE PERFORMANCE OF WORK IMPROVEMENT TEAMS

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## ABSTRACT

*Work Improvement Teams are groups of employees who meet regularly to attend the matters pertaining to their work. Work Improvement Teams bring about many benefits to the institution including improved employee engagement and employee satisfaction leading to enhanced organisational performance. Hence, it is of utmost importance for managers to promote Work Improvement Teams in their organisations. The objective of this study was to develop a tool to measure the performance of Work Improvement Teams for quantitative analysis. Qualitative methods were used to identify the functions and processes related to these teams and a tool with five indicators was developed to measure the performance.*

**Key Words:** *Work Improvement Teams, Quality Circles*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Work Improvement Team (WIT) is a group of members of a same work unit who meet regularly to identify, analyse, solve problems, implement or recommend them to the management. Therefore, they contribute to the improvements of the outputs of their work units [1]. In the manufacturing sector, WITs are also called Quality Circles. The concept behind the Work Improvement Teams is 'parallel structure approach', in which employees are involved in problem solving [2]. Mueller (2013) further describes organisational parallel structure as a system within an organisation, which is complementary to traditional top-down bureaucratic structure. Moreover, it is separated from the routine day to day activities of the organisation and thus it operates in a special manner. The ideas generated in these teams are needed to be approved for implementation by the management, and therefore it is not a matter of delegating the decision-making process. Instead, it can be considered as a way of joint decision making [2].

Work Improvement Teams brings about many benefits to the institution that they operate in. They promote employee participation in decision making, improves employee satisfaction, motivation, creativity, and facilitating the generation of Kaizen suggestions. According to Wilhite et al. (1983), an organisation with functioning quality circles experiences improved organisational communication, growth and development of employees, improved employees' skills on decision making and enhanced managerial awareness on job related matters. Therefore, it is evident that Work Improvement Teams engender eminent benefits to the institution. However, in order to achieve satisfactory benefits, a mechanism has to be established to measure the performance of Work Improvement Teams in an objective manner.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods were used in gathering data to develop a tool for measuring performance of Work Improvement Teams. The process of conducting Work Improvement Teams was studied with a thorough literature review. Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions were the data collection instruments used to get a comprehensive insight into the matters pertaining to Work Improvement Teams. Data collection was done in August, 2020 at the National Hospital of Sri Lanka after obtaining ethical clearance from the ethics review committee of the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine and the ethics review committee of the National Hospital of Sri Lanka.

According to Cohen & Crabtree (2006), a broader understanding about the research problem can be gained by using Maximum Variation Sampling technique, which comes under purposive sampling. Therefore, in this study, the same sampling technique was adopted to select the participants to get a wide range of data related to the functions of Work Improvement Teams. Deputy Directors of the Hospital, Medical Officer in charge of the Quality Management Unit, Consultants, Special Grade Nursing Officers and Ward Sisters were selected as Key Informants. Separate Focus Group Discussions were conducted with Consultants, Doctors and Nursing Officers. By analysing these qualitative data, indicators were developed for inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes related to the functions of Work Improvement Teams.

## 3. RESULTS

As participatory management is one of the philosophies behind Work Improvement Teams, the values and ideas of all the team members are considered to be important, and it is evident that participation remains an important factor for the success of such meetings. Therefore, presence of all the team members, regardless of their position, is expected for team meetings. Hence, the proportions of Work Improvement Team meetings with expected participation out of total conducted WIT meetings was identified as an input indicator.

Suggestions generated from Work Improvement Teams are needed to be forwarded to the management for the purpose of obtaining approval for implementation, and record maintenance is necessary in this regard. Moreover, generation of meeting reports is important in maintaining the organisational memory, which in turn contributes in improving productivity. Therefore, the proportion of Work Improvement Teams that generated meeting reports out of the total conducted WIT meetings in a defined period was considered as a process indicator.

Frequent meetings improve the efficiency and effectiveness of solving problems. Therefore, Work Improvement Teams are expected to conduct meetings frequently, and the management can decide the expected number of WIT meetings that should be held within a given period. Therefore, proportion of Work Improvement Teams that conducted expected number of meetings was identified as an output indicator.

Apart from the presence of a favourable organisation culture, a significant amount of creativity is also needed for team members to generate Kaizen suggestions. Thus, the number of Kaizen suggestions generated during a defined period was recognized as an outcome indicator.

Similarly, the proportion of suggestions that were implemented out of the total suggestions was also identified as an outcome indicator of the performance of Work Improvement Teams.

The developed indicators of the performance of Work Improvement Teams are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Indicators to Measure the Performance of Work Improvement Teams**

<b>Indicator</b>	
Input Indicator	Proportion of Work Improvement Team meetings with expected participation out of total conducted WIT meetings
Process Indicator	Proportion of Work Improvement Teams that generated meeting reports out of the total conducted WIT meetings
Output Indicator	Proportion of Work Improvement Teams that conducted expected number of meetings out of the total established teams
Outcome Indicator	Number of Kaizen Suggestions generated during a defined period
Outcome Indicator	Proportion of suggestions that were implemented out of the total suggestions generated from Work Improvement Teams

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This tool is tailored to measure the performance of Work Improvement Teams quantitatively, and therefore, it can be used for several managerial and research purposes. Performance of Work Improvement Teams can be assessed periodically with these indicators and statistical tests can be applied to look for any statistical significance of changes in performance over time.

As indicators have been developed separately for inputs, processes, outputs and outcome related to the functions of Work Improvement Teams, the data generating from these indicators can be used to analyse the performance of Work Improvement Teams with reference to the systems model.

In addition, by using this tool, performance of Work Improvement Teams can be compared across institutions, and this will facilitate the process of external benchmarking.

According to Blair and Ramsing (1983), functions of Work Improvement Teams have an relationship with organisational behaviour including individual motivation, group processes, and managerial decision making. Accordingly, this instrument can also be used as a proxy indicator to assess such parameters as well.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Proper functioning of Work Improvement Teams has a profound impact on the organisational behaviour and thus developing a tool for measuring the performance of Work Improvement Teams exerts a managerial significance. After a literature review and analysis of qualitative data obtained from Key Informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions, a range of indicators covering the domains of systems model were developed, which can be used in measuring the performance of Work Improvement Teams quantitatively.

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