

Integrated Methods, the Next Step in Business Improvement



*In a series of articles, we discuss key challenges and solutions to making business improvement more effective, efficient and sustainable. The fourth article is about **Integrated** business improvement.*

The alternative approach is to let people choose any method they think is suitable. For example, a company that we worked with used Six Sigma, Lean, Change Management (several versions), Project Management, and Agile (several versions). Needless to say, this approach often leads to higher costs (admin, training, maintenance, etc.), increased complexity, and very likely rivalry.

A better way forward to benefit from time-tested improvement methods is what we call adaptable and integrated business improvement. It is a needed-driven approach that integrates the strengths of the best improvement methods and adapts them based upon the opportunity at hand.

Proven methods like Lean, Agile, and Six Sigma are structured into *Knowledge Areas* and "pulled" into action through Improvement *Applications* that outlines, like a recipe, the best combination of method, tools, and practices for a particular type of improvement opportunity (Figure 2).

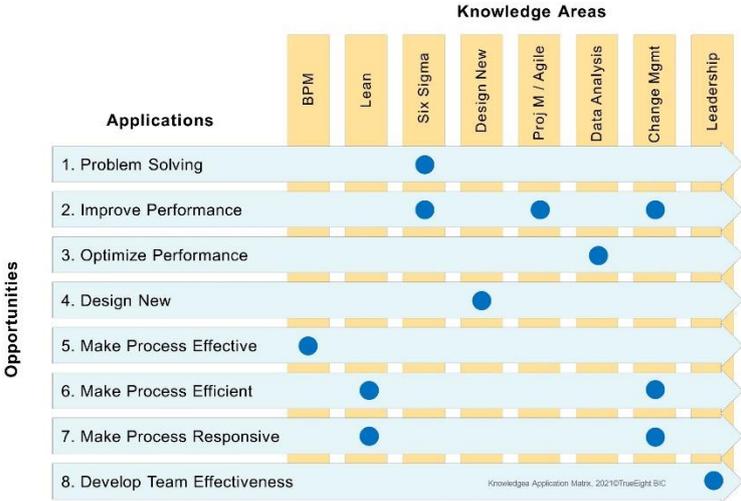


Figure 2. Need-driven business improvement starts with the opportunity.

Adaptable and integrated business improvement combines the best of two worlds, high effectiveness through the deployment of several improvement methods and high efficiency through one standard framework with minimal administration, rivalry and overlaps.

Adaptable and Integrated Improvement Model (AIIM)

Adaptable and integrated business improvement is put into practice with AIIM, which is a complete improvement system that contains all the Knowledge Areas, Applications, Tools, and Practices that improvement teams need to handle the organization’s improvement opportunities (Figure 3).

AIIM resolves the problem with rivalry by treating improvement methods as equally important *Knowledge Areas*, and by matching each method with the *Improvement Application* where they can contribute the most. In this way, each method’s unique strengths can be exploited without conflicts.

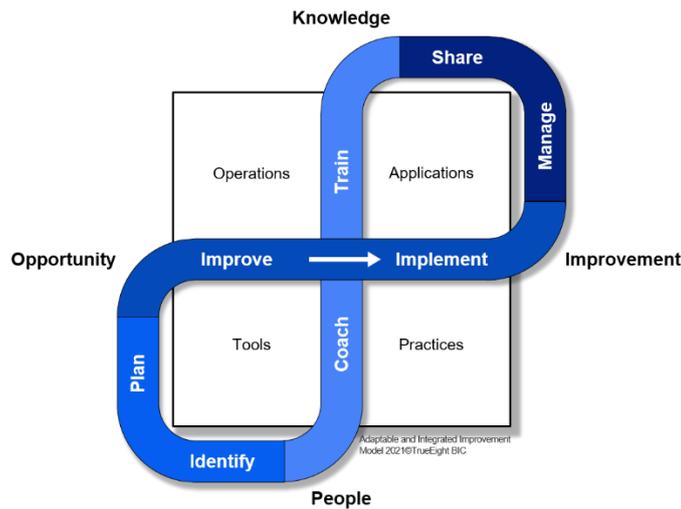


Figure 3. The adaptable and integrated improvement model (AIIM).

The overall objective of AIIM is to provide the improvement team with the most suitable approach, method, tools, and practices for the job. It is a people-centric approach, where the method adapts to the need, contrary to today’s method-driven focus where a standard method is applied to all kinds of opportunities, whether it is effective or not.

One Flexible Improvement Process

AIIM uses an eight-step flexible process based on the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle [5] to guide the overall improvement work - identify, plan, improve, implement, review, share, learn, and coach (Figure 3). For the Improve and Implement steps, the improvement teams are further guided by a five-step model based on Lean Six Sigma DMAIC [6] and A3 Problem Solving [7] to execute the different improvement applications (Figure 4).



Figure 4. A versatile and robust 5-step improvement model based on Six Sigma, Lean, and A3 Problem Solving.

Just like the Iphone overtook the feature phones by providing a standard platform that quickly could be adapted to the user’s needs through applications, the next step in business improvement will likely be an improvement system that quickly match an opportunity with the right application of the most suitable methods, tools, and practices, i.e. an adaptable and integrated improvement model.

References

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