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It has been a while since I have had the time to write an issue of Food for Thought. The good news is P squared has been very busy assisting organizations with process improvement efforts - even in these tough times.

That made me wonder - why now? Why are so many organizations coming to us when times are tough?

I put together a few ideas below and hope it gives you some food for thought!

Why Process Improvement is Needed Now

In today's tough economic times, companies are increasingly looking to process improvement (PI) to help reduce costs, increase revenue, stay competitive, and improve customer service. By putting PI methods in place and getting internal cooperation, organizations can more readily improve processes to help meet business objectives at the organization level.

However, process improvement is not a one-time undertaking. Business conditions and objectives change over time as the competitive and market landscapes change. This means organizations must approach PI as a continuous, iterative process.

While technology can help, process improvement is often best driven by guided group interactions and collaboration - using time proven process improvement tools to drill into the opportunities for improvement, solve problems, document decisions, and put them into place.

It's important to have a clear strategic direction for the company before embarking on a PI initiative. Otherwise, how do you know if you are working in the areas of greatest strategic importance to the company? It also helps individuals understand the rationale for improvements if they see the big picture.

Challenging times require continuous process improvement from top to bottom. To become an industry leader, businesses must properly align their organization and processes to foster such traits as consensus decision making, increased innovation, cost and quality improvements, faster product development and improved asset utilization.

No doubt the recession and rapidly slumping sales are forcing many companies to reevaluate their priorities with regard to their continuous improvement initiatives. Instead of focusing on Lean, Six Sigma, and other solutions, it is more about positive change and moving toward alignment of strategy, cost reduction and delivering results.

Our experience with a number of companies in the past year shows that the focus of PI is alive, well and thriving! Even though times are difficult, a focus on identifying opportunities to reduce cost and streamline processes through the direct involvement of your employees, will ensure a successful company as we emerge from these difficult times.

This can bring your organization together and create a great feeling of "team work" driven primarily by a feeling that we are all in this together!