

Continuous Quality Improvement

What is it?

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is a systematic organization-wide approach for continually improving all processes that deliver quality products and services. It encompasses processes that serve external customers and internal customers. These other terms are also used to describe it: Continuous Improvement, Total Quality Management, Process Improvement, Quality Improvement, and many specific techniques and programs.

CQI relies upon the following principles, all of which are aligned closely with the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence:

- Customer focus: meeting or exceeding customer expectations while maintaining or improving costs
- Expectation for continual improvements in all processes
- Employee and partner or supplier involvement
- Use of data and facts to make decisions

Benefits of CQI

Organizations that systematically use CQI get these kinds of benefits:

- Higher customer satisfaction and loyalty
- Higher revenue
- Lower costs
- Higher employee satisfaction and retention
- Fewer errors and less re-work

How do you get started?

Getting the benefits of CQI relies upon trained individuals who understand the principles and tools of quality who are able to work together in teams to improve processes. Here is the approach we recommend to learn CQI and get immediate improvement results. The training workshops use “action learning”, meaning you learn the material by applying it in the workshop on real issues your organization faces. Best practice examples from other companies are included as well.

- I. Senior management briefing (1 day, maximum 12 people):
 - a. Benefits of using CQI
 - b. Infrastructure for successful CQI
 - c. Identification of key results needed in the organization
 - d. Assessment of the organization’s current performance
 - e. Select CQI Council or Team and develop its Charter

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2. Select and launch first process improvement project(s) with management (1 day, maximum 12 people)
 - a. Clarify strategic direction and organizational goals as context for prioritization
 - b. Identify key processes and their current ratings on the *Process Excellence Scale*TM¹
 - c. Prioritization of poor performing processes relative to customer requirements and strategic goals
 - d. Identify process owners
 - e. Develop team charters for the first improvement projects
 - f. Identify team members (including a CQI Council sponsor, employees, partners/suppliers, customers, and/or others with a stake in the process improvement)
3. Train process improvement team members and facilitate completion of 1-3 process improvement projects (3 days, maximum 21 people for 3 teams)
 - a. Using the *Process Excellence Scale*TM for continuous process improvement
 - b. Customer requirements for key processes
 - c. Problem solving tools and when they are appropriate to use, including:
 - i. Flowcharting and process re-design techniques
 - ii. Root cause analysis techniques
 - iii. Force field analysis
 - iv. Pareto charts
 - v. Prioritization techniques
 - vi. Cause-and-effect diagrams
 - vii. And many more tools and techniques
 - d. Selection of process measures
 - e. Benchmarking
 - f. Meeting facilitation skills
 - g. Meeting participation skills
 - h. Review improvement project before and after results with management on last day
4. Identify next process improvement projects and establish rollout schedule (1 hour conference call with up to 6 members of the top management team)
5. Repeat steps 3-6 for next high priority process needing improvement involving other staff/employees.

¹ The Process Excellence Scale is trademarked by Leading Excellence

How do you learn more and continue to excel after that?

1. Organizational Performance Assessment. The survey ascertains:
 - Alignment of the organization with leaders' goals and expectations
 - Excellence in process management
 - Extent of customer/patient/stakeholder focus
 - Effectiveness of strategic planning and execution
 - Effectiveness of human resource practices
 - Appropriateness of organizational performance data and knowledge management
 - Performance results
2. Learn the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence by attending the Internal Baldrige Assessor Workshop, your state or the national Examiner Training, or through other means.
3. Apply for your State Baldrige award. Use the award feedback report to re-prioritize needed improvements every time you apply. This provides a continuous improvement system that helps you elevate your performance and achieve dramatic breakthroughs. Achieving higher-levels of award provides objective evidence that your organization is becoming, or already is EXCELLENT.
4. Apply to serve on the Board of Examiners for your State Baldrige award (fees vary by state). This deepens your understanding of organizational performance excellence and exposes you to best practices.