

Targeting Waste

Waste is “a deviation from the way things ought to be” – which in our book is one definition of a “problem.” One type of waste is **material waste**. In manufacturing this includes defective or useless material produced by the manufacturing process. In service areas, any duplication of effort or information collected is waste. Another type of waste is **rework**, when a product or service must be redone (including time and money spent correcting errors, unacceptable work and misinformation).

Material waste and rework are often easily observable. These can be targeted for action by listing them, as problems, directly on a **BPI** Problem Inventory (or Concern Analysis) worksheet. But, another type of waste is hidden within normal operations or “the way we do things.” It is **process waste** and includes extra steps and inefficiencies that have been built into the work process itself.

Reveal process waste

Unit’s purpose

State the purpose specifically, indicating the direct customers and what product/service is provided to them.

Work flow chart

Chart how work comes into the unit and all the steps/activities taken by the department. Leave nothing out. List everything (e.g. inspecting, double checking, storing, moving from one place to another, returning telephone calls, making reports, etc.)

Value-added analysis

Each activity (above) either adds value – **value-add**, or doesn’t – **non-value-add**. Anything that produces the product or service directly is a value-add. If the activity does not directly produce the product or service it is a non-value-add (e.g. storage, inspecting, proof reading, transporting, walking, lifting, filing.)

Targeting Waste

Work flow deviations

All non-value-adds are targeted as deviations to be listed on a Problem Inventory work sheet. Remember “storing” or “waiting” are non-value-added activities. So, don’t overlook work flow pinch points – those places where work stacks up because it can’t handle the amount of work being pushed through the system. You should also be aware of value-adds that take too long. These should be listed with the non-value-adds as deviations on the Problem Inventory list.

Hidden problems

Effort spent producing goods or services that the customer doesn’t want are another source of waste. So, a real effort should be made to understand what is needed from the point of view of the customer. This is not a one-time activity. Make sure the unit has a procedure that includes the customers in the problem identification loop. Also, enlist the help of suppliers. There may be procedures that interfere with their ability to meet what the unit needs.

Outside the unit

Waste that does not directly affect the unit or its customers should also be identified. It takes work to produce anything, including waste. Finding places where efforts are being wasted provides valuable feedback to the organization.

Sources of work complications

Work processes become complicated and inefficient when decision-makers use “muddled action” (trial and error) instead of “corrective action” (addressing the root cause). To maintain and improve processes, decisions should only be made when the true causes of problems are known. Also, be aware that “interim actions” create work complications. They should only be allowed to exist for a brief period of time – just long enough that the cause of a problem can be verified and effective corrective action implemented.

Critical thinking collaboration

The “Targeting Waste” procedure outlined in this article is a good place to start to clean up the debris of past decisions. In the long run, using critical thinking tools to uncover root

Targeting Waste

causes and to select the best corrective actions will help prevent new work complications. This is the surest way to fine tune technical and human systems for continuous improvement, day-in and day-out.

Conclusion

All this may sound like a lot of effort. On the other hand, how much waste can your organization afford? Let us show you how to avoid complicating your work processes with what may be your reliance on outdated decision and problem solving methods. Move now to streamlining your processes simply by being better problem solvers. Read this article: [Stopping Work Complications](#) to stop work complications at their source. [Contact BPI](#) for information on how our standard and self-paced [Critical Thinking](#) workshops can provide the knowledge, skill and procedures necessary to make "targeting waste" in your organization your normal way of operating.