

➤ Continuous Improvement - The Corus Way

Introduction

Corus is one of the biggest steel companies in the world, in 2005 ranked as eighth. In 2004, after a period of losses, it decided under its new Chief Executive, Phillippe Varin, that it needed to compete more effectively in international markets. It must also be prepared for any downturn in the steel market. To do this, it launched a programme called 'Restoring Success'. This aimed to cut back on waste and reduce unnecessary duplication of activities and, by the end of 2004, had proved successful with half of the target savings made and the business in profit for the first time since its 1999 formation.

Continuous Improvement (CI)

In 2005 Corus decided to develop a programme to create real value in steel. Called 'The Corus Way' it concentrates on three main areas:

- * to become the best supplier to the best customers
- * adopting world class processes based on CI
- * ensuring growth.

CI is central to 'The Corus Way'. CI has developed from the Japanese idea of 'kaizen', which advocated gradual improvement over time. This means changing the culture of a workplace so that everyone is looking to make improvements. It is also linked to the idea of lean manufacturing, i.e. minimising waste. Employees are also encouraged to work not 'harder' but 'smarter' - to be spending time creating value rather than wasting time or resources on unnecessary activities. CI covers all aspects of the business, not just production.

The Corus Academy

Corus has set up a 'virtual' academy to implement CI consistently over all of its divisions and internationally. The academy helps the business to share best practice and develop common approaches to sharing knowledge and expertise. The barriers to learning at Corus are lowered by using a standard way to describe things (a common language), sharing best practice, using the best tools and having shared standard approaches.

Training and development

Training means developing better skills and knowledge of benefit to Corus, development includes the needs of the individual. To ensure that CI is happening Corus needed to train senior managers and then to create 250 CI coaches. Each takes 29 days to train so this is a big commitment. The coaches are then the 'champions' of CI. They are trained using real work observations and case studies from which they can identify ways to improve.

Success

CI helps to minimise waste and increase the effectiveness of both workers and machines. It also improves work and safety conditions. Major savings on time, materials and wastage have been made by changing systems and practices. Improved working environments have also resulted from the changes. By using CI, Corus can provide customers with better value, in a more cost effective way.