



Using Graham Process Charting to Shrink the Customer Chain

Many manufacturers have become frustrated with the lack of success of their Continuous Improvement program. Even after great expenditures of time and money, they are not seeing the contribution to the bottom line that they have been led to expect.

Graham Process Charts are an outstanding tool that can not only revitalize Continuous Improvement but also provide the best way for a manufacturer to initiate such a program.

Start with the Chart

Starting improvement projects with a chart is important for four reasons. First, it causes the people in the business to agree on the process that is used. While this may seem obvious, the task is often quite difficult as there are often disputes as to what actually happens. And there are almost always overlapping and redundant tasks in any manufacturing process that are hidden until a team takes the time to review each step in thorough detail.

Once agreed to, the steps are then charted. When the Graham Process Chart is used, it provides quick method to obtain a clear picture of the process. The second reason the chart is important is that this picture provides the simplest way for the people who use the process to comprehend just what is actually happening at every step. Trying to verbally describe what goes on in a manufacturing business can be almost impossible. But when charted, even people who have no familiarity with the process in question can see how things are done. This save tremendous amounts of time and debate.

Third, the chart allows a chance to identify simple improvements that can be made easily with very little expense or delay. Such “low hanging fruit” allows improvements are not only powerful but also required prior to moving on to more significant changes in a process.

Fourth, the chart now provides a record of the current state as well as the future state after improvements are made. This allows for effective comparison to measure success in the projects that are undertaken.

Charting the Time

The Graham Process Charts also have a unique feature that makes it a very powerful tool for improvement: the ability to capture times at each step of the process. A Graham Chart allows the user to record times for both the operation as well as the delay prior to completion of the step. When combined as a total time, this provides the basis for making effective improvements throughout the Customer Chain.

The Customer Chain® Improvement Process

The Customer Chain is defined as

“The connection of all the activities from the initial customer contact to the delivery of all desired products, services, and support.”

The ultimate improvement in a manufacturing business comes from examining every link in the Customer Chain® to reduce not just the direct time (signified by the point where each link touches) but also the time it takes for until the operation is done (the space inside the link). All the wait time in the chain represents indirect costs, which are usually 4 to 8 times as much as the direct costs. But often, these costs are ignored because they are hard to see. The Graham Charts provide the most effective way to visualize this loss of time and are vital to the Customer Chain® Improvement Process, which is performed in five steps:

- 1) Objectives: What results do you want?
- 2) Current State: Where are we now?
- 3) Action Plan: What should we do?
- 4) Implementation: Do it!
- 5) Evaluate: How are we doing?

Charting is a critical component of Step 2 by creating an effective way to see what is currently happening in a process and helping to create the most effective target for improvement. Charts are then used again at Step 5 to verify the success of the change or recalibrate the program if the desired results aren't there.

Process Charting and Time-Based Strategies

The ultimate tool for improvement is to use the data from a Graham Process Charts within the Customer Chain® Improvement Process to implement Quick Response Manufacturing (QRM). Companies that attain this level of Continuous Improvement have shown the ability to dramatically reduce lead times and create significant savings while providing the ultimate in customer service.

The Graham Process Charts can then provide a means for employees to examine their process routinely and find new ways to make improvements on their own. When guided by the goal to reduce lead times, an “Improvement Generator” emerges to continuously create effective change throughout the business.

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