

Tip Sheet: Forming Teams and Champions

1. Introduction

Many UK companies do not give waste management the same emphasis as activities such as production and sales. Yet, the true cost of waste can be as high as 10% of business turnover.

Minimising this cost improves profitability and helps to maintain business competitiveness. And, by being good for the environment, this management initiative should receive enthusiastic support from all employees.

A waste minimisation programme, incorporating Waste Prevention Reviews (WPR) can produce significant cost savings and other benefits for any company. However, it requires careful planning and co-ordination (ideally by a waste minimisation 'Champion') of groups of people working in teams.

The role of the Champion is crucial to a successful waste minimisation programme. It is also challenging. The Champion does not minimise waste, but seeks to motivate others to do so.

2. The role of the Champion

Waste minimisation requires significant co-ordination of activities, since to reduce waste in one area of a company may require action in other areas. The approach and methods used to initiate and sustain a waste minimisation programme have similarities with other management techniques such as Total Quality Management (TQM). The role of the Champion is to co-ordinate and facilitate. However, to be effective in promoting and implementing waste minimisation within a company, the Champion must have the support and commitment of senior management.

While the Champion is essential for the co-ordination of the waste minimisation programme, it is a team, or teams, of other employees who actually achieve results. The use of teams is borne out of necessity, the team must include those who know most about the manufacturing process and hence, the causes of waste. Involving people from an early stage of a waste minimisation initiative helps to develop the sense of 'ownership' of waste minimisation opportunities.

Implementing a waste minimisation programme in any company requires flexibility in the role of the Champion due to:

- the changing role of the Champion as waste minimisation 'takes hold' in the company;
- the size, nature, complexity and culture of the company;
- the need to interact with other functions, people and teams in the company;
- the waste minimisation targets that may be set by management; and
- the time required for the role and the level of support to be solicited from other people in the company.

Only by ensuring that employees from all areas are involved, can a company successfully integrate waste minimisation into its culture. Initially, the most effective way of achieving involvement is to recruit teams to carry out specific waste-related projects. The key point is to harness the powerful motivator 'involvement creates ownership'.

3. The role of the team

Teams need to be used throughout the waste minimisation programme to:

- carry out waste surveys (Waste Prevention Reviews) to identify problem areas;
- brainstorm particular problems to develop waste minimisation ideas;
- select the most feasible ideas; and
- implement the selected waste minimisation opportunities.

The number of teams will depend on individual company circumstances, e.g. size, number of processes, number of waste streams, the scale of the data collection exercise, the particular phase of the waste minimisation programme. Teams may be assigned to particular areas of the company, e.g.:

- a team for each production area or building;
- a team for each material or utility type, e.g. raw materials, consumables, electricity, water; and
- a team to address particular waste issues, e.g. material handling.

In addition, the team structure should not remain static. Typically, small teams of 4-8 people instigate the data surveys and review of ideas. These teams tend to grow as opportunities are identified. They may then split into a number of project or implementation teams.

4. Team members

A team that has been recruited to target a particular waste problem should ideally be cross-functional; people with different roles in a company will bring different experiences and ideas to the team. While it may seem logical to involve people who are directly concerned with the area under examination, it is often useful to invite the opinions of people who have little or no knowledge of the area. Such people can often suggest simple solutions to problems that a more experienced person, who may be 'too close to the action', can overlook.

A cross-functional approach is also helpful when waste minimisation opportunities are being implemented. This is especially true in large companies where barriers to implementing change may exist. With a cross-functional approach, departments can work together to implement solutions that are acceptable to everyone. In manufacturing industry, experience has shown that teams are most effective if they include employees from:

- engineering/utilities/site services responsible for the design, installation and maintenance of plant and equipment;
- production management responsible for scheduling and line management; and
- operatives who actually perform the day-to-day production tasks and who usually know most about activities that cause waste.

As the environmental pressures on industry increase, many companies have already recruited groups of people to examine environmental issues. These teams may be referred to as 'environmental teams', 'green teams', or 'quality improvement teams'. If such teams already exist, they can be involved in the waste minimisation programme; not only will they already have some knowledge of environmental issues, but they will also have demonstrated their willingness to help the company improve its performance. It is essential that all team members are trained sufficiently to enable them to carry out their tasks effectively. The type of training required will depend on the actions required and the phase of the waste minimisation programme.

5. Coordinating the teams

It should not be assumed that once the members of the teams have been recruited and trained the programme will automatically run smoothly. Participation in the team may be the first time some employees have ever worked together, or even met. Careful co-ordination by the Champion and time to learn to work together are needed for the team to work effectively. In addition, roles within the team may be different from usual line management responsibilities; co-ordination will thus require skill and diplomacy by the Champion. To be effective, the Champion must co-ordinate all activities carried out by the teams. This may involve:

- regular team meetings (fortnightly or monthly) with quarterly presentations to the Steering Group;
- weekly sub-team meetings, plus a monthly meeting of the full team; and
- the Champion liaising with team members individually and acting as the contact point between members (this may be necessary to cover shift patterns).

The way in which the Champion co-ordinates the activities of the teams will depend on local conditions and the management style of the company. It is important that the Champion is flexible enough to let the teams 'get on with it' and achieve results, but sufficiently dominant to ensure that deadlines are met.

The ability to help groups and teams to achieve their objectives is important. Here the important skills are:

- forming groups/teams that are effective;
- running meetings effectively;
- leading brainstorming sessions;
- using techniques like 'cause and effect' analysis to clarify and structure ideas; and
- resolving conflicts and obtaining consensus.

6. Managing teams

The basic management skills associated with planning and controlling activities are critical to the smooth running of a waste minimisation programme. These include:

- setting clear, achievable goals and objectives for teams;
- setting realistic timescales for project activities;
- identifying and planning resource needs, e.g. person-days, equipment, etc.;
- monitoring progress and holding team meetings to identify actions needed to correct any problems or delays;
- reporting progress to the Steering Group;
- collating information in a standard format for analysis and summary, e.g. data on waste minimisation opportunities; and
- 'standing back' from the detail of day-to-day activities to see if key areas are being neglected and/or to ensure that resources are being used effectively.

Beyond the first 18 months of a waste minimisation programme, there are three main options for the role of Champion, i.e.:

- establish it as a key role in the company, either on a full-time basis or as part of another job;
- rotate the role around individuals with other responsibilities in the company, perhaps every 18-24 months; and
- gradually eliminate the role by embedding waste minimisation into the company's culture and procedures.

The last option is the most challenging and difficult. Yet, in the long run, the companies who will benefit most from waste minimisation will be those that can eliminate the role of Champion by integrating it into company systems, because it will be 'owned' by everyone.

However, reaching this position is likely to take a considerable time and, until then, the role of the Champion is central to the success of waste minimisation in any company.

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