

Kaizen Blitz: Performance Improvement in a week!

Would you think it was possible, in the space of a week, to:

- Reduce the amount of movement of people and paperwork in a process by 80%?
- Reduce the work content of a process by 40%?
- Reduce process cycle-time by 90%?

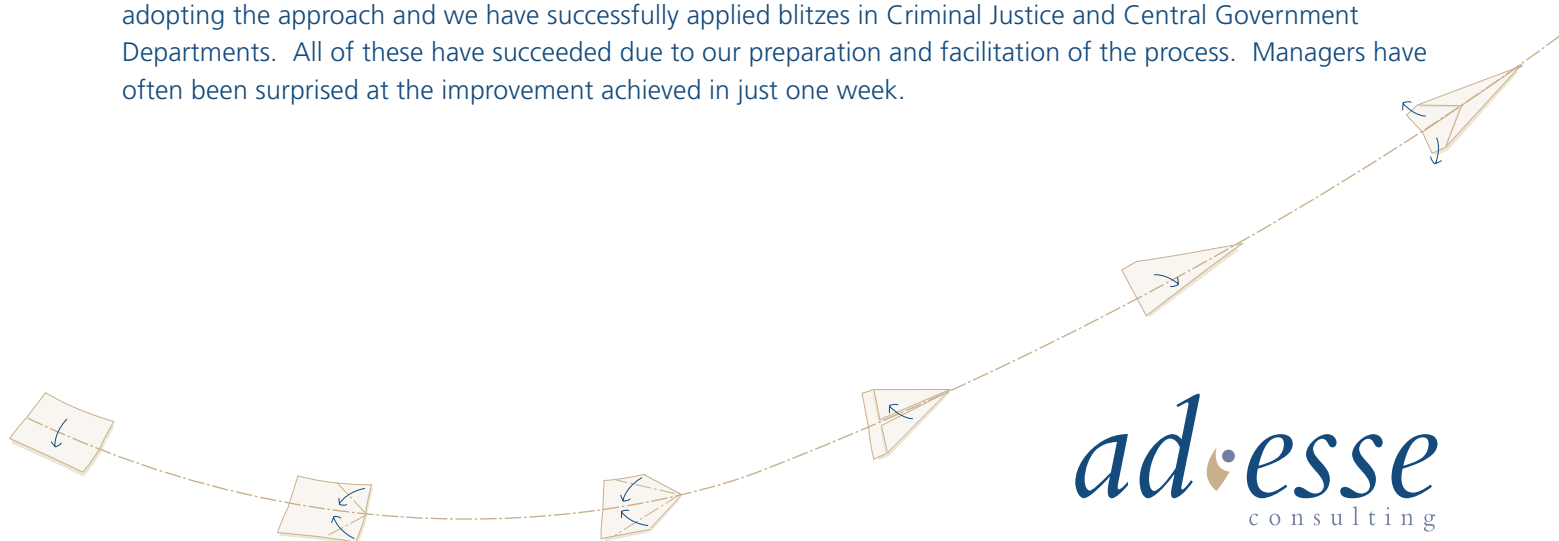
It may seem unlikely that you can achieve such rapid improvements, but the increasingly popular and powerful Kaizen Blitz provides an answer.

One of the frequent problems that we encounter when looking at how organisations tackle process improvement is that the projects they use to manage the improvement process are often stretched out over many months, with the teams meeting for one or two hours every week. By the time that improved performance comes through it is often far too long considering the time and effort put into the project.

The Kaizen Blitz approach is a fundamental technique that we use to achieve rapid performance improvements. It is a way for teams to carry out problem solving and process improvement, in a workshop environment, over a short timescale. Because the project is concentrated in a short time period it is also easier to use external facilitation and support than bringing a consultant for each team meeting, once per week.

By way of background, “Kaizen” comes from the Japanese and means “continuous improvement”. We all know that a “Blitz” is something that happens quickly (originally from the German “lightning” or “flash”). It sounds like a bit of an unlikely combination, particularly given the Japanese emphasis on sustained improvement over a long period of time. In fact, it brings together the best of continuous improvement tools/techniques, improvement projects and achieving significant results just when you need them (i.e. quickly).

Ad Esse consultants have facilitated hundreds of blitzes in private sector organisations as diverse as computer software, facilities management, media and manufacturing. Increasingly, our public sector clients are also adopting the approach and we have successfully applied blitzes in Criminal Justice and Central Government Departments. All of these have succeeded due to our preparation and facilitation of the process. Managers have often been surprised at the improvement achieved in just one week.



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Organisations where our consultants have run Blitzes include:

- A computer software company looking at their product testing process
- A PC manufacturing company looking at the 'kitting' process – preparing the boxes of accessories that accompany new computers; and another looking at the complaints process
- A Probation Service Area, looking at improving the speed of issuing a warrant against an offender for not turning up to an interview
- A media company wanting to design a new publishing process
- A lens manufacturer, looking at how orders were taken and processed in the sales admin office
- A Home Office Directorate, looking at the processing of application forms
- A Probation Service Area, looking to improve the performance of one of its programmes involving a cross-section of partner organisations

KEY FEATURES OF A BLITZ

- A four or five day event to deliver specific performance improvements
- Facilitated by one or two consultants who have strong process, analytical and change management skills
- The participants include all the right people to analyse the problem, develop improvement solutions and begin to implement them
- There is management commitment to the time and resources required, and to empower the Blitz team to "do what is needed" to achieve improvements
- Tangible benefits are often visible immediately and are certainly visible within weeks of the Blitz

ENSURING SUCCESS

As with most improvement activities, preparation is key. We work with a client to:

- Identify a senior management sponsor for the event
- Scope out the improvements required, including specific SMART objectives which the team must achieve, and any constraints that apply
- Gather available data and process information that will be needed during the Blitz
- Select and brief the team and other key stakeholders

You might think it is a huge commitment of people, but it's unlikely to be more expensive than running the same project over several months. Where the aim of the project is to reduce cycle-times, another week of delay is probably insignificant! And, you get the results sooner, so there are savings from earlier implementation of results.

THE BLITZ EVENT

Typical Blitzes last for 4–5 days, depending on the scope and complexity of the issue being addressed. Day 1 usually covers the basic principles and tools to be adopted during the Blitz, an introduction by the sponsoring manager and some initial definition of the issue. It also includes some training to help participants recognise the features of a 'good' and 'bad' process so that they are able to identify strengths and areas for improvement in their process.

The middle day(s) are where the majority of the analysis (e.g. process mapping, data analysis) is done. The team may also engage with other key stakeholders or partners, to get their perspective and buy-in.

Having worked through the “as is” situation, the team move on to develop workable solutions, test them out and make decisions on what will really work, in practice. It is not unusual for the team to:

- Redesign forms and paperwork
- Develop new operating procedures and checklists
- Re-arrange the office or factory layout
- Re-arrange desks, machine or equipment positioning
- Re-organise filing and record systems
- Develop new training and skills matrices
- Establish key performance measurements to track success

On the final day, the team pulls together what it has achieved, its recommendations, a communication plan and a presentation to the sponsoring manager and other relevant people and senior managers who will be involved in supporting any ongoing implementation.

POST BLITZ SUPPORT

Following the Blitz event, there may be a need for coaching support to key players as the solutions get implemented. We often work alongside line managers and team members, as necessary, to provide further guidance.

Many of our clients’ Blitz events are focussed on delivering specific improvements in key processes. Not only can we facilitate these events, but we also bring strong analytical capabilities to help develop a clear insight into causes of current performance. We have improved hundreds of processes and can often help the teams ‘think outside the box’ when looking at how to tackle the process problems confronting them.

We also transfer skills to our clients’ people during the Blitz event, so they can sustain the improvements and do more in the future.

BENEFITS ACHIEVED IN BLITZES

In Ad Esse we have many examples of improvements following a Blitz event. Those listed here reflect typical process analyses and improvements:

Mortgage Processing Office

- Before Blitz, people spent on average 25% of time on non-value adding activities:
 - o Some people spending over 30% of their time in motion
 - o Applications being “lost” in the flow somewhere
 - o Work in progress between stages that were not balanced
- After the Blitz, office equipment and tables moved to fit process flow
- Use of coloured binders and coloured fax paper
- Stages balanced through minimal retraining
- Target response of 4 hours met 95%+ rather than 75%
- Movement cut 80%
- Customers reported greater satisfaction with service

Internal Customer Complaints Process

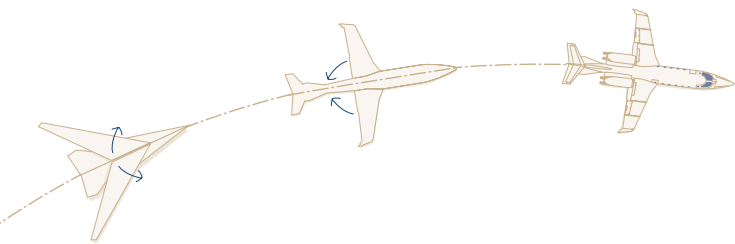
- Before the blitz, the process was not treated with a focus on time; customer complaints were batched
- After the blitz, the average time to deal with complaints reduced 50%
- Longest time to treat complaints reduced by over 90%
- Work content of average complaint reduced 40%

Probation Area Programme Improvement

- Staff re-deployment and improved partnership working (deployment of agreed protocols) has seen capacity grow to 109% of target
- Process analysis identified need for standardisation of paperwork between three offices, which has been achieved
- Difficulties experienced in time delays during handoffs with partnerships have improved owing to agreed protocols and expectations with regard to timescales
- Staff satisfaction with the process was measured using a team health audit tool. Favourable results have been recorded:
Staff satisfaction up 18%
Inter-team relations up 11%
- Feedback from all staff involved highlighted the benefits of involvement in BPI. In particular the sense of ownership and responsibility which allowed staff to feel involved and in greater control of the way in which they worked.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on how to deliver rapid improvements using Kaizen Blitzes, please contact us at: seriousfun@ad-esse.com



FURTHER INFORMATION

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