



CabinetOffice

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT – A STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

Continuous improvement is an approach in which all staff seek out, support and implement changes to make the services and products we provide better quality and more cost-effective. The potential benefits of continuous improvement are substantial, and all the more valuable at a time when financial budgets are severely constrained. Through making better use of our own and others' expertise we can make a significant difference to our work's quality, cost-effectiveness and impact.

Context

The Cabinet Office's federated structure, coupled with its strong group/unit focus make creating a corporate culture of continuous improvement more difficult. On the other hand, staff engagement and confidence in managing change are improving and the fact that the cross-government centre of excellence for continuous improvement is sited within the department offers the prospect of unrivalled access to emerging good practice.

Vision

- We want to become an organisation that learns from its experiences and from others', capitalising on the lessons of successes and failures to improve our performance month-on-month and year-on-year.
- Our work centres on strategy, policy and coordination. For that reason, we want the Cabinet Office to be an exemplar for excellence in policy development and implementation, co-ordination of government action and support for Ministers.
- Because of our role and position at the heart of government, the effect of the improvements we make will be felt across government and by citizens throughout the UK.

Aims

The aims of the Cabinet Office continuous improvement strategy are to:

- Strengthen our collective ability to learn and to reap and apply the benefits of that learning, making available tools and materials that will help staff use continuous improvement in their work, and building challenge and feedback mechanisms into approvals and review processes;
- Create an environment in which continuous improvement is a significant and growing influence on our work, so that over time it becomes an integral and indispensable part of it;

- Deliver measurable benefits in terms of efficiency; and
- Improve our effectiveness in achieving our strategic objectives.

Measures of success ('What would good look like?')

Our overall measures of success are:

- Achieving our strategic objectives for 2015 on or ahead of time and at or below budget, while responding positively and flexibly to new challenges;
- Meeting or exceeding our efficiency targets.

Success measures relating specifically to continuous improvement include:

- Improving our rating against the Cabinet Office continuous improvement assessment criteria (see annex);
- Improving knowledge of our customers (by which we mean internal and external customers and stakeholders, for example, public users of our services, Ministers, other parts of government and our delivery partners) to achieve improving customer satisfaction scores and user feedback;
- Improving our people survey scores (*e.g. we work together to improve our service, are encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things and are safe to challenge the way things are done; change is managed well and is usually for the better and the Cabinet Office as a whole is managed well*);
- Sustaining and developing our staff suggestion scheme so that it becomes more dynamic, producing growing numbers of suggestions and evidence of improvements made.

In order to be successful we must:

- Recognise that we are not yet a learning organisation, in which we make best use of our collective knowledge and expertise;
- Ensure that senior staff show leadership and commitment both in what they say and what they do;
- Strengthen managers' commitment to improve what we do and how we do it;
- Ensure staff are empowered to suggest and pursue potential improvements;
- Put systems in place to capture learning, building on the experience of systems already operating in some parts of the organisation, and require that decisions are based on it (drawing on evidence both of what does and what does not work); and

- Find ways of measuring and explaining the benefits of continuous improvement and sharing lessons learnt.

Roles and responsibilities

Every member of staff in the Cabinet Office is responsible for learning, and for contributing to continuous improvement. The senior sponsor for continuous improvement is Bruce Mann, reporting to the Executive Management Committee.

Actions

Short term actions include:

- Identifying recent, current and forthcoming opportunities to assess and present improvement projects through the lens of continuous improvement;
- Identifying areas in which we currently gather (or plan to gather) customer feedback on our public-facing activities;
- Identifying early projects (including those already under way, see below for the current list of suggestions) that can be used to build our knowledge and experience of improvement techniques and generate evidence of the benefits in the Cabinet Office context;
- Building awareness of continuous improvement and the knowledge and take-up of learning and development opportunities (e.g. available through Civil Service Learning);
- Inviting expressions of interest in taking part in training and projects, and capitalising on that energy to build a growing group of skilled staff;
- Improving engagement with departments (building on ERG's recent piloting of better relationship management arrangements with DWP, DfT, MoJ and MoD) to provide feedback on performance; and
- Sharing our approach with our closest departmental partner, HM Treasury, to explore pooling expertise and development plans.

Medium and longer term actions would be designed in the light of the outcome of the above but would be likely to include:

- Drawing up specific measures of success and a benefits realisation strategy;
- Establishing and supporting a Cabinet Office (or Cabinet Office/HM Treasury) community of practitioners;
- Raising continuous improvement's profile in performance appraisals, etc., and considering whether and how to put specific responsibilities on senior staff to show leadership and commitment to it;
- Developing a more ambitious rolling programme of continuous improvement projects.

Projects

Initial areas for improvement work are set out below.

Area	Description
Private Office processes	Building on the work that is already under way, to look at the handling of correspondence and PQs, learning from other departments and potentially piloting/exporting improved processes across Whitehall.
ERG controls	Assessing external perspectives on ERG processes and working in partnership with colleagues in other departments to reduce unnecessary requirements and other bureaucracy.
Staff change requests	Design and implement a streamlined process for joiners, leavers and movers, reducing the burden on line managers so that they complete one notification rather than several (ICT, security check, building pass, shared services, etc.) when changes occur.
Shared services	Design and implement improvements to shared services, ensuring as far as possible within the system's design that it better fits the needs of staff and line managers.

Risks

Risks to implementation and measures to address them are summarised below.

Risk	Mitigation
Low engagement with continuous improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the potential benefits • Secure Ministerial and senior official endorsement for the strategy, and continuing involvement in implementation • Create ways of rewarding improvement (e.g. through recognition, performance appraisal system, bonuses, etc.)
Expertise/resources not available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring in expertise from other departments to train our staff and help us gain practical experience • Require each unit to nominate a continuous improvement lead to undergo initial training and carry out early improvement projects • Consider, in the light of early implementation, creating a standing team of continuous improvement specialists to provide support across the department
Potential improvements 'blocked' without good reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require those opposing proposed improvements to set out their reasons in writing; summaries of the case for and against specific changes to be reported to EMC • Create ways of discouraging negative behaviours (e.g. through performance appraisal system)
Benefits not quantified or realised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with others (e.g. other departments, ERG's cross-governmental continuous improvement team) to develop quantification and realisation methods to use in the Cabinet Office's context.