



Clarity and measurability are essential in improvement work, says Ronnie Granlund.

The Building of an "Improvement Machine" that **Saves Millions**

Over the past two years, the Finnish company Snellman has established a systematic Six Sigma-based improvement process, sometimes referred to internally as an "improvement machine." This effort is already generating millions of euros in annual savings. Success is based on measurability, simplicity, engagement, and continuous improvement training.

SNELLMAN is a Finnish family-owned company based in Jakobstad, founded in 1951. It has 1,300 employees working in meat processing. *Ronnie Granlund*, the manufacturing director, explains how they have developed an improvement process to identify potential improvements and then execute targeted projects using the Six Sigma DMAIC methodology (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control).

The Importance of Measurable Results
– We discussed what a sufficiently productive and simple improvement process should look like for us. Today,

we have clarified the process, including roles, documentation, and more. Most importantly, we have made the improvement process measurable, making it possible to manage, says Ronnie Granlund.

He emphasizes the importance of measurability.

– It is crucial to demonstrate that improvement efforts deliver results. That's a language that management understands.

After each improvement project, a verification phase ensures that the expected results are achieved. This is also linked to specific cost categories,

making it clear how much has been saved in different areas, such as energy optimization.

Keeping It Simple

Initially, there was some resistance to the initiative, and numerous discussions took place regarding how the improvement process should be implemented and how all identified improvements should be documented.

– It was important not to overcomplicate things. It was also essential to listen to feedback while insisting on using this approach. I pointed out that if we don't follow the agreed-upon method,

we will never know if this is an effective way to improve, says Ronnie.

– It took surprisingly long to gain acceptance for this way of working, but once it was accepted, the improvement work started running much more smoothly.

Investing in Training

There is now a high level of engagement and understanding of improvement efforts at Snellman. The company has also invested significantly in training. Ronnie Granlund and two colleagues completed Sandholm Associates' Quality Manager Course. The work to establish the improvement process was carried out in parallel with this training and built upon the knowledge they gained.

– It was an advantage that several of us were immersed in the same knowledge. It provided a broad understanding and confirmation that we were on the right track. After that, we trained 55 employees as Yellow Belts, which gave the improvement work an extra boost, says Ronnie. Green and Black Belts training are now being conducted. More Yellow Belts are also being trained.

He also highlights the importance of structuring training properly. First, train key personnel to build the improvement system, and then train employees more broadly to sustain it. Otherwise, there is a risk that employees gain knowledge without having a functioning system in place to apply it effectively.

At Snellman, the management team also receives ongoing training. A leadership forum is held once a month, and management receives training sessions every two weeks, alternating between two themes: management processes and quality and improvement work, both fundamental pillars of the company's improvement strategy.

– These sessions allow us to regularly reflect on whether we are working on the right things.

Saving Millions Through Improvements

The benefits of the improvement process have already become evident over the past two years. Because the work is carefully measured, the company has a solid grasp of the figures.

– The current growth rate is 8.3 million euros in annual savings, realized through improvement activities. A total of 311 improvement projects or opportunities have been identified. So far, 156 projects have been completed and fully implemented. Ronnie explains that they currently have 45 active improve-

ment projects led by 26 different project managers.

These projects are targeted improvement initiatives driven by the Six Sigma DMAIC methodology. For example, the company has identified correlating factors and tested various methods to produce more efficiently and generate higher value. In one project on a production line, the proportion of second-grade products was reduced from 9.2% to 2%, resulting in a savings of 61,000 euros per year. In another project, the yield of a product was increased by 10%, resulting in an additional 200,000 euros in annual value.

Increased Job Satisfaction and Energy

Beyond financial gains, other positive results have emerged.

– There is increased engagement, job satisfaction, and a sense of purpose. Many employees understand that they can contribute, improve, and make a difference. Everyone has two jobs, to perform their tasks and to improve them.

– We now have a system for how we work with improvements. This allows us to better direct the energy and willingness to improve while making it much easier to work as a leader, says Ronnie.

He also stresses the ongoing need for leadership support and engagement in the improvement work.

– It is essential to continuously monitor how improvements are progressing, ensuring they deliver measurable results and maintaining a good pace in the improvement process. Although we have solid data to support our progress, it's still necessary to continually communicate about these efforts.

– Improvement work quickly becomes natural to yourself and your team, but you must also ensure that the entire management team continues to understand its importance. Everyone in the company must see the value of improvement work and the potential for further enhancements.

Potential improvements, inefficiencies, and solvable problems are identified in many ways. This includes discussing with staff, conducting internal and external benchmarking, analyzing deviations, using statistical tools, performing value stream analyses, and conducting audits.

Final Advice for Improvement Work

– You only gain real momentum in improvement work when you combine systematics, competence, and engagement. It's crucial to carefully consider how you want to lead and develop the

organization and to establish a standardized system for doing so. Don't waste energy on an indistinct system, concludes Ronnie Granlund.

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In Snellman's improvement work, Sandholm Associates has contributed with the Quality Manager Course and Black Belt training. In-house Yellow and Gren Belt training has also been provided.