

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND ITS COMMITMENT TO ACQUIRE BUSINESS EXCELLENCE THROUGH CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT *

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ABSTRACT

THIS research paper is an effort to recognize the key organizational structural practices which if approved and applied could prove tremendously effective in driving the organizations to attain business brilliance and excellence. Continuous Improvement needs to be practiced throughout the organization from management to employees under control and leadership. A practical and strategic tactic engaged by the executives in a best way for the growth of an organization and business attitude using continuous improvement as proved in the case study of Corus. Companies are usually familiar with the worth of continuous improvement (CI) in refining the performance; some have yet to improve the systems to guarantee that the efforts of the CI are intensive on concerns of strategic importance to any firm. Indeed, as documented in operations management, CI events can have an important influence on the expansion of strategy as well as its application that would probably lead toward business excellence. CI has strong relationships with TQM along with its elements to gain excellence. Further there is a strong relationship between strategic agility and continuous improvement as it continuously regulate and adapt strategic way in essential business, as a function of strategic ambitions and changing circumstances, and make not only new product and services, but also new business models and innovative methods to cope with external environmental factors and create worth for a firm.

1.0: INTRODUCTION

It is extensively decided that one of the fundamentals for continuous improvement achievement is a clear and strong strategic framework, which is visibly connected to all personnel together with the long-term and short-

term targets and landmarks linked to that (Imai, 1986; Bessant et al., 1994). Actions to guarantee that top administration strategies are implemented effectively throughout the firm have become known as policy deployment'. The traditional method for arranging strategy is top-down with

detailed tasks for understanding the goals allocated to lower level management of the firm.

Continuous improvement serves as a long-term business strategy to improve the business in terms of customer value and satisfaction, quality, speed to market, flexibility and reduced cost. Business excellence can be attained by firms which are able to respond instantly to new and diverse circumstances and customer needs and continually seeks for innovative solutions and continuous improvements in products and procedures. Firms need to constantly acclimate, develop and innovate. Numerous firms got started CI exercise in the day-to-day operations for example quality assurance, process improvement and defect reduction etc. In presently fluctuating and challenging financial environment, each business wants to be making enhancements and improvements in the daily operations. Triumph of a continuous improvement program is inclined by a number of organizational features. These features comprise: clear strategic outlines incorporating continuous improvement, a fundamental helping culture, an infrastructure that enables, a backup toolkit and further the need to strategically accomplish continuous improvement as a continuing procedure. Successful continuous improvement needs long-term organizational promise for the expansion of a reliable set of shared standards and beliefs.

1.1: AIM

The aim of this research paper is to study the strategic management and its commitment to acquiring business excellence through continuous improvement.

1.2: IMPORTANT TERMINOLOGIES

There are few terminologies which are required to be understood before analyzing the subject:

1.2.1: Strategic Management

Strategic management is defined as the process by which managers of the firm analyze the internal and external environments for the purpose of formulating strategies and allocating resources to develop a competitive advantage in an industry that allows for the successful achievement of organizational goals.

1.2.2: Business Excellence

Business Excellence can be described as a strong management level with all the key tools and knowledge of being successful. It involves having the resources to learn and solve problems. It may involve focusing on a team environment within your company and allowing for creative brainstorming. No matter what definition you choose, within our network we believe many areas help you achieve Business Excellence.

1.2.3: Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is an ongoing effort to improve products, services or processes. These efforts can seek "incremental" improvement over time or "breakthrough" improvement all at once.

1.2.4: Total Quality Management (TQM)

Total Quality Management (TQM) is an approach that seeks to improve quality and performance which will meet or exceed customer expectations. This can be achieved by integrating all quality-related functions and processes throughout the company.

1.2.5: Strategic agility

Strategic agility means learning to make fast turns and being able to transform and renew the company without losing momentum (Doz & Kosonen, 2008; Hamel & Välikangas, 2003). At best it will result in being able to produce the right

products and services at the right place at the right time at the right price for the right customers (Long, 2000).

2.0: LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of strategy is an ongoing need for practitioners, and an ongoing debate in the literature. The realization of some of the potential benefits of performance measurement simultaneously has led to the need to enhance our understanding of the impact that it has on strategic planning for continuous improvement that leads to business improvement and thus achieves an excellence level afterwards.

Strategic planning is the set of processes undertaken by an organization in order to develop a range of strategies that will contribute in achieving the organizational direction.

A regular performance measurement for continuous improvement is used to

1. Helps to direct the allocation of resources.
2. Assess and communicate progress that leads towards strategic objectives.
3. Evaluate the managerial performance.
4. Helps managers in order to identify good performance.
5. Provides a means that introduces individual strategic stretch targets.
6. Ensures that the corporate management knows when to intervene if the business performance is being deteriorated.

The need for organizations to align their strategies with simultaneous performance measurement systems seeking continuous improvement is well established in the literature.

Performance measurement was found to be one of the main factors that characterize the modern practice of strategic management and reveals to continuous improvement requiring areas thus committing business excellence. It revealed that it has significant influence in supporting the achievement of an organization's goals and the effectiveness and efficiency through continuous

improvement and thus appropriate strategic management process. An increase in complexity expressed either via the organizational size or via environmental turbulence, increases the need for information which can be provided by making the effective utilization of performance measurement that would lead to make required changes in the strategies to cope with the continuous changing environment through a continuous change process. Organizational excellence can be achieved by the organization by incorporating major organizational characteristics. Although, organizational excellence is always desired by all the stakeholders of business on the other hand employees and top management play a more constructive role in establishing organizational norms and values for driving the organization on the path leading to business excellence ensuring continuous improvement processes in their strategies.

Organizational learning can be described as the practice of continually generating, sharing and leveraging individual and collective learning experiences as not only a continual improvement process to improve organizational performance thus committing a profitable and flourishing business leading towards excellence but also learn from this on-going basis. It refers to learning the importance of success and speed in the ongoing process that what went right and which areas still need improvement, thus sharing the experiences to improve the motivation level.

Organizational strategy determines the organizational structure, which in turn influences the organization's performance. It refers to the relationship of TQM in context of quality assurance and continuous improvement with organizational performance. TQM is thus strongly recommended for strategic management from an operational level to a strategic level. Through customer feedback and quality assurance using continuous improvement under TQM as an organization's strategy customer loyalty is achieved and better performance as well. TQM significantly affects

organizational performance along with organizational strategies.

Strategic management within the small firms sector has remained limited rather the requirement being felt and importance being recognized reflecting their lack of long term vision. An entrepreneur is required in small firms to rather than owners trying to take strategic decisions. An entrepreneurial process that refers to recognizing opportunities, than seeking for resources to see the goals achieved and then access to suitable markets is required with entrepreneurs having a focus on changing market requirements in order to carry out continuous improvements on a regular basis for the firm's success regarding performance keeping in view the strategic triangle (strategy, structure, resources).

Continuous Improvement is often being referred by a Japanese word 'Kaizen' which means 'change for the better' and covers all the processes of an organization. Launching brand new facilities cost a lot therefore carrying out a continuous improvement in the existing setup as per changing requirements either with respect to increasing demands is a better yet a challenging option. It starts with management and under their leadership works down throughout the organization. Scheduling for each element of this process ensures that bottlenecks are kept to a minimum level and a minimizing waste i.e. Lean production is being referred. Its implementation can only be expected by facilitating the changes that are going to be involved in the process. Vision plan should include the set of milestones to be achieved setting business excellence as clear target. Key performance indicators and benchmarking serve helpful and consideration of benefits improve the motivation level.

Ensure that the best possible services to customers are being delivered from the available resources by continuous improvement considering it a key driver. Strategies should include continuous improvement to ensure customer satisfaction, maintaining organization and leading it towards

the best. Improvement should be planned considering all factors corporate planning, long term financial forecasting, risk mapping and being prepared for it, service improvement plans, strategic action plans to ensure the excellence. A proper framework should be developed to manage and deliver improvement, supporting customer involvement to ensure improvements through their feedbacks, give employees the awareness and understanding of continuous ongoing strategies to develop their interest, ensure employees appropriate performance by keeping the outcome reporting in the plan of the organization.

Continuous improvement refers to getting better all the time to achieve beneficial results for the organizations ensuring that the areas being focused for improvement are the required ones. Thus this ongoing change process gradual, incremental or breakthrough is an aspect of TQM. Evaluating the current position helps formulating the strategies to be adopted; everyone in the organization is responsible to carry it to maintain the competitive edge for an organization. Motivating employees by rewards ensure their commitment to work.

CI and planning strategies are organizational learning processes. The strategic planning process reflects the new ways of managing change, controlling costs and improving quality. Continuous quality improvement (CQI) tools and processes provide strategies for management of change and a framework for effective strategic planning. Strategic planning provides the framework for defining the mission, vision and goals whereas continuous quality improvement provides principles and tools for guiding the planning and improvement processes leading towards performance improvement.

TQM is mainly concerned with continuous improvement in all work processes, from high level strategic planning and decision-making, to detailed execution of the work elements.

There is no single formalization that integrates success though continuous improvement helps gain a competitive advantage.

Business excellence lives up to its promise to sustain through an approach of continuous improvement. Organizations have to continuously improve and up to date the strategies according to the external environmental changes using strategic agility.

Continuous improvement strategies help utilize resources in best possible ways. It requires commitment towards work by every single member with a well-defined assigned task through framework and time to time checking through a maturity level.

Continuous improvement using information Technology towards Excellence aimed at the development of software-aided tools to support companies in SME's with the development of sustained CI process following the top down process for goal setting and feedback on the company's performance to start and continue improvement activities. It must be set by top management, thus performance measures would help them allocate deprived areas for improvement.

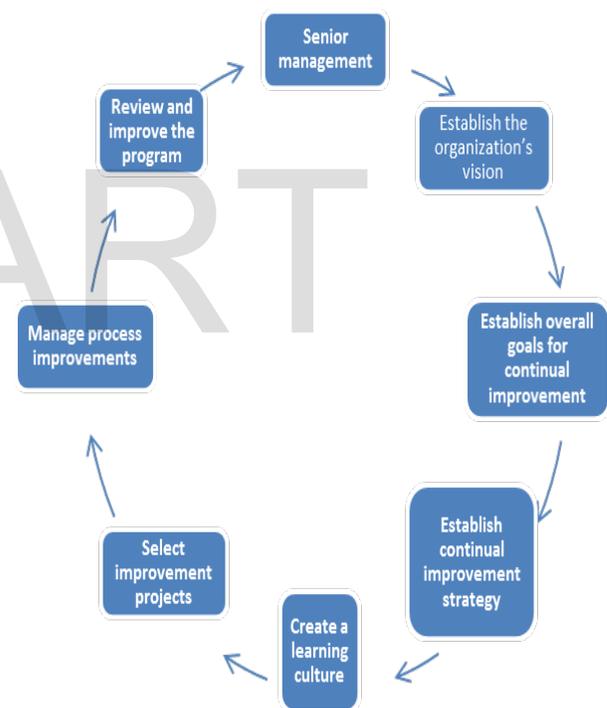
Management should not only focus on the areas of well-established goals but also tend to identify the areas that become hurdles to achieve them by taking continual process measures.

A companywide process of focused and continuous incremental innovation refers to a continuous improvement process. It is required at all levels of an organization that must include all operational levels that must ensure fast throughput time, cost effectiveness and valued quality.

To compete with intense competition and have a competitive advantage over the competitors the continuous improvement culture needs to be sustained with different strategies to move towards business excellence.

3.0: A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT, ITS IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPORTANCE IN THE ORGANIZATIONS

A structured approach for the sake of applying an organizational continuous improvement program is given below. While individual continuous improvement plans could be effective in an organization, larger achievement can usually be attained through an organization-wide synchronized method which is related thoroughly to the objectives of the organization and its business plan.



As soon as ordered improvements get effectively applied, senior administration should govern which new significance plans should get started. Implementation of the Continuous Improvement Viewpoint across people and procedures breeds organizational and executive success throughout the organization. This itself is a strategy to attain the business excellence.

Continuous improvement is very significant because it pursues to improve and expand the products, services and procedures in order to improve competitiveness and modest position in an economy. This can be attained by improving excellence, effectiveness, innovation or any component that can be vibrant to whichever system being constituted. Continuous Improvement refers basically to a concept that is about becoming the best in the field one happens to be in.

4.0: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN TQM AND ITS ELEMENTS TO GAIN EXCELLENCE

TQM is primarily concerned with continuous improvement in all work, from high level strategic planning and decision-making to comprehensive implementation of the work elements in any organization.

A vital principle of TQM is that errors may be made by individuals, but maximum of them are produced, or at least allowed, by defective systems and procedures being used. This refers to the root cause of such errors that can be recognized and removed, and recurrence can be prohibited by altering the procedure.

There are three major tools of deterrence:

1. Preventing mistakes (defects) from occurring (mistake-proofing or poka-yoke).
2. Where mistakes can't be absolutely prevented, detecting them earlier to prevent being passed down the value-added chain.
3. Where mistakes recur, stopping production until the process gets corrected, to prevent the production of more defects.

4.1: The Primary Elements

Total quality management can be shortened as a management system for a customer-focused firm

that includes all personnel in the continuous improvement.

4.1.1: Customer-focused

The customer ultimately determines the level of quality.

4.1.2: Total employee involvement

All employees make participation in working toward common goals. High-performance work systems integrate continuous improvement efforts with normal business operations.

4.1.3: Process-centered.

A fundamental part of TQM gets focus on process being centered. A process is a series of steps that take inputs from suppliers (internal or external) and transform them into outputs that are delivered to customers. The steps required to carry the process are defined, and performance measures are continuously monitored in order to detect the unexpected variation which can be faced.

4.1.4: Strategic and systematic approach

A very critical part of the management of quality is the strategic and systematic approach for achieving an organization's vision, mission, and goals. This process, called strategic planning or strategic management, includes the formulation of a strategic plan that integrates quality as its core component.

4.1.5: Continuous improvement

A main thrust of TQM is continuous improvement in process. Continuous improvement drives a firm to be both analytical and creative in finding ways to become more competitive and more effective in its market.

4.1.6: Fact-based decision making

In order to know how healthy a firm is performing, data on performance measures are necessary to be collected. TQM requires that an organization continually collect and analyze data in order to improve and achieve decision making accuracy, and allow prediction based on past history.

4.1.7: Communications

During times of organizational change, as well as part of day-to-day operation, effective communications plays a large part in maintaining morale and in motivating employees at all levels within an organization.

5.0: CRITICAL FACTORS IN CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Brotherton and Shaw (1996) describe critical factors as vital features that must be attained by the firm and these areas will yield the competitive advantage. In this article, the critical factors are actions, tactics, methods, tools and techniques that contribute to the success of continuous improvement. Bessant et al. (1994) argue that there are some critical factors for successful continuous improvement as:

- **Strategy:** Continuous improvement must be incorporated within the firm’s strategy. Continuous improvement actions also need to be well-organized having goals, landmarks and a communication system with a set mind.
- **Supportive culture:** Continuous improvement standards must be stimulated by the firm. The idea that everybody has something to contribute must be part of the organizational culture.
- **Infrastructure:** Accepting organizational structures, which endorse well-organized communication and decentralized

decision making system includes infrastructure.

- **Process:** Accepting learning or problem solving procedures constitute process.
- **Tools:** The accessibility of problem-solving tools is of great advantage in supporting personnel implement continuous improvement.

CATAGORIES	CRITICAL FACTORS
Organization and operation	New behaviors and values Leadership Employee involvement Cooperation and integration Communication system Promotion of CI activities Problem solution models and skills Organizational support
Incentive systems	Personal characteristics Company skills for employee involvement Motivation Formal and informal rewards
Support tools	Problem solution models and skills Standardization tools Problem identification tools

6.0: A CASE STUDY: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM AT CORUS STEEL

6.1: Introduction

Corus is a steel manufacturing company and it is a subsidiary of Tata steel. Its emphases on meeting the requirements of its worldwide consumers and providing innovative solutions. Corus has steel manufacturing facilities in Scunthorp; its manufacturing covers 2,000 acres and employs 5,500 people. The site consumes 6.5 million tons of iron ore and 2million tons of coal each year to produce 4.3 million tons of steel products. In a major building project, such as a shopping complex, the cost of the steel can be as little as 5% of the overall cost of the project, because of these issues, Corus needs to differentiate its business from its competitors in order to continue to grow.

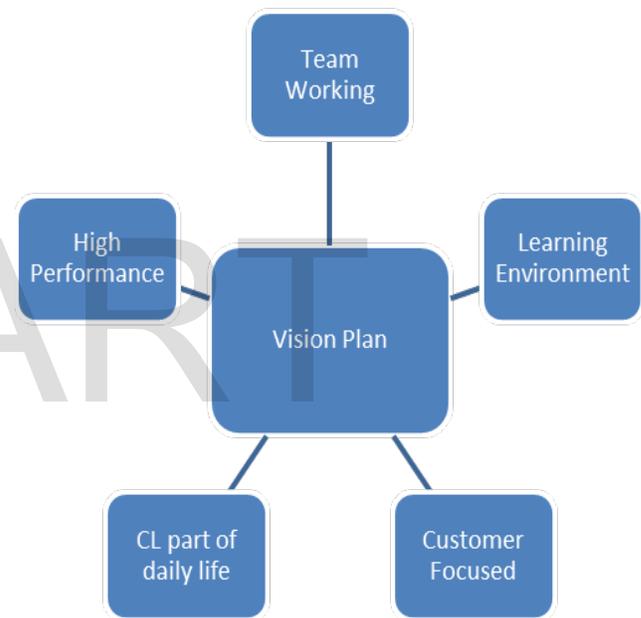
6.2: Corus business strategy

The Corus business strategy is to produce quality steel to fulfill consumer necessities, concentrating on distributing products at the right time in order to safe profitable business. A crucial task is to meet the increasing demands for more steel, at increasing levels of quality and to comply with more demanding delivery requirements. It would be straightforward to meet these challenges using brand-new facilities. However, a new 'green field site' steel mill could cost more than £300 million to build. Corus therefore needs to make process efficiencies and quality and delivery improvements to its existing manufacturing plant. This presents challenges when older facilities are not well structured to use modern manufacturing techniques and processes.

6.3: Implementation of continuous improvement culture in Corus

In Corus, a continuous improvement manager coordinates the process. 40 continuous improvement chosen workforce received training

to facilitate improvements. Corus continuous improvement has put together a 'toolbox' of techniques, which the coaches use with managers, employees and operators. These help everyone understand where and how they can improve their work. Corus has set out a 5-year vision improvement plan, which will help in the process of developing a continuous improvement culture of the business. Everyone in the organization has to understand and actively support the plan. Workshops for all employees have taken place to explain the vision and why the change is necessary if CCI is to remain competitive.



With the help of the continuous improvement plan workers have drawn maps of their processes. These show the links between the stages of manufacturing as well what information flow is needed.

6.4: Target setting

The continuous improvement trainers support the crews and individuals and endorse or 'champion' new methods of working. In order to benefit employees admit the changes, the 5-year plan recognized a timeline for the program of introducing change. The team and individuals are

empowered to take responsibility and make decisions for them.

6.5: Key performance indicators

A significant part of the Continuous Improvement program was the formation of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Corus has set new KPIs, which emphasis on meeting customer targets, such as:

- A zero backlog of customer orders - this means consumers always get their deliveries on time.
- Meeting targets for rolling steel plate in its allotted week.
- Corus monitors and measures how its processes relate with other producers and opponents in the steel industry. This process of benchmarking means that Corus is continually reviewing its activities to achieve best practice. Corus shares appropriate data both within and across Corus to drive improvement.

6.6: Outcomes

Corus established the new steel product to help it win the Royal Navy contract. As a result, it benefited in many ways as a side effect of the changes:

By using its existing CI procedures to guide its research and development and testing, Corus developed the new specification of steel required at a competitive price.

- Investment in new technologies and equipment, used alongside lean production techniques, enabled Corus to minimize levels of waste and reduce high manufacturing costs.

- It was able to meet customer deadlines, a vital element of making business operations more competitive.
- Corus adopts a practice of benchmarking as part of its continuous improvement plan. It shares its best practice across the industry.

Steel products for this industry require approval by shipping classification societies, such as Lloyds Register of Shipping. By meeting the higher specification, Corus gained Lloyds Register approval for the new steel plate it developed for the Royal Navy. This approval means that Corus can offer these high quality steels to other customers. This expands its customer base. Its investment in CI systems, research and development and the use of its employees' knowledge have provided Corus with a distinct competitive advantage.

6.7: Conclusion

In a competitive industry, businesses need to use all the resources they have, together with skills and knowledge. Continuous improvement at Corus delivers a procedure in which everyone can play a part in moving the business forward. Working in teams empowers personnel to share their thoughts and knowledge. New product development may involve risk, such as capitalizing time, resources and money in new technologies. Though, it also generates business openings. Continuous improvement has helped Corus to meet the Royal Navy's progressively sophisticated necessities for high specification steel products. Yet, in meeting these requirements, it has also unlocked extra business occasions. By captivating this agreement, Corus is currently capable to make this higher-grade steel accessible as part of its product portfolio. As a long-term strategy, it will help the business to outpace its opponents and raise its market share. It ambitions to expand operational

demands to accomplish customer hopes and outperform competitors.

7.0: STRATEGIC AGILITY AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Strategic Agility will become the final competitive advantage, empowering businesses to leapfrog the competition to become the new market leaders.

Today's business leaders need to be capable to adapt to altering circumstances, particularly when those fluctuations are going to last at the pace of the improvement and accomplishment. This means leaders need not only to be able to verbalize, communicate and implement strategy, but also need to be able to adapt and grow their business model choices.

This is the reason that the idea of strategic agility is quickly becoming important for supporting high-performance in active working situations.

In an age of unstable market variations, our strategic agility, thinking, and strategic planning solutions help to exploit the performance and growth accordingly. To effectively anticipate and address developing styles, complete strategic management abilities are vital at each stage of the business. The skill to grow and take strategies from plan to action sets the high performers apart from the ordinary and puts moneymaking businesses ahead of those which are incapable of holding the speed of variation, innovation and change.

8.0: STRATEGIC AGILITY: NEW THOUGHTWARE FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

- ✓ The business landscape is fluctuating quickly. The speed is rushing. It is a time of instability and doubt, but also a time of extraordinary and unexpected opportunity.

- ✓ Market leaders in the New Economy will be those companies that have refined and superior strategic agility.

- ✓ A strategically agile company is focused, fast and flexible. It is resilient and receptive, innovative and inspired.

- ✓ Strategic Agility is produced through the mixture of 3 organizational abilities:

A: Strategic Sensing

The ability to recognize, anticipate and quickly respond to changing market Conditions—proactively and reactively.

B: Organizational Fitness

The strength, speed, flexibility and resilience needed to succeed in an increasingly turbulent market and competitive business environment.

C: Shared Accountability

Engagement, commitment and alignment of organizational behavior accomplish common objectives.

- ✓ The dares of a dynamic and vibrant business atmosphere claim a team-based, combined approach to Strategic Planning which emphasizes business leaders on the growth and expansion of these capabilities.

9.0: SUGGESTIONS

Strategic management is not an easy, step by step process. It is not linear, but a messy, interactive process that requires hard work and dedication from all people in the organization to move it towards a competitive position. These suggestions can be supportive to firms in order to plan an efficient strategic management process through

continuous improvement. Effective action strategies as a result of Continuous Improvement will significantly support the leaders of firms in attaining the strategic initiatives towards strategic management, advantages and emerging measurable and trainable operational procedures.

9.1: Communicate expectations

All hopes of the personnel, management, consumers and other stakeholders should be communicated well, clearly and frequently in order to improve the culture of continuous improvement.

9.2: Deliver information and training

Continuous development needs progression in knowledge, awareness and skills. Schedule ongoing training programs should be announced with the help of which individual skills and abilities will be recognized that are compulsory for the continuous improvement and offer openings for the group members to build up the skills and abilities to cope with the environment.

9.3: Assess knowledge and skills

Corporate team should use the assessment tools to gauge the progress of the individuals.

9.4: Explain to everyone why they matter

People need to identify that their contributions would make a difference. Their concepts, ideas, queries and opinions are all significant contributions that can possibly make new and more creative and innovative methods of doing things.

9.5: Provide encouragement in order to develop a culture of continuous improvement

Applause individuals when they demonstrate progress and growth in the mastery of a precise skill being developed and practiced. This becomes significant when they have worked hard to learn and improve. The firm should hold the appreciation ceremonies, openly applaud the individuals, establish the incentive and motivation programs and propose the promotions for the sake of continuous improvements.

9.6: Allow room for experimentation and mistakes

People study through a course of trial and error; let the team members feel that while excellence and brilliance is the final goal, attaining it may include experimentation, investigation and imperfection so the factor of frustration gets prevented.

10.0: CONCLUSION

This research offers a number of significant insights. These comprise of:

Organizations feel to focus on the process of continuous improvement so they would be rated high on the Business Excellence scale as well as have high levels of performance. Advantages should be considered to be distributed to numerous stakeholders including Employees, Customer and the organization itself.

An organization's ability to react to its changing environment, termed Strategic Agility, should be found to have a positive relationship with the performance of the organization to gain business Excellence positively correlates with Strategic Agility, which in turn is correlated with higher levels of performance.

For private sector organizations, reputation, brands and the customer base are also important sources of advantage and for public sector organizations, the culture of the organization and

the service providers are also important sources of advantage.

Improvement activities should be deployed top-down at all organization levels, especially since the cause of insufficient performance can usually be found only through a careful analysis of primary, management and support processes. A bottom-up process of providing feedback information on goal achievement is another cornerstone of a full policy deployment process.

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