



Kaizen Tools to Improve Government (Excerpts from the Results Iowa effort to improve government)

Kaizen is a Japanese-inspired process used by the world's most innovative private sector companies to improve customer service by providing rapid, dramatic new efficiencies and performance improvements. There is also an Iowa connection. The principles underlying Kaizen were first articulated by Sioux City-native Edward Deming.

In the spring of 2003, the Iowa Coalition for Innovation and Growth approached the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) with concerns about the length of time it was taking businesses to get "new source review" air quality construction permits. Even though the DNR Air Quality Bureau was issuing about 2,000 permits annually the time to process standard construction permit of 62 days, needed to be reduced. To address the problem, the Coalition proposed using the Kaizen methodology. (They even agreed to finance it.)

Here's what happened. Clear goals were set, and then the employees and customers came together for one week. By the end of the week, they had designed and implemented a new process to accomplish the goals. That included changing reporting relationships, moving desks, routing calls, etcetera. The results were startling. The 62 days became six days. The increased efficiency allowed the department to do more with existing resources, enabled staff to focus on mission critical work, helped to maintain or reduce the cost of government, and build partnerships with the private sector. Importantly, no environmental standards were compromised in the process.

For the next few years, Iowa Coalition member businesses continued to partner with the state to drive waste out of key processes and enhance working relations and understanding. Since the first event in 2003, 33 events have been held by 12 departments. Saving time and maintaining standards allows your government to be more responsive and better able to utilize the resources available to focus on issues Iowans care about. For a list of examples of the time saved due to our efforts to improve, go to the ResultsIowa home page and click on Featured Result. Here are just three illustrative examples

- The Civil Rights Commission was able to increase the number of investigations completed by 40%.
- 17,600 days were saved by reducing the time to process General Service contract renewals from 23 days to 1.1 days.
- Corrective action decisions on Leaking Underground Storage Tanks now take 90 days instead of 1,124 days.

Kaizen does not sacrifice quality or regulatory protection but it does change customer expectations and our view of what we do...Government does not have to equal bureaucracy.

We have made a firm commitment to continue this public-private partnership and establish a state government Kaizen promotion office. Resources in the Iowa Department of Management have been dedicated to helping agencies target key processes with Kaizen and other process improvement efforts.