Abstract

This article discusses the use of work teams at Varian Australia, a manufacturing organisation based in Melbourne, Australia. The company manufactures high-technology instruments that are largely exported to the USA and Europe. The paper describes the experiences of the company with continuous improvement process teams (CIP) and corrective action team (CATs) over a decade, from 1990 to 2000. The article discusses the reasons for the slow down of the process improvement program and the appropriate changes that were made to relaunch the continuous improvement strategy at Varian Australia. Based on the qualitative analysis in this article, a number of interesting lessons can be learned. The main lesson is that voluntary, cross-functional teams are more effective than compulsory membership, as team members are motivated to work towards their goals and better understand the processes. Team members found that by working together the result of their combined effort was much greater than the combined results of their individual efforts. This approach reduced the product development cycle on Varian projects by up to 50%.
Keywords
Continuous improvement process; Continuous improvement process teams; Corrective action teams; Australia
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