**Supervisor Development Program**

Continuous Improvement Problem Definition and Why Solve this Now

A good problem statement:

1. Identifies the problem.
2. Includes supporting facts/data by quantifying or qualifying the problem.
3. Identifies the impact the problem has on the organization.

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| **Aspects of a Good Problem Definition** | **Sample Idea 1** | **Sample Idea 2** | **Your Ideas** |
| **Identify the problem you are trying to solve.**  (Transfer your best thought from DOWNTIME and TEAM above and add what you instinctively know to be the most pressing problem. If your improvement tries to address several problems, this will cause confusion later and may be as sign you’re trying to “boil the ocean.” Pick one problem your process improvement capstone seeks to address.) | *Amount/Errors: How many times do we have to go back and correct payroll after it’s processed?*  *As supervisor, I know it is a problem because each bi-weekly pay period, central payroll staff complain about how much time it takes to go back and correct errors. This is waste.* | *Time: How long does the streets operator spend at the tipping floor before leaving?*  *As staff working at the transfer station, I can see that a line of operators often sit waiting in a line to drop off their load onto the floor before getting back to their route. This is waste.* |  |
| **Quantify or qualify the problem.**  (Get as clear and measurable as possible with how big your problem is. Do you have the numbers on the current state now? If not, present your instinctive knowledge to qualify the problem and describe how you plan to capture the current state before reporting out on 11/10/2021.) | *I believe this problem occurs at least twice a pay period. I do not have exact data at this time. My plan is to survey my staff in central payroll regarding the months of September – October to quantify the problem before 11/10/2021.* | *I see a line of machine operators waiting a couple times per day. Given there is video footage of the area, I plan to review one day’s data to approximate the problem.* |  |
| **Impact on the organization.**  (Why is this change needed now? What value(s) are you embodying through this process improvement (equity, civic engagement, well-being, shared prosperity, stewardship)? Describe the potential future state if this problem is addressed.) | *As stewards of public resources, payroll should be processed accurately. City of Madison staff deserve to be paid accurately and in a timely manner. If this change is made now, time will be saved for central payroll staff and employee satisfaction with our service may increase.* | *I have the responsibility of stewarding the maintenance of the tipping floor and have the opportunity to address a waste I see on a daily basis where machine operators are waiting in line. Time and money can be saved if waiting is addressed.* |  |

**Put it all together.** Make a pitch for your Continuous Process Improvement capstone that clearly defines your problem and why it’s important to solve now.

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| **Sample Idea 1** | ***Good***: The problem I am trying to solve within my unit is the time we spend re-working payroll after payments have been issued. This is important to solve now because all staff should be paid accurately and in a timely manner.  ***Better***: With our organizational value of stewardship in mind, the problem I am trying to solve within my unit is reducing the 2.5 hours spent per pay period by three payroll staff re-working payroll after payments have been issued. This is important to solve now because it represents approximately $8,000 in wasted time per year to ensure all employees can be paid accurately and in a timely manner. (*Calculated by* [*Principal Accountant wage*](https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/MadisonWi/classspecs) *($45/hr) times 2.5 hours for processing times 3 employees times 2 payroll periods per month times 12 months*) |
| **Sample Idea 2** | ***Good***: The problem I am trying to solve within my agency is the amount of time machine operators spend waiting in line at the tipping floor. This is important to solve now because waiting is a waste identified in the 8 Wastes (DOWNTIME).  ***Better***: With our organizational value of stewardship in mind, the problem I am trying to solve within my agency is the 12 minutes spent on average by three machine operators waiting in line to offload onto the tipping floor on a daily basis. This is important to solve now because this waiting represents approximately $4,000 in wasted time per year. (*Calculated by* [*Machine Operator wage*](https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/MadisonWi/classspecs) *($28/hr) times (12/60) minutes times 5 days per week times 4 weeks per month times 3 operators*) |
| **Your Ideas** | **Good includes**: Concise description of the problem and why it’s important to solve now.  **Better includes**: Concise description of the problem, why it’s important to solve now including supporting data/facts, and a stated tie in to our organization’s values (equity, civic engagement, well-being, shared prosperity, and stewardship). |

Check your problem definition and why change is needed now. Does your problem statement conform?

* **Pain**: I know consequences of not addressing the problem (e.g. wasted staff time, increased turnover, lost funding, equity concerns, etc.).
* **Real**: The problem is not onetime; it has been acknowledged in the past by a number of people.
* **Obvious**: The problem is clear to all who read it, even if they are not familiar with the service.
* **Bound**: I know where the problem with this process begins and ends.

If you can answer the above questions with your problem definition and why solve this now, you are likely ready to proceed with identifying your sponsor and team.