



Sustaining the Gain: Why Maintaining Operational Improvements Is So Challenging

If your organization is good at making operational improvements, but struggles to sustain changes long-term, you're not alone. Research shows that most companies need help sustaining the gain. See how the right approach can enhance operational excellence.

Keeping Up The Good Work Is Hard to Do When It Comes to Sustaining Operational Improvements

So you've improved your operational performance. Maybe you've standardized processes, cut costs, improved quality, or implemented a new lean technique. Kudos are certainly in order.

But now the really hard work begins.

If your business is like most, you know from past experience that sustaining gains

long-term is a challenge. Even companies that start with the absolute best of intentions often see their results wane over time. Recent research by the National Center for the Middle Market and Dr. Peter Ward, a professor of operational management at The Ohio State University Fisher College of Business, confirms that the problem is widespread: More than two-thirds of mid-sized companies (with annual revenues between \$10 million and \$1 billion) and three-quarters of larger firms struggle to sustain the improvements they make.

This, of course, presents a serious problem. Without the ability to sustain operational improvements, companies may not be able to meet their profitability and growth goals in years ahead.

5 Issues that Can Derail Operational Improvements

One way to keep your operational improvements from petering out is to understand what, exactly, can disrupt them. Some common culprits include:

1. **Turnover.** Improvement projects can often go the way of their leaders. If the person who spearheaded the project moves on or moves up in the organization, the initiative may lose steam without its champion at the helm. While some turnover is inevitable, creating a culture where everyone understands and contributes to ongoing improvement can help keep projects from running out of steam, regardless of who is currently in charge.
2. **Poor problem-solving skills.** Even if an initiative works great out of the gate, problems will eventually arise that can stall progress. Without an approach that enables people at all levels to identify issues and their root causes, the improvement processes you put in place can end up becoming more of a hindrance than a help. People will ultimately find ways to circumvent the process or stop using it all together.
3. **Disparate data.** The right data, delivered to the right people or system, at the right time is key to sustaining improvements. For one thing, people need to see the value in what they're doing. Performance data provides the continual proof that the process is working. Just as important, operations need timely, usable, and actionable data to show when and where things aren't going as planned. In

other words, if a problem comes up, your organization needs information it can act on right away to resolve the issue and ensure that process improvements continue to deliver results as intended.

4. **Poor visibility and accountability.** Achieving operational excellence is only possible when everyone plays a role. Without a clear line of sight into what's happening in the business and where, it's difficult for organizations to understand where they need to focus resources or make changes to keep process improvements running smoothly.
5. **One-and-done mentality.** Leadership teams often fail to fully grasp the 'continuous' part of continuous improvement. Because performance results reside in ever-changing, always dynamic conditions, improvement work is never really done. Companies need stamina along with a genuine desire to continuously look for ways to make processes better and keep improving their operations.

A Formal Approach For Sustaining Operational Improvements Can Keep You on Track

At TBM, we've developed just such a formalized approach. The [TBM Management System](#), along with the [Dploy Solutions](#) suite of digital manufacturing platform, provides a structured solution to sustaining operational excellence, giving organizations the framework, process rigor, skills, and technology they need to make improvements and maintain them long-term.

Management System eBook Sustaining Your Operations Powerhouse

Our latest e-guide explores the Center's research on how to sustain operational improvements, and it outlines how The TBM Management System, and its supporting technology Dploy Solutions, can help your company adopt the Center's recommendations. Learn how you can leverage operational excellence to drive sustainable, profitable growth.

[Read it now](#)



Bob Dean, Co-Founder, Board Member, & TBM Alumnus

Bob Dean co-founded TBM Consulting Group 25 years ago. He recently retired from day-to-day consulting but he continues to serve on the TBM Consulting Group Board of Directors



Dan Sullivan, Executive Vice President

Dan Sullivan is Executive Vice President and serves on the TBM Board of Directors. He leads the firm's North American consulting operations. He is a coach at heart and is passionate about operational excellence, cultural change and results.



David Pate, Vice President

Dave Pate is an experienced business leader with previous roles in plant management, planning and lean operations. He currently serves as Vice President, introducing new clients to TBM, cultivating long-term growth with current clients and on-boarding new clients.





Gary Hoover, Vice President, Global Private Equity Practice

Gary has over 30 years of experience as a global leader. He rejoined TBM after working as Vice President of Operations at ESAB. Gary currently leads TBM's Global Private Equity practice.



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Ken Koenemann leads TBM's Supply Chain and Technology practices and is currently leading new product development for TBM's proprietary software business, Dploy Solutions.