

# Putting Best Practices

BEST BETTER GOOD

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**KEY CONCEPTS**

- Establishing formal best practices can improve customer satisfaction, improve performance, and shrink costs.
- Start small when creating a best-practices program; begin by analyzing just one or two business processes.
- Once a best practice is determined, don't forget to go back and measure its success.



# BEST PRACTICES

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And, that's where the idea of best practices comes in. Handling work orders in an efficient, well-organized manner? Communicating with all third-party vendors clearly and professionally? Challenge these business-as-usual methods, and you may discover that you could be handling the tasks even *more* successfully than you are right now. Ask any organization that has put best practices into action:

Customer satisfaction improves, performance is enhanced, costs go down, and communication barriers disappear. It may seem too overwhelming to even think about if you don't currently have a best-practices program in place; just start small. Following the path on pages 38 and 39 will help you establish a method for defining, keeping tracking of, and relaying your department's best practices. Begin by identifying one or two processes to work with, and you'll soon find yourself looking for ways to turn "good" and "better" into "best" ...



### Review current business practices and develop benchmarks.

The only way you'll improve processes is if you take the time to understand current business practices and evaluate existing processes and routines. "You're just fooling yourself if you think somebody else isn't out there looking at what you cost or how you run your business. You really should understand how well you're doing and be able to explain it in real terms," says Joe Clarke, facilities manager, Yorktown Heights, NY-based IBM. "When you're getting started, be prepared to discuss your current business practices and share data."

Benchmarking should also come into play here – you can't achieve best practices without it. At Waltham, MA-based Raytheon Co., benchmarking is performed on a yearly basis (both internally and externally). The organization is able to assess the data, compare it with the previous year's numbers, and decide if changes need to be made. "After the data is compiled, we identify those categories where we see opportunities for improvement or the creation of a new best practice," says Steve Fugarazzo, manager, facilities engineering, Raytheon Co.

Using a standard set of questions to collect data and trend key areas, IBM also uses benchmarking data to identify areas that could lead to a best practice. NASA applies the same philosophy: "Benchmarking is one way we actually discover best practices," says Gene Hubbard, director, facilities engineering and real property, NASA, Washington, D.C. NASA benchmarks against similar organizations as well as against industry standards.

Industry associations (such as IFMA) also have extensive benchmarking-survey data available to facilities professionals. "We found [IFMA] to be a wealth of knowledge, providing an abundance of data for us," says Fugarazzo. Make benchmarking a habit, and you'll quickly build a catalog of data that you can use as a point of reference.

## Success Story #1

**With lighting taking up anywhere between 10 and 20 percent of a monthly utilities budget for a commercial facility, Waltham, MA-based Raytheon Co. established a best practice for selecting efficient lighting fixtures. It found a manufacturer that offers direct/indirect fixtures with occupancy sensors and individual lighting controls for each occupant. After utilizing the fixtures in a small area, the organization found it was receiving good payback (especially considering utility rebates); Raytheon's team also received lots of positive feedback about the lighting system on employee-satisfaction surveys. It's now a best practice to implement these fixtures throughout all of Raytheon's facilities.**



### Study other organizations' best practices; share your own ideas.

There's never a need to reinvent the wheel (to tweak it, maybe – but not to reinvent it completely). Take a look at data that has already been collected by other organizations – it's a cheaper and faster way to get started. "Research some big-bang best practices, focus on their advantages to the organization as a whole (and especially to the mission of the organization), and work to get top management buy-in," says Hubbard. Study existing information from organizations similar to yours in both size and function. "[In this process], we're not necessarily inventing anything; we're innovating. And, innovating needs collaboration," says Clarke. "We're very interested in the future of research libraries, so we're going to go out and ask, 'What have you done lately in that area?'" says Craig Paepfer, director of real estate and site operations at IBM's research division. Raytheon credits the sharing of ideas amongst peers as part of its best-practices success. "Sharing really puts you on the map, and the sharing of these ideas is a two-way street," says Gregory Ferrick, facilities director, Raytheon Co.

In addition to checking out other organizations, sit down with your own team (consider inviting other employees in your organization as well) to brainstorm. Raytheon conducts best-

practices forums on a scheduled basis to give team members a chance to share ideas with each other. If an idea isn't deemed as a best practice, it doesn't get lost; it circulates and is available for the organization's use (even if it's not mandatory as part of the best-practices program). The organization has also employed "lunchtime learning" sessions to communicate best practices to other professionals.

You don't have to reinvent the wheel when you're brainstorming ways to address specific best-practices initiatives, either. "We're partners with two of the Environmental Protection Agency's programs: ENERGY STAR® and Climate Leaders," says Fugarazzo. Using the EPA's already-existing information to save energy and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions is a straightforward way to tackle a best practice that involves cutting electricity usage, etc.



**Identify one task that needs improvement.**

Whether you're looking for ways to save money, cut down on water usage, enhance safety, or improve internal communications, there should be a reason why you focus on a certain process for improvement. "We focus on the best bang for the buck," says Hubbard. "Don't implement a best practice just because it looks good; we strive for a return on our investment of time and resources." Mike Day, director of facilities, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Janelia Farm Research Campus, Ashburn, VA, recommends following that same thought process when singling out procedures that warrant improvement. "Look at the areas that you think can save the organization money, increase efficiency, increase safety, enhance communication, increase performance – any of those things that would benefit from such a program is the place to start."

The call may come from the top down to improve a certain process (such as in Raytheon's case: CEO Bill Swanson challenged each of Raytheon's seven businesses to a 10-percent reduction in electricity consumption, which led to the development of best practices in energy conservation), or your department may choose to improve a certain process based upon their own experiences (or frustrations) with it. "You don't need to wait for [executive management] to come and say, 'We need to lower costs.' You can go to them and say, 'We're comparing ourselves with 20 different organizations. We fare well in these areas, but we've got some work to do in these other areas,'" says Paepfer. Roundtables, forums, and surveys are all practical ways to gain knowledge about the processes that need to be improved. "What you don't want to do is react to something you hear from one person. We try to find trends to determine when something is worth [changing]."

Once you determine which task you're going to undertake first, make goals and expectations clear. What do you expect to happen as a result of establishing a best practice for this process?



**Determine how that task is currently being completed (and how the process could improve).**

Preliminary development of the best practice should begin with the person or people performing

the task; they'll know what needs to be changed or updated better than anyone else. "[The people performing the tasks are] looking at something that may not be functioning or operating at its optimum. If they identify a method as a proposed best practice, then the review and approval process begins," says Ferrick. After the initial development stages are complete, Raytheon forms a team to work on the best practice's tactical components. "We make sure it's an engagement of all of our facilities leadership teams. This allows us to take into account the different needs that are at all of our locations."

If you're discussing best practices in terms of janitorial services, involve the custodial staff; if the best practice revolves around work orders, involve the team members that receive, distribute, and follow up on those requests. "Write out the new process, develop a draft, and solicit feedback from the people involved (including the end-users)," says Day.



**Decide who should follow the best practice.**

When a best practice is implemented at NASA, everyone that works in or on NASA facilities (whether or not they're NASA employees) are expected to abide by that best practice, according to Hubbard. Although not all organizations function this way, it's not uncommon for facilities professionals to ask third parties to adhere to best-practices policies and procedures. "When we use outside architects, engineers, and contractors for major construction projects, our best practices are shared with these third-party business partners to ensure a common approach," says Ferrick. "All affected parties performing work or services within Raytheon are obligated to follow our best practices. This dovetails with our Six Sigma process, so we make sure that we are *partnering* with our contractors. If the best practice is good enough for Raytheon, it's good enough for our contractors. It's a very dynamic operation."



**Set up a team for final review and approval.**

Should the team that develops the best practice be the same team that reviews it and approves it for implementation, or should a separate team be formed to give final endorsement? It's really up to you and the culture of your organization. At IBM, although executives are involved in day-to-day activities, the organization empowers its facilities management teams to decide how to incorporate a best practice.

Regardless of who is involved in the final sign-off, Raytheon recommends having a standard evaluation process in place to ensure continuity and buy-in. Its review and approval process is rigorous and is completed as quickly as possible.

At NASA, there are two formal best-practices teams (the Engineering and Construction Innovation Committee, which is involved in design and construction initiatives, and the Operations and Maintenance of Facilities Innovation Team, which is involved in facilities management practices) and one informal best-practices team. "All of these teams research best practices (through professional publications, conferences, professional-

*continued*

## Success Story #2

Mike Day, director of facilities at Ashburn, VA-based Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Janelia Farm Research Campus, found that videotaping equipment repairs helped new employees and entry-level staff members understand their tasks. The Howard Hughes Medical Institute now employs a best practice that allows staff members to view a PowerPoint presentation showing how to correctly perform such tasks as removing a bearing from a piece of equipment. "Having seen the process first before they actually do the work allows employees to be quicker and more efficient; they understand the tools they need to perform the duties. It takes a little time to create these videos, but it's a nice product in the end," says Day.

organization memberships, and forums), develop implementation plans for adapting and implementing best practices determined to be of benefit to NASA, and assist in their implementation," says Hubbard.

### 7 Decide how you'll deal with changes.

"Flexibility is a key to success in any organization," says Hubbard. But, how does flexibility relate to best practices? It requires your team to be open to change. For example, when NASA implements a best practice, it's typically implemented as mandatory; however, grandfathering clauses and waivers are also part of the program. "In our implementation of sustainable design, we mandated that all new facilities and major renovations receive a minimum LEED Silver rating," he says. However, when the best practice was put into place, current projects were waived from the requirement.

As better technology and more efficient methods become available, the possibility of change needs to be planned for. "Nothing stays the same," says Day. "Because we're putting most of our best practices on the Web, we will be able to easily go back in, make changes, and make revisions."

### 8 Ensure that the procedure is accessible.

Once a best practice is established, it should always be kept in writing. You'll have a trail of the processes that were implemented (and when/why they were implemented), and everyone in the organization will have a document to refer to when faced with questions. "People come and go; in order to institutionalize best practices, [they] should be in writing to ensure consistency across the organization and across time," says Hubbard.

Tracking best practices electronically is another option: Raytheon keeps its best practices in a database that allows users to

search for specific processes. "We find it advantageous for our large business; we are geographically dispersed, and this really helps us in implementation. And, it also provides us with tracking capabilities so that we know which sites have implemented which best practices," says Elizabeth Rasmussen, business operations, Raytheon Co. "We have been at this for many years. The Raytheon best-practices program has developed into a far-reaching, Web-based tool which is easily accessed and, therefore, easily applied to enhance operations," says Dan Ryan, vice president of operations, Raytheon Co.

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute takes this one step further: The organization's directors developed a "go-to guide," which includes everything a new employee (or even a current employee needing quick answers) might need or want to know (including best practices). "It includes the purchasing process, where to buy equipment, maps of the facility, ID-badging processes – every question/answer that we could think of for a facility is in this guide. When people come through the door, they typically spend a lot of time trying to find the answers to these questions," says Day. "This document fixes that."

### 9 Verify the success of your best practice.

There are countless ways to measure the success of a best-practices program. Evidence of cost reductions, increased productivity, and higher customer satisfaction are all indicators. "You should measure success based on the goals that you set at the beginning of the program," says Day. For example: If you established a best practice that involves energy conservation, you can measure your success by your electricity bills. However, be aware of the consequences of your goals: If you save energy, but your tenants are always too hot or too cold, you've got a best practice that isn't very useful at all. "Identify the goals you want to achieve, and then come back later to measure how well you actually met those goals," says Day.

One way that IBM's research division gauges its best-practices achievements is via customer-satisfaction surveys. "We measure success by formal and informal feedback, and periodic, structured surveys," says Paeprer. Raytheon's Ferrick agrees: "Ultimately, the success of our best-practices program is reflected in our customer-satisfaction survey scores. We do a monthly customer-satisfaction survey, and a lot of these best practices are highlighted there so that, not only are they put in place, but they're communicated."

### 10 Start all over again!

Congratulations! You've created a best practice – you identified the need for an improved process, determined a new way to complete the task, decided how to communicate the new process, and took the time to evaluate the impact of your best practice on the organization. Guess what? It's time to do it again. Steps 1 through 9 will be your guide as you compose a comprehensive best-practices program to make your organization function at its very best. **B**

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