Welcome to this video brought to you by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness at Bowling Green State University. In this presentation, we would like to underscore the importance of continuous improvement within the context of programmatic and institutional excellence, specifically we will briefly discuss the “ingredients” of a culture of continuous improvement (or, in other words, what makes for building a culture of continuous improvement). We will conclude with a few considerations as to how the program review process at BGSU can support continuous programmatic and institutional improvement.

First, what is Continuous Improvement? Broadly speaking, Continuous Improvement is changing for the better. It means new ideas are generated, tested, refined, and implemented by everyone every day everywhere. It is a leadership mindset. To create a continuous improvement culture, you need: 1) Will (you have to believe that “good enough” never is; in other words: Do the work, be the change!); 2) You need to foster an environment of curiosity, of engagement, of involvement, of appreciation, of recognition. Continuous improvement is based on employees’ engagement and empowerment; 3) Skill: continuous improvement is about development which takes time, effort, organization, and planning skills; 4) Authority: in a culture of continuous improvement, everyone is truly allowed to make improvements, and to make actionable contributions (no matter how great or how small), that is the measure of being engaged and, ultimately, of success because folks feel empowered to drive change; 5) Guidance: Finally, continuous improvement is about learning and expanding new boundaries and in doing so, guidance is necessary to ensure that even in the creation of new knowledge and possibilities, everyone is moving along institutional priorities and goals and not diverging from them.

Source for Images: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWj9MowzDV0>

Continuous improvement is one of those things that is like a snow cone. A snow cone is something that pretty much everyone can agree is awesome and full of yummies! Who wouldn’t want it?  However, many times, for whatever reason, not every organization has a plan for how to achieve Continuous Improvement. Fewer still, have systems and processes in place to support it, and many who try never successfully reach their goals. Why is that?

Let’s see if a snow cone analogy can help explain some of what conditions are necessary for a continuous improvement culture to take hold.

If Neglected, It Will Melt

It is quite likely that the number one destroyer of Continuous Improvement is simple neglect. It is easy to get very excited about certain opportunities that may present themselves to revolutionize a field, cut waste, maximize usage of current resources, and clobber the competition. We hold meetings, send out a follow-up message with tasks for everyone, maybe even put up some signs but then go back to business as usual: within a few days, the initial excitement has waned. Pretty soon, we revert to the old way of doing things.

If you want to see what happens to Continuous Improvement programs with disengaged stakeholders, just leave your snow cone on the driveway or in the hot sun for the afternoon. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIFhvRoQ49E> If neglected, the snow cone of Continuous Improvement WILL melt!

The alternative is for all stakeholders (faculty, staff, leadership, etc.) to fully commit to Continuous Improvement and embrace it as, not just the program of the week, but as the basis for the transformation of the organization’s culture.

Accountability has a tremendous role to play in this. Accountability is the obligation and willingness to accept responsibility for one’s actions or lack thereof, to be honest, transparent and ethical. Accountability implies willingness to be judged on performance – not in a punitive way but in a way that underscores the relevance of isolated programmatic decisions for broader environmental or institutional impact. The four C’s of Accountability are: Clarity, Communication, Commitment, and Consequences. There are a few ways by which accountable practices can be built, managed and sustained. These include:

* Making employees commit to completing certain tasks and ensuring they follow through with them.
* Having upper management set expectations on the duties to be completed with associated deadlines.
* Creating a safe environment where taking risks is rewarded and learning occurs in a natural, non-threatening way.
* Defining ownership of tasks, projects, or other aspects of work. Should there be a problem, the owner of that task or project must be held accountable.

Accountability will look different and yield results that are as different as they are different campuses. However, there are some overarching benefits to establishing a culture of accountability:

**Accountability promotes operational excellence.**When employees understand that their work is being looked at and will be evaluated, they are more likely to put forth stronger effort as it is understood that what they do matters. More importantly, when employees know that the work they do can “make” or “fail” the institution and that their professional role or part “matters”, this serves as a long-term motivator towards generating excellence and greater commitment to the common good.

**Accountability yields more accurate results.** Universities with a standard of accountability will have boundaries of acceptable deviation. For example, a University may allow for a certain dollar threshold of financial misstatement due to immateriality. If it holds itself accountable to a low threshold of materiality, it will not accept larger errors, unexplainable variances, or delays in reporting.

**Finally, Accountability builds trust.**External and internal stakeholders’ confidence in BGSU is only driven so far based off of the prospect of our stories of success. In other words, external and internal investors must believe that BGSU is well-run, honest, competent, and efficient with its resources.

### Another key Ingredient is Transformation

What is a snow cone? It is 95% water, with a little flavoring thrown in. But, somehow, a glass of water with a squirt of sulfur-based Skunk’s spray doesn’t seem as appealing. Freezing the water and shaving or crushing it just so, makes it something utterly new. In most organizations, employee ideas for improvement are as ubiquitous as water. They're just sort of everywhere, but not something most people think about very much. That’s the point of Continuous Improvement: to transform those ideas into something new – into action. Just like there is a process in making a snow cone, Continuous Improvement sets forth the process of turning an idea into a [successful innovation](https://blog.kainexus.com/continuous-improvement/innovation/4-innovation-tools-that-accelerate-business-momentum). The opportunity is captured, analyzed, implemented, measured, and shared. Ideas are systematically turned into amazing results.

You Need the Right Stuff

The reason that I am not enjoying a snow cone right now is that I don’t have access to a snow cone machine, and I presently lack the will and the extra time to go find a snow cone stand. Why doesn’t spontaneous continuous improvement happen more often? It could be that employees don’t have the right tools at their disposal. Perhaps they lack the level of engagement that compels voluntary effort, or maybe they are unable, or afraid to carve out time. Universities or programs within a university that are committed to improvement take steps to address each one:

**Tools: For example, a** continuous improvement software solution that is used across the entire organization can help provide greater structure to the improvement process, create a common language, and give everyone insight into the health of improvement efforts across all departments.

**Engagement:**  Recognition for improvement efforts also goes a long way toward getting people excited about the work, as does fostering a sense of empowerment and ownership of the processes and tasks that they tackle every day.

**Time:** You ask: When are employees supposed to work on improvement when every task is urgent and ASAP means yesterday? There has to be some give in order to practice continuous improvement. Think of using rapid improvement events or daily huddle meetings to carve out time for transformation within your respective department.

It’s More Fun with Friends

Eating snow cones by yourself is not as fun than enjoying a tasty, cool treat with your friends. Continuous Improvement isn’t only more fun when people work on projects together, but it is also more effective. In fact, the most common places where processes and value break down are the transition points between people, teams, and departments. That’s why Continuous Improvement works best as a university or department-wide initiative with everyone from the front lines to the suites fully in the game.

Hopefully, this Continuous Improvement snow cone analogy has given you some food for thought. In short, it is a delicious thing, but it won’t materialize without some planning and effort. Hopefully, I’ve gotten you motivated enough NOT to find and run to the nearest snow cone shack!

With this next slide, we would like to focus on four elements critical in the cultivation of a culture of continuous improvement: (1) the creation of stable processes, (2) the fostering of good teamwork; (3) the recognition of potential and (4) a communal understanding of change, its requirements and repercussions.

* **Creating Stable processes** that can aid in changing the culture takes time and commitment, creativity and endurance – unless we are left behind the competition! I am hoping this FUNNY YouTube Insect race analogy helps your ponderings about the creation of stable processes and mindset transformation within your own department.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xkepdSPnyU>

* **Bad and Good Teamwork:** The next video on good teamwork is not only hilarious but fantastic at driving the point: It is better to travel together! We encourage you to watch it thinking about what possibilities it can awake for you and your department team: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUXdrl9ch\_Q

Working together to overcome threats (real or perceived) by offering clear instructions to colleagues, by supporting one another and exercising “soft skills” such as empathy, collaboration, clear and transparent communication, are key to establishing a good teamwork mentality. ALWAYS REMEMBER: A great communicator is a person who can hear if the other person is not listening.

In achieving success and victory, it is smarter to join resources, work in groups, and pull our strengths together collaboratively! This next video says it best: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyIkgi2LDbk>

* **Recognizing potential**

Recognizing potential implies that from small, unexpected beginnings or limited resources, we hang on to the capacity to transform threats and obstacles into opportunities for growth.

Recognizing potential requires Patience as it takes time for ideas to be nurtured, to germinate, to bloom, to be born, to sprout; others will never be born at all; or may begin as small seeds but then lead to more or broader discussion or possibilities;

At times, the advent of a new idea may necessitate the shedding of an old skin or an old pattern or routine or habit several times over; until they are formulated in an actual formal quality proposal.

And once implemented over time, the idea proves its durability, its viability, its force, its relevance, in terms of gain, strength, persistence, continuance, adaptability, growth and evolution. New ideas or **changes** take courage to break from the routine, to venture out to try something new and unexpected. Depending on external forces and circumstances, these ideas will be tested over time for their viability.

At this time, we invite you to reflect on the Life Cycle of a Ladybug: how the small insects blossom from very mediocre beginnings. Could it be that the number of dots on our wings reveal the uniqueness of our ideas? Those dots or ideas we carry as faculty and staff and students at BGSU constitute what separates us from others; these “ladybug dots” are the BGSU mark, they are what makes us stand out.

The Life Cycle of a Ladybug: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ws_D5nXOAJg>

* **Understanding Change:**

Change requires breaking off from old habits and creating new ones. Aristotle once said: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then is not an act but a habit”. Let’s learn from the brain:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAxOY7xAIII>

**Changes can involve pain,** letting go of mindsets, past ways of doing things – let us learn from the eagle on how the bird “shaves off” or discards the old to recreate the new not just to survive but also to thrive and expand its life expectancy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nb9915WsFoE>

Or perhaps some of these changes will mean that you tread there where none else has trodden before with a great deal of creativity and inventiveness or that you are called upon to pave a new path altogether: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWZ6b_I-Djg>

Continuous improvement is about the power of dreaming, no matter what your reality as a department may be now, what do you envision it to be? What could it become? Continuous Improvement is about utilizing what resources you have available to you now to make a department, school or college dream come true: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7OQHIpDlvA>

**PR and CO**

We conclude with a few considerations of how the program review process at BGSU can help support continuous improvement for your respective program, department, school, or college.

Program review is a comprehensive look at individual programs and covers staffing, curriculum, learning outcomes, action plans, etc. It often involves external reviewers, and usually highlights the importance of assessment. Most program review self-studies are written by the faculty members within that program and therefore are heavily geared toward curriculum, staffing, and resource needs.

* Meeting Stated Student Learning Outcomes and Closing the Loop:

Program reviews ensure that programs are meeting their stated student learning outcomes. The Higher Learning Commission requires, under core component four, that “The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs” and “The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.” It is important to ground conversations in what our accrediting organization says about assessment, outcomes, student learning, and specific criteria or assumed practices they require. When we keep the focus on student learning and continuous improvement, the program review process evolves to ensure that we are getting the information we need. Essentially a process of meta-assessment starts to occur.

* Augmenting Capacity and Closing the Loop:

After all of the work to create a self-study, it is essential that programs use the results gleaned from any of these reports. The program review process should lead to opportunities for reflection and sharing. In addition to reflection, program review can lead to data workshops that serve to “close the loop”. Data can be shared and discussed from the institution and/or programs to support professional development to address areas identified in the program review self-study. This is an opportunity to increase capacity by means of workshops on a variety of topics such as curriculum maps, best practices in assessment, samples of assessment activities, results from surveys, etc.

* Asking and Answering the Right Questions:

The program review process at BGSU is intended as a springboard for programs to ask and answer the right questions relative to long-term quality, sustainability and growth. It provides an opportunity for faculty and staff within a department or school to spend some time on deciding on the why, who, how, and what of their programmatic life. Why are you doing each of these activities? What is the ultimate outcome, why are you doing them? how do they align with the institution’s mission and strategic plan? Skipping this step will result in less faculty and staff interest and engagement. And the why should include more than just accreditation compliance. The program review process at BGSU guides the continuous improvement flow by building common purpose and understanding, by supporting system alignment, change and maximization, by scaling for depth and breadth, and by planning for a continual cycle of reflection, planning and action.

* Root Causes and Problems of Practice

Finally, the program review process can assist programs, departments and schools in identifying root causes or problems of practice. Root cause data provided in the program review self-study can shed light on a deeper understanding of the causes of gaps or problems and define priority problems of practice that, when addressed, are expected to result in a significant change in the gap or problem. There is more than one way to brainstorm root causes. The **Fishbone Diagram or the Problem Tree Diagram**, can help you capture ideas generated during collaborative discussions. The results from a root cause analysis of the current context provides a rich data set that the planning team can use in identifying strategic drivers. In framing the root cause analysis work, it is helpful to address the need for participants to focus on what is within—not outside of their school or department’s control.

NEXT SLIDE  
Once your team has a deep understanding of your problem, you can better articulate what you believe will be necessary conditions to address it. One way is through the **use of a driver diagram.** A driver diagram is a type of structured logic chart that serves as a visual tool for addressing your problem. Not only does it make your theory of change explicit, it allows you to develop and test theories of improvement—as well as build upon knowledge gleaned from research, observation, and experience. The purpose of a driver diagram is to inform your action plan – which is, in effect, your continuous improvement plan.

Change practices are the interventions or specific work practices that affect the secondary driver and, in turn, the primary driver. Consider a suite of interrelated change practices as an innovation. A change practice is concrete— an action or a set of actions you can do to create the desired change, helping to attain your goal.

For illustration, a problem of practice might be related to a marked decrease of student enrollment over time within a specific discipline or major – let’s say from 400 students in 2020 to only 100 in 2022. Root causes data sets might identify graduation rates, retention rates, overall student satisfaction with the courses in the said discipline or major (as demonstrated on course evaluations) or with advising resources, etc. In this case, let’s say retention turns out to be the primary motivator (or driver) of enrollment decrease. As part of the program review self-study, you would want then to reflect further on the WHYs. For example, are secondary drivers related to poor or a lack of advising? Student caliber and/or preparedness for college study? Student lack of engagement in course materials and/or curricular activities? The identification of secondary drivers can lead to the formulation of practice change which are so critical to continuous improvement.

In conclusion, in order to support a culture of continuous improvement, programs, departments, or schools have to create paradigm shifts to achieve the following: • A collaborative work environment • An ongoing collective practice of reflection, inquiry, and improvement. The process of continuous improvement enables people to test, refine, and improve both their daily work practices and the innovation itself. The program review process can provide direct input on how continuous improvement can be planned for tangible success.

As always, for additional information or if any questions, feel free to contact us via email at [institutionaleff@bgsu.edu](mailto:institutionaleff@bgsu.edu) or phone at 419-372-7601. We are also on Facebook and Instagram. Thank you for watching.