Dashboards for Continuous Improvement

Dashboards are an essential visual management tool to enable data-driven continuous improvement of business processes. They track key metrics on a frequent basis, providing real-time visibility into operational performance. Well-designed dashboards drive actionable insights and improvements.

Effective dashboards have the following key characteristics:

Simplicity - Dashboard data and layouts should be simple to understand and interpret. Use color coding, charts, etc. Limit the metrics displayed to the vital few.

Actionability - Dashboards should lead to clear actions and accountability. They provoke responses.

Real-time - Data should update frequently to provide real-time visibility. Issues can be caught early.

Visibility - Dashboards need to be positioned where they will be seen and monitored consistently.

Dashboards are commonly used for:

- Monitoring service level agreements (SLAs) and key performance indicators (KPIs)
- Tracking trends and outliers
- Enabling rapid responses to operational issues
- Driving continuous improvement initiatives
- Providing overview of team or departmental performance

To enable a culture of continuous improvement, dashboards should be reviewed in daily team meetings to highlight accomplishments, next steps, and impediments. Issues raised can be documented and followed up on.

Effective use of dashboards institutes a short-cycle PDCA (plan-do-check-act) improvement loop. By making the current status highly visible, teams can identify problems in near real-time and collaborate on solutions. Dashboards thereby drive ownership, urgency, and ongoing incremental optimization.