

COLLECTIVE IMPACT and CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: ONE in the SAME?

By Amy Bethge

Though many differences exist between the business world and the world of nonprofit organizations, the two industries often share striking similarities. Frequently in these two fields, many of the differences lie in the terminology used to express the goals of the mission, rather than the execution of the mission itself. Here is a close up look at the Collective Impact approach stemming from the field of nonprofits alongside the Continuous Improvement strategy adopted by the business realm. Could it be that the two are more similar than we may have thought?

WHAT IS COLLECTIVE IMPACT?

Collective Impact is a strategy used to solve a complex social problem. It requires a coordinated effort across various different sectors in order to focus on a problem and a shared goal. In order to efficiently utilize the Collective Impact strategy to create lasting solutions to social problems across a vast range of diverse communities, organizations involved in the governmental, societal, and business sectors need to coordinate their efforts and work together to accomplish a clearly defined goal.

Five Conditions of Collective Impact Success:

1. **Common Agenda:** All participants have a shared vision for change
2. **Shared Measurement:** Data must be collected and measured consistently
3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action
4. **Continuous Communication:** Consistent and open communication
5. **Backbone Organization:** Separate organization is needed to serve as the backbone for the initiative and coordinate participating organizations.

WHAT IS CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT?

A Continuous Improvement system, which evolved from the Lean Manufacturing strategy, works to emphasize the prevention of waste, which can be defined as any extra time, labor, or material spent producing a product or service that does not add value to that service. A Continuous Improvement system's unique tools, techniques, and methods can help an organization to reduce expenditures as well as the amount of time that it takes to complete a series of tasks within a process.

Four Goals of Continuous Improvement Success:

1. **Improve Quality:** Ability of products or services to conform to customer need
2. **Eliminate Waste:** Deliver quality products and services the first time and every time
3. **Reduce Task Completion Time:** Quickly respond to changes in customer demand while improving return on investment
4. **Reduce Total Costs:** Balance prices of products and services prices with operating costs

EXPLORING THE SIMILARITIES

While at its core, Collective Impact can be viewed as the commitment of different actors to a common agenda to solve a social problem, and Continuous Improvement as a means of maximizing customer value while simultaneously minimizing waste, the two strategies have a significant amount of similarities.

Similarities:

1. **Efficiency:** both strategies allow organizations to function as efficiently as possible while positively influencing as many as possible
2. **Constant Evolution:** both constantly strive to improve products, services, or process to positively impact the main



organization/organizational goals over time

3. **Shared Goals and Ideals:** it is imperative for both strategies that all members involved have common interests
4. **Community/Client Satisfaction:** both aim to ensure that all community members and clients are satisfied with the services provided to them

At their most basic level, Collective Impact and Continuous Improvement are both focused around collectively utilizing all entities available, such as community organizations or employees, to effectively work to improve the goals of the organization at hand. While the terminology used in the two industries may differ, the goals of each are one in the same; provide goods and services to the public at a rate that is most beneficial for both the organization itself, as well as those it is serving in the community. Both strategies strive to ensure that the public receives the best service available in order to improve the community as a whole.

Clearly, the collective domains of nonprofit organizations and businesses are more similar than they may have at first seemed. Although sometimes we do not think the two share many facets, at the most basic level of these two concepts, both operate in very similar ways using very different terminology.

Amy Bethge is a recent graduate of Keene State College and is pursuing a Master of Public Health degree at Southern Connecticut State University. Her passion for living a healthy lifestyle and helping others to do the same has afforded her the opportunity to work towards community betterment in the capacity of the various internships that she has held. In the future, Amy hopes to obtain a job in the field of Public Health that will allow her to work towards community betterment full-time while utilizing Collective Impact strategies.

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