

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT APPROACHES AMONG TRADE-CONTRACTORS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Continuous improvement methods are increasingly adopted in the execution of construction projects, with several general contracting companies applying a wide variety in their organizations. However, the adoption of these methods by trade contractors is lagging. To fill this gap, the current study compares how trade contractors adopt and sustain continuous improvement processes, training, and methods, based upon a framework of continuous improvement principles in their organizations. For this purpose, seven case studies were selected from successful adopters among trade contractor companies. These cases illustrate how a trade contractor can employ continuous improvement initiatives to improve their operations and construction processes. The paper presents a comparative analysis of the approaches each contractor applies in its organization to present common elements of successful contractors and highlight some variations among the firms. By highlighting similarities and differences in how each pursues their methods and improvement process, the path to achieving continuous improvement for the trade contractor community can be more clearly identified.

The results of the comparative analysis indicate that although there are many similarities in how each company consolidates continuous

improvement approaches into their tasks and activities, some variations in how they implement these approaches were recognized, differentiating a highly successful firm from its peers. These attributes are embedding continuous improvement into the mentality and culture of the company, incorporating training programs into an active culture of coaching and mentoring to provide employees with a comprehensive insight into the company's culture, processes, and standards, empowering field leaders to take responsibility for CI initiatives, defining standard processes for their operations and balancing empowerment of their personnel with standardization, high emphasizing on identification and elimination of waste for the entire production process, using the PDCA concept to evaluate the effectiveness of their processes or approaches to pursue continuous improvement, highlighting small improvements rather than trying to achieve large transformational changes, widely using Visual Management to enhance information sharing and raise awareness, and ultimately, searching for ways to simplify their operations by breaking processes into smaller manageable pieces. All trade contractor organizations can consider the provided approaches to start their transformation or become more successful adopters.