



KPIS AND EMPLOYEES: INVOLVE US UPFRONT AND LET US HELP DEFINE RELEVANT MEASURES

by John Johnson

So, what about the use of KPIs from the perspective of the employees, the people who are directly involved in the manufacturing, testing and support services that fill the supply chain with pharma products?

What is their perspective? Do they read KPIs? Do they need them? What do KPIs actually mean to them?

We intercepted a production operator at a client's premises and asked her these key questions.

ARE THE KPIS POSTED ROUND THE SHOP FLOOR USEFUL TO YOU AND YOUR JOB?

The operator laughed as she explained how the answer would have been quite different a year ago, "In the past, we had KPIs plastered all round the walls and they looked like wallpaper. No one explained them to us, they didn't get changed very much and we all just walked past them," she said. "We ignored them as they looked like management babble and we took the view that if management needed us to change something important, they would speak to us. I don't know how many hours people put into preparing them, but it made no difference at all to the way we performed our jobs."

SO WHAT CHANGED?

"For years, nothing! But one day they were all taken down and we spent a morning with the supervisor discussing how we were losing contracts to competitors who could do more with less, performed changeovers faster than us and made fewer reworks or reinspections. We were all really unhappy about that as we didn't want to be second best and it could affect our long-term futures if we didn't make our best a little better.

I love this job and didn't want to change as I live locally and the firm had been the best employer in this region for years. We talked about how we could help the company improve the costs associated with 'not-right



first time,' and how we could boost output simply by understanding waste and error and at the same time avoid frustrating waiting periods or reinspections (everyone hated those jobs).

We talked about how we could manage the unit better and make it more fun. The supervisor introduced daily huddles with each line team, everyone got a say, everyone was told the same message face to face and any issues were brought to the surface. At first there was a lot of opinion, but we quickly realized we needed more facts."

WHAT FACTS DID THE LINE TEAMS NEED?

"Simple things at first. Information like notification of any new steps in SOPs, 'watch outs,' introductions to new team members, discussions on expected output, actions needed to avoid stoppages and such like. Most stoppages were related to poor quality product so we knew that if the line was set up well and run smoothly, the product quality would improve and we would get fewer rejects and better yields."

HOW DID THIS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

"At first the team huddles felt odd and clunky but as we established for ourselves what was important, we started to model ourselves on a Formula One pit stop team; everyone being clear on what was needed, when and why; and we looked out for each other. The metrics took care of themselves really. We got better and the metrics improved without us needing to fiddle them. It felt good!"



WHAT SWITCHES THE TEAM OFF?

“We just don’t have time for anything irrelevant and we have a low tolerance for management babble! We didn’t allow any metric to enter our huddles unless we agreed it was useful and we agreed we could act on it. Once it was accepted though, we ran with it. A couple of times, management wanted to measure something else but we just countered it with something more insightful, fought our corner and showed how much more useful our measure was. We were taking control of our own performance and we wouldn’t be distracted from our job – making quality products on time and to budget.”

SO WHAT WERE YOUR THREE MOST INSIGHTFUL MEASURES?

“We knew that quality was paramount but a quality product not available on the shelves or too expensive wouldn’t even be ordered and we needed contracts to pay our wages. So we knew the metrics had to be balanced into quality, service and cost measures and we chose three measures for each and made each one important.

In terms of quality, we measured the team’s ability to complete the batch records without errors and omissions, the reject rate and our 5S housekeeping scores (each of these were within our so-called sphere of influence).

Of course we also measured output per shift, reasons for stoppages and schedule adherence, but what drove better figures in those areas was generally the team’s accuracy of set-up, speed of response when something went wrong and our ability to do the right thing, follow procedures

and avoid the need for GMP deviations. Prevention is quicker than a cure and we used the team huddles to avoid false starts, mistakes and poor communication. The metrics looked after themselves after that.”

“If you always do what you always did, you’ll always get what you always got.”

Henry Ford

SO IN CONCLUSION, AS LONG AS WHAT YOU MEASURE IS RELEVANT AND YOU CAN INFLUENCE IT, YOU ARE HAPPY?

“Absolutely, just don’t get in our way and distract us with fancy charts that look like wallpaper – keeping it simple and local has made all the difference to us.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John Johnson is passionate about helping organizations foresee and overcome the barriers to sustainable long-term growth. He brings 28 years’ experience across a range of companies in the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry. He has worked in small, medium and large pharma biotech companies across the product lifecycle for a wide range of dosage forms, holding senior operational and corporate-level experience in operations and quality assurance and leading multinational companies in many strategic projects.

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