

## In this article we discuss HOW we find projects that are put forward as Improvement Projects

In previous articles, we've talked about various ways to complete an improvement project. But how do we identify the projects in the first place, and how do we know which projects to work on?

In this article we'll discuss the project generation approaches that have worked best for us.

There are several ways that project ideas can arise. One common method is **brainstorming**, where a number of participants are given open ended questions and asked for ideas. The quality of ideas is not important at this stage as the goal is lots of ideas into the hopper and we will vet them later. Critiquing too early leads to stifled idea generation.

Brainstorming sounds perfectly sufficient but the danger in a totally unstructured approach is that you can end up with one or two people who dominate the discussion and you miss creative or important ideas that those individuals didn't see or didn't want discussed.

The **fishbone diagram** can be helpful here as it directs discussion in several different ways, and can flush innovative ideas out. The spines on the fishbone are labelled such that the full scope of the operation is represented and this ensures you avoid missing an entire category of improvement ideas.

Two more structured approaches are the **Strategy Flowdown** and **FMEA**.

A strategy flowdown starts with listing the main corporate objectives, then for each of these identify the strategies intended to realize the objectives. Continue with departmental and individual objectives and so on. Then look for where there are barriers to achieving those goals.

FMEA, or Failure Modes and Effects Analysis, is similar but starts with what potential failures could occur. This is widely used within the safety industry, but very useful in other contexts. Here, you are thinking of all the ways each part of the existing business (or the part you're working on) can fail. How would you know, what could you do to mitigate that at the earliest possible moment etc. This generates project ideas that prevent losses for example.

Improvement projects themselves frequently spawn new project ideas to address issues uncovered during the project. A **baseline project** can take this idea further. This type of project is a careful analysis of business data looking for unusual patterns or combinations of effects that lead to high costs or missed opportunities. Often a baseline project will be launched to shore up weaknesses in data that are blocking specific improvement projects.

The key thing about Baseline projects is that they are holistic whereas narrower improvement projects can miss the interconnections between projects and optimize the part vs. the whole.

For each project idea generated, try not to be critical of it in terms of trying to stop them but be honest about the potential magnitude of the impact, the time it would take to accomplish the project goal and the resource demands it will put on the organization. You'll need this for the next phase which is in the article coming right after this!

As always, if this is an area where experienced help could move you forward faster, give [Sigma Done Simply](#) a call!