

A study of sustainability of continuous improvement in the manufacturing industries in Malaysia: Organizational self-assessment as a mediator

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to investigate the influence of six variables: strategic focus; monitoring continuous improvement development; integration of continuous improvement; management of continuous improvement; involvement/engagement and learning; and knowledge sharing, on sustainability of continuous improvement capabilities in the context of the manufacturing industries in Penang, Malaysia. The paper determines the impact of organizational self-assessment towards the relationship of these six factors and sustainability of continuous improvement capabilities. **Design/methodology/approach:** The study opted for an exploratory study using the survey instrument to collect data. The questionnaire was published through the web and manual distribution. For the web survey, e-mails were broadcasted to invite the random employees to participate in the e-mail survey, where respondents were directed to answer the attachment that contained the questionnaire. Online survey method is chosen because it is convenient, time and cost effective to interact with the respondents who are dispersed in different geographical areas. **Findings:** The paper provides empirical insights about how strategic focus, management of continuous improvement and learning/knowledge sharing positively influence on sustainability of continuous improvement capabilities in an organization. It suggests that organizational self-assessment has a mediating effect on the relationship between strategic focus, learning/knowledge sharing and sustainability of continuous improvement capabilities. **Research limitations/implications:** The complex nature of the process of sustaining continuous improvement capabilities as a research topic places limitations on this study, particularly in the area of sample selection and data collection. The major sample selection at the manufacturing organizations is difficult because an organization's perception in terms of continuous improvement may not be the same, thus it is not easy to ascertain relevant sample characteristics. **Practical implications:** The implications of this study highlighted that the most effective predictor for sustaining continuous improvement capabilities was strategic focus, in addition, this study provided insight into the mediating effect of organizational self-assessment towards the effectiveness of sustaining continuous improvement capabilities in the manufacturing industry. **Originality/value:** This paper fulfils an identified need to study how the effectiveness of sustaining continuous improvement capabilities can be developed.

Keywords

Continuous improvement; Critical factors; Critical success factors; Malaysia; Manufacturing industries; Organizational self-assessment; Sustainability