

Promoting Innovative Thinking through Small Group Activities: A Case Study at JSPL-Raigarh

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Abstract- Great organizations focus on employee empowerment and encourage them to think innovative through their active participation, strong teamwork approach and interactive communications in every aspects of the business. Small group activities are one of the best way to promote employees' participations and innovative thinking.

This paper describes the approach for promoting innovative thinking through various small group activities that are running successfully at JSPL-Raigarh. This results in developing a culture of the continuous improvement to build 360-degree development of the organization in the competitive business world.

Key Words: Small group activity, Innovative thinking, Employees empowerment,

1. INTRODUCTION

When employees are not practising innovative thinking at their workplaces, one may likely notice a decline in the quality of their work, a lack of desire to learn and an overall drop-off in effort. To reawaken their drive, employees must be interested in what they are doing on a daily basis and be challenged by new tasks and projects. Innovative thinking at workplaces is an important employee engagement strategy that not only helps organizations to remain competitive, reduces costs and creates value for customers, but also leads to happier and more creative and engaged workers. It's no wonder that promoting innovative thinking is the top priority for the business.

Jindal Steel & Power Ltd. (JSPL)-Raigarh also promotes the innovative thinking amongst employees at their respective workplaces by involving them in various small group initiative like SMILE scheme (Self Motivated Individual for Learning & Empowerment), Suggestion Scheme, Innovation Week Celebration, Quality Circles and other quality concepts team (Lean QC, 5S teams, Kaizen Circles), etc. This helps them to enhanced self-confidence, improvement in analytical approach, presentation skill, development of teamwork, job satisfaction, etc.

JSPL-Raigarh, India's leading integrated steel plant with a production capacity of 3.6 MTPA is a part of US\$ 12 billion Jindal Organization, is the fastest growing steel plant in the country. The organization with strong core values has a vision to be a globally admired organization with sustainable

development. Captive mines for iron ore and non-coking coal are some of the major assets of JSPL. Along with this, JSPL has in house coal-based sponge iron plant of 1.4 MTPA with captive waste heat recovery boilers and fluidized bed boilers that account for a total production of 340 MW of power. The state-of-art technologies have been used for coke making, sinter making and hot metal production through blast furnace route. Steel Melting Shop is well equipped with 3 ultra-high power electric arc furnaces, 5 ladle refining furnaces, 2 tank degassers, 1 RH degasser, 1 slab caster and 2 of each combination and billet caster.

As far as finished products are concerned, JSPL possesses 1.0 MTPA Plate Mill, 0.75 MTPA Rail Mill and 0.7 MTPA Beam & Structural Mill to produce a variety of sizes of beams, rails, channels, plates, coils. Along with this a pre-fabrication plant for developing larger sections of parallel flange beams and structural.

At JSPL innovation is intrinsically and deeply embedded and therefore, the use of innovative methods and technology has always been encouraged. JSPL-Raigarh believes that innovation, which involves the generation and implementation of ideas into new / improved products, services or processes, is vital for the success of every organization. Hence, a culture of innovation within the organization is being inculcated through:

- ❖ Raising awareness on the importance on innovation and innovative thinking process.
- ❖ Disseminating information on how to create a culture that values creativity and innovation.
- ❖ Assistance in developing systems for generating, capturing and implementing innovative ideas from various stakeholders.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Diana [1], one of the methods of continuous improvement is the philosophy of Kaizen (SGA - small group activity) and a presentation of the practical benefits provided its implementation. Based on the results achieved, it could be a very useful method in solving problems and improving workers engagement. Small group activity is also known as focused or continuous improvement.

SGA finds its origin in the Japanese industry where it is called "Kobetsu Kaizen" or Quality Circles. SGA is a method

for problem solving in teams by structurally searching for the root causes and eliminating them.

Dr. Dev Raj Jatt [2] has discussed about the quality circles which is a small group of employee of 8 to 10. The reason for such numbers is that number of interaction among members would be manageable.

Dr. Juran is credited with having brought in the human element in quality. Juran's approach is attainment of quality through people. That means, organizations should create an environment and methods to ensure that whatever is said in the system become guidelines for functioning to get the desired results [3].

Kobetsu Kaizen plays a vital role to sustain in present market scenario for an organization. Kobetsu Kaizen pillar of TPM (total productive maintenance) is not a simply analysis and indicates the effectiveness of an equipment. Rather, it is a tactical tool to increase availability, performance rate and the quality rate, through kaizen perform by the plants [4].

TPM methodology is performed by all employees from top management to bottom line of an organization [5].

3. SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES AT JSPL-RAIGARH

- SMILE scheme
- Quality Circles and other Quality Concepts Teams
- Suggestion Scheme
- Innovation Week
- Six Sigma Projects

3.1 SMILE scheme

SMILE scheme (Self Motivated Individual for Learning & Empowerment): SMILE Scheme, at JSPL-Raigarh, was launched with an objective to give employees a chance to become an important part of the organization by seeing their innovative ideas and thoughts being implemented in the areas they work in. SMILE teams (having 5-8 employees) from different sections/departments work in harmony to achieve the common goal of the organization at large. The scheme covers all departments across the plant, wherein teams volunteer to resolve the Production/Operation, Safety, Health & Environmental and other generic issues.

It provides a platform to develop the innovative and creative aspect of the talented workforce in providing feasible business solutions that will give a competitive edge and contribute towards the growth of the organization. The suitable rewards and recognitions in form of either monetary / non-monetary as decided and upon the discretion of the management, are awarded to all the deserving SMILE teams. The process flow of the scheme is shown in Fig. 1.

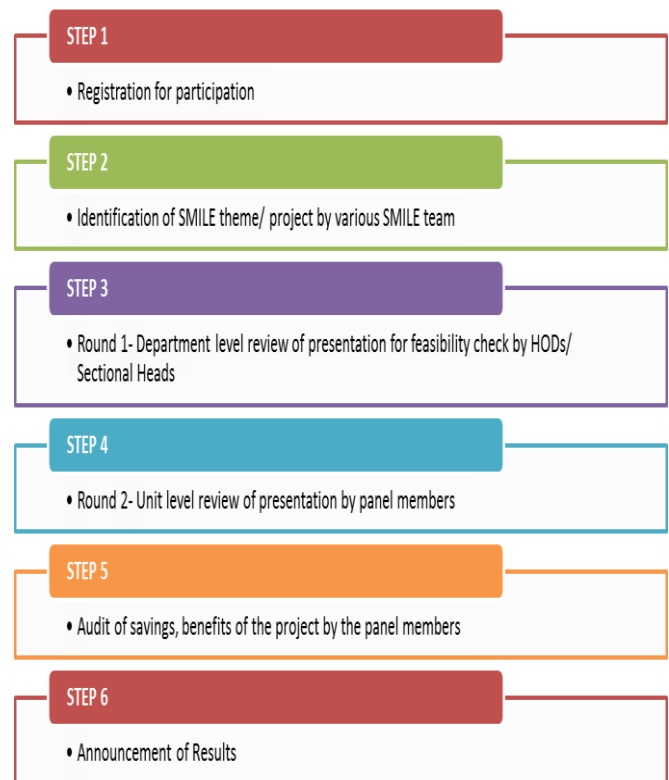


Fig. 1 : SMILE Scheme Process Flow

3.2 Quality Circles and other Quality Concepts Teams

Quality circle (QC) concepts is more than forty years old. While it is well established in Asian countries. A quality circle is a participatory management technique that enlists the help of employees in solving problems related to their own area of working / jobs. QCs are formed of employees working together in an operation who meet at fixed and regular intervals to discuss the problems of quality and to devise solutions for improvements.

To foster culture of teamwork, improvement, employee involvement and to create a happy work place, JSPL-Raigarh encourage their employees to participate in Quality Circle competitions (chapter / national / international level) every year. At JSPL, Quality Circles teams participate and present their case studies in different level of Quality circle competitions i.e. In-house, CCQC (Chapter Convention on Quality Concepts), NCQC (National Convention on Quality Concepts) and ICQCC (International Convention on Quality Control Circles).

The Quality Circle concept is based on very positive aspects. Primarily it aims at development and welfare of the people. The idea here is not to lure and attract people with selfish motive, but to improve their ability not only to do their job better but teach them how to use what they have learnt for their personal lives also, thereby enable them to lead a more planned and happy life.

This way Organizations carryout two important functions:

- I. Setting up of the organization on a sound footing and on a strong functional level and
- II. Fulfill social obligation.

At present, there are more than 75 QCs and other quality concept teams are active at JSPL-Raigarh.

3.3 Suggestion Scheme

Giving employees a voice helps in increasing the engagement. The objective of this scheme is to foster total employee involvement, evolve an organized channel for the flow of innovative ideas by innovative thinking to recognize employees for their creativity and motivate them to carry on their quest in contributing to the growth of the organization through commitment, ownership and responsibility for the work they are doing. The suggestions are given online/offline. The scheme runs throughout the year, wherein suggestions are rewarded annually with a very attractive token prize and cash awards.

3.4 Innovation Week

To commemorate the beloved Founder of OP Gindal Group, Mr. OP Jindal (Babuji) on the auspicious occasion of his birthday on 7th August, every year, the week from 7th – 14th August, is celebrated as the “Innovation Week” to encourage the innovative thinking amongst employees. Innovative ideas are presented by employees from various departments every year. The theme of Innovation week is chosen by Management which are based on cost reduction, Productivity, Improvement, Work efficiency improvement, Simplification of existing methods, Energy Conservation, Environment friendly practices and Safe working conditions.

It consists two categories :

- a) Theme Category
- b) General Category.

In theme category, the teams are submitted and performed presentation on the basis of given theme decided by the Top Management and in general category any type of improvements projects can be presented by the teams.

After the presentation, announcement of result and award take place to the winning teams in Innovation Week award ceremony.

3.5 Six Sigma Projects

Employees also undergo six sigma projects for process excellence. Specialized trainings are imparted by external / internal trainers to make employees proficient in designing projects through six sigma methodology. This not only leads to process change but also gives a chance to employees to think out of the box and be innovative at work place.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Small group activities are a proper tool to increase involvement of each employee of the organization.

JSPL has followed several tools and techniques to encourage Small group activities. The effective implementation of these tools made continuous improvement as a culture to build 360-degree development of the organization in this competitive world.

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BIOGRAPHIES



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