

Continuous improvement

To get better, train, communicate, benchmark — and be willing to change



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“Improve.” It’s central to the continuous improvement model. There are several areas of a snow and ice management operation where you can use the Sustainable Winter Management (SWiM) model to drive improvement. The primary SWiM guidelines to include as a standard set of policies for improving your snow and ice management operation include:

Change

Developing a company culture that accepts change and continuous improvement is potentially the most challenging for any organization. Change is so important because as an industry, our clients are accustomed to a business-as-usual approach to managing snow and ice conditions. Innovation, optimization, and increasing efficiencies and profits are all enabled by change and a systemic cultural acceptance to change. It only takes one person in an organization to sabotage change for the sake of improving.

How do we change? First, we need to ask the question: What would be worth changing for the positive?

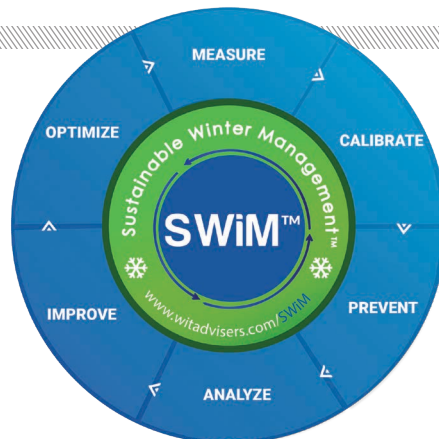


TRAINING: Consistent, scheduled training opportunities are critical to building a culture of continuous improvement.

Profits? Quality and the level of service (LOS) for your clients? Morale? Differentiating yourself from the competition? Work-life balance? The

amount of sleep you and your team are getting or lacking? If these questions resonate with you and your team, congratulations — you understand why change and continuous improvement is critically important to sustain any business or operation.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is the sixth in a series that discusses policy, methodologies and environmental stewardship through the lens of sustainability as it applies to winter management operations. Each issue will look at one of the categories of SWiM policy standards.



Benchmarking

Set and follow targets for production, material/inventory outputs (including salt use) and overall costs. These are things you can benchmark against your own company’s performance and that of the industry’s best practices standards.

Communication

This is an area where we all can improve. To do so, we need to determine what needs improved. Are we communicating to the proper decision makers or do we need to improve our levels of relationships? When and how often to communicate? Do our clients/constituents see us as approachable? Are we available to those with whom we should be communicating? What message needs communicating? How can we best deliver our message using tools, technology, cadence and reliability?

Training

What does your training look like now? Is it the typical half-day once or twice a year style that expects your employees to “drink from a fire hose” and then expect 100% retention of what’s taught? Or is there a more regularly scheduled cadence of focused topics for learning? Is your training well thought out, developed and scheduled? Or is someone asked to put something together the night before?

Level of service

Not to be confused with scope of work, LOS is the level of expectation(s) a client or constituent expects when it snows. It’s what gets sold and is produced. It’s the benchmark of quality.

Because it’s the core of any snow business, it begs the question: How do we improve it? What needs to be measured to then improve upon? How do we measure LOS? With cameras, written documentation, automated tracking or guessing?

Safety

Embed safety in every training or educational opportunity — across every level of your operation. Safety tailgate talks on their own only scratch the surface. Whether it’s plowing snow, shoveling walks, cleaning trucks, mowing grass or working at a computer, the safety components that make up each operation and function of every job is what needs to be taught. Not necessarily the safety aspect

individually. It needs to relate to every job role within the organization.

Increasing your ability to control costs, manage risk and enable continuous improvement is possible when you practice the “Improve” policy and other SWiM guidelines. These guidelines are designed to help snow and ice management operations

start with a simple set of criteria. It’s up to you how you want to improve with them. **SB**

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