

LEAN Implementation observations

INTRODUCTORY PHASE

In most cases, an organization does not have to look too far or too deep to identify streams of waste: excess motion of employees or equipment; defective material; employees or equipment waiting; excess inventory; over-production; over-processing; and transportation of material from one location to another.

Often, the people who have worked for years in environments with these forms of waste have become accustomed to seeing or recognizing that there is an opportunity to work more efficiently. An example could be something as simple as a garbage can placed 15 feet from where an operator performs the bulk of his tasks on a machine. These scenarios exist in almost every organization. The question is, how do we eliminate them?

We settled on a consulting company well-versed and experienced at both training and implementing lean principles. What we quickly realized was that we needed not only to educate our senior executive team, but we also needed to educate every individual team member within our organization. It took time, money and energy. It was a very difficult and challenging process, but in the end, there was no question it was the right thing to do and well worth the investment. The training was excellent, the concepts and lean principles became clear, and the root cause of our problems and issues began to manifest themselves in ways that seemed extremely, almost embarrassingly, obvious.

After nearly six months of training our senior executive team; sales force; and finance, purchasing, production, maintenance, engineering and logistics teams, we began to look at the underlying structure of our business systems and processes. We looked at every item produced, and its specific routing or sequence of process steps. There were hundreds of iterations or sequences by which all of our products were made, and we realized that they really needed to be organized into a much better group of part families.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The value stream engineer developed a value stream map, both current-state and future-state, based on goals for what we wanted to accomplish, and then we identified kaizen events or areas of opportunity to help us accomplish those goals. The majority of these goals centered around meeting promise dates, improving quality, increasing capacity, improving productivity, reducing cost and occupying less physical floor space.

The goals for each area were displayed and prioritized. Our desire was to start out with a kaizen event that would lead to a trophy area, or an area that would stand as an example of what the lean process can achieve. We set dates and identified individuals who should be invited to attend the different respective kaizen events.

"Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow."

Ronald. E. Osborn

Where Lean Thoughts can become Reality

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APPLICATION OF LEAN TOOLS AND METHODOLOGIES

Once you have identified and defined value streams, and set up and carried out your first group of kaizen events, you will realize how to use other lean tools that facilitated a variety of other lean improvements, both large and small, throughout all areas of our operation.

Implement 5S, point-of-use storage (POUS), kaizen, standardized work, kanbans and cellular/flow improvements. Let teams develop shadow boards for housekeeping supplies; label and organize your racking stations; and move operating supplies and inspection tools right to the point of use. Add visual controls and kanbans so that replenishment of racks, clamps, rags, personal protective equipment, chemicals and so on is completed automatically through a Timed Delivery Route. Work is staged on carts identified with flags, and a cone on each cart shows the finish of that order. Mix is scheduled to optimize the process capacity. The work is delivered to the operators with everything that operator will need.

CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Continuous improvement is probably the most difficult step we've identified with lean manufacturing, and from what we have gleaned from other companies, we're not alone. Continually auditing and driving continuous improvement will help maintain the momentum needed to develop a culture of continuous improvement and lean sustainment. Our company has developed a variety of tools to aid in this effort:

Employee engagement. For example, each team member has a goal to submit 12 Waste Stoppers per year or one per month. This drives employee engagement and is the basis for small or larger kaizen improvements. It's easy to measure, and great incentives are tied to meeting the goal.

Standardized work. We developed a standardized checklist for leaders, managers and engineers to audit improvements and processes, and require that data and/or numbers be logged, rather just checked off as complete.

Incentives. We offer creative incentives for performance, ideas and participation.

New hires. The foundation of any culture is its people. Employee entrance into the culture is huge. Can temporary or staffing agencies select new employees better than you can? Doubtful!

Culture of change. Employees need to be willing to embrace change, because the status quo is the opposite of continuous improvement. An open atmosphere of communication has to be present. If team members are afraid or can't voice their opinions and concerns, growth is stifled and it's difficult to improve.

Measuring. If it can't be measured, it's not happening. If it's not reported, it's extremely difficult to change or improve.

"Keeping the surgeon at the table" needs to be a large priority; anything that takes the operator away from his or her workstation should be analyzed and, if possible, delivered to him or her at the time it's needed.

There are many more tools not listed here that can help create a culture of continuous improvement.

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