

Implementing Lean in a Government Department

BACKGROUND

Ad Esse have recently been working with an internal Team to implement Lean in a major Government Department in a site employing over 400 people. A number of achievements were brought about:

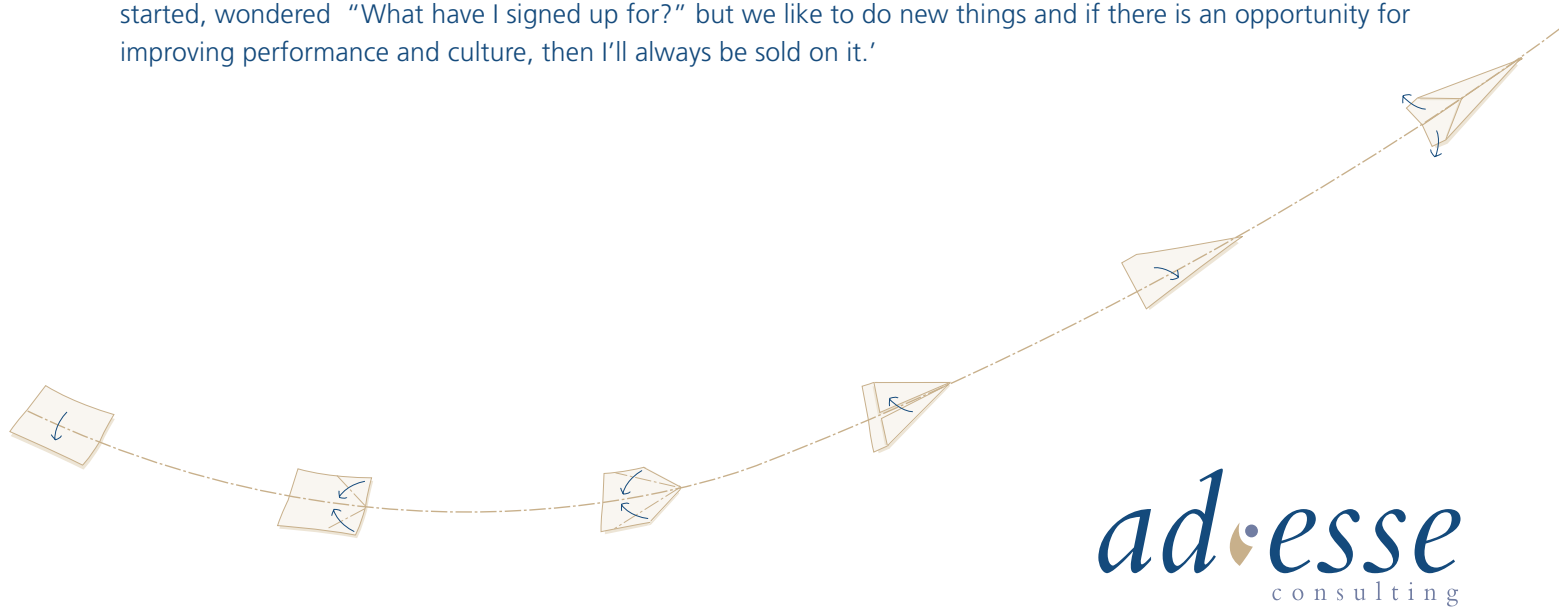
- Over £600,000 of potential improvements identified
- Decreases in Work Outstanding, between August and November, of between 20%-40% depending on the area of work
- Achieving the above whilst also dealing with an increase in intake, a decrease in staffing – or, in one area, both
- Achieving improvements in staff satisfaction in all eight areas surveyed, two key ones being :

	September 2007	January 2008
I understand how Lean will help improve processes	77%	84%
Lean has delivered improved service/performance in this office	26%	59%

WHY DID YOU SIGN UP FOR LEAN?

A senior manager of the site was interviewed for Actuality and we asked a number of questions about why they signed up and how they found the reality of Lean implementation. The first thing we wanted to know was why that particular office had volunteered, particularly since Lean implementation was part of a new programme, one that was aimed at changing the way the Department worked. 'We had been told that the Department was looking for an ideal place to implement Lean, one that was ready for change. That was how we were seen.'

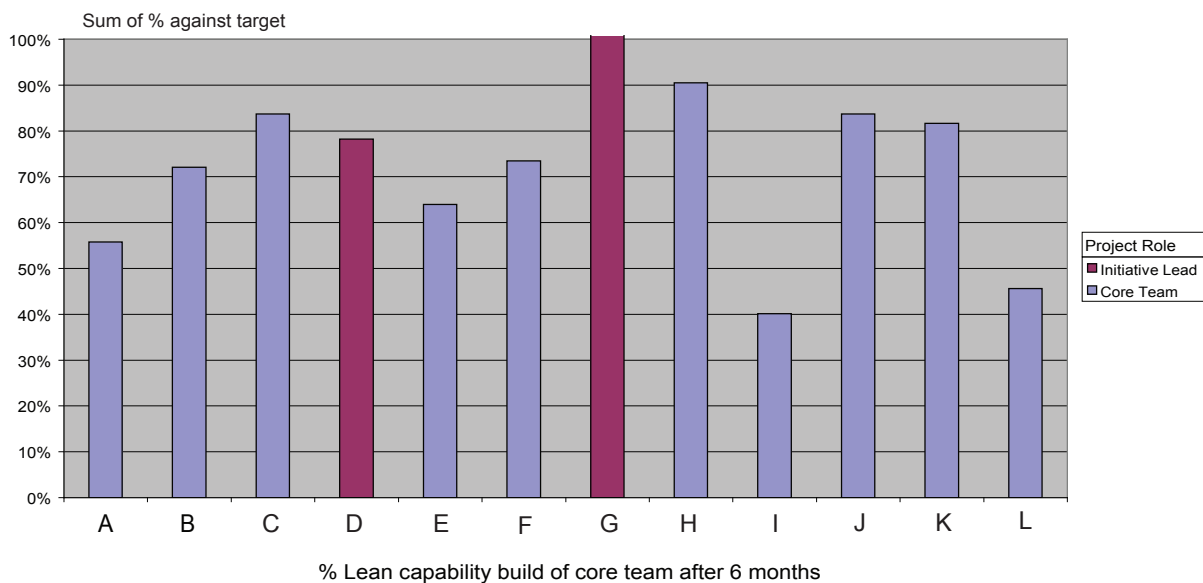
As with all change programmes, they experienced the usual feelings at the start, excitement followed by doubting whether this was a good idea. 'I was slightly worried about what it would mean and at one point, before we'd started, wondered "What have I signed up for?" but we like to do new things and if there is an opportunity for improving performance and culture, then I'll always be sold on it.'



In the early stages, a local Project Manager was appointed and a team of around nine people (the Core Team) recruited. Rather than being hand-picked as change experts, the Core Team were chosen from those who carried out the day-to-day job of processing forms. They were asked to express interest in joining the Team – within 48 hours - thereby creating a sense of energy and ownership. Many were completely new to the techniques of change management and were not used to running workshops, mapping processes, developing suggestions for improvement and implementing them etc. The Team was completed by two Consultants, experts in Lean, and a number of people from the Department’s central bodies, whose role was to deal with the Department’s varied structures, ensure that the metrics were in place, pick up ideas and pass them through to Policy colleagues for potential wider implementation – and at the same time, develop their own expertise.

DEVELOPING THE CAPABILITY

The commitment of the local management team was important for the success of the project. In the early days, the Core Team went through intensive training in Lean philosophy and Lean tools and techniques. For this period, they were much less visible around the building than they were to become. The senior manager took the view that ‘if we need nine people, we’ll have nine people full time and train them, not have them moving in and out of the Team with a potentially negative impact’. It proved invaluable to give this core of people time to develop their understanding of Lean. At the time (and even more so in hindsight) it became ‘quite thrilling’ to see the staff’s ability and confidence develop.



Behind this whole approach was a belief in the value of passing on the knowledge and skills. At times, when there had been around two months work on the capability build and on diagnostics such as Value Stream Mapping and assessing Waste, the expression ‘keeping the faith’ was used. It was clear that the Team were beginning to think differently about the processes they used to get work done and there was a strong desire to allow them space to think this through. By now, six months in, they are running workshops unsupported, have over 100 improvement ideas to work through and are at the forefront of implementing them with the Teams they were originally a part of – and to which they are now moving back as practitioners of Lean.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE MAJOR CHANGE?

We asked the senior manager what he saw as the major change after six months of Lean implementation. Notwithstanding some impressive performance figures quoted at the beginning of this article, the reply was an unequivocal **'Empowerment of staff'**.

An expression that we often use about Lean implementation is that is simple but not easy – the philosophy and any one of the tools can be readily understood, but there is no easy way to put them all together in a Lean implementation and create the 'buzz' that comes from people working well as a Lean Team.

We started Lean implementation by asking for examples of Waste. We were given examples of the waste of motion and we were told simple things like, 'I have to walk to the fax machine.' We simply said, 'Why not move it?' It is not always easy for managers to understand the value of encouraging simple, quick and cheap improvements to create success but on this site both the Core Team and other staff on the ground were encouraged to do this. By also using Information Centre meetings to allow presentations of continuous improvements and recognize success, the beginnings of a culture of continuous improvement were created. The benefits of this approach are now paying back with improvement suggestions on a much larger scale. Within weeks, further improvements were identified. The first of these to be implemented has been costed as giving potential savings of around £150,000 a year.

WHAT DO YOU SEE FOR THE FUTURE?

The senior manager's unequivocal comment above, 'Empowerment of staff' was followed by a very realistic assessment of the time that it takes to change the way we see the world and the way we work. 'I've started to make staff believe they can influence their world; we've opened the door for that, we need to make sure it happens.'

Many good things are in place to help this, for example:

- a Value Stream Map has recently been created to assess value and cost in processes worth millions of pounds.
- Whereas the initial focus was on empowering staff and feeding back to their managers; the site is now working with managers to ensure they also have the knowledge and skill base to become Lean leaders – creating the vision and then coaching, encouraging and empowering their staff to develop a culture of continuous improvement.

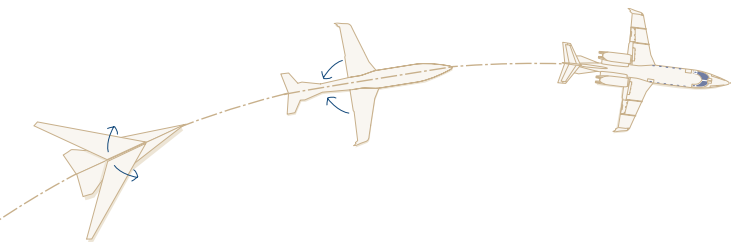
The implementation of Lean has been described as being like a virus, it's contagious and once you've caught the virus it changes your perception. The senior manager of the project recently won three Premium Bonds in the same week. Not only did he celebrate his success, but he also saw them arrive through the letter box in three separate envelopes and thought, 'What a waste'. The contagion of Lean is clearly here to stay.

METHODOLOGY

On several occasions during the interview, the senior manager noted his fears about consultants. 'Previously, we've had things done to us, so we were concerned what it would mean'. 'We were worried about having consultants catapulted in who won't understand the reality'. Lean implementation, however, is also about modelling good Lean leadership ourselves, about working with the business to improve and sustain improvement, which itself is then owned and developed by the business. The reality of his experience was summed up in his comment, 'Thank you for changing my view of consultants'. Lean implementation works by passing on Lean tools and philosophy, by modelling Lean behaviours and working with those who do the job to find and implement improvements. A vital part of our Lean implementation is, over time, to make ourselves superfluous and to ensure that there is a transition of expertise from Consultants to the business so that they can continue to improve processes long after we have gone.

..... AND FINALLY

We asked the senior manager about how he saw the future and were told, 'It'll be a part of the infrastructure here – you won't notice Lean, you won't mention the word "lean". If it's to be done here, we will just do things that way'.



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