

Applying Lean and Reducing Waste Transport

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This article is the third in a series of seven, with the aim of helping to answer the question:

“How do we deliver the most effective service for the very best cost to the taxpayer?”

The full set of seven wastes are:

- Waiting
- Inventory
- Transport
- Motion – people, materials and paperwork moving
- Excess Processing
- Over-Production
- Rework.

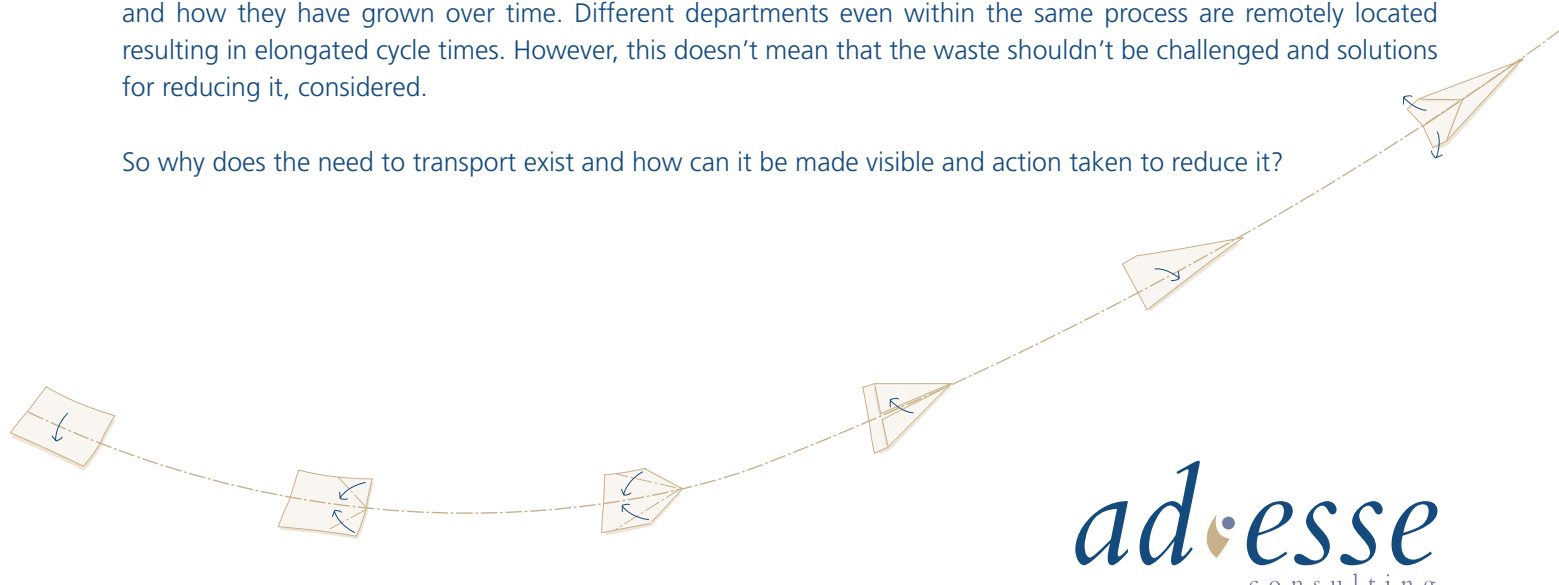
BACKGROUND

In this article, we are looking at physical transportation. This can be in the delivery of services or sometimes moving things around such as files or case notes.

In an office environment, examples may be the transportation of a physical document from one building to another, or often being transported from one floor to another in the same building. Also the delivery of some health services can be dependent upon visiting or driving to different locations.

Sometimes it is impossible to eradicate the movement of goods and services due to the sheer scale of organisations and how they have grown over time. Different departments even within the same process are remotely located resulting in elongated cycle times. However, this doesn't mean that the waste shouldn't be challenged and solutions for reducing it, considered.

So why does the need to transport exist and how can it be made visible and action taken to reduce it?



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LEARNING TO SEE

One of things we always find when mapping out a process, especially in the Public Sector is that the value added ratio (the time adding value for the customer in relation to the overall lead time) of a process is always very low. Often a contributory factor is the remote location of parts of a process. This can be different buildings in different parts of the country, or even different parts of the same office complex. The power of seeing a service through it's whole journey across silos in organisations cannot be underestimated. This powerful technique of Value Stream Mapping allows organisations to visualise what couldn't be seen previously.

THE SERVICE IMPLICATIONS

The fact is that just physically shipping something from A to B adds absolutely no value to the end user whatsoever. So in identifying wastes that need to be removed to improve flow and service to the customer Transportation can be a frustrating one. We often see improvements being made in each separate location but because it is very rare for someone to oversee a whole Value Stream the "bits" in between are often forgotten.

A large central government department was sending paperwork via a 3 day delivery service (to keep costs down) but without taking into account the impact of the delay to it's customers. In fact it was seen as something that had tried to be subject to improvement and as costs had been reduced with the 3 day delivery, the job was considered to be done. This inward view of the process didn't force them to challenge the thinking based upon their customer's experience. When we got them to look at it in a different way, it didn't take them long to challenge the long-standing thinking and develop an electronic solution and reduce 3-day cycle time to same day service.

The other aspect that can be challenged, and perhaps more easily as someone outside of the process, is whether the process can't be housed, if not under one roof, but in fewer discrete locations, – again, reducing overall cycle time and being of benefit to the customer. Obviously to do this could mean major cost and logistical implications to change. The benefit of making such changes would have to be considered and costed.

So if something has been transported – what else can go wrong? It is not infrequently that items go missing or are lost in transit. It doesn't have to be items being transported to another site, these problems can occur even when moving things around the same building.

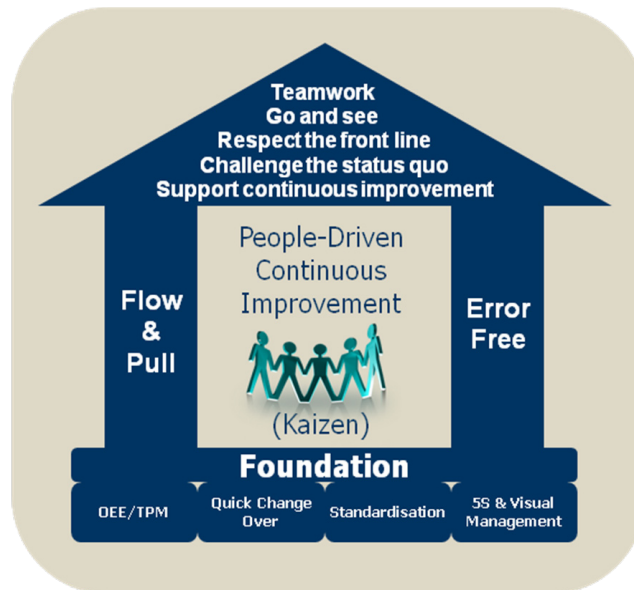
"2 stages of a paper-based process in the same 3 storey building had become an issue with customer complaints increasing as a result of documents going missing. The process was split across different floors and there was an unusual and unique way of transporting paperwork between floors, their own lift system specifically for the paperwork. It was only when looking more closely that it was discovered papers had been falling down into the lift shaft creating their own source of poor customer service and complaints."

Often it is difficult to determine which processes should be moved closer together even within the same building, but in a similar way to remote office locations, mapping the process makes it easier to visualise

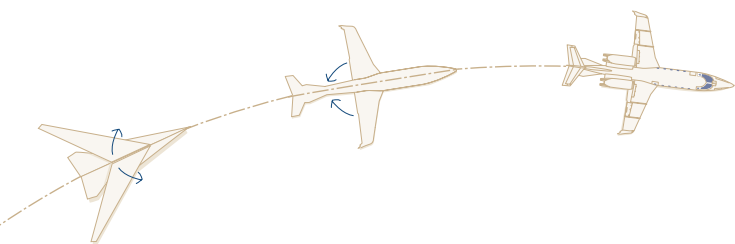
So, as in the perhaps extreme example above, office layouts can often be the fundamental cause of excess transportation. When appropriate, reorganising the desks within an office from a functional to a cellular layout has been found by many organisations to help not just reduce transportation waste but also reduce Work In Progress and waiting.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

As we've seen Transportation, in certain circumstances, can be difficult to remove or even reduce. However, that's not to say it shouldn't be challenged and all possible solutions considered. Often transportation is one waste that really elongates the customer experience in comparison to some of the other wastes. If transportation is combined with rework and it's easy to see how the problem is compounded with work bouncing around an organisation until it's correct. Intelligent application of the Lean Tools from the Lean Temple will help develop the most appropriate and sustainable improvements.



If you would like to know more about the seven wastes and potential solutions to reduce waste and improve your customers experience then contact us directly or look on our website for our programme of free seminars. We're more than happy to find out about and discuss any issues you may have.



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