

Leading Lean

Today's business environment is complex, challenging and often turbulent. Being an excellent leader in such a world can be difficult and demanding. Leading Lean requires more.

You may be implementing Lean principles, but do any of the following apply?

- You haven't quite achieved everything you had hoped for
- Not everyone seems to have got on board with the principles on a day-to-day basis e.g. data not fully captured, disciplines not fully followed
- You still have "problem" employees (and "problem" managers!)

Lean Principles

Before we launch into an explanation of what we mean by Leading Lean in detail, let's just recap the key concepts of Lean thinking:

- All value-adding activities in the organisation should be improved
- All non-value adding activities should be removed
- A faster process is a better process
- A clear focus on everyone meeting the external customer's requirement
- A clear definition of internal/supplier relationships
- Effective measurement and analysis of processes

Lean thinking was developed in post-WW II Japan and subsequently introduced to the West. Since then its use has spread, largely within manufacturing although numerous service organisations have recognised the transferability of its principles and have benefited from its application.

The advantages of implementing Lean speak for themselves; here are a few examples where we have supported clients with whom we have worked:

- In a manufacturing company the lead time on the manufacture of aircraft panels was reduced from over 6 weeks to 1 week, thus eliminating the need for finished goods stock
- A kanban between two stages in a manufacturing process was developed, eliminating over 1700 fork lift truck movements and reducing stock values by £120k
- The Overall Equipment Effectiveness was increased on a single machine from 35% to 80% thus doubling capacity and eliminating the need to spend £350k on a new machine to meet increasing customer demand
- In a computer kitting operation, the time to kit was reduced, the movement required to produce the kit was reduced and kit accuracy increased from 90% to over 99%.

Achieving all the Benefits

But do all organisations who have implemented Lean therefore gain all of the anticipated benefits?

A phenomenon that we have encountered and one which appears to be on the increase is that leaders themselves, whilst persuaded of the logic of Lean and whilst verbally committing to its implementation, subsequently behave in a way that prevents maximisation of benefits. Whilst they may implement the practical aspects of Lean, they fail to sufficiently influence, motivate and inspire employees to maximise the potential, or sometimes even sustain the initial gains.

Leading Lean is a unique combination of three aspects:

- Leaders commit to the principles of Lean thinking and create the conditions in which they can be used
- Leaders fully understand the principles of Lean and embody those principles personally in everyday leader behaviours
- Leaders apply the principles of Lean to improve the effectiveness of the leadership process within the organisation

We are now helping organisations to think through very clearly what each of the above points actually means, what it looks like, and how the three aspects combine.

Leading Lean clearly requires the integration of excellent leadership principles with Lean thinking. It is about developing competence as a Lean Leader, then demonstrating the knowledge, skills and attitudes to Lead Lean coherently and inspirationally.

What's Different?

We have discussed Leading Lean with people in a variety of business environments and the most frequently asked question is 'Isn't it just about being a good leader in general?'

Well, no it isn't. Will good leaders be able to implement Lean thinking effectively? Absolutely. Will they fully maximise the benefits and achieve sustainable improvements? Most probably not.

Now, in addition to helping organisations implement Lean approaches in services and production, we are adding value by providing support such as coaching for senior managers and a series of Leading Lean workshops for managers at all levels. The focus is on developing highly practical skills that can be applied in the workplace, to create the environment where Lean principles will flourish.

Our Leading Lean programmes are not "off the shelf" training; they are designed to meet the specific needs of our clients. We do this by carrying out an initial diagnosis of needs, then design a modular programme to meet these over a 4 to 6 week period. The programme includes a blend of formal inputs and practical work-based assignments, plus 1-1 coaching support to ensure managers can really apply their learning.

Quotes from 3 participants after a Leading Lean Programme at SP Systems:

Russell Taylor, Lean Project Manager:

The programme was very well thought through, I cannot recommend any improvements. It must be run for other managers within the organisation.

Adam Summers, Night Shift Manager:

The programme has enhanced my knowledge of lean and leadership which will help me to do my job in a more lean, constructive and professional manner.

Garry Newton, Process Manager:

My attention was kept throughout the programme which was impressive! It will help me tackle specific issues within my department and others. This programme should be completed by all managers.

If you would like to talk to us about achieving sustainable improvement by Leading Lean in your organisation, please contact us at seriousfun@ad-esse.com