

Applying Lean to Adult Social Care



Background

The London Borough of Merton Council (Merton) is one of 26 four star councils in England and Wales. It has an annual budget in the region of £230 million and is the largest employer in Merton with a staff of over 5,000. Merton has a strongly improving direction of travel, strongly performing services and performing well in its use of resources.

Merton Council as a “floor” authority receives the lowest possible share of central government funding support. Every year, in order to maintain its financial position, the council has to close a gap between its resources (mainly council tax and central government funding) and its commitments. In the budget round for 2010/2011, the initial budget gap was over £14m.

Although, to date, Merton has been able to meet its 4% annual efficiency savings target, initially by obvious savings on a service by service basis, they now need to make a step change to the way they do business.

The council has embarked on a transformation programme in order to make the required reductions in spend while maintaining or improving the customer experience of services. This means taking a radical look at what the council will look like in the future in terms of cost base and staffing.

This means analysing processes to ensure money is only spent on things which directly add value to the customer using “Lean” thinking principles.

Ad Esse's Role

The programme of work we designed aims to support Merton becoming a truly Lean organisation (Lean is not just about process efficiency but also about creating a culture where all staff know what they are doing, why they are doing it and how well they are doing). When this awareness is prevalent, Lean uses the knowledge and capability of all staff to challenge what they do and develop more effective systems. When this is coupled with Lean Thinking, focusing on the real needs of the customer and identifying the real cost of a process to Merton and the customer from end to end, we can identify what real waste is and make major decisions to redesign processes.

When describing how to introduce a successful Lean programme, we always emphasise the importance of having a mix of top-down systems improvement work balanced with the bottom-up Lean foundation activity that develops the culture of continuous improvement enabling the major changes to succeed, sustain and continue to develop.



The top-down improvement work providing the “systematic review and redesign” methodology using a mix of Lean process improvement tools and the development of Merton’s staff and managers’ Lean understanding and change management capability through training, coaching and mentoring.

To help clarify the main project themes and to begin to engage senior managers, a diagnostic was carried out based on existing data within the organisation, and ensuring that representative activities of the organisation were investigated in some depth.

This diagnostic was fed back to the senior management team and a number of potential areas for service reviews investigated. It was tempting to focus the service reviews on the areas of greatest financial benefit, however there is an additional imperative for the organisation to build its capability to undertake reviews going forward.

As a result reviews were selected across 4 of the 5 directorates within the council. The goals for the reviews also differed:

- Transactional process where cost savings needed to be achieved whilst maintaining or improving service levels (Revenues and Benefits);
- Social work environment where a new policy was being introduced (self directed support for Adult Social Care (ASC)) and significant reductions in staff via voluntary redundancy were happening. Improved customer service was also desirable;
- Demonstrate Lean in a front-line service organisation where the workplace is very dispersed – Waste Operations;
- ‘Difficult’ service – demonstrate the applicability of Lean where the organisation has multiple interlocking functions (Children, Schools and Families).

This case study focuses on the service review commissioned within Adult Social Care processes.

From possibility...

As part of a Government-directed initiative to change the way adult social care is provided, Merton Council has revised its systems to give local people more control and choice over their support arrangements. As part of the, ‘Putting People First’ recommendations to establish a more personalised system, Merton had explored introducing a Self-Directed Support (SDS) service for residents with assessed, eligible long-term needs. The Lean review was used as a means to ensure new processes were ‘Lean’ by design; existing inefficiencies and wastes had been removed or significantly reduced wherever possible.



Using a four stage approach (shown above) managers and staff were guided on using Lean diagnosis tools, such as Voice of the Customer (VoC) and value stream mapping (VSM), to identify activities not directly contributing to customer value (classified within Lean as non-value add or waste).

The review commenced with a meeting with the sponsor to discuss issues and desired outcomes. This was followed by a group workshop where customer critical requirements were analysed and prioritised. Selected frontline workers from teams and associated specialist functions were chosen and scoping/outcomes agreed. The scope was confirmed as the customer’s experience of the whole ASC Access and Assessment process from the point of referral to the case being closed following review.

Determining customer value...

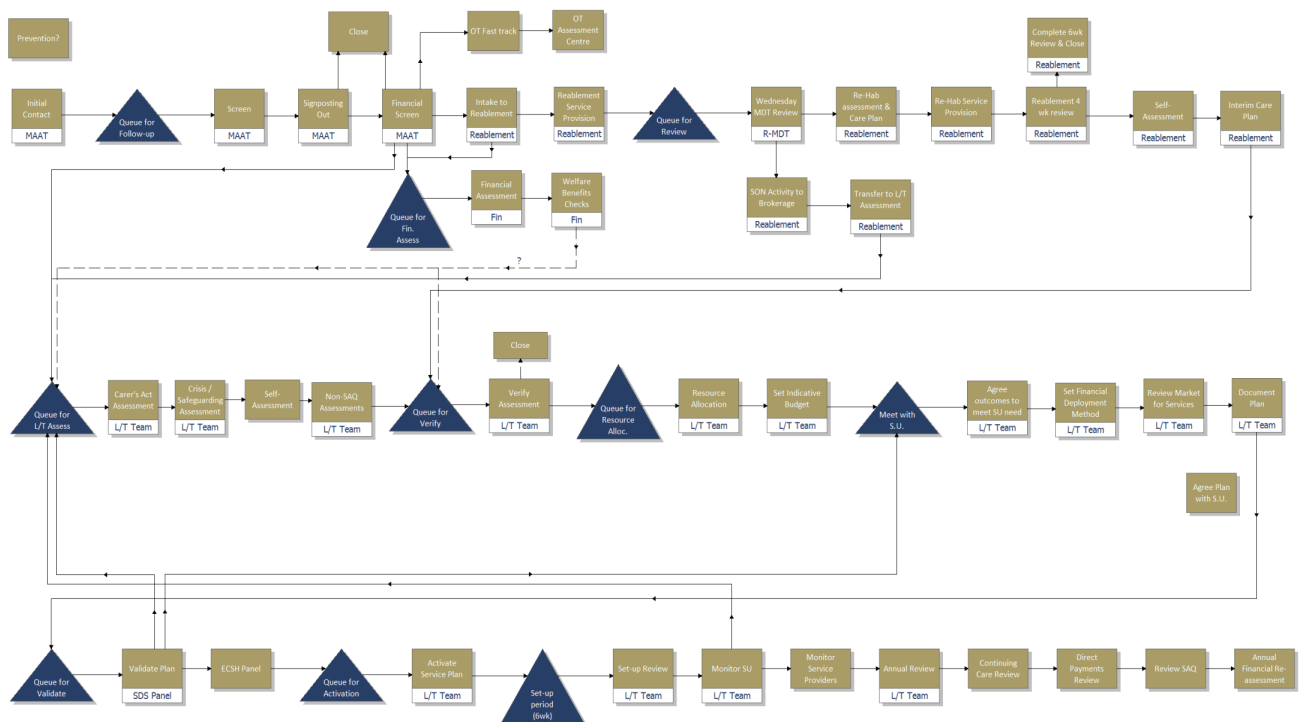
What customers considered value add within the ASC processes was determined by analysing current customer feedback, which isolated the following four customer critical requirements:

1. **Timely support / care / advice**
 - Quick response
 - Right time for customer
2. **Right support / care / advice**
 - Appropriate support
 - Choice of the customer
 - Correct, consistent advice / assessment
 - Consistent / reliable contact
3. **Clear engagement**
 - What can be done
 - Financial status
 - Expectations
4. **Professional Engagement**
 - Dignity, respect, honesty.

Once customer value was defined time was devoted to high level mapping which prompted discussion of the metrics and further data collection required to baseline the current service. To this end and to capture issues directly experienced by staff, 'Day In the Life Of' (DILo) observations were commenced which identified some of the following as areas for improvement:

- Workplace Organisation
- Waiting for communications / back & forth communications
- Duplication of work / checking / recording
- Inconsistent process / roles / outputs
- Process issues (not simplest, too many changes)
- Right skills for activity
- Conflict between process driven (30%) and client reactive (70%) activity.

These issues were fed into the 'To Be' design workshop where staff were supported in finding ways to mitigate the waste using Lean tools and techniques. The process was re-mapped and these along with the subsequent discussions formed the basis of an implementation plan ('To Be' process shown below).



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Outcomes from 'To Be' workshop

Areas ripe for efficiency improvement were captured. These focused on removing handoffs and implementing a monitoring system which would identify issues prior to them becoming major problems.

Key changes to how the work was managed included:

- Pulling work from defined work queues only when staff were able to complete
 - Pull from initial contact follow-up
 - Pull from Financial Assessments
 - Pull to monitor self-assessment
 - Pull to verify Self Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ)?
 - Join with resource allocation / indicative budget
 - Set appointments to agree outcomes at the time of pulling SAQ for verification
 - Pull cases for activation of Service Plan.

To ensure work is pulled and completed against the agreed standards the team use information centres which include measures such as:

- Return rate from Plan Validate panel
- Referral Right First Time (RFT) rate (from professions).

Outcomes...

Merton received the following outcomes & benefits:

Waste totalling over £100K identified

Reduced cost for assessment

Reduced cycle time

Reduced work input

Managers and staff engaged and driving change from within the service using information centre's to identify and solve problems.

Reduced workload for Market Review

Reduced amount of care delivered without Financial Assessment

Reduced reactive working due to increased Monitoring activity

A detailed action plan for implementation – linked into the overall Lean transformation programme.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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