

Lean is Simple!

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Lean is now a proven approach that has been successfully used by Toyota and many other companies for over 40 years. Lean is simply a philosophy and proven long-term approach that aligns everything in a business with a total focus on delivering increasing customer value.

It identifies and eliminates all waste (non-value add activities), improves your strategic processes and increases production flow by improving efficiency. Typically, the best source for ideas to improve things is from workers on the floor (they know the process best).

Secret to “Lean success” (per Toyota)

"Simply look at every step in a process from the time a customer places an order to the time you ship product or complete the service being provided. Then determine if each activity really adds value (from the customer’s perspective). If an activity “doesn’t add value” it should be considered waste “Non-Value Add – NVA”. If waste, then tag it and look for ways to eliminate it.

There are only three type of activities.

- Value-add (VA) – things we do that add value to the product or service being provided.
- Non-value add (NVA) – the things we do (activities) that do not add any value (waste).
- Non-value add required (NVAR) – the things we do that do not add value but we “have to do.” (For example – agency regulations or tax code requirements)

Lean solution - Simply look at your process and identify ways to eliminate all NVA activities = eliminate waste



Kaizen is a powerful Lean tool that can improve any process by the following.

- Encourage ideas from all workers & respects their input. There are no “bad suggestions.”
- Get everyone to think about how they can eliminate “waste” / improve their workstations.
- Reward and acknowledge successful ideas then document value add / benefits realized.
- Use power gained by engaging worker input. Create a culture of respect and open communication = proven competitive advantage.

Process Improvement – Value Stream Mapping is one of best Lean tools to start with. It provides you with an overview of your current process, areas to improve and an overall game plan. It helps you by thinking about your process in terms of; Current State – define and document how each process “actually works” (not how you think it works).

- Ideal Future State – brainstorm how the same process “could work” – in an “ideal future state.”
 - Identify ideas to improve each process – create a list by engaging your team.
 - Action Plan – review and prioritize top 10 ideas (the 80/20 rule - critical few) / implement items over next three to six months.
- Repeat above “cycle of improvement” at 3 or 6-month intervals.

Create a core group of “problem solvers” – create a Lean Team & build on it.

- Successful Lean programs create a group of “problem solvers.”
- Lean is simply a systematic approach used to identify, understand root cause, and solve problems vs. “work arounds.”

- Another key to success is changing the way problems or issues are discussed:
 - From - Who is at fault, it is not my area of responsibility or not my department.
 - To – What is the problem, let us determine the root (real) cause, develop & test a solution.

Lean is Simple – Bottom Line:

1. Look for and eliminate process waste. Realize that “waste is everywhere.”
2. Encourage workers to provide ideas on how to improve their process every day.
3. Identify the problem, determine the root cause, test & then implement the best solution.

About the Author:

Ernie Kulik is a credentialed professional with a solid engineering background and an experienced project manager on over 100 projects. He developed a strong set of problem-solving, process improvement, and engineering skills by leading construction, engineering, and Lean/Ops Ex teams as Manager Facilities and EHS for over 128 facilities across North America. Kulik has a passion for sharing his expertise and helping companies as a hands-on engineer, project manager, Lean consultant, or as an effective trainer.

Need help?

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