



LET'S GET LEAN

CECILIA DANLIN, continuous improvement manager, Messer Cutting Systems, talks with *FFJournal* about reducing waste in industrial settings

Q: What is Lean, and how does it apply to transactional environments?

A: Lean manufacturing has long been recognized as a gold standard for continuously improving processes in industrial settings—and its principles can be applied to the office environment, as well. Transactional and administrative processes are considered “non-value added” (that is, processes or tasks that do not contribute to the creation of the product or service the customer is willing to pay for). Of course, many of these activities are required to run the business, so we refer to them as “non-value added but essential.” Regardless of whether a process is essential, it is important that transactional processes are targeted for the application of Lean.

Lean is a methodology focused on identifying and eliminating waste in processes. In an office setting, “waste” can manifest itself in unnecessary paperwork, redundant meetings or inefficient workflows. By applying Lean principles, we can significantly improve efficiency and reduce costs.

Q: What are the core principles of Lean?

A: The core principles of Lean include the following:

- **Specify value.** Clearly define what your customers value and what they are willing to pay for.
- **Identify the value stream.** Map out all the steps involved in delivering value. This includes the manufacturing processes and office-based activities, as well as the hand-offs that occur between them, such as sending purchase orders to suppliers and creating shop orders that are handed off to the production supervisors.
- **Create flow.** Make steps flow smoothly without interruptions. Reduce the number of required documents, eliminate waste that is baked into the processes, and arrange equipment and workstations to facilitate smooth flow of materials and information.
- **Establish pull.** Produce only what is needed when it is needed. Avoid printing anything if

possible, and don't keep a rack of shelves well stocked with rarely used forms. With the advent of current technologies, we should be asking ourselves if something is really needed before hitting the print button.

- **Seek perfection.** In the words of legendary football coach Vince Lombardi, “Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence.”

Q: How can I identify waste in the office?

A: Common types of waste in office settings include overproduction, such as brochures, forms and unused reports; time spent idle waiting for information, resources, approvals and decisions; unnecessary movement of people or documents; doing more work than is required, such as re-entry of data; having too much stock of supplies or information; and errors or mistakes that need to be corrected.

Q: How do I get started with Lean in my office?

A: Begin by forming a cross-functional team of employees—a Lean team, and provide training on Lean principles and tools. Then, start with a small, high-impact pilot project. Use value stream mapping to visualize the current process, pinpoint areas for improvement, amend processes to eliminate waste and streamline activities, and track key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the impact of Lean.

Q: How can I overcome resistance to Lean implementation?

A: Change can be challenging, so it is important to communicate clearly, provide training, recognize and reward achievements, and be patient. Buy-in and culture shift are critical elements to Lean, so explain the benefits and involve employees in the process. Lean is a journey, not a destination. By embracing Lean principles and tools, offices can achieve significant improvements in efficiency, productivity, as well as overall customer and employee satisfaction. **FFJ**

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