



Achieving and sustaining operational excellence using Lean



'The team was enthusiastic, there was a fantastic response culture from the rest of the business, it was a great opportunity for real shop-floor participation and it got results.'

*Mike Davies
Director
Silentnight Beds*



'I thought it was going to be so boring sitting in a room. I've had my best week ever, loved it, got things done that we've wanted for years.'

*Machine Operator
Silentnight Beds*

Achieving and Sustaining Operational Excellence Using Lean

It's more than just technique

Increasing competition, rising costs and the ever-present need to be the best, continues to drive companies and organisations towards working smarter to reduce waste and achieve competitive advantage.

Lead from top to bottom, bottom to top ... and side to side!

To achieve competitive advantage improvements need to be championed and staff engaged at all levels to make change happen and ensure skills are embedded and benefits sustained.

It is often assumed that line managers and staff have the necessary skills to drive improvements and engender staff participation. This is not often the case, especially where grass-roots improvements have not been encouraged consistently across an organisation and are not part of the company culture. A line manager who tries to gain the participation of staff more broadly in change - or to work with multi-disciplined teams - can send a ripple of negative tremors across an organisation.

Our experience confirms that without the understanding and commitment from the top and middle layer of an organisation towards improvement, it is hard to gain the involvement and understanding of those working at lower levels.

Getting the right mix for making change happen

For transformation to be effective and long-lasting, we suggest a two stranded approach that evolves over time and consists of: 1) Lean leadership; and 2) Rapid Improvement Events followed by continuous improvement.

As well as including the right people in the Rapid Improvement Event (RIE) team, it is vital to ensure those around the team are considered as they need to understand and support the work being done. For this reason, our Lean leadership training is targeted across the organisation to encourage participation and enthusiasm for the new way of working.

The RIE team is made up of:

- Staff taken from a vertical slice through the organisation involved in the area of improvement.
- Staff with skills and expertise from other departments or disciplines that can assist.

It combines those that know the detail of what happens at the grass roots and those with the authority to sanction change.



“Our approach is to develop your skills to achieve, implement and sustain real improvements involving people through Lean leadership, RIE’s and continuous improvement.”

Ian Page
 Consultant
 The Consultancy

Lean leadership

We believe that there are eight key steps to transforming any organisation.

1. Establish a sense of urgency and commitment from the top.
2. Assemble a group with enough power to lead the change and encourage them to work as a team.
3. Create a vision to help direct the change effort and develop strategies for achieving that vision.
4. Communicate the vision using every vehicle at your disposal.
5. Empower others to act on the vision, getting rid of the obstacles to change.
6. Plan for short-term wins, recognise and reward employees.
7. Consolidate improvements and produce still more change.
8. Institutionalise new approaches and develop the means to ensure leadership development and succession.

As every organisation and team is individual, our programmes are tailored to take into account current knowledge, existing culture and the specific challenges being faced by an organisation.

Rapid Improvement Events (RIEs)

Having set the platform by developing Lean leadership skills, a Rapid Improvement Event can deliver real operational improvements by working with multi-functional teams. This frequently taps into existing knowledge and a wealth of ideas that can be converted into reality provided the key stakeholders are participating and supporting the RIE. Decisions can be made on-the-spot rather than postponed or referred on. Typically, RIEs last five consecutive days and follow a format that can be flexed to meet the improvement being tackled.

Day 1	Discover and measure the current situation.
Day 2	Continue to measure and move into analysis, verify root causes and criteria (actual demand, variation etc) that need to be taken into account in the re-design.
Day 3	Improve, re-design and determine changes (make sure it will work) and plan/communicate implementation.
Day 4	Implement improvements that can be made straight away including support and communication. Plan improvements that need to be implemented over a period of time.
Day 5	Check improvements that have been made straight away and adjust if necessary, check plans for improvements to be implemented over a period of time. Present back to organisation.

Our consultants can help you define an area of improvement and target an effective team to tackle it. The key is to avoid ‘paralysis by analysis’ and to recognise that it is not necessary to learn every analytical tool or statistical technique before you start making practical operational improvements. Training can be provided on individual tools and techniques as they need to be used. This makes learning very practical, staff are empowered and positive change becomes rapidly tangible.

Sustaining with continuous improvement

We expect significant progress towards operational improvements throughout a RIE. If well managed, these events generate energy and commitment to positive change. This should be maintained and built upon through a planned continuous improvement programme. This helps to sustain the improvements made and also to capitalise on the flow of ideas and commitment that follow on from this activity. It is typically spearheaded by a coordinator who is actively supported by top management. The coordinator facilitates the involvement of team members to enable the ideas and actions coming from the people involved in work areas to be developed in a structured way that maintains progress and visibility. This involves:

- A **continuous improvement process** that everyone can share.
- Good **action planning** so that people know who is doing what and can see it being done or identify where support is needed.
- Running **continuous improvement meetings** to maximise staff involvement and action.

Embedding the skills and keeping it alive

Success breeds success and the confidence for all staff to contribute improvements. By involving staff at all levels, skills become embedded and self supporting so that improvement activities can be lead from the bottom up. Give staff the skills, a way, and the chance to contribute and they will.

By continual improvement with the commitment and involvement of staff at all levels, change happens and becomes a way of life to increase competitiveness, reduce costs and become the best, by working smarter and more effectively to reduce waste and achieve operational excellence.

Our Experience

Our consultants all have senior operational backgrounds, and are experienced in deploying Lean techniques in both the industry and the health sectors. The benefits we deliver are real, not theoretical; and the majority of our turnover comes from repeat business from satisfied clients.

Can we help you improve your competitive edge?

For an initial meeting please contact:

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“In our experience Lean improvements falter only when there is too much focus on the tools and techniques, and the expectation of instant improvement. At its heart Lean is a philosophy of ‘how things are done around here’ and understanding and living this requires long-term commitment; but is ultimately the route to sustained success.”

Fraser Geekie
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