



Case Study

Using lean to lead
organisational transformation

Lean thinking: more than just technique

As manufacturing in the UK continues to suffer, it is essential that companies maintain their competitive edge and increase their efficiency. Lean can help organisations create a culture of improvement and positive change.

The Client

Silentnight Beds are the UK's biggest bed manufacturer producing a large range of beds and mattresses, with a turnover of approximately £75m. Company management wished to significantly improve the productivity of the Silentnight Beds operation and were keen to use lean to drive improvements.

The Challenge

Silentnight Beds wished to improve the manufacturing performance /productivity of its operation. Their performance was below that of Sealy and Rest Assured (also part of the Silentnight Group). Average productivity was around 80%, although significantly lower in some areas. The border supply area was a problem, shortages and damage to items often resulted in considerable disruption to planned activity in these supply areas, leading to additional work, duplication and waste.

The Consultancy Company was asked to facilitate and provide ongoing support to the manufacturing area, building on previous lean improvement activities. Whilst lean had been explored and used in the past, it had not been sustained and embedded in the organisation. As a result, any previous benefits of using lean had been lost, creating the need to overcome a "been there, done that" attitude from some staff before they could be fully engaged to own the changes and use lean thinking.

Our Approach

At the heart of our approach was the involvement of staff on the ground and those with authority to agree change. This involvement of decision makers and implementers makes it possible to effect significant change, making real improvements that can be sustained and lead to further positive change. To achieve this, a three stranded approach is required to develop lean leadership, internal lean capabilities and implement improvements.



"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





“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.”

Harvey Leach
Consultant
The Consultancy
Company

These three interwoven strands are used to develop the programme of support required to meet the precise needs of each client, taking into account the progress already made on the lean journey:

- **Developing internal lean capability**

From the earliest stage, it is essential to identify and develop the staff who have a particular understanding, ability and interest in using lean. This group will become the early leaders of lean improvements and will champion the wider adoption of lean thinking in the organisation. To support them in adopting this role, they will require more in-depth support in lean techniques and appropriate leadership and facilitation skills.

- **Implementing lean improvements**

We believe that, rather than teaching a range of lean tools and techniques and then ‘letting the team loose’, the best way to learn how to apply lean is through tackling real problems and introducing the most appropriate methods to generate effective and enduring change.

- **Lean leadership**

Even if not actively involved in lean projects, senior managers must gain an understanding of the underlying principles of lean thinking and how this requires them to both change their leadership style and the way in which the organisation works.

Using the skills of our consultants to assess the current lean maturity of the organisation, a programme of support was developed with the client to meet their needs.

The Programme of Support

Our support focused on enabling participants to tackle issues that mattered, using appropriate tools with an active “learning by doing” approach. The following programme was tailored and delivered to meet the needs of Silentnight Beds.

- **Lean leadership workshop** To create the foundation, senior managers, line managers and leaders undertook a lean leadership workshop. This enabled key staff in the business to collectively understand the power of lean thinking and the development of the leadership style required to be effective.
- **Rapid Improvement Event (RIE)** Focusing on a specific manufacturing cell, an intense period of activity resulted in machines being moved by the fourth day to adopt the new layout to reduce material movements and work in progress. Making these significant improvements created a momentum and enthusiasm for change that had not been previously possible due to the pressures of everyday work.
- **Kaizen (Continuous Improvement Programme)** Building on the energy and enthusiasm created by the RIE, a Shift Manager was appointed to lead improvement activities on the shop floor, involving manufacturing staff at all levels. Coaching and support was provided by our consultants to establish a Kaizen process, providing training in facilitator skills and lean techniques for finding and eliminating waste. Over a 3 month period, the team identified improvements that could be implemented straightaway and took immediate action. Some of the improvements were known, but had never got off the starting blocks until the Kaizen activity took place.



“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.”

RIE Participant
Silentnight Beds

Benefits

The programme had a significant impact creating a culture and enthusiasm for change, with the following real and lasting benefits:

- Managers and line managers developed their working style to create a culture supporting the involvement and participation of staff, evolving away from a directional leadership style that stifled a bottom up drive for improvement.
- A rapid improvement event that immediately yielded 15% productivity gains and led to savings of £100k per annum along with an enthusiasm for using lean thinking to make further improvements.
- Waste identified during the RIE week, subsequently led to changes in the way materials were shipped by working with a key supplier leading to significant cost savings.
- Established a Continuous Improvement Programme driven by internal staff that, over the first 3 months of activity, led to savings in excess of £70k per annum.
- The experience and skills gained through the RIE and Kaizen programme created Champions capable of leading future Rapid Improvement Events and Kaizen activities, making improvement “the way we do things round here”.

Would you like to hear more?

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