

Lean Enterprise Academy



LEA e-letter – 15 July 2008

Doing Lean Yourself

Dear Lean Community Member

I used to think lean was something best begun at work. I listened to friends who enthusiastically embraced lean in their homes, but I hesitated to recommend those new to lean to follow their example. Replenishing kitchen cupboards using Kanban cards and purchasing two dishwashers so you never have to put the dishes away works for some people, but it can also lead to domestic disputes for others.

Better to get some hands on experience of lean at work first before trying to convince the rest of your family. Once the lean infection has taken, then by all means think about taking it home. I certainly did warn those taking the lean medicine that there was no antidote and that they would begin to see lean opportunities everywhere. As you go off on your holidays you will no doubt see more Mura (variation), Muri (overburden) and Muda (waste) in new surroundings on your travels.

Perhaps the best place to start at home in my experience is doing 5S in the home office – managing the flow of paper in and out, using visual management to store everything etc. However I now think we would all make more progress with lean if we really begin using a lot more lean management in running our own personal lives, both at home and at work, particularly if you are a manager.

This was brought home to me recently in redesigning the complex flow of patients through a hospital. With our team's guidance they introduced the core elements of visual management – a Plan For Every Patient and Patient Progress Boards - to track the progress of patients from step to step, to respond quickly when things did not go according to plan and to identify recurrent problems that needed tackling. Variability in each step in the process was reduced and overall performance improved significantly. We had begun to create some stability before we began to redesign the process itself.

However we then walked away to work elsewhere and the discipline of using visual management tailed off things quickly went backwards again and normal chaos was resumed. Not surprising really as the staff were new to this, but much more significantly there was no effective management to make it work. We had made our point and the stability quickly returned when we came back a few weeks later. We have repeated this experiment of walking away on several other projects, with the same results. In these hospitals we were only seeing a more vivid example of what happens time and time again with lean projects in every factory or office. The key to sustaining lean is always management.

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We have always said that learning lean is an experiential journey. The same is true with lean management. So this year I have been experimenting with using the tools of lean management in running my life. One of the hardest things is to do is to use simple policy deployment to focus on just doing the most important things and to deselect the many other things you would also like to do but don't have time for. The second is using A3 planning to really define what you are trying to accomplish and what actions might get you there.

Next comes using a plan by the day or at least plan by the week board to visually manage your workload. My office calls this "Dan's No Board" – as it is really beginning to level out my workload and reduce my natural tendency to say yes to too many things. Then if you can, do a little reflection every week on your effectiveness – how many hours per week are you really being effective and how much time is really not very productive. If you are honest you will be surprised how much of your time – and that of your employees - is wasted in unnecessary meetings, fire fighting, travelling etc. Being able to answer emails while on move for instance goes a long way to making this time more productive.

I wish I could say all this is easy – it is not. It is genuinely difficult to sustain. But keep at it and you will see it makes a huge difference to your life.

Yours sincerely

Daniel T Jones

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