

No One Saw It Coming!

Did someone in your office deliberately set out to devise the most complex, multi-step, and confusing process for handling a piece of work? Probably not, yet each time you and your team face this process, you likely say something like, “We need to do something about this... we must have a meeting next week.” But does next week ever come?

Many of us follow steps in a process that has been around a long time. The process has likely evolved over the years with add-ons from previous managers, customer requirements that are now outdated, solutions that seemed like "a good idea at the time," band-aid solutions, or just plain “let’s do it my way for now” influences.

As a manager, you know something is not right. The team members who must live with it day-in and day-out can attest: The company is being robbed! The thief is taking time and money and leaving behind:

- Non-value adding activity
- Low morale
- Loss of faith in management
- Squandered potential
- **Opportunity for your competition!**

There are quick, effective, and sustainable solutions available that can insure optimum performance. Borrowing on the proven tools and techniques from Lean Manufacturing (The Toyota Production System), we can create office-based improvements and transform your operations into a ***Lean Enterprise***.

There are numerous success stories from companies who have taken these Lean concepts and adapted them to office environments where team members easily identified with the tools and put them to use. Organizations large and small have benefited. Wherever there are transactions, potential improvement opportunities exist.

The usual starting point begins with the formation of a cross-functional team and a comprehensive assessment of the ***current state***. What are we doing right now? How long does it take for each step? Does the customer see value in each activity? Documenting your process with adapted tools based on Value Stream Mapping, Workplace Layout, and Standardized Work will yield quantitative, objective information.

Then it’s time to dream!

Where do you want to go? What is the perfect ***future state***? Create a vision of what the ideal process would look like. Begin identifying targets for improvement, set timetables for achievement and go to work!

The ABC’s of making this process-change sound easy, yet few successfully achieve the goal. Putting words into action is challenging and usually requires some experienced assistance on your improvement team. In the office, there are challenges that are not as prevalent on the shop floor. Consider the following challenges:

- Most team members do multiple tasks at the same time
- Working on processing is not as visible as more "hands-on" work
- As much as 50% of a person's time cannot be scheduled due to interruptions
- Few metrics exist that measure performance for benchmarking

These challenges and others can be overcome with a clear vision, management support, training, and the creation of passionate advocates.

Creating the passionate advocates is key and starts slowly, yet their numbers can grow as results prove the worth of the program. This can be fun, rewarding, and have a powerful impact on your bottom-line! Pick a process and get started. Be careful to do it right initially; early successes fan the fire of improvement!