

The Three Ps of Lean Action

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www.leanuk.org

Although **purpose**, **process** and **people** are the best way to summarize the core concepts of lean, the keys to effective lean actions are solving the right **problems** through reconfiguring the right **processes** by getting agreement and implementing the right **plans**. If any of these elements are missing then these actions are unlikely to be successful. Learning how to do all these three things well are the core competencies for an effective lean leader. Many managers get stuck on the first —defining the right problems to tackle.

We are I think beyond the wide and shallow deployment of lean tools, or Six Sigma tools for that matter, across the organization. This is unlikely to be sustained or to deliver the ability to steal a march on your competitors through superior performance. This is putting the cart before the horse. The involvement of everyone in the organization in continuous improvement activities only really comes into its own after the key value creating and support activities have been integrated into end-to-end processes, not before. Toyota never uses lean or quality tools across the board, only to solve specific operational problems disrupting specific processes from delivering the necessary business results.

A good place to begin framing the business **problems** to be solved, or performance gaps to be closed, is by asking senior managers what keeps them awake at night. This is just the start of a process of digging down to the underlying causes to be tackled. The common denominator behind budget deficits, missed access targets and recurring infections is patients waiting too long for treatment, staying unnecessarily long when they get to hospital and having to come back more often than they need to. Reducing length of stay is a key underlying problem to be tackled in most hospitals.

Waking up to the fact that your suppliers are bleeding because they are now sitting on mountains of unwanted parts as the market for your products crashes, brings home the folly of turning a blind eye to the fact that the lead times through your supply chains are typically 200 days or more. This is a great opportunity to rethink and to compress your supply chains so they can produce in line with demand with maybe a 20-day lead-time. The business problems are different and will change over time but invariably a lean perspective leads to compressing time and hence ensuring that every step is performed right first time on time.

If you are to engage your employees in your lean journey then you also need to listen to their perceptions of the things that frustrate them most in trying to do their work.

Often these are incredibly broken internal support processes like getting a change made to the IT system, hiring the right people, getting invoices paid etc. Tackling the most important of these will not only have a positive effect right across the organization but will also signal that senior management is serious about its commitment to using lean to do the right things.

These business problems are only going to be solved by redesigning the **processes** that deliver them, which means their scope must ultimately be end-to-end from the initial trigger for action through to the end customer, whether this is an internal

Where Lean Thoughts can become Reality

"Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow."

Ronald. E. Osborn

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customer or the final consumer. Successful process design involves understanding the nature of the demand, seeing which products or tasks to focus on, mapping the process and selecting the right improvement actions to take with that type of process. There are now plenty of examples of every kind of lean process, from call centre's through transactions processing, healthcare, process industries and machining and assembly.

None of this will happen unless someone, a value stream manager, is given the responsibility for gaining agreement from all the players on an action **plan** to close the performance gap. This means addressing and resolving conflicts between departmental goals and the needs of the process and using visual project management to carry out the plan. But above all it is about using this opportunity to deepen the diagnostic and problem solving skills of staff at every level by involving them in creating, implementing and reflecting on this A3 **plan** to improve this **process** to solve the business problem at hand.

"The world is changing very fast. Big will not beat small anymore. It will be the fast beating the slow."

—Rupert Murdoch

The Six Tests of Ethical Action

The Publicity Test

Would I want to see this action that I'm about to take described on the front page of the local paper or in a national magazine?

How would I feel about having done this if everyone were to find out all about it, including the people I love and care about the most?

The Moral Mentor Test

What would the person I admire the most do in this situation?

The Admired Observer Test

Would I want the person I admire most to see me doing this?

Would I be proud of this action in the presence of a person whose life and character I really admire?

What would make the person I admire most proud of me in this situation?

The Transparency Test

Could I give a clear explanation for the action I'm contemplating, including an honest and transparent account of all my motives that would satisfy a fair and dispassionate moral judge?

The Person in the Mirror Test

Will I be able to look at myself in the mirror and respect the person I see there?

The Golden Rule Test

Would I like to be on the receiving end of this action and all its potential consequences?

Am I treating others the way I'd want to be treated?

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Lean Thoughts