

Talking about Continuous Improvement

One of the wonderful parts of my job is I have been able to work with a number of very good leaders. The challenge for many CEO is how to engage in Lean when there is so much else demanding their attention

Situation

This Client had grown quickly and was now started on their Lean Journey. The shape of the journey had not taken shape, staff were highly engaged but to an outsider it would be difficult to be able to see what exactly was happening. The previously the use of visual management had been discouraged. A building the size of 5 football pitches had only had one white board on the floor and that had been hidden away where few outside that department would see it. The computer systems that the company had also made it difficult to pull data that could tell how the plant was performing.

The Process

Each week I would visit the company and work with different departments from Project Management to Final Assembly on their Lean Implementation. The last 30 minutes were spent doing a Muda walk with the department managers and a least one member of the senior management team.

One group had just been put together to increase the capability to do repair work internally instead of sending work out. The group was underperforming, under pressure and knew it. The problem was rework, it was too high but no one knew how good or bad it was; only it was a problem.

The first step was to establish where the department was. We found a large piece of paper and taped it to the wall on the left hand side we drew the axis for graph. I asked the team what they thought the reject rate currently was as no one knew. They guessed 25% and marked 25% on the left axis. Next I asked where they wanted to be at year end and they targeted <5% so the right hand side was marked at 5% and line drawn between the two points. The department now had a target to work towards and a way to measure progress. Over the next 3 weeks the department worked out how to measure their quality rate, refined the process and started to show some progress.

Results

The next week the CEO joined us for the Muda Walk. He had joined in on previous walks, knew the process was important but was not able to add more than his general support. This week when he saw the chart he could see the difference everyone's input was making. And a new conversation started on what were the biggest causes, what next needed to happen to improve quality and what he as the CEO could do.

Over the next month metrics were added to each department and to important projects. The data was often manually collected but it enabled management and staff to talk quantitatively about issues and make informed decisions. The payoff for the company is somewhere near 15% additional capacity to date.