

## Learning and Unlearning in Lean thinking

One of the challenges of implementing Lean thinking is that much of Lean goes against what people have often been traditionally taught. Lean thinking also goes against how people have been rewarded for their performance.

Think of Pavlov's dogs, they were taught (very simplified) to associate the ringing of a bell with being fed and would salivate when they heard a bell ring. People are similar but more complicated. Feedback from bosses and peers is used to reinforce behaviour. In non-lean traditionally run companies local gains are often rewarded over the companies holistic goals, reinforcing local thinking.

### **Situation**

The company was starting its Lean journey. I had been asked to do some training for senior management. Part of the training was going to be playing an expanded version of the Lego plane building game to give a hands on demonstration of lean principles and their effect on company productivity and profitability.

One concern the company sponsor had was a manager who we will call "Super". Super had a reputation for great work but never slowed down. A classic A type who over delivered on every project. In that if you needed a couple of engineering options he would deliver half a dozen complete proposals, half of which you would not look at. Examples of Over Production and Over Processing in the project world. The challenge was how would Super react to the Lean world, where we look at the holistic result and sometimes you need to slow down to deliver faster.

### **The Solution**

On laying out the Lego game we rigged it so that Super played in position one. Position one has the most excess capacity and is encouraged to over produce for the first few rounds of the game. As the rounds progressed the results of Super's overproduction became evident. He saw that his busyness was keeping him happily occupied and feeling important but his over production was costing the company in production and responsiveness.

As realisation crept in and we opened up that thinking with discussion on where this was happening in the company and what it was costing the company. The discussion was lively and exposed multiple opportunities and costs.

### **Results**

The result was the project avoided the risk of having a detractor and instead gained a champion. As the project mapping team progressed with their work it was not unusual for Super to challenge the team as to where they were eliminating waste. And when it came to implementing the new process Super was at the forefront supporting change.