



Techniques for Implementing Lean Office

In sail boat racing there are two dynamics to winning: 1) going fast, and 2) going in the right direction. Going slow in the right direction won't do any good. And going fast in the wrong direction just hurts more. The sail boat must be both trim and true. The same is true for the Lean Office.

With office workers, the intangible interactions among people, processes and information are hard to identify and measure. The manufacturing shop floor can easily see the interactions that convert assets into customer value. Partly because of this, the shop floor has been the source of proven quality practices to help go fast and in the right direction. The following techniques are based on lean manufacturing concepts, but are specifically designed to create a lean office that is effective, fast, and aligned with strategic direction.

Policy Deployment

Most office environments have gaps between value statements, strategic plans, and the tactical day-to-day. A lean office technique called Policy Deployment can help alleviate these gaps. Policy Deployment links operating principles directly to values & strategy. Operating principles enable office workers to maintain a system wide view of the needs of the organization, while managing day-to-day work.

Operating principles are adopted to cover customer, market, product, competitive, and other strategies. The following are examples of principles covering increased operational performance.

- Adopt continuous flow
- Reduce the number of “touches”
- Make things easier and segregate complexity
- Reduce waste
- Cross train employees and establish clear priorities

Roles & Flows

Value producing work is a flow traveling through multiple departments within an office. Lean techniques, proven effective on the shop floor, can be modified to reduce non-value creating tasks from the office work flow. Unlike the shop floor, mitigating change is the biggest risk to lean office. By first modeling office Roles & Flows, the visibility of people, process, tool interactions are increased and a framework established for managing change. Roles & Flows also help to define boundaries for measuring work times, cycle times, and throughput, giving management and staff the ability to monitor the status-quo and improve performance.

AGILEAN shows organizations how to use lean office techniques to produce greater customer value in less time with fewer errors

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Continuous Performance Improvement

In most offices, any knowledge of Continuous Performance Improvement stops at the suggestion box. On the shop floor the suggestion box is elevated to a new level by giving workers the power to constantly eliminate waste and to “stop the line” if necessary. Instead of cajoling them with the abstract notion of improving quality, employees are given the more concrete task of removing waste. This approach applies to the lean office. “Where is the waste” hunts are just as effective in the office as the shop floor for rooting out waste caused by variation, overproduction and excess work-in-progress. With waste removed, both quality and performance improves.

Sailing by the Competition

Together these lean office techniques are powerful levers for increasing customer value. Roles & Flows help delineate the boundary between the top-down practice of Policy Deployment and the bottom-up practice of Continuous Performance Improvement. A pure top-down approach binds management too close to day-to-day operations and slows things down. A pure bottom-up effort allows an organization drift from its strategy. The Roles & Flows framework ties it all together; delivering exceptional operational performance aligned with strategic direction. The winning combination for sailing right by the competition.

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