
Lean Continuous Improvement Made Practical

(A case history about Lean Continual Improvement Business Culture)

The Challenge

A leading first-tier automotive parts maker wanted to enhance the business culture to:

- Use Lean/Flow Mfg. best practices
- Increase their use of team-based project methods and employee involvement in the broadest practical range of operational improvement initiatives
- Make Continual Improvement (CI) an automatic part of the management and operating business processes

Lead-Off Approach

Their business culture was already more effective than most in terms of natural team-work behaviors. So adding some focus and structure to project teams was a logical next step. As a starting point, they trained project teams focused on applying Lean/Flow Manufacturing principles for improvements in key processes.

They asked Cumberland to customize a Lean Project Team 3-day launch session plan and facilitate the initial teams until in-house facilitators can be developed.

Results

In the first nine months four project teams were launched and worked their projects through to successful implementations. Highlights included:

- 80,000# mold change times reduced from 2.5 hours to 30 minutes by the Tool Swap Team
- Eight miles of daily walking eliminated in trim cells by the initial 5S Team

- 10,600 SF of floor space square feet liberated by the Clean Sweep Team
- Materials handling costs saved by the Rack Readiness Team

CI Process Development

Prior to launching the project teams, a CI Steering Committee was organized to help direct the CI initiatives, set project priorities, etc. And awareness training was provided to the management group and all front line employees about CI, and especially the initial Lean/Flow focus.

To streamline the CI process, a smaller Steering Committee was formed to limit its functions to high-level decisions involving key goals and resources.

And to enhance the effectiveness of the CI administrative functions, a CI Operating Team was formed to lead the four key CI sub-processes:

- Education about productivity, quality and Lean Flow Manufacturing
- Search for Opportunities
- Measurement of opportunities, priorities, and improvement progress
- Improvement Action coordination

The Road Ahead

Six Sigma and Value Stream Modeling methods are the next tools to be added to the CI Process. Considering their quick initial successes, the CI Teams are certain to achieve ever-increasing rates of improvement in products, services, operating processes and working relationships.