

Lean for Professional Development

Lean manufacturing is a comprehensive term referring to methodologies based on maximizing value and minimizing waste in the manufacturing process. I was recently discussing lean manufacturing concepts with an instructor and a local manufacturing client and it got me thinking about how a few of the principles in lean might apply to other areas our lives. For instance, if you are a job seeker, these principles could help you become more competitive and successful. If you are employed and want to be considered for promotion next year, some of the ideas in lean might help you identify and achieve your goals for 2012.

Many companies use lean as a means of becoming more competitive in the marketplace in addition to the work satisfaction and organization lean offers. Healthcare and service companies are adopting lean principles creating lean hospitals and lean offices. Let's take a look at a couple of the principles found in lean and how they might apply to your professional development in the New Year.

Visual Mapping

First off, we should consider the method we use to capture, analyze and synthesize the information we are planning to generate. Visual Mapping in lean emphasizes the role of visual communication in empowering and motivating employees, and aligning their efforts with the goals of the company. For the individual, this will help with organization and planning of efforts and goals. I recommend getting some butcher paper or poster paper and color markers to create visual maps of your professional development qualities and goals.

Value

At the heart of lean is the determination of value. Value is defined as an item or feature for which a customer is willing to pay. All other aspects of the manufacturing process are deemed waste. Lean manufacturing is used as a tool to focus resources and energies on producing the value-added features while identifying and eliminating non value added activities.

In your own professional development this means focusing on your own value. What value do you bring and how will it benefit an employer? Think about the value you bring to the workplace and try to sum it up in a sentence or two. Here are a few examples of adding value in the workplace:

- making the workplace better by taking initiative
- using good judgment to improve personal productivity on the job
- saving the company money
- increasing revenues or winning repeat business
- solving tough problems
- bringing optimism and a positive attitude

Remember, for this to be meaningful to others, it must first be meaningful to you. This exercise will push you to identify your own unique qualities which bring value to others.

Eliminating Waste

Waste can be defined as activities that consume time, resource and/or space but do not add value. Once waste has been identified, it can then be eliminated. For an individual this means concentrating on things which create value and stopping behaviors which waste time and energy and divert focus from the goal.

Kaizen and Continuous Improvement

Kaizen is the Japanese term for continuous improvement, a strategy where companies and individuals work together *proactively* to achieve regular, incremental improvements in the manufacturing process. Lean is a continuous improvement process.

For the individual, I think you must understand and integrate continuous improvement into your work and life. Continuous improvement is something you do. How can you improve during the next year? What areas do you want to change in a positive way? What skills do you want to learn? A good way to develop this is to examine your current state and your desired or future state.

Make a chart of your current state and another chart for your future or desired state. In your current state chart, concentrate on your values and strengths, your competencies and skills, everything that you bring to the table to succeed. In your future state chart, concentrate on what you hope to achieve in the upcoming year and what it would look like if you achieved it. Describe in detail your desired future state.

Setting SMART Goals

Goal setting is critical to the success of any endeavor including lean. SMART goals provide a helpful way to set goals. SMART stands for Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Specific goals and can be used to outline goals which you are more likely to achieve. Be sure to identify how you will know when you have achieved your goals. This may be as simple as getting the promotion you desire or securing the job you really want, but make sure it includes each component of SMART goals.

Conclusion

Remember, lean is a way of thinking about your activities and how they either help or hinder your ability to achieve your goals. Adding value, eliminating waste, and adopting a continuous improvement mindset are helpful in many areas of our lives. I hope each of you enjoy the holidays and have a happy and successful new year!

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