

## LEAN TOOLS IN A TIME OF CRISES

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The current international COVID 19 pandemic and lockdowns in many countries will have a severe impact on world economy and business practices in general. Many experts have commented that 'the world of work will never be the same again'. I agree.

Most companies will have to adapt their current business strategies to cope with the new normal. Previously profitable companies will have to adopt survival strategies, change supply and resourcing strategies, cope with employee health and many other challenges. The faster they adapt, the better for their survival.

The question I keep asking myself is if my Lean clients will be able to survive during this (and other) times of crises. What tools do they have? How will they use them? Having time to reflect helped me to come up with a few answers about Lean and how it can be used to cope with adversity...

The first tool Lean companies are equipped with, is strong Hoshin Kanri or goal deployment structures. When things change suddenly without warning, Lean companies will have good structures in place to change direction quickly. Because their employees are used to goal deployment and re-alignment, they can use this to their advantage to quickly adjust strategy, communicate new direction, adjust goals and targets and achieve co-operation. This, coupled with strong team areas and regular Plan-Do-Check-Adjust (PDCA) activity, should put them ahead of their competition.

The second advantage to capitalize on is the business culture. In Lean programmes employees are taught to solve problems using tools such as fishbowl diagrams, A3 templates and the 5 Why's. They are also encouraged to learn from mistakes, make suggestions and innovative. Now, more than ever employers should listen to their employees, encourage the use of problems solving tools and templates, and drive their suggestion schemes. The worlds best ideas and solutions are often developed when individuals are forced to think differently. Like in times of significant change. Your Lean team is already capable of adapting and dealing with change.

The third tool, all should use to drive improved hygiene and employee health, is 5S. This is an ideal time to review cleaning practices, develop better standards and eliminate waste. Focus on how processes can be adapted to deal with aspects such as social distancing. Reduce motion and hand-offs between people, separate processes to keep employees apart and use Kanban to communicate process needs. This will lead to less interaction and even better efficiencies. Standardize work practices to ensure protocols for hygiene are followed by all and use proper training methods such as Job Instruction when processes are improved or changed.

With the ailing economy there will be more pressure on companies to cut costs. Companies that apply Lean principles constantly improve processes and eliminate waste. They know how to reduce cost and optimize processes through the application of Lean principles and will be better prepared. Understanding the 7 forms of waste is key to reducing cost and optimizing efficiencies.

Keeping equipment running is also critical to meet demand. As lockdown regulations ease, many manufacturers will be inundated with orders for 'non-essential items' such as winter clothes, heaters, chemicals, hardware, etc. Asset care is thus critical to ensure your equipment remains in good working

condition. Companies should ensure they maintain a good balance between production and maintenance by using (and reviewing) solid preventative maintenance practices.

If you are starting up your manufacturing, take time to ensure equipment is set-up properly, repairs are done and the necessary tools and parts are available. The worst position you can be in is to have lots of orders and an inability to deliver.

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