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LeanSchools eNews February 2009



PAWLEY LEAN INSTITUTE
LEAN THINKING FOR SCHOOLS™

LeanSchools™ eNews February 2009

Welcome to the LeanSchools™ eNews from the Oakland University Pawley Institute. This is a monthly communiqué of the best in thinking for Lean schools. We invite you to read the information and realize that great strides can be made in the journey when you connect with others.

To Change or Not to Change? — That Is the Question!

"To change or not to change?" represents the dilemma of change agency faced daily by school leaders. Although frequently initiated, there is a surprisingly high degree of distrust for change initiatives in the educational community. Behavior intervention programs, curriculum realignment work and scheduling projects, to name a few, are common examples of failed change projects talked about in school hallways.

When an institution begins to link together a series of unsuccessful improvement projects, it is not alarming that the value of any type of change comes into question and "not to change" is a selected preferred state. Descriptions such as "I sort of know why this did not work, but nothing was clear to me about why the project failed," or "My school has gone through so many changes in the recent past that we are in a panic, less organized and more discouraged than ever," or "This project was nothing short of crash and burn and it has demoralized staff and students alike," or "Our principal had a different vision that we never really understood," are common storylines of change projects squandered. When the root cause for failure of change projects is not explored or understood, when change becomes destructive to progress, when there is no collective understanding of the reason for the change or when a lack of common vision is in use, the response "not to change" is understandable.

It is problematic when improvement projects create worse results than the status quo. However, when developed, deployed and debriefed intelligently, educational improvement "by design" does work. Consider the school with poor achievement in spelling, a clear indication that change was needed. This school engaged in a change process that included improvement by design. The teachers spent time reading research on best practice, and the administrative team collected and analyzed spelling data. The school then conducted discussions about how spelling instruction could be improved, decided on school-wide standards and identified a common process for teaching spelling, set up clear goals for spelling instruction, and aligned their work with district and school improvement goals. This change initiative unfolded over time; it represents a deliberate, thoughtful, focused improvement process. Given this improvement by design approach, it is easy to surmise that the probability for the ongoing success of this spelling achievement project is quite high.

In the 1980's there was a prevailing field of thought that promoted change agency by total removal of the old system and replacement of it with a new system, often referred to as "reengineering" or "restructuring." This option is an excellent strategy in some settings. For instance, restructuring is a good option in the private sector when it is possible to create an entrepreneurial division within a larger company or when it is possible to obtain angel investors to supplement a new venture. Reengineering is a good option in lab school or in a funded educational research project. However, in most schools there is no such alternative for restructuring available; the removal and replacement of a current operating system is not feasible. Instead, schools typically make improvements in real time, "onground," with students and teachers. Therefore, the nature of change agency via restructuring or reengineering in schools is very high

risk. In the event of failure, the miss is direct and hard hitting as the old system is entirely gone and the school is stuck with a new system that does not work.

In Lean Thinking for Schools, a very different concept from reengineering is promoted. It is called *gradualism*. Instead of totally replacing the current system, through *gradualism* one works deliberately on focused, incremental changes.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gradualism>

Gradualism is not a new concept for change initiatives in schools; it is the essence of *continuous improvement*, a foundational philosophy of educational change.

<http://curiouscat.com/psci/>

Gradualism is well-represented in the saying, "Go slow to go fast."

<http://ezinearticles.com/?Go-Slow-to-Go-Fast&id=9198>

Gradualism requires a type of mental discipline and long-term view that is somewhat foreign to the western mindset of "instant gratification." So it is not an easy answer to school improvement, but it is *doable and sustainable*.

Gradualism creates an environment for innovation.

<http://management.curiouscatblog.net/>

Because there are specific Lean tools that school leaders can use, such as kaizen, it is possible to maintain a culture of continuous improvement via gradualism.

http://www.tnhonline.com/home/index.cfm?event=displayArticlePrinterFriendly&uStory_id=f2dc1e53-c1f8-4e2a-a26b-ed1b8157b164

Gradualism has one additional benefit for schools. Once underway, *gradualism* leads to rapid development and rapid deployment. It seems strange, but *gradualism* will actually help your organization to move more quickly through improvement initiatives. So when the question "To change or not to change?" is posed, gradualism provides a sound strategy -- "to change!"

Worth Reading

Our comments in these communiqués concerning the "best in thinking for Lean schools" can be supplemented with the "best in reading for Lean schools," and this month we feature Norman Bodek. Read On!

Bodek, N. (2004). *Kaikaku: The power and magic of Lean (A study in knowledge transfer)*. Vancouver, WA: PCS Press.

Norman Bodek is the impetus behind the English translation of the works of the famous Japanese "Lean architects" Shingo, Ohno and others. In this retrospective narrative, Bodek recounts publications, seminars and plant tours with these Lean pioneers, tracing the slow Western gravitation to Lean manufacturing principles. From a historical perspective, this book is important. Conceptually, Bodek details gemba walks, QC circles, jidoka (autonomation), and other tools and strategies of Lean.

The nuggets of value mined from this rich historical context include:

- "Getting to the root cause to eliminate problems and defects is close to the heart of Lean manufacturing" (p. 22)
- Quoting Shigeo Shingo "the job of a manager is to get things done through other people ... management defines the system, workers work within the system. Only management can change the system and the system must be changed continuously if quality is to be improved" (p. 15)
- The gemba walk is the "most valuable part of a managers job ... select a different theme for every walk ... just listen carefully" (p. 138)
- Gemba walk is a "great communications device" (p. 144)

Feel free to forward this information by e-mail to a friend as the LeanSchools community is a growing network of improvement champions!

All the best,

Shannon Flumerfelt

Kevin Brockberg

SUMMARY

Welcome to the LeanSchools™ eNews from the Oakland University Pawley Lean Institute. This is a monthly communiqué of the best in thinking for Lean schools.

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