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LeanSchools eNews March 2009



PAWLEY LEAN INSTITUTE
LEAN THINKING FOR SCHOOLS™

LeanSchools™ eNews March 2009 Act Like a CSI Detective: Go to Gemba

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. We invite you to read the information and realize that great strides can be made in the journey when you connect with others.

If one believes the depictions in the popular television series CSI, CSI: Miami or CSI: NY, few crimes are as they initially appear in terms of means, motive and opportunity.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fC3O6GfGHk&feature=related>

In these television shows, CSI detectives are left with the problem of discovering the truth by considering the impact of both the explicit evidence at hand as well as the tacit evidence of the scene. In order to discover the truth, the dispositions of the CSI detectives require surveying the crime scene with some skepticism and exerting the mental discipline to not accept apparent results of the scene at face value. Rather, the CSIs are trained to look beyond the obvious, and find clear and convincing evidence of what really happened through careful and deliberate observation, a Lean concept referred to as gemba. Gemba is a Lean management practice that requires going to the "real place," either a tangible or intangible place, to observe, understand and improve a current state.

<http://syque.com/improvement/Gemba.htm>

To get to gemba on the CSI television series, some common activities of the detectives include visiting and revisiting the scene, observing the surrounding ongoing activities of the scene, collecting and testing samples, talking to family and associates of victims, comparing information to national databases, reconstructing the victim's tacit and explicit narrative, factoring in the ongoing circumstances of related people and processes, analyzing environmental issues, observing behaviors, interrogating suspects, brainstorming with each team members, visiting places the victim was associated with, talking with subject area experts, using the best forms of technology available and integrating methods from interdisciplinary fields. In other words, the CSIs operate under the assumption that what is first observed may or may not be relevant to the truth. They don't use the first data set they encounter and make decisions. Rather, they work to get to gemba tangibly by walking in the victim's shoes, and challenging what is assumed outside of observation and intangibly by understanding the context, culture and thinking of victims and suspects by challenging their current paradigms, processes and methods.

Interestingly, getting to gemba provides two benefits: the improvement of the evidentiary data and the improvement of investigative methods for obtaining that data. In schools, it is critical to use data-driven decision making in the same way the CSIs do, by going to gemba. Data-driven decision making should provide quality outcomes based on both good and improving data, and good and improving methods of collecting and understanding data. To use data to drive decisions in schools by only looking at bottom line numbers, such as test scores or financial results, is an extremely limited approach to what is possible. For those school administrators who believe that looking at reports and making decisions is the extent of data-driven decision making potential, going to gemba will open up expanded possibilities.

Data-driven decision making can occur on a more sophisticated level than simply looking at numbers when school administrators consider interactions with data as a knowledge management activity that can create or increase organizational intelligence, not unlike the process that CSIs use. Increasing organizational intelligence in regard to data-driven decision making occurs when three elements are employed as points of improvement. The three improvement elements are: the corporate development of essential ideas of best practice and research regarding data-driven decision making; the corporate identification of processes, protocols and structures of data collection and the surrounding culture of knowledge management; and the corporate use of quality assessments and audits of the data at hand.

A diligent CSI detective does not simply look at the "scene" as a skilled school administrator does not simply look at the "reports" of achievement data, for example, and draw a conclusion. Instead, consideration of importance of data in context, "What does this data mean to a failing student?"; the paradigms that surround data interpretation, "What impact on students does this interpretation have?"; the tacit and explicit notions of what constitutes good data, "Are tests important to failing students?"; the systems and bureaucracies that produce reports, "Does this data satisfy a valued requirement?"; and the methods used to obtain and analyze the data, "Is our testing program consistently used?", are all under scrutiny when one goes to gemba. Employing the process of inquiry about the quality of both the data and the processes of data-driven decision making occurs at gemba. Hence, the use of this Lean management strategy provides dual benefits for school leaders by enhancing the quality of organizational intelligence and by enhancing the quality of data used to drive decisions.

Annotated Bibliography Series

Imai, M. (1986). *Kaizen: The key to Japan's competitive success.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Filled with case studies from Japanese and joint-venture corporations, Imai encourages readers to rethink Kaizen as more than mere innovation. Kaizen is the bedrock of Total Quality Control, Quality Circles, Management and Problem Solving that undergirds the transformation to workplace cultures of improvement. This easy-to-read manual is an early venture coaxing a Western gravitation toward Lean principles.

The following quotations outline the value of Imai's reflections:

- Kaizen is "ongoing improvement involving everyone ... Kaizen is everyone's business" (Imai, 1986, p. xxxix)
- "In order for the Kaizen spirit to survive, management must make a conscious and continuous effort to support it ... Kaizen is concerned more with the process than the result" (Imai, 1986, p. 27)
- "Productivity is a measure, not a reality ... [analogous to] finding the room is too cold and looking at the thermometer for the reason. Adjusting the scale on the thermometer does not solve the problem, what counts is the effort to improve the situation ... invoking the PDCA cycle. Productivity is only a description of the current state of affairs and the past efforts of people" (Imai, 1986, p. 38)
- Warusa-kagan are the little "things that are not problems but are somehow not quite right" (Imai, 1986, p. 165) yet need attention greater than the warusa-kagan

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

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