

Thursday, December 17, 2009

It Is Prime Time for Lean in Schools

It is prime time for applying Lean in schools! Why? Because funding concerns for districts have created considerable stress through consecutive years of budget reductions. The intensity and pace of reductions are unprecedented in the history of educational funding, and many districts feel ill-equipped to handle such dramatic patterns of diminishing resources.

Schools are in a terrible dilemma, wondering where to allocate scarce funds most effectively and efficiently. For instance, here are two situations described by administrators concerned about budgets and funding:

Administrator #1: Based upon the fact we have \$6 million to reduce over the next two years, budget cut discussions can become heated at times. I don't know if we are using the right decision-making strategies to make these choices. Other than referring to budget reduction numbers and ranking programs by preference, we use few tools on an administrative level to guide us in this process.

Administrator #2: Given the budget reductions we must enact, programs that are "easy" targets to eliminate are typically served up on the platter of cuts. It makes me wonder if we are underwhelming our district, given the strength of some of these programs. I wish there was a way that we could engage in this process more proactively, rather the slash and burn approaches we are using reactively.

If these scenarios are familiar to you, then there is a need for **better decision-making strategies and more useful administrative tools** for improving the budget reduction processes in your district. There is also a need for **collaborative strategies that result in organizational cohesion**.

Schools have found success by engaging in budgeting issues through the full "Lean package" by putting Lean in prime time. This "Lean package" includes BOTH **thinking strategies and toolkits** aimed at two dichotomous ends:

1a. The **elimination of waste in paradigms** that lead to ineffective actions

AND, IN TURN

1b. The **creation of value through paradigm improvements** that lead to effective actions

2a. The **elimination of waste in various processes** that lead to inefficient uses of resources

AND, IN TURN

2b. The **creation of value through process improvements** that lead to efficient uses of resources

These dichotomous ends, **the elimination of waste and the creation of value** are attainable goals for schools today. Such ends are possible to achieve when administrators are equipped to **translate the benefits of Lean thinking into corporate paradigms and apply the benefits of Lean tools into collective processes**.

The full "Lean package," putting Lean in prime time, is enacted through collaborative methods that produce two results:

1. The **development of leadership teams** equipped to identify and address universal processes to **eliminate waste and create value**

AND

2. The **enhancement of the cohesive impact, consequences and responsibilities** in addressing universal budget issues which impact the system

School leaders engaged in Lean practice make use of the vast social capital resources of schools (80-90% of the budget) to enact methodology with these results, **effective leadership teams and increased cohesion**. The full "Lean package" enables administrators to lead such engagements with knowledge, confidence and acumen.

For example, schools report improvements (elimination of waste/creation of value) in core leadership paradigms and leadership teams, such as instilling vision, defining roles/responsibilities and maximizing communication as a result of Lean implementation. In addition, schools report improvements (elimination of waste/creation of value) in core educational processes and organizational cohesion, such as the delivery of special education services, the programming of professional development, the allocation of budgets and the hiring of new employees. Once Lean is understood and widely used in school districts, the possibilities for ongoing and sustained continuous improvement are limitless.

The Oakland University Pawley Lean Institute provides one and two-day *Introduction to Lean Seminars* and a six-month *Lean Professional Certificate Program*. For the past two years, the Pawley Lean Institute has successfully trained school leaders. As a fully supported organization, backed by the resources of Oakland University for administration, research and teaching, the Pawley Lean Institute is an international leader in promoting awareness and application of Lean principles in schools and universities.

Introduction to Lean Seminars and the *Lean Professional Certificate Program* provide the following learning benefits to participants:

- access to focused scoping services and the development and delivery of customized Lean training and service packages
- access to knowledgeable educational leadership faculty experienced in school administration and the educational sector
- access to a seasoned training team experienced in teaching, coaching and just-in-time support of leaders and teams engaged in Lean implementation
- access to data collection, analysis, and research support personnel experienced in exemplary assessment practices

If your school or district is interested in Lean training, contact the Pawley Lean Institute at (586) 263-6242 or lean@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

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