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LeanSchools eNews May 2009



**PAWLEY LEAN INSTITUTE
LEAN THINKING FOR SCHOOLS™**

LeanSchools™ eNews May 2009

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.

Is It Overproduction to Herd Cats? Give Stakeholders What They Want . . .

A humorous *You Tube* clip from EDS portrays the nature of cats as not taking to collaboration well. This clip describes “herding” cats as complex and difficult work.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pk7yqITMvp8>

Evasive cat behavior indicates that this species seems to operate comfortably in confounding relationships; they do what they want to do regardless of the corporate actions of those around them. Hence, the work of herding cats is not only hard work, but it is not very useful, at least to cats. John Shook and James Womack’s webinar, *Forward to Fundamentals* describes how to deal with this organizational behavior, not working at what does not matter to stakeholders, by identifying a common problem of waste called overproduction.

In Lean thinking, educational leaders are faced with the challenging tenet “Give stakeholders what they want, when they want it, and don’t waste anything.” This tenet is aimed at eliminating overproduction, the problem of providing more than what is wanted by stakeholders and wasting valuable resources to do so. Imagining the scenario that cats are your organizational stakeholders, overproduction is a lot like believing that herding cats matters to cats, when it does not. Jorge Fradino Oliveria’s study of stakeholder value in the healthcare industry describes how to realign to avoid overproduction.

http://lean.mit.edu/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=2179&Itemid=332

School leaders can easily get caught up in juggling the skittish forces of market demand and the stressed limits of organizational capacity by engaging in actions similar to the work of herding cats. Trying to respond to everything in the environment is a fundamentally futile activity that often produces little or no value to stakeholders. Waters and Cameron’s study, *The Balanced Leadership Framework, Connecting Vision with Action*, provides a good list of school leadership behaviors that result in first- and second-order change.

<http://www.mcrel.org/products/290/>

This handbook presents a clear case regarding the importance of avoiding overproduction in leadership practice, as there are some behaviors that result in leadership overproduction when change is pursued.

Overproduction is providing services related to the core mission or support functions in abundance or incorrectly by not knowing if you are offering too much to the stakeholder. In contrast, delivering to the value stream of stakeholders

without waste requires an understanding of what is of value to stakeholders, identifying what is overproduction and eliminating what is waste. Jamie Flinchbaugh's article on eliminating waste in service organizations describes this as observational, deliberate and metric-based work.

http://www.leanlearningcenter.com/downloads/LEAN_PROGRESS_ISSUE_4.pdf

When considering the most confrontational, tedious or litigious situations a school leader predictably encounters, this tenet of stakeholder-centric, yet waste-free practice, is challenging at first. Administrators might feel that this Lean tenet is unrealistic and wonder how to use it practically. How can a school leader provide stakeholders with what they want, when they want and not waste anything? Furthermore, given that stakeholders are in varied groups and include board members, students, employees, the government and community residents, to name a few, this means that taking action to create value for stakeholders is loaded with conflicting interests. For example, one might think, "Does this Lean tenet mean that if a request for a grade change is made when the student did not complete required class assignments, that the request should be granted because a stakeholder (student/parent) is requesting or demanding it?" or "Does this Lean tenet mean that when unions protect inadequate employee performance, that such allowances should be made because a stakeholder (employee/union) is requesting or demanding it?" There are answers to such questions in overproduction.

To better understand overproduction, two steps are required:

1. Understand who your stakeholders are — Identify who your school organization dynamically serves. A Lean organization will translate corporate understandings of stakeholders into a list called a credo, whereby stakeholder groups are prioritized. Schools may find that a stakeholder credo of: students, employees, board, government and community is aligned with mission and vision, for example. Within those ranked stakeholder groups, a clearer understanding of what really matters can be promoted through quality protocols for serving those stakeholders with interactive relationships with the school. A credo can provide direction in developing relevant measures of organizational performance, efficient organizational architecture for eliciting stakeholder expectations or effective service delivery to stakeholders' value streams.

Hence, the grade change request can be examined against the credo — Is the grade change request from a valued stakeholder who is dynamically served or someone who should be understood as a stakeholder, or is the request from a detractor or unreasonable parent/student? Is the request an opportunity to improve assessment systems and reach our mission for our stakeholders or an opportunistic maneuver that belies our mission? And the employee performance problem can be examined against the credo — Is the performance problem indicative of a violation of the credo by the employer/employee relationship or of an internal problem within the school or it is an attempt to shirk job responsibilities? Is it a venue for improvement based on performance standards or it is a monument to improving teacher quality and achieving mission?

2. Understand what constitutes value creation and waste elimination — Eliminate waste in the value stream of stakeholders. Lean organizations eliminate waste using a tool called value stream mapping, whereby stakeholder interactions with the organization are examined. Schools may find that stakeholder waste occurs in terms of how much time in an instructional day is actually allocated to new learning, or how useful parent newsletters are in increasing communication, or how efficiently phone calls are handled and responded to for improved community satisfaction. Value stream mapping provides a graphic organizer of the various steps used to complete a process from the stakeholder's view of what is occurring and allocates a relevant common metric to measure the value or waste in each step. As this graphic organizer is examined, it is easy to see where minutes are used well or wasted, where personnel is allocated appropriately or inappropriately, where supplies are required or underused, for example. Hence, value stream mapping helps the school develop waste-free processes for addressing grade change requests from valued stakeholders within the credo and from detractors outside of the credo. Value stream mapping helps the school community to streamline the process for addressing teacher performance based on the credo and mission.

So, look carefully for overproduction in your educational institution, such as redundant paperwork, interruptions, over-processing of issues, unnecessary verifications and program additions. Understand who your stakeholders are and what is of value to them through credo development. Use value stream mapping to see waste. Understand what your organization does to create value. Improve enterprise architecture to service your institutional credo. It does not matter to cats if we herd cats — it is overproduction!



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
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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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