

## AUA Talk

# “From Tokyo to Aberdeen: What Can Car Factories Teach Universities?”

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## TOYOTA MODEL

The main method we use in Business Improvement is “LEAN”. Lean is a management philosophy derived originally from the manufacturing world – Toyota Production System. Widely used across the manufacturing sector, it is now also being used across public and private sectors (Local Gov’t, Tesco, NHS, and HE) to improve:

- Customer service
- Quality
- Efficiency
- Internal communications

The fact is, Lean is not just a “fad”. Using Lean tools has been proven to work to streamline processes and improve efficiency in the Higher Education sector (Cardiff, Plymouth, St Andrews, across the US). UK Universities are adapting Lean thinking in both admin and academic processes.

## 2 Starting Fundamentals for our Work:

1) **Continuous Cycle of Improvement** – continuously looking at your work processes and striving to improve them; every process can get better → nothing’s perfect (Plan, Do, Check, Act)

As a University, we are very good at the ‘Plan’ part, but sometimes we fail to even reach the ‘Do’ stage!

Some organisations are very good at “Doing” but then might not apply ‘Check’ and ‘Act’ (i.e. learn from their mistakes)

The best organisations work within Plan, Do, Check, Act cycles, continually improving the quality of their service with each iteration of the cycle

2) **Respect for People** – employees are the University’s most important asset, they know what works and what doesn’t and what needs improving

## VOICE

What Lean is and isn't...

- Isn't about always implementing IT solutions!
- It is about finding better ways to work to provide a better product and make our jobs less difficult!

**“VOICE” (use this acronym to remember...)**

V- Adding **value** → only do what counts to the beneficiary and no more

O – Look for **opportunities** to remove waste (unnecessary admin burdens)

I – Continuous **improvement**

C – Always remember the **“customer”** → who is the beneficiary of the process / the work that you do

E – **Employee** engagement → employees know the process best

## **BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT TEAM – HOW WE CAN HELP?**

The Lean philosophy has a number of tools that can be used to help improve processes at the University.

Tools include:

- Improvement Blitzes
- 5S
- Visual management
- Facilitating change

### **A) BLITZ**

How do we do this? Well, some of you might have heard of the Kaizen Blitz / Improvement Blitz that we run; some might have participated in one. We work for 2-3 days with colleagues (mostly from across various areas) to review a process. We follow these steps:

- **FIRST** (AND VERY IMPORTANTLY): Get a “Sponsor” who empowers the team to come up with a better way of working and supports the team in getting the changes made. This should be the recognition that change should be bottom-up not top-down.
- Map the administrative processes, step by step, so we can see what adds value and good service to our customers, and where there is “waste”
- Work to eliminate the waste from the process and streamline it; ensure the process “flows”; sometimes we come up with an entirely new way of doing something, other times we revise the existing way (start of PLAN part of PDCA)
- Focus on the customer / beneficiary of the process

- Let the people doing the process decide on how best to improve it (consult with others if they are not part of the blitz team, either go talk to them or bring them in to talk to us)
- Create an Action Plan and assign tasks to all the team members in order to implement the change (that's the "DO" part!)
- Aim to review and continuously improve on an ongoing basis; get the group to agree to do this (CHECK, ACT)

### **EXAMPLES OF BLITZES: (we work in lots of different areas)**

- 1) **Communicating with PGT offer holders** – how can we make sure they get the right information at the right time, and encourage them to convert (ie. actually take up the offer to study here and register!). All three Graduate Schools, Student Support and SRAS worked together on this. Discovered a lot of duplication and offer-holders receiving the wrong info (ie. housing info for distance students). Led to setting up dedicated PGT New Students website, streamlined communications with no duplicated efforts, ideas for improving the info sent to offer holders and also flagged an issue about the actual offer letter itself (which was outside scope of blitz) which BI has been working on with Admissions since (another significant benefit).
- 2) **IT User Registration** – how to ensure that new starts at University get ID card, IT needs and Desk/Equipment they require on the day they start? No one streamlined process in place to ensure this would happen and survey feedback indicated that this was a major problem. So, team came together from IT, HR and Estates to create a new process. The objective is to ensure that 95% of new starts have what they need on start date and to reduce staff time around these processes by 20%. Have successfully implemented new process and will assess in one year.
- 3) **Medical School Volunteers** – needed to combine two processes into one and streamline it at the same time, create a consistent set of SOPs, and get a better understanding of the types of volunteers we have so can plan better for the future. Will assist students in the learning, staff will spend less time administering the process, the volunteers will get a better experience, and the University will have a flexible system that will be able to cope with any future changes to medical curriculum.
- 4) **Some coming up/just finished:**
  - a. ERASMUS/Study Abroad Process (May)
  - b. PGT Admissions Process (June)

### **WASTES**

We use DOWNTIME as a way of remembering the different types of waste that appear in processes:

- **Defects** (work that needs to be redone due to errors or because incomplete/incorrect information was provided)

- **Over-processing/Over production** (producing either too much paperwork / info, or producing it before it is required or processing things that don't add value to customer (asking to see passport visa multiple times)
- **Waiting** (idle time that causes workflow to stop (waiting for signatures, phone calls, waiting at the MFD too long!)
- **Non-Value Added**
- **Transport/Motion** (unnecessary movement of materials, people, information or paper)
- **Inventory** (excess stock, unnecessary files and copies, extra supplies sitting around just waiting to expire (too much headed paper, chemicals that will go off, small milk containers that go bad)
- **"Madness"** added in → rules that exist but no-one knows why, leads to madness (ie. sorting post into slots only to have them bundled together again)
- **Employee** (Untapped Potential) not using full potential of staff, wasting essential knowledge, experience, ideas (staff are either "resigned" or "they resign")

## B) 5S Workplace Improvement

5S is a way of eliminating waste in your immediate **office environment**. It gives workers more control over their workspace and is a great way to start an improvement initiative.

1. **Sort** and remove unnecessary items.
2. **Straighten** up your work area so that you have easy and efficient access to everything you need.
3. **Shine** means making sure everything is clean and in good working order.
4. **Standardise** by creating guidelines for keeping the area organised (ie. retention policies for documents)
5. **Sustain** by making 5S a habit.

NOT JUST ABOUT TIDYING UP – BUT IS ABOUT MAKING THE WORK ENVIRONMENT BETTER SO YOU WORK BETTER AND MORE EFFICIENTLY! (ie. Fire Station or well-ordered Kitchen)

BI Team have done 5S's in COPS College Office, COPS Graduate School, Registry, Dev Trust, University Secretary and SVP's Office, and PPG. As part of planned moves in central administration areas and Capital Plan Projects (ie. Energy Building), will also be assisting with 5Ss before each move. Also have done External Consulting in this area with Leeds University Library and Imperial College Library.

Bizarre examples of things removed / found: chest x-ray, Union accounts book from 1903-1940

Not needed: LOTS of furniture (some broken), ring binders/lever arch files galore, bags and bags for Shred-It, IT equipment that was obsolete, pens/envelopes that were dried out they were so old, stationary from the Millennium (!), etc...

### **C) Visual Management**

Visual management is a way of organizing work or tracking tasks, especially for projects or joint tasks. It is a great way for the whole team/office to keep up to date with what is happening and stay focused. It can also help alert when there is a problem and work has stopped or backed up. (Example PGAP Central, OneSource SLC System Testing) You could think of putting up a visual management board in a school office to keep track of work coming in / out, for example (like requests from the Centre, admissions, student numbers, key dates that are important to the school, who is working/on leave).

Visual management is used everywhere, you just might not realize it. Read an article last week about Airline Safety Industry policies helping to inform improved safety reviews in NHS to reduce the number of accidents in surgery etc... Flaps v. Landing gear example in B17 bombers. Patient boards in hospital wards / A&E (have you seen this on TV show 24 Hours in A&E?)

### **D) FACILITATING CHANGE / WORKING WITH BI TEAM**

In addition to these types of work, we are also helping to facilitate changes / improvements to processes in a wide variety of areas:

- Admissions Offer Letter
- Student Monitoring
- Process for booking staff meeting rooms
- Academic input into new Teaching spaces for King's
- PGR Applications process in CASS – pilot for electronic process
- Reduction of Paper use in CASS (“Think Before You Ink” project)
- Improvements to the Online Prospectus
- Of course.... OneSource projects – SLC, Finance, HR, and others...

Business improvement does require an investment of time, energy and imagination.

Talk to one of us if you think you might have a possible project in your area or if you want more information about BI. We are always looking for “local champions” as well... 😊

Our webpage on Staffnet:

[www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/business-improvement-1228.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/business-improvement-1228.php)