

Viewpoint

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Lean road to perfection

Efficiency is key to customer satisfaction

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines perfection as “the highest degree of a quality or trait”. This remains an aspiration for most businesses and few, if any, business processes would claim to have reached a state of perfection. This is especially true when you look at business performance from a customer perspective.

If your customers were to define perfection from their point of view three words would probably spring to mind “free, perfect, now”. So ask yourself how close to this customer ideal can you get? There is nothing like seeking perfection for helping the business to focus on what the customer really wants.

To achieve the customer ideal you should be striving to meet the customer need for the lowest possible cost, at the highest level of quality, in the shortest possible timescale, with zero defects on every project. This is an achievable aim and a very desirable one.

At worst you drive out inefficiencies, improve product quality and speed up delivery. You save money, customer satisfaction increases and you can also increase your margin. All you have to do is make sure that the price you charge the customer lags behind the degree of efficiency savings you make. What's to lose?

There is a methodology for achieving customer perfection: it's called Lean. Now before you say “we used Lean” or “we didn't find Lean programmes successful” I am prepared to bet the programme was implemented badly or without sufficient senior management support or investment. The reason I know this is because Bourton Group has been implementing improvement

programmes for over 40 years and in all that time not a single Lean programme has failed to show significant improvement. The normal range of improvement is between 10 and 30%.

Striving to improve efficiency really has no downside because it will increase margins, avoid the need to cut services and improve customer satisfaction. Now would be the perfect time to take a far more considered and detailed look at how Lean could help you achieve really significant performance improvement.

The first step we would recommend is to read the CIRIA guide entitled *Build Lean – Transforming Construction using Lean Thinking*. It is a call to arms as to the importance and benefits of implementing Lean in the construction industry. A number of the industry's leading Lean practitioners were involved in writing and reviewing the guide – including some of ours.

The guide will be launched on 9 May 2011 and can be found at www.ciria.org. You can put your name down for a pre-print promotional copy by emailing enquiries@ciria.org before 14 April 2011. Alternatively you can get in touch with us via the contact details below. Hopefully this will be just the nudge you need to genuinely move from average to class-leading on the road to perfection.

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