

# Applying Lean in an Office Environment



When Lean principles are applied to the office environment it's not about 'taking away all the interesting bits and turning your staff into robots. But more about removing waste so your teams can spend more time on creative or considerative steps that will deliver more value to the customer.

A model of Lean implementation considered effective in an office environment is the Rapid Improvement Event (RIE), sometimes also referred to as a Kaizen Blitz Event.

## What is a Rapid Improvement Event?

The RIE is an improvement approach where intense activity occurs over a short period of time, typically one week.

Overall activity duration, including scoping, planning, training, etc. occurs over a period of between four to eight weeks, dependent upon the complexity of the issue being addressed.

To bring about significant improvements in performance in a short period of time; the approach focuses on a small number of different work teams or processes without a high degree of complexity. It also relies on using the people involved in the process, those who do the job every day.

## Quick wins

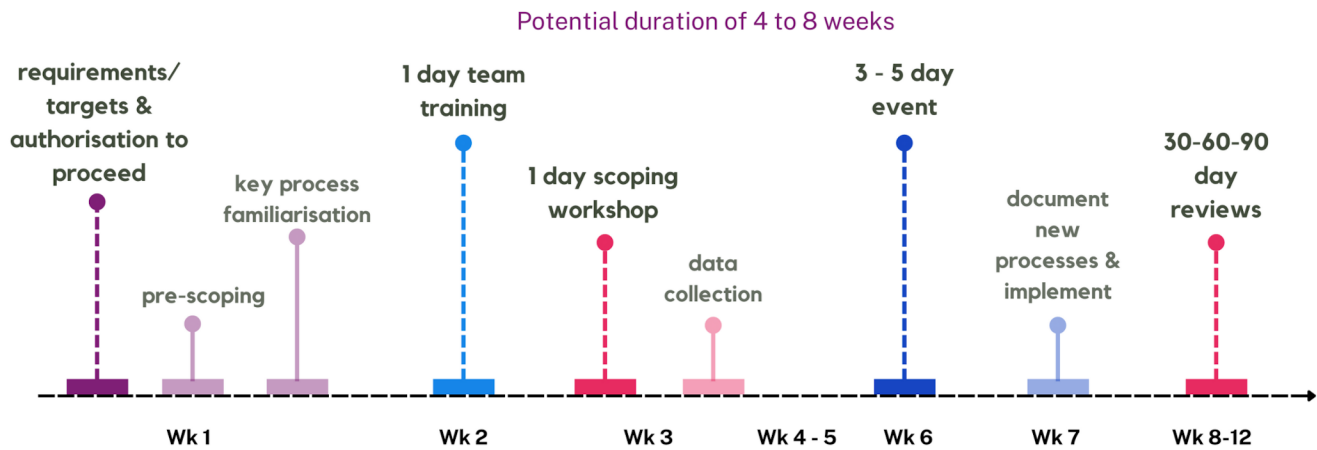
We have this approach is preferred by line managers because it provides a faster return on effort, is more visible, and does not challenge existing management styles to the same extent as full implementation.

Staff also like it as they feel engaged in a process that quickly achieves improvement.

The only downside is that the 'quick wins' may be difficult to sustain when they are not easily integrated into the overall strategy of the organisation.



The RIE approach below illustrates a high-level view of stages and timings

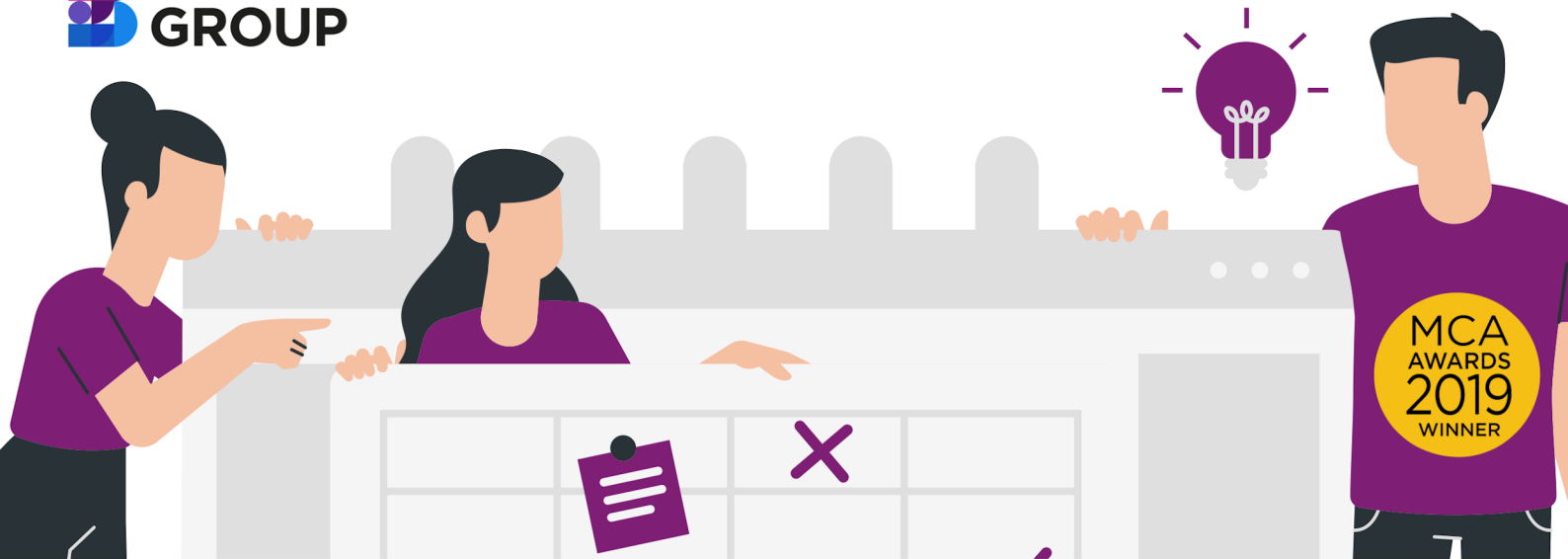


With this approach, the change required is quickly identified. It offers solutions as well as allowing those taking part to plan actions needed for implementation, while utilising Lean tools and techniques to:

- Define, understand, and measure the existing process or *Current State*
- *Identify waste* and process failings
- Identify the *root cause* of this process waste
- Develop a revised and significantly improved new process or *Future State*
- Document the *new process* in a format that a review team would find the most user friendly
- Implement the improvements and bring into realisation the *Future State*
- *Monitor and review* progress

The timeline below adds more detail to the high-level view





Fundamentally, the RIE approach is simply focused on answering three basic questions:

- Where are we today? - Current State
- Where do we want to be? - Future State
- How do we get there?

Consider carefully how waste manifests itself in offices

In the office, environmental waste exists but usually doesn't manifest itself in a physical form and sometimes it is actively managed.

It's not uncommon to see staff using 'workarounds' with offline spreadsheets or numerous meetings. Worse than that, we occasionally see reward management of waste through recognition of constantly fire-fighting the same fires.

Waste in the office environment, once pointed out, tends to be easy to spot and is termed 'Surface Wastes'.

Here are some examples of the eight wastes associated with Lean Thinking in the office environment.

Typical surface wastes:

- *Transportation* - retrieving or storing files, carrying or posting paperwork
- *Inventory* - open projects, unread or no actionable emails, old database records, batching orders
- *Motion* - searching for files, hand offs and waiting for approvals moving from one system (or screen) to another

- *Idle Time* - waiting for systems to come online, waiting for customer response, waiting for approval and sign-off
- *Over Processing* - repeated manual entry of data, detailed report when a phone call would do, more information than the customer needs, over-regulation and layers of approvals, duplication and additional checking
- *Defects, Rejects, Rework* - data entry errors, missing information, pricing errors
- *Over Production* - doing more or ahead of customer need, doing reports no one actions, making extra copies
- *Skills Misuse* - using skilled workers for low-skilled work, using the wrong equipment

## Conclusion

Lean Rapid Improvement Events are a great tool if you are looking to drive performance improvement and get team members and managers excited. However, always remember that to achieve the full, sustainable Continuous Improvement culture that Lean supports, just doing RIEs will not be sufficient.

Bourton Group is an operational management consultancy whose expertise lies in business transformation and change management.

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