

## Idea Management as a Lean Strategy

Organizations that succeed in today's competitive environment share a common secret - their management practices ensure the involvement of all individuals in their organizations. For organizations to be truly successful they must provide vehicles to engage their people and to tap their creativity and innovation.

The misuse, abuse or non-use of employee ideas is one of the last barriers of the industrial and information age. This kind of behaviour - or lack thereof - does damage to the bottom line. It kills the one thing organizations need most - new ideas. So here is both a question and a call to action, dear readers: What old paradigms, practices and behaviours do our organizations, and we, need to get rid of in order to unleash and maximize the potential of employee creativity and innovation in the workplace?

Employee suggestion programs have been historically charged with this important role in organizations. They have been around for over 100 years and have flourished throughout Europe and North America. They have continued to redefine themselves from the old days of the suggestion box ... essentially a coffin where ideas from employees went to die ... to modern-day decentralized processes where front-line managers are the gate-keeper's of their employee's ideas.

But suggestion systems, however they are defined and operationalized, no longer provide the sole conduit for employee ideas. Continuous improvement processes, Kaizen and Lean, to name just a few engagement vehicles, have challenged current idea management thinking.

The application of Lean techniques improve the flow of ideas and are critical to continued growth:

- focus improvement efforts on key themes
- top down and bottom up strategies for success
- problem solving with trained local facilitators
- increased corporate support for implementation
- alignment of values, goals, people and process

The 3 elements of work are as below:

1/ Value Added Activities that transform or shape material or information, are wanted by the customer and are done right the first time

2/ (Required) Non Value Added Activities that result in no value but which cannot be eliminated based on existing technology, equipment or thinking ie regulatory, customer mandated, legal

... the target should be to minimize these

3/ Waste ... Non Value Added Activities that consume resources but create no value in the eyes of the customer  
... the target should be to eliminate these

If you cannot get rid of it, it turns to required, non value added!

And it is not just the classical production areas where non value activities abound. Some facts from the administrative arena:

- 70% of the reasons for customer complaints comes from administrative processes
- 30% of working time is occupied by meetings which are often inefficiently organized
- 13% of the daily working time, on average, is required for "searching"

Lean = Kaizen! Lean processes mean the systematic identification and elimination of all non value adding activities by all employees (National Institute of Standard Technologies).

Framed simply: Efficiency = doing things right. Effectiveness = doing the right things. Efficiency is completing a task successfully and without wasting time. Our employees know where these opportunities lie and can tell us. After all, the expert is the person doing the job daily. Organizations that know how to harness these hidden reserves in these difficult financial times help themselves become "fit" again. They also have a better chance to come out of this crisis strengthened. Waste has no future!

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Bio:

Bernie Sander is an international consultant, author and workshop leader. He lives in Ottawa, Canada and travels the world working with Fortune 500 organizations. He has international expertise in suggestion system design and implementation, continuous improvement processes, group facilitation and problem solving, strategic planning, recognition architectures and idea management processes. He is President of his own consulting firm, Innovation Transfer, serves on the education faculty of several international organizations and is author of the books, "A Wake-Up Call for Idea Champions" , "On Idea Management" and "PiT-Stop – Problem Finding and Problem Solving in Teams" , all best practice thinking in the field of managing employee ideas. Bernie served as a past President of the North American Employee Involvement Association and speaks at many international conferences annually.