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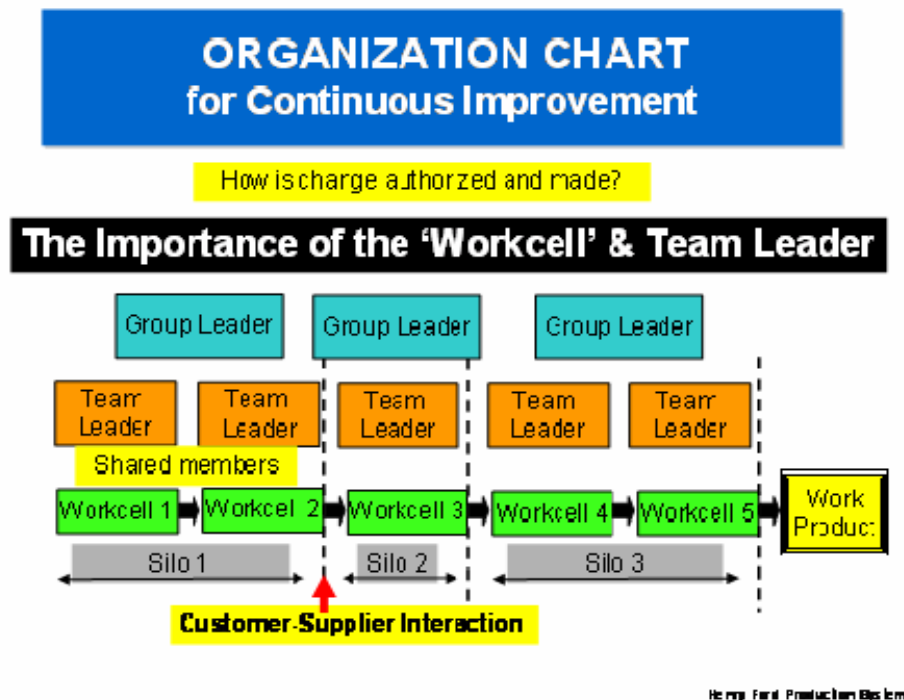
Wednesday's Words of Quality

Problem Solving that Leverages Worker Empowerment

In a Lean management system, continuous problem resolution is dependent on a worker-driven 'bottom up' approach rather than the conventional management driven 'top down' approach to problem solving.

This principle is at the core of Demingism but can only be effective if leaders create a blameless culture for workers to identify defective work and a structure that enables and incentivizes their participation and collaboration in continuous improvement. The irony here is that to empower workers to be accountable in solving their own problems through PDCA requires more work for leaders, not less.

In other words, the main role of leaders and managers is to ever improve the system of work itself. We do this by leveraging the quality improvement organizational structure illustrated below in this Henry Ford Production System adaptation of Toyota.



This quality reporting structure aligns team members with their team leader by work stations into small teams that foster worker identification of the nature and scope of daily defects, and stimulate and guide the discussion of possible solutions that can be tested. This cooperative approach is predicated on a *'no blame but all accountable'* sense of process ownership by teams.

Workers more readily assimilate the mantra- "never pass a defect" through this empowering structure that continually informs the workforce about the quality of their work product and charges them with improving it.

Roles of Leadership

The role of leadership is to establish the shift in work expectations, structures and realignment of incentives so that workers can relate to and interact with each other horizontally across the path of workflow and contribute collaboratively toward work process redesign across historical silos of control. To be effective in fostering change from the bottom-up, so to speak, the people-focused strengths of Toyota's culture must be reproduced- namely:

- Employees in charge of their own jobs
- Employees designing standardized work
- Employees working to continually improve the work, changes made and effectiveness assessed by the customer focused PDCA cycle

Roles of Team Members

In this new Lean culture of work, the consistently engaged, learning, communicating and contributing team member is expected to fulfill the following empowered roles so that effective process improvements can be continually designed and tested by scientific method (PDCA) in the workplace:

- Understand the work rules, principles and tools of process improvement
- Identify defects, daily, on whiteboards
- Meet in teams regularly to share and brainstorm problems in the workplace
- Join teams charged with addressing interventions
- Assist in design of measurement tools
- Collect data
- Assist in root cause analysis
- Communicate to other teams, customers-suppliers
- Communicate to managers/leaders
- Keep track of process improvements
- Continually seek better ways of performing the work
- Present results of successes
- Learn from previously proposed interventions that did not work (the failures)

Teamwork is the Cure

Teamwork is the foundation of Lean process improvement, and it has been proven that individuals will extend themselves to make the company successful if they are engaged early on in the decision-making process. In Toyota's culture, learning often is by experience in which an early ongoing effort is demonstrated to teach teams how to work together to reach common goals. The problem-solving approach is "Go and See" in which subject matter experts observe the problem to deeply understand the current condition before suggesting process improvements. This includes analysis of workflow, standardized work procedures, and further evaluation to analyze and detect the root cause of defects. In comparison, other quality improvement methods often are limited to the review of data from reports created by individuals external to the work itself. This has limited value and changes made without participation of those invested in the work seldom sustain.

Transforming the culture of work, or more correctly the employees' incentive to relate to each other and work differently, must occur to obtain success in a Lean enterprise.

Will this approach work for you in clinical medicine? Read on.

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How a Lean culture of empowered workers can reduce turnaround times and improve patient care

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Zero defects. It's a goal that all labs strive for. But it's not one that's easy to achieve.

That's what Rita D'Angelo wanted for her lab. And while she may not have reached her goal, she's headed in the right direction.

As the Quality Manager in the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine in the Henry Ford Health System, D'Angelo is in charge of the Quality Systems Division where she facilitates process redesign for the 12th-largest hospital-based lab in the country.

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She knows that process improvements come from an empowered workforce, and that's where she started this journey. In 2005, the lab created a Lean culture with training based on a Toyota-style environment but designed for the laboratory. Once trained, everyone on staff knew that they had the power to make changes—and they did. Forty the first month, 1,392 process improvements in the last year.

You can take the first step toward empowering *your* lab's workforce when you [register to attend](#) the 2011 Lab Quality Confab and join Rita D'Angelo for her session "Lean Culture of Empowered Workforce: How the Lab as Supplier Can Help its Customers Sustain Continuous Improvement."

Now, D'Angelo wants to promote this worker-empowered Lean model in other departments at Henry Ford—and she's starting with gynecology oncology.

The GYN oncology department needed a standardized approach to processing specimens because it provides services to several hospitals. To avoid confusion and reduce turnaround times, everything coming into the lab has to be handled the same way. The ultimate goal was to provide cancer patients with an exceptional level of clinical service that would reduce treatment delays and get them to surgery more quickly by getting test results sooner.

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Using a leadership-driven model, based on the principles of Lean, the department empowered physicians, nurses and technical staff to implement their own process-improvement ideas. Teams regularly work together to identify problems, recommend possible solutions, and measure results. And they've seen a significant improvement in turnaround times. Now, diagnostic reports that used to take 5-6 days are being delivered in three-and-a-half. Their stretch goal is to get test results to patients before they leave the hospital after surgery.

Here are just a few of the lessons learned that D'Angelo says helped in her lab—and could help in yours, too:

- Leadership support is key as long as managers are willing to give up some of their control.
- Implement a few small ideas each week so staff can realize the benefits sooner rather than later.
- Communication is key. Make sure you create an environment that encourages people to talk to each other.
- Standardize your lab's processes so everyone knows what they need to do and when they need to do it. You'll reduce waste and shrink turnaround times.

Saving money is important, but it shouldn't be your primary focus, says D'Angelo. Improve your processes, reduce turnaround times and the money will come.

One low registration fee gives you access this, and more than 40 other equally valuable sessions during this two-day event. Register today for the [5th annual Lab Quality Confab](#), November 15-16, 2011 in San Antonio, then join us for "Lean Culture of Empowered Workforce: How the Lab as Supplier Can Help its Customers Sustain Continuous Improvement" featuring Rita D'Angelo.

And remember to book your hotel room before this Friday to take advantage of the special low conference rate of only \$189/night, single or double occupancy.

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