

What does language have to do with Lean?

Creating Common Language

THE STORY:

Your organization has been experimenting with Lean for a couple of years. As a leader you believe the best thing to do is stay out of the way and just let it happen. And so in different parts of the organization different methods, tools and language are in use. One team is using Japanese terms popularized by Toyota while another uses plain English terms to communicate the same thing.

INSIGHT:

One of the fundamental concepts in Lean is – in every way possible – to reduce variation. The reason is clear when you extend the story out a few years and you find one team can't speak to another in a common language. Your team may use an 8-Step process improvement method while another uses a methodology known as DAMIAC to do the same thing, and yet another applies theory of constraints to improve processes. Creating a common language and using common methodologies enables an organization to readily collaborate. In addition, a common language increases the chance the changes will stick because of the simply reality of greater momentum aided by more people doing the same thing.

A common method makes it easy to throw teams together to address increasingly complex issues. Without the common language that comes from common methods, teams will move slower, have more conflict and have a decreased chance of success.



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