

How Lean helped Highlands College to streamline their Processes

The Challenge

Highlands College had a long standing issue regarding the process for payments for hourly paid staff, Visiting Lecturers. The process was complex and staff found it difficult to understand, as a result payments were slow and errors high leaving staff involved feeling frustrated and demotivated..

Applying Lean

Highlands had heard about lean and brought in Lean experts Gary Lacey and Barry Jeffrey, to help them look at the staff payments process using lean and six sigma methodology. They had a tight timescale to make the changes so organised a 2 day event committing the whole team for this period to get the work completed.

Discovery phase

- A diverse team were brought together to work on this project of all grades, including those that had knowledge of the process and some that did not. This ensured people were asking the 'why question' throughout the event.
- When we mapped the process we found that data was manually inputted onto more than one form, providing an opportunity for error and the potential for the incorrect payment to be made to the member of staff.
- Found that Up to 8 college departments or sections were involved, with 9 hand-offs and twenty individual transactions. This caused delays and also lead to staff spending a significant amount of time checking the accuracy of data input.
- The cost of the administering the process was approximately 10 per cent of the total value of the work undertaken by the visiting lecturers.

Design phase

- Two departments that had traditionally sighted each other as being the cause of the issue due to perceived reluctance of the other to change started to understand the challenges that each team had been facing and worked together to improve the system.
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- The team worked together to create a future state process that maintained financial rigour whilst cutting out the over checking and ensuring the process empowered those that completed the initial form to get it 'right first time'.

Delivery phase

- A new process was developed which reduced the work flow to 10 steps, 3 hand offs and only 3 departments involved thereby reducing the risk of error and time it takes to process a payment.

- They redesigned the paperwork to make sure it encouraged accuracy and was easier to complete.
- The team created a communication plan to ensure everyone involved in the process understood the changes and their role in making it work.

Next Steps

The new model for visiting lecturer payments has been in operation since September 1st and is working well, so far the new process has delivered on reducing the amount of administrative time and we are confident it will achieve its financial savings. What the process also created was a culture of lean methodology within the college. Since this workshop we have conducted a lean workshop on our part-time enrolment process and quite often in meetings when issues or problems are discussed you will now hear the comment “we need to lean this”.

What people said

“The two day workshop was a very clear and interesting way of identifying how we can be ‘lean’ in what we do. We have since eliminated time consuming processes for producing and checking work schedules which have not only reduced costs but also had a positive effect on improving the way we do things for both staff and visiting lecturers”

Jeff Reed, (Interim Deputy Head Services & Business Development)

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Linda Nelson (Estates Manager)

Top Tips

It was an advantage for us to have someone independent to facilitate the event. Sometimes using someone from outside the team helps individuals to be more objective about the issue.

Bringing people together for a 2 day intensive workshop allowed us to solve the issue quickly. Those involved saw the progress and felt motivated to make the changes.