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Principles of a Lean Office

There are many benefits to developing a Lean office but many don't know where to get started. While formalized training and curriculum is available, many companies may not believe they have the time or resources to dedicate to the plan. They may be overlooking huge benefits in efficiencies, cost reduction, reduced staffing needs and more.

For professionals looking to take on a Lean initiative or are considering making their office function a little more efficiently, this article provides a few principles to get started.

1. A Lean Office requires dedicated leadership

Leaders are responsible for laying the concrete foundation instrumental in the smooth running of the lean office. They draft the company's vision and develop strategies to accomplish them successfully. They know the importance and value of having satisfied employees on board at the company and create an empowered and visionary frontline team.

While companies with grassroots efforts may experience some degree of improvement, it's the leaders who implement different plans and strategies to ensure the company enjoys consistent success.

2. A Lean Office Needs Clear Goals and Metrics

Lack of adequate metrics may make it difficult to assess the effect of each change. Not having clear, measurable objectives may give rise to confusion and pandemonium at the office, which can destabilize the company's efforts.

3. A Lean Office Maintains Standardized Processes

Companies often come across instances where two different people in charge of a process adopt completely different

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methods to accomplish their objectives. Objective facts are overruled by personal preferences. Unless there are set standards in the company, improving a process may be nothing more than a pipe dream.

4. A Lean Office Utilizes 5S

Disorganized offices are havens of ineptitude. Leaders need to establish standard processes for the company and build their offices based on this method. Eliminate clutter wherever it pops up and assign things to maximize benefits to the company. One such strategy is the 5S method (Sort, Set, Shine, Standardize, and Sustain).

Consider running an experiment: Give certain employees a stopwatch and ask them to start the timer whenever they need to search for something or walk away from their desk to meet someone. Review their log once they're done with work. You'll see that a significant portion of time is potentially wasted due to poor office layout.

5. Lean Offices Have Low WIP

A lean office seeks to reduce or eliminate work-in-progress as far as possible. This allows the company to speed up the lead time, reduce inconsistencies in customer experience reports, and cut back on unnecessary activities.

6. Lean Offices Promote Flow

Flow is a term used to refer to the ability of office employees to complete their tasks in the least possible amount of time, without being subject to any queues or hassles. While it might seem difficult to accomplish, flow makes everything more efficient when it's finally achieved in an office.

7. A Lean Office Understands Demand

People seeking to create a lean office are often challenged by demand variations as it completely contradicts their calculations. Managing demand tends to be less complex when done directly on the floor. Heijunka, or load leveling, can lower the amount of demand a team has to cater to. However, office employees may find it difficult to handle their workload. For instance, phones can't be answered unless someone calls them and customers have no interest in



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For instance, no bank can approve a loan application on the day it's received – there are checks it needs to cross before it can be approved. Unfortunately, this system of checks and balances may also bog down department speeds.

This is further complicated by the fact that office work isn't 'demand' most of the time. Calls from clients seeking to know the status of their order is work, but can be a waste of time. The goal is to reduce these types of interruptions as much as possible. True demand refers to a variable you want to increase.

Understanding demand patterns play a crucial role in the development and establishment of a lean office. Not having a grasp on this concept can potentially lead to chaos.

8. Lean Offices Make Use of Daily Management Systems

Every successful lean office employs a daily management system. Once demand patterns have been determined, the lean office must develop a strategy to handle this demand. Daily management systems can match available resources with expected demand.

Additionally, they enable constant monitoring of company resources and triggers a proactive response whenever teams lag behind in their performance.

9. A Lean Office Is Built on Teamwork and Communication

Lean offices have a highly fluid structure. Employees need to stay flexible and responsive at all times to cope with dynamic demand patterns.

10. A Lean Office Has A Visual Vibe

Communication, teamwork, and management is easier when employees can simply walk into their office and grasp whatever the team is working on. Since most of the work in our modern world is done on computers, understanding the situation may take employees more time. Visual offices reduce this lag and allow for greater communication.

11. A Lean Office Is Focused on Continuous Improvement

While this type of corporate culture take years to develop, a true continuous culture is one where every employee actively works towards making improvements and reducing waste on a daily basis.

