



AUTHORS:

L-R: Claire Morgan,
Stuart Nelson

OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND TO THE LEAN INITIATIVE

McWilliams Sails is a growing organisation with scope to grow in international markets in its three core revenue streams. The leadership team know that they need to scale smart in order to succeed. The team saw the investment in Lean as an investment in not only process improvement, but also in the growth of the employees and the quality of service they offer their clients.

The business was acquired in 2017 by the new owners; however, the business came with legacy processes and mindsets that it was imperative to change so as to improve the business as a whole.

The objectives were:

- Introduce Lean tools.
- Create a continuous improvement mindset.
- Find opportunities to add value to clients and improve the service.
- Grow capacity in bag production.
- Increase efficiencies in processes.

LEAN INITIATIVE UNDERTAKEN – LEAN THINKING, TOOLS, TECHNIQUES

Acquiring a legacy business is not without its challenges, and one such challenge was the ability of the employees to recognise areas of improvement and then change the engrained processes to improve efficiencies. The Lean process has been instrumental in this, and savings in costs – both in time and in materials – have been realised and will continue to reward the progress that the programme has afforded us. We can already see that the productivity during busy times with the bags has been increased significantly compared to last year. Our sales are up approximately 40% versus a year ago, and the bags are being turned out quicker and the staff stress levels are much reduced.

What was wrong? As has been said, legacy businesses have legacy processes and mindsets. The organisation was littered with wasteful processes, materials, and so on. Nobody knew what we had, where it was,



COMPANY OVERVIEW

McWilliam Sailmakers has 6 full time employees and 1 part-time employee. It has three core revenue streams: handmade bags (holdall style); windsocks; and sails for yachts (including sail repairs and new sail builds). Annual turnover across the three revenue streams is €800,000.

Holdalls: The holdalls are popular across Ireland. The primary market is within the sailing community as the bags are water resistant, durable, and last a lifetime. Aside from the sailing community the bags are popular with all other sectors as travel bags, school bags, beach bags.

Windsocks: The windsocks are sold throughout the world. We do strong business within Ireland and supply windsocks to all major airports and factories. However, we also have a good customer base in the Middle East and Asia.

Sails: Our sails are sold primarily to the Irish sailing community, with modest sales in the UK.

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MCWILLIAM SAILMAKERS

what it was doing, or why processes were being done the way that they were being done – aside from the fact that they were being done that way “because that’s how things have always been done”. An example from bag production is that the bags were being cut out using a large plotter machine which can cut approximately 20 bags in one go. Once they were cut out, they were being transported across the width of the loft only to be brought back to where they originated when a bag order was placed – lots of Motion waste. The whole loft space was redesigned to reduce such wasteful activities.

The first step of the Lean process was benchmarking how long does it actually take to make a bag. This had previously never been understood. We considered why we made the bag the way we made it, how we could organise the space around us to better utilise the tools we had, and what and where were the tools we needed to have close at hand. Once we knew where the bottlenecks were, we were able to identify fixes to the processes to enable us to get to a minimum amount of time that it takes to make a bag.

We had this information, but still we had issues with why the staff were stressed when orders came in, why some days no bags were being finished, and why external staff were helping make bags when the quantity of the orders were not large enough to warrant it. We knew our capacity but we were still having issues. We had issues with staff mentality – “we can’t make that many bags a day, it’s simply not possible... there are too many orders” and the like.

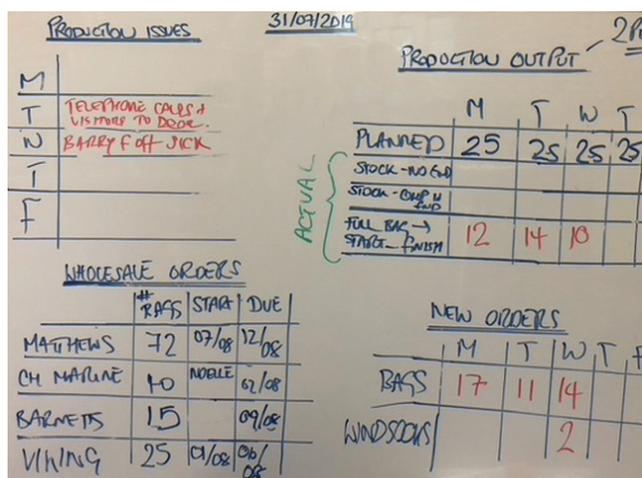


Figure 1.

It took a key member of staff being on holiday to finally force us to identify the bottlenecks and to understand how we can improve that process even more. We then went on to

implement the PIT meetings to ensure that daily production targets are understood, providing a central place where we can record what wholesale orders are, when they’re due, and a place to record the interruption issues causing production targets to not be met. With all of this, we were immediately and easily able to reach our 25 bags-per-day target production.

Another area of issue was the amount of “stuff” in the loft that was useless, not used, or not even known about. The loft was transformed one area at a time so as to only contain what was needed. Items were then labelled, and this led to being able to throw away what wasn’t needed, provided us with the ability to see what we had in stock, and enabled the identification of what re-ordering levels we needed to implement.

A key challenge pertained to changing our previous way of working to a new way of working, and challenging pre-existing mindsets like “that’s the way we’ve always done it, so why change”, and implementing solutions. Our key changes included using 6S Workplace Organisation to transform stores, plus the revision of the Bag Production Process, and the adoption of standardised PIT meetings. Notable results include a 60% increase on Bag Production Capacity, and significant space gain through the 6S process.

LEAN INITIATIVE IMPROVEMENTS & IMPACT

Whilst challenging, the whole Lean process has been incredibly rewarding and ultimately very successful. We entered into the programme to improve bag production primarily, but the results and work done were seen across the business as a whole.

It has led to having difficult conversations and times due to the nature of trying to change legacy processes and mindsets. It has caused issues as a whole, but ultimately the mindsets have been changed, the improved processes have been adopted, and we have come out on the other side with processes that are much more efficient, processes that work, increased productivity, and ultimately attained happier customers as they are able to get their bag in a shorter time.

We now have a streamlined process when a bag order arrives in the door. We now have the ability to see what

orders are in hand, how to prioritise these, and how to get all of the orders done in a timely fashion. Before the Lean processes were implemented, we were sometimes averaging only 10 bags a day – and the bags were only taking 21 minutes to make [timed as part of the Lean implementation], which was neither efficient nor cost-effective. We now have a process that improves on this to the extent that we can comfortably make 25 bags a day.

“This improvement in process has enabled us to enter into a book of work to rebrand the bags, create a proper social media strategy, and redesign the website as we now know our capacity and what we can achieve with the resources that we have. We can now properly plan for real growth.”



Lean Service Provider

JigsawVAE

Stuart Nelson

stuart@jigsawvae.ie

www.jigsawvae.ie