

standardise documentation and anticipate some of the needs and common questions of those parties.

Lean Thinking, Tools, and Techniques used included:

- The Kano Model.
- Cost Reduction Methods.
- Customer Profiling [what is of importance and value, observe, immerse, and engage].
- Problem Statements.
- Continuous Improvement Mindset.

LEAN INITIATIVE IMPROVEMENTS & IMPACT

We have already seen improvements in a number of areas. As discussed above, some of the major changes undertaken as a result of this collaboration were:

- 1. Introduction of online feedback forms – deemed a great success** – the introduction of new online forms for feedback and applications have resulted in a 70% increase in first-time responses to feedback reports. The review of these feedback reports has been reduced to 5 minutes per group [down from 60 minutes] because the information is all consolidated in one place.
- 2. Introduction of mobile messaging to contact trainee groups and leaders – deemed a great success** – direct connection has hugely reduced the volume of email communication once used exclusively for groups, instead meeting them where they are and providing a more immediate line of communication. An office mobile phone has been introduced, allowing the streamlining of information flows and an “always in touch” model that suits the nature of the business.
- 3. The use of Welcome Packs for host families and trainee groups – deemed a success** – as these have been introduced to anticipate common questions, both for host families and groups of trainees. These have been successful, although at this stage a year on, they do require revision and additions to keep up with the changing nature of our business processes.
- 4. The review and simplification of project plans – deemed a limited success** – while we addressed this topic in our sessions, the amount of time spent in pulling together the various pieces of information required for these plans is still longer than we would like, but the principles we

learned are proving very useful as we continue to work on the issue.

- 5. The use of specific excel tools to improve access to information and reduce data duplication and errors – deemed a limited success** – while some of the advanced techniques in excel [PivotTables, VLookup] were explored as potential solutions to common data entry problems, additional intensive staff training would be needed to get the real efficiency benefits out of these tools.
- 6. Red-flagging issues that require attention within 30 days – deemed a success** – we continue to manage issues in this way and take advantage of built-in tools in our operations systems to keep track of the many issues that arise
- 7. Improvement potential regarding client management through use of a Customer Relationship Management system – deemed a limited success** – while we have adopted *HubSpot* during the last year as a system for managing customer relationships, we have recently moved on to another CRM. Still, a marked improvement in sales and the implementation of a sales funnel model have been beneficial over the past year.

“Overall, Career Training Internships has benefitted from the implementation of the Lean techniques that Stuart introduced to us. We have achieved efficiency in a number of communication areas, and we continue to have a staff that is willing to pursue these techniques and embrace the principles of Lean and sustainability as we look to constantly improve our business processes.”



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OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND TO THE LEAN INITIATIVE

We first heard about the Lean for Micro Programme through a supplier of ours who had already completed the programme. He couldn't recommend it highly enough and the benefits that had resulted from his own experiences after having completed the programme.

We decided to apply for the Lean Programme in 2018, and began to work with Allyson English as our Lean Service Provider. It was very important for us that we were able to call on Allyson's expertise throughout, and she was of particular benefit during the site visits in helping each of us to understand Waste and most importantly help us understand how to see our wastes.

Before beginning the Programme, we had never heard of Lean and were mistakenly under the impression that it was only applicable to manufacturing businesses. Happily, we were proved wrong and could see very quickly that the initiative could equally be rolled-out to services businesses. Wherever there is a process there is waste, and wherever there is waste there is an opportunity for a Lean project – no matter what the sector.

LEAN INITIATIVE UNDERTAKEN – LEAN THINKING, TOOLS, TECHNIQUES

Streamline Admin Processes, Standardise Work Practices, Improve Stock Management

We commenced our Lean project by streamlining our admin processes and standardising our work practices, and we also looked at our stock management with a view to creating efficiencies in how we ordered and stored stock. We did this with the help of the following Lean tools and techniques:

- 5S Workplace Organisation.
- 8 Wastes.
- Visual Management.
- Standardisation.
- Kanban
- DMAIC [Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, Control].



COMPANY OVERVIEW

Whelehans Pharmacy has been serving the people of Mullingar in County Westmeath and surrounding areas since 1898. Offering excellent and personalised customer service, our friendly and highly-trained staff are always on hand to give assistance and advice. We cater for all health and beauty needs, offering a comprehensive range of medicines, cosmetics, and fragrances. The core of our success for over 100 years is delivering care to the community through exemplary customer care. Our staff provide an efficient service in a friendly and personal manner.



Figure 1.

We began by reviewing our workstations and our workshop floor layout. By using the 5S principles, we were able to remove clutter, see problems much quicker, and increase productivity. We introduced visual standards for each workbench which allowed anyone visiting the stations to see how the area should be kept. This process also negated duplication as the workflow was then clearly identified and issues were more visible to each operative. We provided each workstation with its own set of tools to carry out the job and identified the need for separate PCs to negate waiting. This in turn improved turnaround times and greatly streamlined the whole ordering process. The rearranging of fast-moving stock items closer to the workbenches also increased productivity and improved turnaround times.

Throughout this project we learned about the 8 Wastes, and, by identifying practical examples relating to our situation, we were able to encourage and engage staff members to actively look for these in our day-to-day operations. Involving the staff in this activity not only improved morale

and engagement, but it also promoted a buy-in from the rest of the team. In relatively quick time, we successfully transitioned to looking for Wastes as a part of our daily routines, and more importantly discussing how we could negate them occurring at all.

Visual management has played a big part in our Lean journey and has made our team stronger by opening up new communication channels. We have found that involving the team and building a platform to allow for new ideas has resulted in the team becoming more energised and engaged.

Stock management was of concern prior to the Lean Programme. We had identified that the purchasing and storing of our goods could be improved. We learnt about Kanban systems and colour-coding cards to identify stock levels and push-pull to balance production. We found this a benefit that directly resulted in reduced stock levels and let us see where the time and cost savings could be made.



Figure 2.

Our administration processes were also improved by standardising our workflows and analysing the times and staff activities involved with the completion of paperwork. By defining the process and measuring it, we were able to improve the processes and in turn reduce our downtime and duplication. As a result of balancing the line in our admin processes, we were able to increase capacity by 20%.

LEAN INITIATIVE IMPROVEMENTS & IMPACT

The Lean improvements and impact included overall savings in the admin processes that resulted in an increase in capacity of 20%, and the standardisation of work at the dispensing workstations with the introduction of individual PCs and tools to carry out the job resulted in a reduction of 20% in turnaround times. With the introduction of tighter controls on stock management and improved purchasing processes, this too has led to reduced costs both in monetary terms and in time savings.

One of the biggest improvements we have seen has been in our admin process. We have not only balanced the line of work here and increased capacity, but we have introduced better ways of working and communicating with each other which in turn has allowed us to provide a better service to the customer.

“As a high volume dispensing pharmacy that specialises in dispensing and delivering medicines safely and accurately to nursing homes all over Ireland, we need the business to be as efficient as possible by ‘systemising the routine and humanising the exception’, and this is what Lean did for us. Becoming involved with the Lean Programme meant that we could learn the best practices from international industry to make our business as efficient as possible, reducing waste, and making the most out of the limited resources we have in a low-margin high-volume business. If you are an SME with aspirations of growing or are struggling with costs, I could not recommend Allyson and the Lean for Micro Programme highly enough. With the support of your LEO, it makes affordable this type of mentorship which would often be out of the budget of small businesses. Do not miss out on this amazing opportunity to make your business as Lean as possible.”



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