

Amnis and IHM share radical tips on how to sustain Lean

By Bob Little

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Sustaining Lean – a masterclass for healthcare sector professionals jointly being run by the quality, innovation and productivity organisation, Amnis and the Institute of Healthcare Management (IHM) – will explore some radical views.

Among these is that healthcare organisations – including hospitals – are giving up too soon on ‘Lean’ based improvement initiatives.

Amnis’ Mark Eaton, who is also the author of the book ‘Lean for practitioners’, explained: “Basing improvement initiatives on the concepts of ‘Lean’ and ‘Lean Sigma’ – basically, doing more with less – is a sound principle but, for this to succeed, you need to change people’s working culture and behaviours as well as processes.

According to Eaton, the main reasons why Lean initiatives fail to become accepted long term practice within the healthcare sector are:

1. Rather than be a Board-led issue, Lean is launched at divisional or departmental level. This leads to fragmentation of activity and dissipation of effort.
2. Failing to align the Lean-induced productivity improvements with the organisation’s objectives. This leads to Lean being ‘out prioritised’ by other activities, put on hold and then mothballed.
3. Relying on external consultancies or agencies to run the Lean initiatives. Building internal capability and involving the healthcare organisation’s frontline teams is the only way to get Lean out of the textbook and into the clinic.
4. Not building the organisational resilience to withstand initial resistance to Lean’s principles and practices.

Recent research by Amnis shows that healthcare organisations can focus on using tactical tools to produce performance improvement - such as those found in Lean programmes – when they should be focusing on process and people in order to bring about lasting transformation and change. Amnis’ extensive work in the healthcare and other sectors has shown that the key to long-term success – and sustaining ‘Lean’ - is to concentrate on developing the right strategy for the transformation programme, including identifying the overall process to use and the steps to be taken, as well as engaging the front-line teams and then keeping them engaged.

Davinder Viridi, director of strategy at Amnis, said: “There are many healthcare organisations which have used Lean tools to address low level, tactical issues. However, our studies show that this approach nearly always fails to engage clinicians and that it is also difficult to link the resulting low level improvements to the organisation’s overall transformation strategy, meaning that nothing really changes.

“Being clear about the problems that need to be tackled - by engaging and continuing to maintain a dialogue with front-line teams as well as having a robust structure and strategy for improvement - leads to improvements that are better aligned with the organisational strategy,” he revealed. “Basically, you need to focus on the process of transformation and engaging people rather than ‘tools’ and ‘events’ in order to bring about lasting performance improvements.”

Mark Eaton, Amnis’ managing director, added: “In the Sustaining Lean masterclass, our specialists will be explaining and suggesting ways of how to do this successfully.”

The IHM's Phil Slinger said: "Each of the courses we run jointly with Amnis generates extremely high satisfaction ratings from the delegates. This has encouraged us to discuss arranging a further, similar programme with Amnis for 2010."

The remaining masterclass in the Amnis/IHM series is on 'Thinking Strategically', and is being held in Birmingham on 26th February 2010.

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About 'Lean'

Coined by Jim Womack's research team at MIT in the 1990s, 'Lean' means doing more with less. The core idea behind 'Lean' is to maximise customer value while minimising waste. A Lean organisation understands customer value and focuses its key processes to continually meet those needs.

About the Institute of Healthcare Management (IHM)

The IHM is the professional organisation for managers throughout healthcare, including the NHS; Independent Providers; Healthcare Consultants and the Armed Forces.

The IHM's focus is on improving patient/user care wherever and whenever healthcare is needed. The route to achieving this is through the promotion of excellence in healthcare management.

The IHM achieves this by:

- Publishing standards of management practice
- Promoting the IHM Code (covering behavioural and ethical aspects of management practice)
- Establishing a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework
- Promoting CPD and moving towards implementing a CPD validation mechanism
- Holding CPD events in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Establishing a coaches database to support members when they choose an executive coach

The IHM has access to the highest offices of the NHS. Many of the senior players in the NHS are members of the IHM. More importantly, by promoting CPD, the IHM influences the management practice of thousands of managers.

About Amnis Limited

Working with both public and private sector organisations, Amnis is a consultancy which specialises in innovation, transformation and organisational improvement, helping clients plan and deploy strategies for successful transformation. Its goal is to help clients not only deliver sustainable change but also to develop their capability to tackle their next challenges.

Providing both consultancy and training services, Amnis' team includes specialists in Lean/Six Sigma, organisational development, strategic planning, change management and systems thinking.

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