

Lean Management and its applicability to hospital practice

Developed more than forty years ago at Toyota, Lean Management is appearing more and more in the service industries. Recently it has begun to take up root in hospitals. But is this simply a new method for creating the illusion of innovation or can good really come of it?

What is Lean management?

Lean management is a practice for progress in industry that was developed in the 1950s at Toyota (Toyota Production System). In the 1990s it was taken up and conceptualized by MIT under the name of Lean.

This innovative practice is based on three overriding concepts:

1. Improvement of the organization based on adding value as it is perceived by the customer
2. The practice must allow those who create the added value to work better

3. A managerial approach, it introduces team working and motivation around shared objectives recognized by all as being essential to progress.

On this basis Lean management leads to:

- Innovating by better working practices that become the new standards: sowing the seed
- Replicating these innovations in the business

As an example, France's national hospital improvement methodology, Diagnostic Flash, will be influenced by introducing patient quality indicators such as: period of admission pre operation, the delay in assuming responsibility for emergencies, or the number of days waiting between the date of departure envisaged and the actual date of departure.

beyond the single local pilot scheme: nurturing the young shoot

- Organizing the perpetuation of the new practices to guarantee the application of systematic and optimum durable standards: sustaining the plant.

The contribution of Lean practice to a hospital's improvement projects

Patients come first. That's the central tenet of Lean practice in hospitals. It puts the expectations of patients at the center of the procedures for improving the hospital: getting an appointment quickly, understanding the consequences of their treatment, knowing how long they will stay in hospital, being able to choose their meals etc. These basic patient requirements are no longer unmet due to operational constraints but are incentives for changing the organization of the hospital.

Lean practice is also centered on improving the quality of the product or service by rigorously analyzing the causes for failure and checking the procedures for continuous improvement. The focus on improving quality as perceived by the patient results in an improved overall hospital performance.

Methodologies that can be easily appropriated within the hospital by the various professions are incorporated within Lean practice. Of course, as a professional universe a hospital is very different to the manufacturing environment in which Lean was first developed. For example, in a hospital there is often no shared vision between the various participants in measuring the performance of the hospital. And the relationship of staff with the patient is radically different from the relationship between the worker and his product.

Such differences can be an asset to Lean practice if, for example:

- It endeavors to make the choice of the quality criteria for the patient a factor in motivating all the staff at the hospital in the procedure for progress
- The governance of the project reflects the diversity of the responsibilities and professions in the reorganization of the processes.

Success factors

Capgemini believes a number of factors can influence the success of Lean practice within hospitals:

1. Introduce from the start a 'win-win' concept on three levels: the patient; the carers; and those who finance the hospital
2. Limit Lean from the outset to 3-5 areas of quality improvement relevant to the history and the specialism of the hospital. Assess which processes will immediately bring quality benefits to patients, such as the system of access, the provision of care, deployment of departmental clinical services and resuscitation, the organization of staff rotas etc.
3. Consider and organize from the outset the process of expanding good practice. Lean practice is not only an action in the laboratory for two or three departments; it only makes sense if it makes in-depth changes of the process for continuous improvement across the hospital. How can the improvements of the patient experience in the two departments of pharmacy and surgery be replicated and adapted to all departments?

The hope is that Lean will finally provide the means to reconcile those hospital staff responsible for quality systems with those concerned with improving efficiency.



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