

Demystifying Lean Construction

5 words to guide your company toward a lean state of mind



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For centuries, construction firms of all makes and models have struggled with productivity. While other industries have benefitted from robotics, automation and other technological advancements, many studies indicate that the construction sector has suffered with no sizeable gain over the last 50 years.

Whether it is total quality management or lean, there are countless tools and avenues that enable firms to reduce waste and inefficiency. The greatest example of transformation and adoption of best practices comes in the form of safety management. Regardless of the situation, something provides a catalyst for firms to make a strategic decision to implement a safety-minded culture.

Firms must recognize that even if they appear to excel in labor management techniques, the real power begins with developing a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. The enemy of productivity and any companywide initiative is complacency. By maintaining a strategic plan that is always focused on improvement, a firm has the ability to eliminate the smallest imperfection or even tackle productivity. One of the main tenets of lean is the use of DMAIC:

- Define
- Measure
- Analyze
- Implement
- Control

Too often, firms jump to the implementation step, but fail to understand the root causes of their own inefficiencies first.

DMAIC is a system that helps thoroughly evaluate a firm's deficiencies and create a solution that modifies the behavior.

The most important thing to consider for any firm is who will be the champion or change agent. The individual must have a mindset that balances the big picture vision of the firm and a thorough understanding of the ground level tactics.

One of the biggest mistakes of any initiative is creating tools and processes in a vacuum, without the buy-in of people who will use the tool. With the complete support of the organization's leadership in place, the change can begin.

1. DEFINE

Within this step, the team must develop a problem statement. There are many types of definitions that can be used:

- The firm's labor productivity has continued to decline over the last 2 years.
- Material expenditures have overrun the budget on the last 25 projects.
- There is a communication breakdown between the office and the field.

It is important to ground the definition statement in fact. The statement must remain neutral. Be careful to avoid any false information or bias.

