

Doing more with less- proposal to establish a lean working knowledge transfer project for the learning and skills sector

Morley College



Project Synopsis

Our Lean Working Knowledge Transfer project was designed to pioneer new distinctive ways to transform services for learners whilst simultaneously reducing the delivery costs involved. Education and Training providers have been tasked with finding new and innovative ways to both make efficiency gains and cut operating costs as part of wider reductions in public expenditure. This project has attempted to help partners in meeting this challenge by supporting participants to apply Lean Working ideas and techniques to a selection of business problems and then disseminating the 'lessons learned' across the sector. The partners in the project included:

Morley College

Morley College is one of the oldest adult education colleges in the country. It was founded in the 1880s and grounded in a strong commitment to the role of adult learning to support personal, social, economic and cultural needs and interests. Today the college, located in central London, provides a wide range of courses and serves over 10,000 adult students over the year.

Preston College

Preston College is a further education college in the city of Preston, Lancashire. The college originally opened in September 1974 and offers a range of accredited vocational courses in a wide range of subjects including for example dance, music, media and performing arts.

Oxfordshire County Council Adult Learning Service

Oxfordshire Adult Learning is based in Oxford and offers a diverse range of subjects including apprenticeships, NVQs, GCSEs, A levels, basic skills, university degrees, diplomas and distance learning. There currently over 9000 adults and 3000 young people enrolled on courses

ID Limited

ID has been established in the provision of specialist disability services for 10 years and is based in Newcastle. The educational provision is based on the recognition of the rights of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities to engage in educational activity and work toward achieving their potential.

NCFE

NCFE is a national awarding body. Awarding bodies design and award qualifications which recognise the skills, knowledge and understanding achieved by a learner at a particular level

and in a particular subject. NCFE is a registered educational charity and a company limited by guarantee. Its charitable aim is 'to promote and advance the education and training of young persons and adults'.

Versa Professional Services

Versa Professional Services provide cost-effective consulting services combining fresh thinking with practical know-how to clients including Regional Development Agencies, the Skills Funding Agency, local authorities, universities and colleges. Versa is an approved supplier of professional support services to LSIS.

Project Aims

Our project aimed to secure improvements in sector practice by helping the partners to try new ideas and techniques focused on enabling them deliver better value for money to consumers using 'low waste' service delivery processes. This was considered innovative because whilst Lean is well understood in many other industrial sectors it is not well established in the education and training sector. We sought to achieve our aim by:

- Embedding the principles of Lean Working within the partner organisations to help them develop new and innovative approaches to service design and delivery and enhancing their 'capacity to improve'.
- Equipping partners with the tools to develop a sharper focus on the needs of customers by using as the starting point for 'problem solving' a much better developed understanding of the needs and requirements of service users.
- Helping to equip the wider sector by disseminating new ideas and innovative improvement techniques that can be used to simultaneously accelerate improvement; transform services; reduce operating costs and deliver improved value for money.
- Demonstrating both a credible 'proof of concept' for the wider sector as well as providing practical guidance on how best to implement Lean ideas and techniques to improve the delivery of education and training services.

Project delivery

The methodology for the project was simple but effective. Versa Professional Services worked alongside each of the partners to work through a specific problem using Lean ideas and techniques to resolve that problem in the following stages:

- **Stage one** - Identify and scope out problem to be tackled - this involved working with senior managers in each of the partners to identify and get agreement to a specific problem being used as a pilot to try out the Lean approach.
- **Stage two** - brief/train staff about Lean ideas and techniques - this involved both briefing senior managers on the ideas and techniques involved in Lean and training operational staff on how to apply Lean ideas to the specific problem identified.
- **Stage three** - undertake rapid improvement project - this involved bringing together a team of between 4 and 9 people 'touched' by the problem and working with them to investigate analyse and define the problem as well as to design, develop and implement an 'optimum' solution using Lean ideas and techniques.
- **Stage four** – evaluate the outcomes of the project - this involved participants in reviewing the progress they had made and identifying any lessons learned. This information was fed back to the project evaluator to help ensure that lessons learned from the project were captured and disseminated effectively.
- **Stage five** - share experiences with partners and wider sector - this involved bringing partners and interested parties from across the sector to share and discuss progress and lessons learned at a one day dissemination event held at Morley College in London.

Coordination

The project was managed effectively using a 'virtual' steering group made up of senior representatives from each of the partner organisations. This group 'met' regularly, chaired by the Principal of Morley College using telephone conferencing facilities to enable people to discuss project activities and monitor progress against the project plan and its associated milestones. Some concerns about communication being inhibited by reliance on virtual meetings were identified by the evaluation and one suggestion to improve practice in the future was to build in a face to face meeting early on in the lifecycle of a project like this.

Knowledge exchange

A number of partners also engaged in individual 'knowledge exchanges' as part of the project. These involved staff from partners spending time with other partners and contributing in some way to their problem solving processes. Participants reported this as a highly beneficial way of transferring knowledge between partners.

Project Outcomes

The project clearly achieved its objective of 'equipping people to use new Lean working ideas and techniques to improve the productivity of their organisations and increase the effectiveness of the services they provide'.

In addition the project has provided firm 'proof of concept' that Lean ideas and techniques can successfully be adapted and deployed by education and training providers to both improve the quality of the services they provide to learners, reduce operating costs and contribute to the long term success of the sector. Other more specific outcomes from the project included:

- The 'capacity to improve' management teams through the use of Lean ideas will help to ensure ongoing continuous improvement within each of the partner organisations.
- The enhanced knowledge and skills developed by the people participating in the project will help the partner organisations continue to improve quality and reduce the cost of delivering services.
- Specific cost savings reported by partners include £21,000 at OCC ALS and £12,000 ID Limited.
- Significant reductions in the amount of staff time required to undertake specific processes.
- A contribution to the strategic priorities of the sector including non-competitive interaction between partner organisations: acting collaboratively is a key driver in developing new market arrangements across the sector.
- The community learning project specifically explored better ways to reach under represented groups: this supports the current shift within the IACL national agenda to ensure providers support widening participation whilst managing decreases in funding
- The lessons learned from the project were disseminated across the sector to stimulate new thinking and new approaches to the problems facing providers.

The project provided good value for money with a significant number of staff trained in a wide range of new techniques at relatively low cost. The project led to significant improvements in quality, generated significant cost savings and freed up resources to be deployed in more effective ways.

Lessons Learned

A number of important lessons were learned during the project many of which were captured in detail by the evaluation report. These include:

- Participants reported a high level of satisfaction with the project suggesting that the approach taken overall and the specific training in Lean ideas and techniques was both relevant and useful to participants.
- The importance of getting a 'richer picture' of the problem and of not jumping to conclusions about how to solve the problem before completing a thorough investigation first and how the use of the Lean approach and tools encourages this.
- The importance of gathering and understanding in detail the 'voice of the customer' in the process of designing effective and efficient operational systems within education and training organisations. This understanding of 'voice' is integral to making sure that the design of operational systems reflects consideration of the dimensions of equality and diversity.
- The speed in which the use of Lean ideas and techniques can be internalised by project teams and therefore be applied easily and rapidly to other problem areas within the host organisation.
- The simplicity and ease of use of many of the Lean ideas and techniques and the ease of transfer into and application by people working in education and training organisations.
- The importance of using structured approaches to problem solving and systematically standardising working practices; and the value of this in facilitating quality improvement whilst enabling teams to collaborate across boundaries within and between organisations.

Sharing of Project Findings

A dissemination event was organised at Morley College to enable participants to share their experiences and key learning points with interested parties. The event was attended by 30 people from across the sector with an interest in Lean.

At the event each of the partners gave a detailed account of their experiences of applying Lean ideas and techniques to their organisational problems as well as describing the lessons they learned from doing so. The event provided an opportunity to illustrate how Lean ideas and techniques could successfully be applied to education and training provision.

The event provided an important opportunity for participants to meet, discuss progress and share their thoughts and insights into how Lean ideas can be applied across the sector. A good practice guide to using Lean ideas and techniques for education and training providers will be placed on the Excellence Gateway for public access.