

Lean Approaches to Business Management' in the Scottish Police Service?

Nick Parker, who leads a consultancy specialising in the Police and Criminal Justice Sector (www.nicholasparker.co.uk) is working in collaboration with Dr Rob Smith of SIPR and the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen to research the applicability of 'Lean' methodologies to the Scottish Police Service.

Lean is well established in business. Pioneered by Deeming¹ the concept offers an effective way to improve efficiency whilst maintaining an unrelenting focus on service delivery to the customer. It enables proponents to improve the flow of business processes and eliminate waste and often make savings whilst still providing a quality service through continuous improvement. The stimulus for the research is a Scottish Executive Report on the topic². Recently it has been used effectively in the public sector, particularly the health service and local authorities. Elements of the methodology may well be transferable to the police service. It is a philosophy, a way of working, not a quick fix.

The primary focus of Lean is the service delivered to the customer, internal or external. Policing is becoming more customer and service focused but those customers are diverse. Lean segments customers according to their needs, allowing processes relating to key segments to be examined in detail. Ideally this is done by a small team of managers, supervisors and service delivery staff responsible for the process under review. Internal teams understand the process, are often already aware of opportunities for improvement, can act as ambassadors for change during the change implementation phase and should develop the skills to deliver continuous improvement. The challenge for policing is the lack of continuity caused by the constant churn of police officers and some police staff as they follow their career paths or respond to operational need, and the resource implications of abstracting staff from their day to day work. It may be more efficient to form a small dedicated central team supported by representatives from the area under review.

The process reflects previous police inspection methodologies with the addition of cost benefit modelling, value stream mapping and other simple tools. The basic steps are – Feasibility; Analysis, Redesign, Implementation; and Continuous improvement. The methodology has been used to good effect elsewhere in Britain as evidenced by the following micro case studies:-

- *Control room* – A high performing control room in a provincial police force used Lean to deliver a 10% saving on its running costs, identified high levels of idle time due to resource not matching demand and redeployed its back end quality control team to a front end quality assurance role, enhancing the quality of service to the public.
- *Intelligence management* – A metropolitan force used Lean to reduce its criminal intelligence processing time from up to 28 days to 2 days, fulfilling the requirement of investigators for current intelligence.
- *Domestic violence risk assessment* – A provincial police force used Lean to reduce the time taken to share risk assessment information with partner agencies from 2 weeks to 1 day, enabling the delivery of earlier support to the victim.

¹ The Deming Dimension. Henry R Neave SPC Press Inc 1990 Tennessee

² See 'Evolution of the Lean Approach to Business Management and its Use in the Public Sector', HMSO.

- *Child protection* - A Lean review of child protection streamlined information flows between the police and children's services freeing up time to enhance investigation.
- *Quest* – This programme currently being applied in some English police forces is a derivative of Lean.

There are challenges to be overcome particularly in relation to sustainability. Other organisational commitments can divert attention away from the process. Overt leadership and organisational commitment are vital. Staffing the team can be difficult, as can articulating quantifiable outcomes. Lean is not centrally driven and focuses more on quality than quantitative outcomes which sits easily with the ethos of Scottish policing with its team based focus. The greatest challenge is to ensure it is strategically driven both from within the service and politically. It does deliver and it is sustainable but it takes time to fully embed. It can be usurped by a political desire to achieve short term gain. Applying the principle now could help the Scottish police understand where they need to go and how best to get there.

Nick would like to hear from anyone in the Scottish Police Service or in a connected Criminal Justice role who is already using the methodology or is interested in finding out more. Nick can be contacted on nick@nicholasparker.co.uk