



KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATED INTO RESULTS



# USING LEAN PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE CONTINUAL SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

## WHITE PAPER



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### AVOIDING THE SCALE

Let's face it – we could all lose a few pounds of inefficiency if we looked at our current practices through the pragmatic lens of value and waste.

One of the challenges of effectively engaging in continual service improvement—or even the initial task of documenting processes, policies and roles—is that it forces us to take a long, hard look at what we are doing today and our effectiveness.

Failing to acknowledge or confront IT Service Management (ITSM) issues stems from the same dislike we have for bathroom scales or the annual fitness assessment. As long as we don't have the facts confronting us, we can willfully ignore what we know to be true, but do not want to face.



### GETTING STARTED

The first step is to acknowledge that there are many of our current practices that are not beneficial to our goals such as activities or actions in which we engage that are wasteful, redundant and provide little to no value.

This means that we first have to understand which activities of a process are part of its “value stream”, where process inputs are worked on and transformed into a valued output, which meet a validated need. In light of this understanding we can assess all process activity in terms of:

- Value Activity: Actions, resources or activities that have a direct connection to producing the desired outcome
- Necessary Non Value Activity: Actions, resources or activities that, while not having a direct hand in producing outcomes, provide the necessary measurement and governance elements to keep the process intact – the glue holding the process together and executed as expected
- Waste Activity: Actions that neither support the outcome, nor have a hand in keeping it together

With these principles in mind, the goal is to optimize the valued activity, minimize the Necessary Non Value Activity and eliminate the waste. However, the question is “how do we identify the waste, trim the fat and make sure we are only engaging in actions that produce value?”

This is where the Lean Waste categories come in – time to have your process measured on the Lean Scale!



### LEAN WASTE CATEGORIES

Consider using the following categories to evaluate either your current 'as is' process, or your 'to be' process design, and face the unpleasant facts of process bulge that will likely require a lifestyle change to remove.

**Over Production:** Too many steps, transactions, authorization requirements, and/or cycles in the process.

Sometimes our processes end up looking more like a Mac Truck when all that is needed is a Honda Civic. The problem is that we can over engineer a process based on the goal of perfection versus fit for purpose, but sometimes good enough is good enough!

**Over Processing:** Too much Non Value added activity.

Yes, measurement is good and assessments keep an eye on quality and service improvement opportunities; however, maintaining a sane balance of reports, administration and process governance is key, based on the complexity and risk required.

**Waiting Unnecessarily:** Too much time between process activities.

Since a process is a series of dependent or parallel tasks, which take inputs from the upstream activity and passes them downstream towards the eventual value based outcome, there are many points of potential wait-states where the flow of the value stream spends unnecessary time queuing. Making sure that these wait-states are not excessively long, and even evaluating their necessity, is a key part of finding opportunities for process improvement.

**Ownership Issues:** When a single person cannot be identified as the single point of process accountability (the request "take me to your leader" produces a blank stare).

Without clear process ownership, finger pointing and "someone should really take care of that" type of statements are common. Just like having 25 priorities means that you have no priorities, a process without clear ownership suffers from benevolent neglect. The concept of "we all own it" is sure to lead to wasteful activity.



**Unnecessary Movement:** Too much or redundant movement between value-added steps.

A good example of this is a poorly designed Change Management process where all changes regardless of risk or size flow through a change advisory board for approval. This tends to bog down a Change Process, where it is deemed to be ineffective, bureaucratic and wasteful of people's time. The idea is that changes should have the right level of approval and release assurance based on the level of risk—too many approval cycles for a minor change are not beneficial.

**Underutilization of Human Resources:** Not making use of available skills and talents.

We typically think of waste in regards to what we should not be doing, but we are often wasteful by failing to make use of valuable human resources. For example, not giving the Service Desk ownership of end-to-end incidents; not utilizing the Quality Assurance folks in the production assurance steps of Release and Deployment Management; not involving your Architecture group into the process of defining IT Services (many of which they helped to design). Unfortunately, we too often allow a silo mentality to block us from using the skills already inherent in our organizations.

Formal Improvement Models can be used effectively to move us into the discipline of self evaluation and prioritized improvements. Just like signing up at health clubs and working with personal trainers can provide structure and motivation in our personal lives, working within a structure and being held accountable at work gives us the discipline to get things done. This is where Lean Principles can be used to drive a discipline of assessment and improvement.



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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

#### Troy DuMoulin

Troy is considered by many to be one of the world's foremost ITIL® and ITSM experts. A passionate and experienced Executive Consultant, Troy is always willing to use his rich and extensive background to share what he knows, and is always on the hunt for more knowledge. Troy always has his finger on the industry's pulse – if there's a question about what the latest trends in ITSM, Lean, Business Relationship Management or Organizational Change Management are, he has the answer! Troy is a frequent speaker at ITSM events, a contributing author for several books focused on ITSM and Lean IT concepts, and his blog is one of the industry's most popular and informative.

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