

Evaluation of Lean Approaches in UK National Health Trusts

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Abstract

The concept of Lean manufacturing was initially developed by Ohno (1988) and resulted in the well known Toyota Production System. This work was later commercialised by Womack and Jones (1996) who described lean as the ‘antidote to waste’. More recently, the concept of lean manufacturing has been developed and implemented for various industrial scenarios. Independent of the industrial sector implementation still focuses on the core objectives of elimination of waste and creation of value for the end user. Adoption of lean principles has been successful to service companies as well as to manufacturing companies from where the concepts originated (Alstrom, 2004). In particular health care organisations are increasingly recognising the benefits of adopting lean practices (Sarkar, 2008), (Ballé and Régnier, 2007), (Allway and Corbett, 2002) and they have embarked on their implementation. According to Brandao de Souza (2009), the NHS Modernisation Agency first suggested the implementation of lean practices in healthcare back in 2001 and since then, the adoption has ‘grown significantly in the last few years’. Jones and Mitchell (2006) have identified particular problems that UK NHS Trusts face and suggest that implementation of lean practices is the way forward in resolving hospital acquired infections, capacity and financial constraints and public concern about waiting times. The NHS hospitals are now required to operate within budget and provide high quality healthcare service. Lean system implementation can enable the attainment of these benchmarks. Assessing the extent of adoption and its associated benefits therefore becomes useful in the formulation of implementation strategies. This paper presents the results of a preliminary research carried out across NHS trusts in the UK. The research aimed to determine the extent of lean implementation and the perceptions of those with lean roles and responsibilities.

Keywords: Lean manufacturing, health, quality, healthcare service, NHS, United Kingdom

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