



UIMPROVE and Lean

What is Lean?

The following is an extract from a report - *Evaluation of the Lean Approach to Business Management and its use in the Public Sector* - published by the Scottish Executive in 2006:

There are many views of what constitutes "Lean thinking" or "Lean production". Although most people recognise the roots of Lean thinking in the Toyota production system, there has been considerable development of the concept over time. Womack and Jones are regarded by most as the originators of the term. They developed five core principles to represent Lean :

- Specify the value desired by the customer
- Identify the value stream for each product providing that value and challenge all of the wasted steps
- Make the product flow continuously
- Introduce pull between all steps where continuous flow is impossible
- Manage toward perfection so that the number of steps and the amount of time and information needed to serve the customer continually falls.

In practical terms one of the underlying assumptions made by Lean is that organisations are made up of processes. Hence, improvements made in a Lean context optimise the process or customer's journey rather than optimising individual departments. This perspective, which is widely applied in industry is sometimes referred to as the "process-based view" of organisations.

Thus, at its simplest and in UIMPROVE terminology, Lean is primarily about improving processes.

I've also heard of Lean Six Sigma, what's the difference?

There are a number of different interpretations of Lean Thinking around at present, all stating their roots are in the system used by Toyota to manufacture cars. The approach is based on some very sound principles about process management and brings with it several tools which, if used, will help streamline your processes.

'Six Sigma' is another approach to improvement. You may well have heard of it because different levels of practitioner are awarded with different colour 'belts' - so you can train to be a Six Sigma Black Belt. Vladimir Putin would approve. Here is a definition for Six Sigma from the Juran Institute Website:

Six Sigma is a systematic and fact-driven methodology used to eliminate process deficiencies and variation that cause dissatisfaction. The technique is a measure of performance that strives for near perfection in all processes.

The less charitable among us might say that Six Sigma was the fad before Lean. When the wind changed, and Lean came into fashion, instead of dumping Six Sigma, some suppliers tinkered and re-branded.

How does UIMPROVE fit with Lean?

At its purest, UIMPROVE is about improving whole organisations. However it is an extremely pragmatic approach and has been successfully used by individuals and teams within organisations where not everybody has subscribed to the approach.

Here is our definition:

UIMPROVE is an integrated **system** of improvement that can be used by any organisation, team or individual to transform the way they work.

UIMPROVE comprises four interlocking areas of activity:

- (1) Improvement - Better strategy development, corporate planning, projects and processes
- (2) Teamworking - Better and more cohesive working within teams and between teams of all descriptions
- (3) Leadership - Better leadership practices and processes
- (4) Data - Better use of data at a strategic, project and routine operation level

The improvement giants who underpin the work of **UIMPROVE** are Shewhart, Deming, Juran and Tribus. The key similarity between **UIMPROVE** and Lean is that their origins lie in Japan, and in particular the work of the Giants. Therefore the underpinning principles are the same. The key difference is that Lean focuses on process improvement and **UIMPROVE** is about organisational improvement covering much more ground. To take a couple of practical examples, there is no Lean Approach to strategy development and no Lean equivalent of Planning Methodology (yet).

The addition of 'yet' is important. What is happening at the moment is that people are realising the limitations of Lean (it is about process improvement and is derived from manufacturing) and when they find something it doesn't fit, they make it fit. This is diluting the original approach.

Lean - good or bad?

Good. As long as you use it for the right thing - i.e. process improvement. Look at it alongside **UIMPROVE**'s Improvement Methodology for the best results.

Lean is far better than previous fads such as Business Process Reengineering. However, many of the big consultancies that were peddling Business Process Reengineering a few years ago are now 'experts' in Lean.

Which is better - UIMPROVE or Lean?

The two approaches can't be compared in this way as they have a different purpose. Lean is designed to improve processes, **UIMPROVE** is designed to improve organisations.

What's good about Lean?

It's a systematic and participative means of improving processes underpinned by sound philosophy and a good pedigree.



What's going wrong with Lean?

There are three emerging problems:

- (1) People, especially Consultants and other Improvement Professionals are 'adapting' it to fit scenarios it was never designed for "without knowledge"
- (2) There is too much focus on the 'tools' and not enough on the underpinning philosophy
- (3) Organisations are taking a Lean Enforcement approach - Lean Methodology (whatever that is) *must* be used in all circumstances, even those for which it was never intended

What will happen to Lean?

The original version of this Briefing Note was written in 2008. Lean has already become corrupted and diluted and has become a fad which has already been replaced by 'World Class' (don't ask) in a number of organisations. It will be interesting to see what a 2018 version of this Briefing Note will look like (there will be one on the website in 2018 so make a note in your diary to check back then).

This is a great shame as Lean, as originally intended, is a great approach to process improvement underpinned by a fine philosophy.

But it has happened many times before. In the 1980s Total Quality Management (TQM) became the new way to implement quality in organisations. When Professor Noriaki Kano visited the USA to evaluate how it was being used, his findings signalled that only when top management bought into quality did things change. To quote Professor Kano:

Change In The Quality System - in any country or organisation, total quality activity can begin only if top management is conscious of the critical need for company-wide commitment to quality and its own responsibility for introducing such activity.

Ultimately TQM was proven to be a fad. But this did not stop good people with a good knowledge of the underpinning principles from driving forward improvement in many organisations.

I like Lean, what can I do?

Improve things. The profession of improvement began with Walter Shewhart in the 1930s and was developed by Deming and Juran over the following 50 years. Learn about the history, philosophy and pedigree of improvement. Learn about as many different approaches as you can. Try different methodologies, tools and techniques. Keep on improving things.

How can UIMPROVE help?

Because Lean and UIMPROVE share common roots, they have a lot in common. The danger with the scenario outlined above is that Lean becomes discredited and, in the traditional way of ending a fad, the baby is thrown out with the bathwater. Adopting UIMPROVE, especially aspects such as Strategy Development, Annual Planning and Project Events is a good way to consolidate and build upon the enthusiasm and gains generated by Lean.

A common question is 'can my organisation implement both Lean and UIMPROVE at the same time?'. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive but remember UIMPROVE is about organisational improvement of which process improvement is a sub-set. Lean might be described as the Extreme Sports version of process improvement.