

CASE STUDY

RELYON BEDS



solution. During 2008 this objective was strategically accelerated. This entailed changing the mindset and culture within Relyon from the traditional command and control style of management to one of continuous improvement and creative problem solving.

First Things First

With a dedicated Business Improvement Team, Relyon knew that engaging its workforce in lean manufacturing principles was critical to this change. The Lean Foundation programme from the National Skills Academy for Manufacturing opened up a way of driving lean down into the shop floor thereby capturing 70% of the workforce that would not have had the experience or skills to undertake a lean programme at Level 2.

For Relyon, the Lean Foundation programme has rapidly created a lean culture across the organisation. Not only has it helped employees to understand the business better, it has given them confidence and skills in lean manufacturing principles. Through working together in teams employees gain a depth of understanding of each others' issues across the business. And the collaborative nature of learning that the course requires ensures transfer of this approach back in the workplace.

Cultural Change

The 12 employees that went on the four day course took a total of four weeks to complete it and the results were immediately apparent. These operatives had more confidence and understanding to challenge the status quo, and to find creative ways to do things differently resulting in new and better ways of working.

“We sent a group of people from general operative level and the engineering section on the programme. This has been enormously beneficial to us helping to change behaviours from that of expecting to be told what to do to becoming part of the solution.”

Gary Schultz,
Business
Improvement
Manager

Relyon has been manufacturing high quality beds for 150 years and is renowned for its hand-crafted, traditional products made from the finest quality materials. With customers including Harrods, Marks & Spencer, Sleep Masters, Bensons for Beds and Mothercare, Relyon depends on the skills and competencies of its workforce to carry its reputation of making the best beds in the world.

Six generations of local people have cut the fine material, crafted the cane edging and stitched the fabrics that make up these acclaimed beds. The company has always believed that its future success lay in creating an openly collaborative way of working where employees are part of the

Gary Schultz elaborates, "We have traditionally had a very paternalistic culture here, and employees have been used to being told what to do. Yet with the confidence and skills gained from Lean Foundation they have been able to effortlessly move to becoming empowered to make their own decisions in the workplace."

For Relyon the significance of this change of culture cannot be over estimated. The traditional culture created barriers of fear of blame and change; natural barriers to change. Yet through understanding the purpose of lean principles the operators, who are fundamental in the production process, have been able to quickly move to a new way of working to bring immediate business benefits to the company.

Empowered Learning

The programme was delivered on site, at the workplace in a flexible way that fitted in with the shift patterns of Relyon and avoided taking too many people away from work for too long. The four days were delivered one day a week over a four week period and encompassed a broad spectrum of employees from engineering and manufacturing departments. The course encouraged interaction and team working so that employees were able to understand how others think and approach things at work.

David Darch, a team leader says, "He got us to all work together really well. Even though we were all from different departments we were all working with the same aim. It made it seem easier than it probably was because we were learning off each other."

What has most impressed the business improvement team is that these employees are now proactively becoming agents for change around the business. The course has created employees that think for themselves, challenge the status quo and question why things are done as they are.

Sustainment in Learning

The learning from the Lean Foundation programme translates into immediate behavioural change in the workplace. In this way the benefits of the course continue to be realised long after the teaching has finished; the learning becomes sustainable and self generating. From the initial cohort of 12 nearly three

quarters have voluntarily signed up to do Business Improvement Techniques (B-IT) level 2. In addition, the Business Improvement team has initiated small group improvement activities to work one to one with the operators in helping them solve their work based problems. "The Lean Foundation programme is really helping us to change our culture for the better in Relyon," continues Gary Schultz. "Because it drives lean down in to the shop floor to really make a difference in the way we work."

Pay Off

The managers at Relyon have no doubt that the programme will bring significant monetary benefit. A recent waste reduction project is anticipated to save as much as £45,000 per annum and another project that was initiated as a result of Lean Foundation – involving a revamp of the 5S audit – has saved a significant amount of time and labour.

As well as keeping a record of all improvements resulting from the Lean Foundation programme, the Business Improvement team have sought the involvement of finance managers to help put an absolute figure on the value of the savings. Gary Schultz adds, "The main efficiencies have been around productivity improvements through saving time and increasing efficiency, as well as waste and raw material cost savings. In short the Lean Foundation programme has delivered real bottom line benefits across the business in as a little as two months."



Relyon Factfile

- First started making beds in 1858
- 455 employees and turns over £40 million per year
- Operates across 4 sites in the South west: Wellington; Okehampton; Taunton; Bridport
- Manufactures a range of divan beds, mattresses, storabeds, bedframes and bedroom furniture.
- The majority of manufacturing is done at the Wellington site which covers 24 acres
- Over 1,000 stockists throughout the UK
- Part of the Steinhoff Group, one of the largest furniture groups in the world