

Lean in Government and Education: Applying Lean Thinking Beyond the Factory

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FACTORY

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Lean Thinking Beyond Manufacturing	1
Chapter 1: What Is Lean?.....	2
Chapter 2: Understanding Waste in Government and Education.....	4
The 8th Waste: Untapped Human Potential in Government and Education	5
Chapter 3: Value Stream Mapping for Public Services.....	8
Chapter 4: Standard Work and Process Discipline	10
1. How to Respond to Citizen Complaints	11
2. How to Onboard New Employees	12
Chapter 5: Kaizen in the Classroom and Office.....	14
Case Study: Students Improve Cafeteria Flow Using Kaizen.....	15
Chapter 6: Leadership and Culture for Lean in the Public Sector.....	18
Going to the Gemba: Where the Real Work Happens... ..	19
Chapter 7: Visual Management and Daily Huddles	21
Chapter 8: Lean in Policy Implementation	23
Chapter 9: Engaging Stakeholders in Lean Transformation.....	24
VOC.....	25
VOC and DMAIC	26
Chapter 10: Sustaining Lean in Government and Education.....	28
Building Sustainability Through Training – The Power of Kata and Learning by Doing	29
Why Traditional Training Fails	30
Kata: Practice Makes Lean Permanent	31
Train by Doing: From Classroom to Gemba	32

Summary:	33
Chapter 11: Applying Just-In-Time (JIT) in Education and Government	34
1. Kanban: Managing Work Transparently.....	35
2. Takt Time: Aligning Workload with Demand.....	37
3. Continuous Flow: Reducing Interruptions.....	39
4. Heijunka: Leveling the Workload	41
5. Summary: JIT as a Cultural Mindset.....	42
Conclusion: A New Vision for Public Value.....	43
Appendix A: Case Study – Lean in a City Permit Office	44
Before Lean:.....	45
Lean Interventions:.....	46
After Lean:	47
Appendix B: Lean in Education: Case Study – Improving Student Services in a Public University.....	48
Context:.....	49
Problems Identified (The "Current State"):.....	50
Lean Interventions:.....	51
Results After 6 Months (KPIs):.....	52
Lessons Learned:	53
Appendix C: Case Study – Improving Flow in a Governmental Department (Department of Vehicle Registration)	54
Background.....	55
Step 1: Current State Mapping.....	56
Step 2: Lean Interventions.....	57
Measurable Results (Before vs. After)	59
Lessons Learned.....	60
Final Reflection.....	61

Appendix D: Case Study – Lean Transformation of the Student Enrollment Process	62
Background:	63
1. Problem Statement:	64
2. Current State Mapping (Before Lean):.....	65
3. Lean Tools Applied:	66
4. Future State Improvements:.....	67
5. Key KPIs – Before vs After:	68
6. Lessons Learned:	69
7. Conclusion:	70
Appendix E: Lean Maturity Assessment Tool.....	72
Appendix F: Lean Readiness Checklist (Non-Industrial Sectors)	73
Appendix G: Lean Templates and Tools	74
Appendix H: Glossary of Lean Terms.....	75
Appendix I: Recommended Reading & Resources.....	80
Appendix J: Decision Matrix – Lean vs Six Sigma	81
Appendix K: The Seven Wastes (Muda) in Government and Education.....	82
1. Overproduction.....	83
2. Waiting.....	84
3. Transport.....	85
4. Overprocessing	86
5. Inventory.....	87
6. Motion.....	88
7. Defects.....	89
Final Note:	90

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Introduction: Lean Thinking Beyond Manufacturing



Lean is no longer just a factory-floor philosophy. Once seen as a set of tools for improving production lines, Lean has evolved into a universal approach to improving systems and delivering value. Today, governments, schools, and public institutions face unprecedented pressure to deliver better services with fewer resources. Waste, inefficiencies, and bureaucracy frustrate both citizens and public servants alike.

This book explores how Lean Thinking can transform public sector organizations and educational institutions by fostering a culture of continuous improvement, empowering staff, and creating more value for stakeholders. Whether you're a teacher, government administrator, or policymaker, this book offers practical guidance on how to bring Lean principles to your organization.



Chapter 1: What Is Lean?



Lean is a philosophy of operational excellence focused on maximizing value and minimizing waste. At its core are five key principles:

1. **Define Value** – from the perspective of the customer or stakeholder.
2. **Map the Value Stream** – identify all steps and eliminate non-value-adding ones.
3. **Create Flow** – ensure smooth, uninterrupted workflows.
4. **Establish Pull** – provide services when they are needed, not before.
5. **Pursue Perfection** – continuously improve.

Originally developed at Toyota, Lean is about respect for people, problem-solving, and learning. These ideas are as relevant to a city hall or a university as they are to a car assembly plant.

While many organizations mistakenly treat Lean as just a set of tools—like 5S, value stream mapping, or Kanban—true Lean transformation goes far deeper. Lean is not a toolkit; it is a **culture** grounded in continuous improvement and respect for people. At its core, Lean thinking shapes how problems are

approached, how decisions are made, and how leaders engage with teams. In both government and education, sustaining Lean requires **leadership commitment** to building this culture—by going to the gembu, listening to frontline voices, modeling humility, and coaching daily improvement. Without this cultural foundation, tools alone offer only short-lived gains.