

Sustaining Lean Transformation

By Kim Barnas, President, Catalysis

American educator and author, Reed B. Markham, once said, “If you are standing still, you are also going backwards. It takes great effort to maintain forward movement.”

We all understand that leading any organization, large or small, takes great effort. But leading people through complex organizational change, creating new operating systems and improving on them every day, empowering each employee on the team to take action — these continuous improvement efforts require extraordinary diligence and constant attention.

Organizational change only works when leaders have a shared desire to improve their organization and make those improvements stick — all the way down to the level of each individual employee.

I think of lean as an operating system. In this system the chief executive provides a vision that is supported by the strategic

engagement of the executive team. These focused strategies are deployed through the organization using lean breakthrough tools and methodologies. The lean management system comes into play to remove waste, manage strategic priorities and sustain breakthrough improvement while engaging all staff in daily continuous improvement. This system becomes the way we know and improve our business.

With this in mind, let’s look at how hospital executives, leaders and employees can make dramatic and lasting organizational change within their healthcare systems using lean methods.



Inspiring Healthcare Leaders
Accelerating Change

LEAN HEALTHCARE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: MORE THAN A BOX OF TOOLS

A lean management system is not a box of tools leaders can cherry pick from to make quick, organizational change. It is part of an integrated operating system where Leadership Vision and Strategies are connected to daily continuous improvement to sustain and steadily improve the organization.

There are eight key elements, or tools, of a lean management system:



Each of these tools are linked to create a system, not just a pile of discrete tasks. These elements work together and become interlocking gears that ultimately move an organization forward.

The critical step for any leader interested in lean is to look beyond the tools and resources and, instead, consider four core elements to effectively implement lean management systems.

CORE ELEMENT NUMBER ONE

Lean methods and systems start at the top and are rooted in values, principle and behaviors.

Commitment to behavior change and to lean practices begins with the chief executive. If he or she is not fully committed, the organization will quickly reach a success plateau. What's more, when this plateau is reached, without a rooted leadership commitment, many organizations simply abandon the system entirely.

But if department heads, managers and frontline workers see commitment from those they report to, they will embrace the change and make the system work at every level of the organization.

As president or chief executive officer, once you make the commitment to support system change using lean methods, you're ready to take the next step. Starting with yourself, identify the principles and behaviors you need to adjust to get you there. This cannot be delegated and is a commitment that must be observable to your leadership team. You set the tone and expectations for this transformation and have agreed to create a new operating system based on lean principles to guide your organization.

CORE ELEMENT NUMBER TWO

Effective leadership

+

**lean principles
and tools**

+

**lean management
system**

=

**the lean operating
system.**

An executive with a clear vision will be able to use lean to support both strategic initiatives and daily operations. System change requires a decisive plan involving lean methodologies and practices. This plan includes the critical steps needed to connect vision and values with the principles and behaviors that will support transformation. To connect all of this, a clear definition of how to manage becomes critical i.e., a lean management system. Lean, in effect, is more than a management system. It becomes the operating system for the organization itself.

As with most large-scale initiatives, organizational change demands strong, consistent leadership. Executive vision — a vision that is communicated and shared with each and every employee — is critical. And this vision must be supported with a strategy and plan that can be implemented by teams and individuals.

Providence Little Company of Mary (PLCOM), a 450-bed hospital in Torrance, California, quickly discovered the benefits of connecting its organization's strategy with leadership vision. Mary Kingston, CEO, shared a common interest in implementing a lean management system at PLCOM. Step one, and perhaps the most important, was sharing her vision with every physician and leader in her organization. Steadily, the cascade and communication of this vision reached every employee. Through visual management, and strong communication strategies, the entire organization understood the vision, strategy and steps that needed to be taken to create PLCOM's new lean operational system. The result, leaders and staff across the organization created a culture that is more adaptable and prepared to face sweeping healthcare change. Their quality measures improved as did customer satisfaction and employee engagement.

CORE ELEMENT NUMBER THREE

**Leaders must create
behavior change
at every level of
the organization
to benefit from
sustained operating
improvements.**

At Western Sussex Hospitals in the United Kingdom, Marianne Griffiths, her board of directors and leadership team have created a clear vision of what's important for the organization. As the organization began its lean journey, it focused on a patient-first approach to transform the organization. Each employee was asked to make continuous improvements to benefit patients. Using a breakthrough/Kaizen approach they began their journey. As they moved forward they added a lean management system called "Patient First Improvement System."

The Patient First Improvement System serves as a framework for service development at the hospital with a focus on redesigning systems to remove waste and reduce errors, and to standardize practices so every patient gets great care and service.

The staff at Western Sussex have become an army of problem solvers with the permission and skills needed to make change that improves service for patients. In April 2016, the Care Quality Commission gave Western Sussex an Outstanding rating — one of only three acute trusts in Great Britain to receive the highest possible grade. In addition, the NHS has asked the leadership team to oversee operational change at two other hospitals in the region that are not meeting performance objectives.

CORE ELEMENT NUMBER FOUR

Educate the board of directors to generate long-term support for organizational change.

The first three core elements outlined above stress the importance of developing leaders and teams who will support the organization's vision, strategy and need for organizational change. But let's take it one more step — to the board of directors.

In order to create long-term board support of a major initiative such as lean healthcare transformation, the CEO must educate each board member about his or her role. If board members do not understand their role as counselors and strategists — and start to micromanage in day-to-day operations — your potential for success becomes limited.

St. Mary's General Hospital in Kitchener, Ontario, has accomplished numerous lean achievements including a reduction in patient falls of more than 50% and a reduction in patient infection rates of more than 40%. These successes are attributed to lean systems and thinking that created sustainable improvements.

While Don Shilton, president at St Mary's, is pleased with these results, he attributes much of the hospital's success to his board, which is engaged in understanding the benefits of lean.

The board of trustees embraced its role in keeping hospital-wide initiatives focused on lean. Most board members participated in site visits at other hospitals where they saw lean at work. Each St. Mary's board meeting now begins with a 15-minute board huddle focused on the corporate goals and board-level improvement ideas.

The result is a board that believes in the organization's vision and strategic direction; and a hospital president who trusts that his board of trustees will support his decision making at the operational level.

What's more, when the next president is hired to take St. Mary's further into the future, board members will likely insist that a commitment to lean management principles is part of the required skillset.

IN SUMMARY

Lean thinking becomes the driver for broad operating system change. From board members to C-suite executives, and from department/function heads to frontline employees — when everyone understands and embraces the vision, success is much more likely to result.

Lean management systems can and will drive results long term and sustain them as long as there is a vision at the top and an explicit strategy in place.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kim Barnas is president of Catalysis. She is based in Appleton, Wisconsin, where she supports operations and coaches other healthcare executives. In addition, Kim leads and supports Catalysis teams that are working to help healthcare systems that are committed to transforming the patient experience, making quality more transparent and reducing healthcare costs across North America and the world.