

## Two Requirements for “Lean Product Development”



I was discussing Lean Product Development with a potential client recently. He told me **“we have Lean Product Development, all our engineers are overloaded”**. I tried to explain that being shorthanded does not mean they were practicing Lean Product Development. In fact, if everyone is overloaded most of the time, that is a pretty good indicator that they were not a Lean Enterprise. That conversation got me to wondering how many managers and business leaders think they are forcing their company to be “lean” by cutting back on people when in reality they are just forcing overload and in the process hurting productivity. I think the basic **requirements for Lean Product Development are really quite simple – simple but not easy!**

**Requirement 1 – Align all project activity to business strategy.**

**Requirement 2 – Minimize waste and non-value added effort in everything you do.**

Or in other words,

Requirement 1 – Make sure you are doing the right things.

Requirement 2 – Make sure you are doing things right.

In my many years of experience in engineering management the first requirement is the most difficult. I have seen too many companies that simply don't have a good business strategy; one that is well thought out, clearly articulated and widely communicated throughout the company. **If you don't have a strategy, or everyone in the company doesn't know what the strategy is, how can people make decisions?** How does anyone know which projects to work on, which projects have priority and most importantly which projects not to work on? In far too many companies, in far too many cases the squeaky wheel gets attention, which leads to too many projects. Too many projects in the pipeline cause severe multitasking, which research shows absolutely kills project productivity. It is vitally important that the really important projects get all the resources they deserve and that the lesser projects are killed. After all, if a project isn't vital to supporting the business strategy, why work on it? There are lots of tools to help align the project pipeline. **But the most important part is to create the opportunity for decision making to insure that the entire organization is aligned and supportive.**

Much has been written about the second requirement - minimize waste. There is a very large selection of tools and methodology available to help accomplish the second requirement. Six Sigma, Design for Six Sigma, Project Management, Risk Management, 5S, Constraint Management, the list goes on. They are all good tools. Properly selected and properly applied, they can work wonders for most businesses.

**Please remember, “overloaded” is not “Lean”.** Engineering productivity and Lean Product Development are favorite topics of mine. If you have any questions, or would like to discuss this area more, please give me a call.