

Back to basics? Lean Summit spotlights how effective simple change can be

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Africa's eighth lean management summit will highlight simple management systems that boost efficiency and customer service in both the private and public sectors in South Africa.

Primed to host its eighth biennial Lean Summit Africa at Cape Town's Vineyard Hotel in October, the Lean Institute Africa (LIA) is hoping to draw public sector players in addition to top business delegates. Lean management methods, long respected in the private sector, have also shown strong results in bumping up efficiencies in SA's notoriously challenged public sector, notably in health services and hospitals.

Under the theme of Building Capability for Challenging Times, the Summit will highlight how getting back to basics on systems and operations has the potential to revolutionise efficiency and customer experience.

"Lean management can have an enormous impact on the way an organisation functions, and it is growing as people experience how quickly lean can impact customers, staff morale and budget by eliminating waste," says Professor Norman Faull, founder and Chair of the Lean Institute Africa and Emeritus Professor at the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) who will be one of the key speakers at the event.

Faull will be joined at the podium by keynote speaker Mike Rother of the US, author of Toyota Kata and winner of the Shingo Prize, the world's highest standard for operational excellence; Nigel Ward, Senior Vice President, Toyota South Africa; Deon Styger, Executive Manager Operations, Airbus Defence and Space; and Rowleen Wagner, Chief Executive Officer, Frere Hospital in the Eastern Cape.

Proven within the Japanese automotive industry through the Toyota Way, lean management looks to pare down and re-arrange systems without throwing more resources at the problem or blaming staff, which can be a kneejerk response in the public sector, says Faull.

Faull, who will be speaking at the summit on the topic of 'What government needs to get right,' said that working in the health sector in recent years, lean management systems have been used to cut queues and waiting times dramatically in several hospitals around the country by addressing simple things like punctuality, absenteeism and a shift from batch processing to individual processing.

To achieve these results Faull said that practitioners examined frontline services and introduced simple, visible charts for staff tracking such basics as punctuality and absenteeism on a daily basis. Seen as a process rather than a solution, the system requires senior management to engage with challenges on a daily basis and to get buy-in from those on the frontline. He likens it to a daily hygiene routine like brushing your teeth and says that such an approach can bring stability and predictability to a system beleaguered by chaos, stress and time pressure.

"Change in any organisation, whether public or private, needs ongoing commitment," says fellow speaker, Rother. "Don't look for an answer and think you're done." Rother will be drawing on wisdom from his Toyota Kata book, which has had a profound influence on lean practitioners globally. Through his Improvement Kata and Coaching Kata (a Japanese term that is typically used in martial arts but which can be applied to routine or patterns) he sets forth simple steps towards continuous improvement, adaptability and achievement within an organisation.

Faull adds that the process invites people to be open to constructive criticism. This can be difficult in South Africa, he says, particularly with race playing a role in the South African historical context. "But in the Toyota Way, faults are there to be

acknowledged and improved upon. In such a culture risks can be taken, and significant changes made.”

Other speakers at the Summit include Shanil Haricharan, Government Technical Advisory Centre; Karen Schlebusch, Managing Executive, Business Connexion; Verna du Preez, Lean Practice Coach, Standard Bank; Kirstin Wallace, General Manager Halfway Production Centre, Halfway Toyota; and Maatje Wessels, Clinical Risk Manager, Mediclinic.

The Lean Summit Africa 2016, Building Capability in Challenging Times, will run from 19 to 21 October at the Vineyard Hotel and Conference Centre, Newlands, Cape Town. To register log onto www.lean.org.za/summit2016.

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