



## Member Initiative Forum: Zurich-Lean



by Robert Boyle  
Vice President, Finance  
Operations at Zurich North  
America Global Business  
Services

A lean methodology is the concept of streamlining processes and eliminating waste to keep costs low, while maintaining high quality products or services.

The Lean Enterprise Institute states that the lean methodology focuses on continuous evaluation and improvement of processes for more effective outcomes.

Lean methodologies are put in place to save companies time and money. By reducing waste, businesses reduce their overhead expenses.

*DISCLAIMER: The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect any official policy or position of Zurich.*

Zurich wanted to implement a methodology to encourage and sustain an environment of continuous improvement. To accomplish this, we have developed the Zurich-Lean methodology with a company-wide focus, spanning several continents. Zurich-Lean utilizes the methodology where a process is reviewed, based on scope, to diagnose root causes of waste found in the process, create a new design, implement solutions and then manage and sustain the new process, including monitoring of pre-defined metrics.

There is a global Zurich-Lean Council that encourages areas to embed this methodology in our culture and provides a way for questions or issues to be discussed and resolved. This approach to continuous improvement has ensured that the methodology, training and tools are consistent. In addition, our Project Management and Change Management methodology and tools are being aligned with the Zurich-Lean methodology so there is continuity where the areas overlap.

The training in the Zurich-Lean methodology currently has four different skill sets including: Introduction, Yellow belt, Green belt and Black belt. Each level allows the person to increase their skill set to include tool utilization, participation and facilitation of a Kaizen event (this is a three-and-a-half day event where Subject Matter Experts utilize the Zurich-Lean tools to create solutions to be implemented within a 45-day period to improve a process), training others in the methodology via formal training classes, coaching others interested in reaching the next level and facilitating comm cells. The comm cell is typically a short meeting held at a predetermined interval where people, performance and continuous improvement items are discussed with visuals for each of the areas. Our comm cells may include people from different locations and have provided a much appreciated vehicle for communication.

People have been encouraged to pursue this training as part of their individual development plan; however, it is not mandatory. During the last three years, more than 30% of the Finance Operations unit in North America has elected to pursue their yellow belt or higher. In addition, there are another 30% who are in the process of completing their requirements for their belts. As each belt is accompanied with a Kaizen event or Just Do It project, the ideas generated from the desk level have been encouraging.

In the past year, there were several Kaizen events sponsored by our area. One of these events has saved Zurich an annual amount of \$72,682.00 USD annually, which is a 12.5% reduction of fees to an outside vendor and another event reduced unapplied cash for a particular area by 97%, which is approximately 500 hours of time annually. In addition, the smaller Just Do It (or JDI) projects also have a big impact. In 2012-2013, the 13 JDI projects completed saved almost 900 hours of time, reduced inquiries to our business partners by 40% and reduced 11,700 lines of manual entry on a monthly basis.

In the last three years, we have had several stops and starts, but in the end, continually improving processes and keeping the customer centric is what has compelled us to continue our efforts. We can't wait to see what future changes will result from our Zurich-Lean journey!