

Lean thinking for business improvement

Willoughby City Council in New South Wales has introduced business improvement strategies in day-to-day operational processes – saving time and money.

The role of the Council's newly established Business Improvement Office (BIO) has been to lead significant corporate reforms while facilitating and guiding team initiatives.

The initial focus has been on adding value by working 'at the elbow' of teams and assisting them with their business planning as a way of demonstrating the tangible benefits to staff.

The result has been that teams are now voluntarily approaching the BIO for assistance with their ideas for improvement early on in their project's initiation.

The BIO approach is also supported by Willoughby's Project Management Office systems and advice.

The first tools deployed focused on the method of 'Lean Thinking', and as part of the Lean toolkit, a five 'S' challenge was undertaken between several teams at the council. The five 'S's stand for Sort, Straighten, Shine, Standardize and Sustain.

The teams that took up the challenge in a planning workshop and had to make a presentation to a judging panel and submit a compelling storyboard.

Member of the judging panel, Council's General Manager Debra Just, said, "I am overwhelmed with the positive progress all the teams made. The benefits were very visible and the sense of pride by the teams in their achievements was palpable".

Similarly, Head of Business Improvement, Mustafa Ghulam, who had been previously involved in five 'S' challenges commented: "This is the biggest progress that I have ever seen for the first time introduction of five 'S'."

Daniel, who led the Willoughby Leisure Centre Customer Service team as part of challenge said: "Thanks for including us in the challenge; it has been a great experience. Very rewarding and insightful."

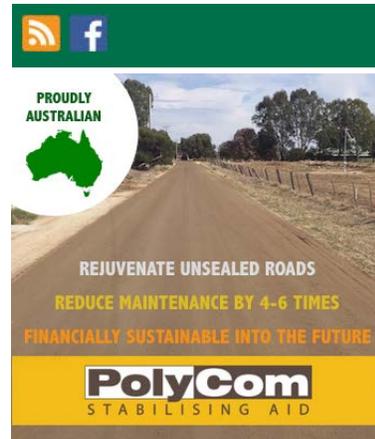
The winning team was Willoughby Leisure Centre Swim School team that not only improved their workplace, but also created more time to have meaningful, value-add discussions with their customers. A recent post-challenge benefit measurement indicated that teams are expecting to save up to 400 hours per annum as part of sustain stage of five 'S'.

A further example of business improvement was Council's recently concluded business planning process, where 160 participants identified 48 business improvement ideas.

This enhanced focus on business improvement at Willoughby City Council has created significant time savings, which is allowing more time to focus on value add interactions with the members of community.

The savings expected to be realised within the Financial Year 2015-2016 are \$174,900 across various areas of Council – ranging from Public Libraries to Council's Development Application processes.

Willoughby City Council will continue building on its capability – the focus now is to embed business improvement as part of each role at the Council.



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