



LEAN CASE STUDY:

ALGONQUIN COLLEGE CONTINUES ITS LEAN JOURNEY

The Algonquin College Lean effort, which began in 2005, continues to make inroads. Last year, Talking Lean related how a Lean team had streamlined the College's counseling department. Since then, that initiative has been expanded to the group's external activities, which include classroom talks and team-building sessions.

The new phase was initiated to help counselors balance their external activities with their personal counseling workload. "It's a matter of synchronization" says Chuck Doyle, the College's Manager of Business Process Review. "You don't want to be teaching in a classroom or advertising your services when there's a high demand for face-to-face sit-downs."

An improvement team collected and analyzed data to gain a better understanding of demand patterns. This has allowed the department to maximize their outreach activities without increasing wait times for face-to-face sessions.

This is only one of many improvement activities that the College has undertaken. "Every year we try to either get between 12 and 15 new activities going," says Doyle, "or circle back and review some of the old ones that need to get to the second future state."

Replication is one of the key themes. The College, for example, is looking at applying the improvements from the counseling department to other student services groups such as employment services and assistance for students with disabilities. The processes, Doyle says, are surprisingly similar.

Another variation has been the use of Lean to help IT reduce the number of software packages they have to support. The problem is that each user group tends to have its own preferences and as a result, IT has to support dozens of different applications, stretching their resources.

The College is using Value Stream Mapping to help user groups define their software needs more objectively. “Some groups appear to be significantly different,” says Doyle, “but if you look at the big picture you realize that there are opportunities to set up some of the processes to be standard.”

“Value stream mapping is extremely powerful because it takes the subjectivity away,” says Larry Coté, President of Lean Advisors, who helped the College get started on their Lean path. “Instead of focusing on personal wants, you uncover what is actually needed to enable the processes and staff to provide maximum value to their clients. When the real needs are clear, it is much easier to identify common elements.”

Other groups in the College are using a similar process to simplify administrative functions such as the bursary application process. Currently, if a student wants to apply for three bursaries, he or she has to fill out three different forms. When the new process is complete, there will be a single universal application form, and an automated process for determining eligibility. Together, these changes will significantly reduce processing times.

The College’s success with Lean is starting to attract attention in the education community. “More and more colleges here in Ontario are certainly taking an interest in the application of Lean,” says Doyle. “I’ve been contacted by three or four, and we’ve got some representatives from the Australian Catholic School Board coming in the next couple of weeks. It’s exciting.”

