

Moving mountains in small steps

TUI Nordic implements Blue Lean for process optimisation

For two years, TUI Nordic has been implementing Blue Lean. With this form of process optimisation, employees take problem-solving into their own hands. Tour operator Fritidsresor was impressed with the success of Blue Lean after a pilot project in the Quality Development and Claims Department. Process time for customer enquiries was reduced by 50 per cent. Review of another 7 processes followed with more learnings for the organisation. After a management workshop with the top 100 managers in Nordic in May, there are already another 20 further projects in the pipeline. TUITimes International investigated what lies behind this success.

"It was clear to us that if we wanted to reach our goals and still be successful in 2010, we would have to work differently," says Henrik Norlin, Director of Finances and in charge of the strategy Costs and Efficiency, describing how the project began. In the search for new efficiency measures, TUI Nordic discovered, in 2005, the company Lean Concept which had specialised in adapting the Lean concept, developed by car-maker Toyota, for the services industry. The principle was convincing – instead of an external consultant or boss determining the measures, it is the employees themselves who analyse workflow and disturbance factors and then develop optimised processes. The goal being to reduce the number of work steps and people involved in workflow, minimise waiting time and make sure that the right information gets to the intended person as soon as possible.

The test took place in the Quality Development and Claims Department at Fritidsresor. Here the problem was that response and process times for customer enquiries and claims were far too long. Therese Söderlund, meanwhile a Blue Lean coach, experienced the introduction of Blue Lean right from the start. "First we focused on the needs of our customers, then we identified disturbance factors and eliminated them – all in very small steps. We stopped, for example, printing out and filing e-mail claims. Instead, these were made digitally available to all colleagues involved. This saved time in filing and we no longer needed to look for information in files," explains Therese, describing a small change which had a great effect. The change process also gained momentum with the decision to break free from rigid work distribution. "We used to distribute work according to destinations. This often made waiting times for customers longer if there were many complaints in their destination. Now, all enquiries are strictly processed according to the 'first in first out' principle so that waiting time is the same for all customers."

What these and other measures achieved was, even for TUI Nordic, quite overwhelming. Process time for claims was reduced by 50 per cent and response time to customer enquiries reduced from seven



Hard work: For the Blue Lean analysis all work flows have to be separated into their respective single steps.



Blue Lean experts from TUI Nordic: Therese Söderlund, Quality Development and Claims Department, and Henrik Norlin, Director of Finances.

weeks to an average of 15 days. Henrik Norlin believes in the principle of personal responsibility: "If external consultants or managers consider new strategies, they often go beyond the employees and are met with resistance. With Blue Lean, on the other

hand, it is the employees themselves who develop a solution in a team and this within three days and without superiors.

Blue Lean coaches help, as advisors, in implementation. After three months, they select, together with the team members, a colleague who will ensure that the group continues to follow the Blue Lean strategy. After the pilot project in the Quality Development and Claims Department, other departments such as accounts and booking system project managers, also noted success. Therese Söderlund: "Our secret? Achieve a big goal in small, measurable steps. Avoid questions such as, 'How can we be more efficient in Quality Development and Claims' and, instead, ask, 'How can we reduce process time by 50 per cent and still keep a high customer quality'."

Do you want to find out more about Blue Lean? Then contact therese.soderlund@fritidsresor.se www.leanconcepts.eu



Blue Lean work principles

- To start with, employees should work with external trainers who pass on their expertise to employees who then become internal Blue Lean coaches.
- TUI Nordic staff must first work on at least two projects before they can become a Blue Lean coach.
- In principle, the search for solutions is more task than department orientated. Co-operations which cross structural boundaries ease success.
- Support of top management is essential for Blue Lean to work and for staff decisions to be respected.



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