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Lean as a Framework for Humanisation in Higher Education

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13.1 Introduction

Lean management is a compelling concept, with a significant history. Lean is at the root of the Operations Management discipline and is now in practice, relatively ubiquitously. This includes in Higher Education (HE), where lean, although not always described as lean in name, is having an impact in Universities worldwide. Central to lean is the idea of beginning from true purpose, and the authors seek to explore how lean intersects with humanisation in HE.

We will begin by introducing the roles we have taken as authors in writing this chapter: Stephen (Steve) Yorkstone and Susanne Clarke both work in HE—Steve in Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland,

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and Susanne at Bournemouth University in the other end of the UK on the South Coast of England. Despite this geographical distance, we meet up regularly all over the world to support the development of lean and continuous improvement in HE globally as leaders of the Lean HE Global community of practice. In this chapter, we share theoretical perspectives on lean and humanising, with Steve providing the guiding hand for the case studies in this chapter, and his experience in lean. James Mann at the time of the case study was the service desk supervisor at Edinburgh Napier University. He has enthusiastically contributed and taken forward ideas into practice and has shown great generosity in sharing his experiences to support embedding these ideas more widely within HE. Susanne brings her knowledge of the humanisation framework in theory and practice.

We will introduce lean by discussing lean as an industrial approach, in order to introduce key concepts in use where lean is practised. We will go onto outline how these principles can play out in practice through a case study describing a programme of lean activity in a university helpdesk. Foremost is our wish to illustrate the interplay between lean and humanisation. The chapter then discusses some of the broader challenges facing the sector. It closes by addressing how a humanising lean approach has a role in offering a practical way forward.

13.2 Understanding Lean

Lean is often viewed as an approach to continuous improvement. Frequently, lean is associated with the removal of “non-value adding activity” to add velocity to business processes. This understanding of lean is limited, however, and misleading. More recently lean has come to be synonymous with the concept of “respect for people“. Lean advocates suggest that it is not simply that continuous improvement requires respect for people to succeed, but rather that genuine respect for people is what causes the emergence of continuous improvement (Clarke et al. 2018).

Lean as a term was made popular by Womack et al. (2007) describing research into the Japanese automotive industry, especially in Toyota.

Originally “lean” was a term of derision for the Toyota Production System, reflecting a system running on the minimum resourcing required. However, as the discussion regarding lean went further, it came to be understood that using the minimum resource to achieve the goal was optimally efficient and therefore a blessing (not a cause for derision). Early translations of lean into other workplaces focussed on the removal of “waste” from processes, i.e. any activity that does not add value to the customer. This focus solely on removing waste, however, is only part of lean, and to solely apply this is to misunderstand lean’s nature.

Currently, worldwide lean academies (associations of lean practitioners and thinkers) are represented by Planet Lean, who offer this definition of lean:

Lean is about creating the most value for the customer while minimising resources, time, energy, and effort. (Priolo et al. 2020)

Since its inception lean has evolved, responding to the challenges of systems thinking. More recently, lean (and especially lean in higher education) has been influenced by coaching, service design, agile and other approaches. This smorgasbord approach means contemporary lean can be hard to pin down (Yorkstone 2018).

Womack and Jones described what they saw in Toyota as what have become guiding “principles” in lean, a series of steps often observed. Womack and Jones’ lean principles are:

- Define value, as perceived by the customer.
- Map all the steps in the value stream, eliminating those that do not contribute to the creation of value.
- Ensure your products or services flow towards the customer in a smooth way, with no interruptions, by the value-creating steps occurring in a tight sequence.
- Let the customer pull value from the next process upstream, allowing them to set the pace for your work.
- Strive for perfection by trying to achieve a situation in which value is created with no waste.

For some sectors, such as HE, referring to those who interact with our organisations—our students, colleagues, stakeholders and research beneficiaries—as “customers” grates. This tension has become known as the “customer debate”. However, this debate is to miss the point: lean is not tied to a superficial transactional financial relationship with stakeholders—one understanding of a customer—but a deeper, more meaningful long-term connection. In the Japanese roots of lean customer can instead be translated as honoured guest.

Since lean’s inception, the concept has been poorly served by organisations who, with much good intent, have taken techniques that work in one organisation or sector and have applied these in another sector or organisation without understanding context or nuance (Radnor and Boaden 2008). Lean is more maturely understood as a learning system, a philosophy, part of the culture of organisations and “the way we do things around here”. In this way, understanding lean is not so much about the type of activity that is undertaken but the qualitative approach to how this activity is done. Parallels with the humanising framework are clear, as the way that actions are taken in context is also key to their nature as humanising or dehumanising.

For this chapter, lean is viewed as a cultural or behavioural phenomenon, founded upon respect for people and continuous improvement; but one displayed in a pragmatic approach where experiments are undertaken to move iteratively towards ever better service. Lean is not understood as purely “top-down”, managerial, reductive, solely functioning on a project basis, or necessarily tied to a financial model of our organisations.

With a broad menu of approaches, tools and applications in diverse industries outside HE, lean offers a useful improvement framework for the diverse university sector. To illustrate the application of lean in HE in practice, this chapter includes below a narrative account of lean improvement in the service desk at Edinburgh Napier University.

13.3 Case Study: Lean, an Information Services Service Desk Journey

13.3.1 Case Study Introduction

The Information Services Service Desk (the “desk”) in Edinburgh Napier University is core to how the University works. The desk is the first point of call to deal with enquires about the technological services critical to how the institution operates, for services such as email, security, but also academic delivery such as our virtual learning environment.

The desk is staffed by a small team based on one of our Edinburgh campuses. With nearly 20,000 students at the University (primarily in Edinburgh but also studying with partners in China, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Switzerland and Myanmar and increasingly across the globe online), we are a very busy service.

Here our co-author, James takes up the narrative to talk us through this case study, with Steve and Susanne providing the connections with lean and humanisation.

We were aware that Steve Yorkstone worked in the area of lean, so towards the end of 2018, we invited him to one of our monthly Service Desk meetings. We asked him to tell us about his job at Edinburgh Napier University, then we shamelessly asked him for help.

We had initially started to review our Knowledge Base—a database where we keep all our Service Desk documentation, and we were looking to make significant changes, such as relocating the database. The task was starting to look impossible, and we hoped Steve would be able to wave a magic wand. It did not take him too long to set us straight and one brainstorming session later we were well and truly on the path to lean.

This case study includes several tasks—how we approached them and what we have learned. The conclusion, although certainly not the end of our journey, is where we try and measure the success of our efforts. Steve and Susanne have added their thoughts at the end of each section discussing how the actions we took relates to both lean principles and humanisation.

13.3.2 Task 1: Service Desk Layout

Would Looking at Reorganising Our Space Help Us Work Better as a Team?

We took a good look at our space and how we wanted it to work for us as a team. Until we started on this journey, we had naturally gone through lots of different combinations. Mostly, however, we would settle for what was the easiest to configure, rather than what would work best to promote team interaction (Fig. 13.1).

There were, as you would expect, several questions that would define our office layout, such as:

- Where were the working network points?

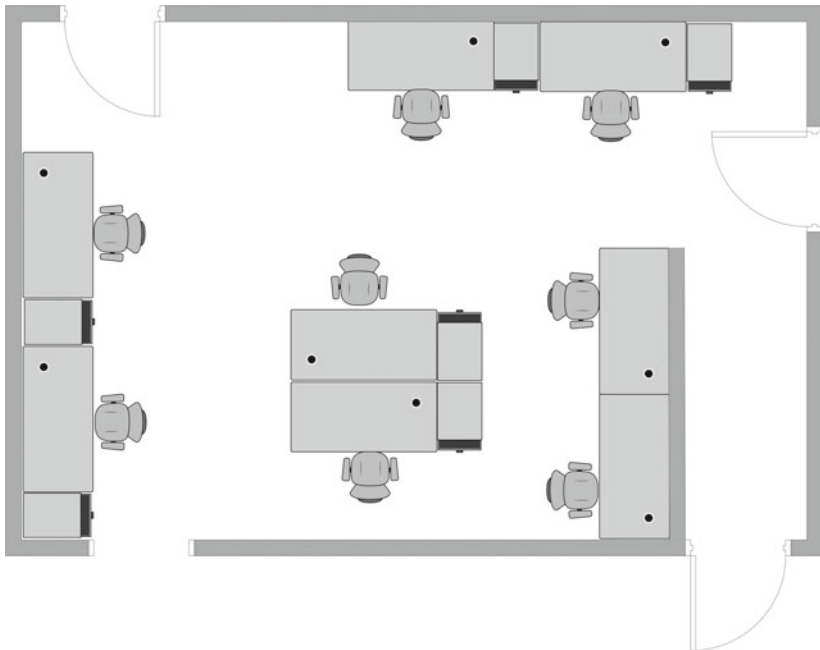


Fig. 13.1 How the Service Desk work space was originally organised

- How many sockets did we have?
- Who wanted to sit together?
- Where was it warmest?
- Who would have to answer the door?

All we found though was that the layout was never right and for the large part we just ended up playing musical chairs. It became the running joke for anyone visiting the office, thinking that we had shifted everything around for their amusement.

In seeking to make lean improvements to our space we changed the kind of questions we were asking about our room:

- What was the purpose of our space?
- Did we just want to have a desk and get our job done or did we wanted to work in an environment that fostered collaboration and inclusivity?
- Would designing a creative and functional space result in better call management, knowledge sharing and team morale?

In asking these questions, we realised that the “hive mind” of the Service Desk is how a lot of things get resolved and issues identified. We need to speak to each other and to have assistance close at hand.

Our first attempt was to create three separate groups of desks. By getting creative with the groupings, we hoped that everyone would be able to see and interact with everyone but still have a sense of their own space. Although cosy, it had the opposite effect, and the team were not happy working this way. We were too close and felt overly exposed to each other, even with desk dividers in place. We discussed as a team how we all felt, and we agreed that proximity is an important consideration—the closer you sit, the more distracting it can be when you are on the phone or concentrating. The team reported that they found this both tiring and stressful. The opposite of what we had set out to achieve.

The next idea we had was to bring our separate groups into one big group of eight desks, in effect creating one long table. This seemed to work, and we now had a space that we all agreed promoted communication and collaboration. We could seat the team strategically, placing

people in the right place so they would have quick and easy access to the people who could help them best (Fig. 13.2).

During this journey, we discovered that addressing physical space is vitally important. Since moving to this layout, we have seen improvements within the team in terms of morale and in the professional approach we take with each call. We now have people seated according to their strengths. Newer staff are closer to someone who can support them. Everyone is available to help, but also have enough personal space to get on with their job.

Bringing a communal feeling to the office has brought us closer together as a team. By allowing everyone to work together with minimum physical barriers, we are beginning to collaborate more. Curiously, it also feels more professional and as a result, we take more pride in the service we provide. When given the freedom to organise our space we have found that we work better together and get more things done.

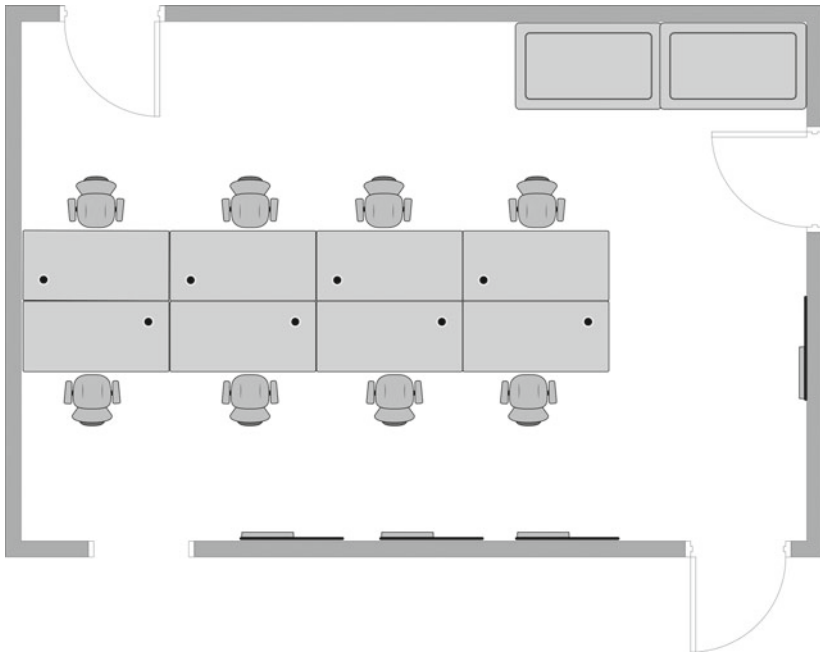


Fig. 13.2 How the Service Desk work space is now configured

- We have learned that it is essential to play with your space to find out what works and what does not. Sometimes you must get things wrong just to find out what works.
- Even though we have a wish list for new furniture, we also learned that we could make do with what we have.

Thinking about the way the team undertook this task, it was clearly an iterative process and experimentation was key to arriving at a better layout. This is an example of continuous improvement in action.

For lean thinkers, flow is key, when a process aligns around purpose and steps in the process occur seamlessly. This is true in the efficient physical production line origins of lean, but, also as we see lean being implemented in other sectors, where the flow relates to the flow of information between teams. This improvement illustrates how physical space is key to the flow of information across the team on the desk.

Elements of Todres et al. (2009) humanisation model are similarly highly practical in the healthcare setting where constructing a physical space around the patient enables embodiment (a sense of wellbeing, through having our needs met, a sense a place), and therefore, better health.

The intersection between lean and humanisation here is an interesting one. In many humanising systems the primary thought is what people might display at the surface level as their humanising needs; the first questions the team asked themselves in this section of the case study “who would like to sit next to who” “who would be warm or cold”, etc. However, this instance would suggest that focussing on the purpose of the team, and removing the physical barriers to communication, has enabled an increased sense of place and decreased dislocation—as communal feeling and togetherness as team bonds are reported to have increased.

It also illustrates how in lean, the decision making is taken at the closest point to where value is delivered, and the team were “given the freedom” to make these improvements. For humanisation, this would be an example of how agency placed in the appropriate place enables better outcomes.

13.3.3 Task 2: Service Desk Visualisation

Will Using Simple Tools to Record and Display Our Work Help Manage Tasks Better?

Visualisation of work is important to not only allow us to manage complex tasks, but also allows visitors to the desk to easily see what we do. Making the work visible is one of the things that Steve told us is commonly seen across lean implementations in various industries.

To achieve this, we had several whiteboards attached to the wall, and we cleared space to use a couple of walls to their full size. We also added a board to help us manage major calls, which are infrequent events, but events that take up a significant amount of time and resource to deal with.

This new way of managing our tasks helped us to manage the “Knowledge Items” effectively. We did not always have time to work on them, with day to day pressures often taking priority. Having the task visualised like this meant that it never disappeared and forgotten. It also served to keep work visible and ensured that everyone in the team was aware of the current status of projects.

High Tech is not always the best solution. To have something that requires you to move away from your desk, your screen helps us think more creatively and work together to find solutions to what can often be very complex and challenging problems.

These visual spaces have allowed us to discuss issues and manage complex tasks easily. They became space where our thinking or tasks remaining were visible for everyone to see, contribute and revisit.

These visual work boards have also become central to our team routine, providing room to work through different processes, provide feedback to the team, manage our major calls and display our important management data.

Visualisation of the work is core to lean, lean thinkers, talk about building a “visual workplace” where anyone could enter the space and identify the activity underway, and indeed whether there were any problems to the smooth flow of that work (Womack et al. 2007). This is

often deliberately physical in nature, despite the availability of software solutions for this, with teams gathering in real space daily in front of a visual control board (an “information radiator”) that they are responsible for. The real-world physical meeting enables enhanced relationships; however, discipline is required to ensure that short daily “huddles“ do not become overlong.

While this approach makes sense in the context of manufacturing and is now widespread in the healthcare sector, it would seem unusual for this practice to emerge in our institutions. That said, I am sure we can all picture that school office who uses their whiteboard to manage key tasks; what assignments are due when, key committee meetings and decisions, leave and absences.

Elements of visualisation and the embodiment of work often do emerge as we see humanisation emerge. Combined with the sense of space the team started to develop with their room layout, we see the work become crystallised in the space around them. Indeed, often this happens without intent, as we see the embodiment of perhaps less healthy working practices in detritus that accumulates around busy desks or in less often visited corners. I know when I am over-worked you can see it in piles of un-attended papers on my desk!

Visualisation, the embodiment of work, is bring meaning and supports the development of lean thinkers. In this instance, the concept of visualisation has provided a structure that creates the “official” space for the human business of embodiment to be practised, leading to performance improvements. The space around the people here has become an enabler for understanding meaning in relation to their work. This sense-making brings with it comfort and confidence that comes with knowing we are part of the team—in contrast to the dislocation that dehumanises us, the feeling we get when we don’t know what is happening around us.

13.3.4 Task 3: Service Desk Rota

Could We Make Positive Changes to the Way We Work by Reviewing the Current Working Rota?

We decided to review the current rota pattern, which was very much an unstructured system with ad hoc updates made each day. Mostly this would work fine but when things started to get busy this would often lead to confusion and as a result regular breaks were missed; consequently, both the service and staff wellbeing declined.

This approach also affected the daily tasks assigned to each member of the team, with some analysts feeling like they were stuck on the phones, always picking up voicemails and feeling an increased pressure to take on more daily tasks.

Key issues that were identified:

- Wellbeing
- Service impact
- Distribution of rota tasks
- Structured breaks.

The experiment then was to create a new rota that would address these issues and see if the changes made would have a positive effect.

To really get to grips with the rota we needed to understand how our week was broken up. We started by mapping out our working week. We set about identifying our key tasks and assigned them daily to a shift, which was then staggered across the week, ensuring they were evenly distributed without duplication. These tasks would in turn help identify which breaks an analyst should be on—and provide a fair allocation of breaks across the week.

The impact of the changes was easily measured through a management information system and from feedback from the team. Feedback was positive from the team, who were keen to adopt the new pattern. The real indicator of success, though, was that they started to engage with the process and make suggestions on how it could be further improved.

In summary, by working with the team, we had the correct cover to manage the Service Desk effectively. This had a positive impact on our time to resolve (one of our key metrics) and as a result, better customer service for the end-user.

The even distribution of tasks allowed everyone to enjoy more variety and manage their workload. As a direct result of the changes to the

rotas, the team were better able to respond to calls. There was a marked improvement in team morale, as they felt part of the decision-making process, they had a stronger sense that they mattered and that their preferences and views were heard.

Having a structure in place was more efficient, and peaks and troughs could be better managed. Importantly, it also gave everyone a clear understanding of their roles each week. Since the rota was implemented, we have been able to cope with changes and still see a positive impact on monthly results.

In lean flow is not just about space, but also time. “Takt” time, from the German, is the measure in lean of the time between the start of production of one unit to the start of the production of the next unit. Known as the heartbeat of the work, lean thinkers pay attention to this in order to ensure processes are designed with the right capacity, the right bandwidth if you like, to meet demand (Liker 2012).

In this example, however, focus on a clear structure also enabled the people within this team to work more effectively, but in doing so, release the appropriate time for breaks and personal tasks. The conceptual framework of the dimensions of humanisation function on an individual basis enhanced the sense of togetherness, a focus on the wider team.

This concept of “Takt” time, while understandable on a production line, might seem dehumanising in a university environment. However, this example demonstrates how these boundaries, or disciplined nature, can enable humanisation as the staff work with an increased agency to meet their own and the team’s needs. Improving the rota used feedback from staff in its design, made the problem more explicit, and the benefits help customers and the staff on the rota, including increasing work-life balance.

13.3.5 Task 4: Service Desk Call Management

By Applying Lean to Our Call Management Process, Will We Be Able to Work Smarter and Provide a Better Service?

We set out to redefine the roles and responsibilities of managing the queue. Running up to the change, there was no clearly defined system or call ownership in place. Calls were taken from the queue by analysts with the oldest calls being dealt with first. There was a little in the way of standard approaches to common issues and calls were at times directed to analysts without the correct information from the user, resulting in delays.

This often resulted in a backlog of calls, increased pressure and a perceived imbalance of workload within the team. We still functioned well as a Service Desk, but there were clearly improvements which could be made. All members of the team contributed to the design of a new process and way of working, as detailed below:

- Simple requests were dealt with immediately.
- Standard solutions were applied to common issues.
- Further details were requested, were needed from the caller, before being assigned to an analyst.
- Major issues and priority calls were handled promptly.
- Call volume was evenly distributed across the team.
- Everyone got time off the phone every week, and morale was improved.

The changes made here have become key to everything we do on the desk. Consistency across the calls allows us to provide a high level of customer service, report effectively and to make informed decisions about any process and procedural changes we need to make. We are now able to measure effectiveness, which is a great check to ensure that we are on the right track.

This process has had a positive impact on the team as well. Since its adoption, we have been able to manage our calls efficiently and to a high standard. This is reflected in the monthly reports, which clearly shows the improvements we are making and continue to make using this system.

Here we can see a clear delineation of roles, the creation of what lean thinkers would refer to as “standard work” (Liker 2012). In the context of the previous improvements, this change has also acted as a positive enabler on the team, including improving morale.

It is interesting to reflect on the patterns between the elements of the humanisation framework that emerge through this case study as enabling improvements positively as staff take an increasing amount of control over their own work.

However, likely, this controlled approach to work isn't without its challenges, as doubtless some of the expectations of staff members were not met through these changes. It is this paradox that is contained within lean's "respect for people" principle. Not that we should give people what they seek or ask for in the immediate, but that we should take a deeper or longer view of needs and seek for these to be fulfilled.

13.3.6 Case Study Conclusions

There is clearly within the data a numerical case for lean, with targets being met and key indicators improving; however, it is the humanising elements that have underpinned this success. Each of the interventions necessitated the application of practical changes to the workplace, each of which will have doubtless caused some level of discomfort for some or all the staff involved. Nevertheless, this case illustrates how despite this the actions together have had a transformative effect for the people who use the service of the desk, and indeed for the team itself.

Similarly, to the way that each of the interventions above has worked together, we have seen numerous elements of the humanisation framework displayed and intersecting here. Improving the workplace involves not just one intervention but a consistent approach where people are at its core. Lean is a philosophy, an approach to work, and through seeking improvement, this case study has seen the team culture improve.

Of course, this case study has limitations, being drawn over a relatively short period of time. In a context where there is relatively high staff mobility, including of both the supervisory staff who operationalised these changes (moving on to promoted positions elsewhere), it has yet to be seen whether these benefits will be maintained.

This case study is also drawn from a transactional team in a higher education context, with a clear physical environment, very different

from the classroom, library, or laboratory or other space our academic colleagues work within.

Yet there is learning that is applicable across different working contexts, that of the humanising quality of these improvements being key to their successes thus far. An intervention is necessary for improvement; however, this case study illustrates that the qualitative nature of the approach taken is key to positive long-term impact, almost in excess of the interventions themselves. Humanisation is not about what is done but the way that is done. All these changes could have been made without the humanising elements—and the self-same activities acting as dehumanising rather than humanising—and perhaps without the same kinds of success.

Coaching is an important activity within lean and is sometimes traditionally referred to as being offered by a lean Sensei. Often controversial figures in practice, the ideal Sensei embodies respect for people and encourages those involved in improvement activity to learn through doing. In this way, the team is supported by a coach who provides a stimulus from outside the team to do the right thing. This coaching resides outside of line management to enable individuals and teams to learn what it means to take agency in relation to their work, in a way where staff and management can feel safe (Liker 2012).

The desk team continues to maintain statistics to monitor their performance. Data since the case study has been completed and it is broadly positive. There are plans to re-measure now the team staffing has changed, to see if results are being maintained. We will also assess whether behavioural cultural changes are being maintained in terms of positive team working, with a view to further sustainable performance improvement enabled by humanisation; even in the current challenging context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

13.4 Challenges to Lean in Higher Education

The example above outlines a response to some challenges faced in the sector, and how a lean type approach helped discover purpose, and meet purpose without extraneous activity. That said, the context of HE is one

which is distant from lean's manufacturing beginnings, and what that offers challenges classic lean.

13.5 Organisational or Intrinsic Challenges

There are challenges to applying approaches like lean to HE. One challenge is that of the complexity intrinsic to universities.

Universities are perhaps unique in being our creators of knowledge, they abound with theoretical discussion. This discussion includes, quite rightly, academic criticism of lean as a concept. Academics are powerful communicators unafraid to challenge. This offers challenges to the lean practitioner, who might face vigorous discussion that would not be offered in a non-academic workplace.

It almost seems impossible for continuous improvement in a lean way to work in these contexts. Universities are themselves structured almost like “wicked problems”, i.e. at a level of complexity that is without definitive solutions (Dickinson 2020).

13.6 Situational, or Extrinsic, Challenges

Generalisations can be misleading; however, externally the sector is facing challenges, like many others. Financial constraints are an increasing reality for institutions certainly in the UK. Immediate challenges are facing the business model of HE from increases in technology, notably the growth of online learning. While there is a large take-up on online learning, historically there is also a high non-completion rate from online HE courses, and people taking online courses seem to be from a different demographic to traditional face-to-face students (Ashford-Row and Barajas-Murphy 2019). That said, as we write in March 2020 the pivot to online in response to Covid-19 is enormous and will doubtless have huge repercussions.

Changing population demographics are also likely to have an impact, with students from a broader range of backgrounds, and more diverse life stages (HESA 2020). Yet the sector appears to be continuing to seek to

grow, and to sustain this by leveraging the globalisation of the sector, either through importing international students to existing campuses, through sending academics to teach overseas “flying faculty”, through establishing operations overseas more directly or through franchise agreements (Jais et al. 2015).

At the same time, countries with large populations where the middle classes had made the most of international education in the west (India and China for example) are increasingly developing higher education provision in country (Ruby 2020). This challenges whether growth through internationalisation will be able to be a continuing sustainable approach.

Alongside this there is the climate crisis. Students and staff of Universities are often connected into the importance of the current threats to our biosphere and keen to act on them. Doubtless, the implications of climate change will change many things, including for Universities (Allen 2003).

13.7 Responding to These Challenges

Universities are almost impossible organisations in an impossible situation. However, when seen together, these challenges represent opportunities. We know that creative solutions are often the result of serendipity and messy contexts. It is a truism that when we know the answer to the question before we start the process of answering it, we cannot discover anything new. The most successful universities have learnt to use the unique features of the sector and to enable success in our always-changing world.

Universities require a mature approach to improvement, one flexible enough to change and embrace difference, and that can be applied in diverse way. In this, taking a lean approach can enable improvement. If lean is applied as a top-down managerial improvement approach, it is unlikely to have impact. If lean is taken as a philosophical approach to work, flexible and dynamic, but based around respect for people and scientific method, it has the power to be transformational. As lean itself is a broad approach to change, it fits universities well.

Thinking about lean through the lens of humanisation, and humanisation through the lens of lean, enables interventions to be more likely to succeed. However, there are limits to the application of lean and humanisation in HE.

Notwithstanding, it is the view of the authors that it is the genuine treatment of all people within our organisations in a humanising way that holds the potential to take improvement to a true win-win outcome. For lean practitioners, this is not new, the humanising framework simply makes tangible the “respect for people” principle discussed at the start of this chapter.

13.8 Conclusion

At the time of writing, the future for lean in higher education appears bright. Many universities are working to apply lean or related improvement approaches, and the numbers of institutions engaging Lean HE events are growing. It is hard to predict where this will go next, however; lean practice has been sustained in the sector for over a decade, and some lean practices that would seem to be far from the culture of universities—the daily stand up for example—are proving to be beneficial.

The daily stand up, championed by the University of Strathclyde is a daily 15-minute meeting to discuss a brief standard agenda focussing on the most important things for the day. It is an example of a practical lean tool that acts as a scaffold to enable people to relate differently to their work—when done with the appropriate qualitative approach: i.e. humanisation.

The real challenge for applying lean is to stay true to respect for people, as this volume is exploring, with an embodied relational understanding (Galvin and Todres 2010). A mature understanding of lean places people at its core and does not view those who intersect with our activities as disposable “customers” but rather as people and communities with whom we offer lifelong service. This is at the core of the success of lean enterprises, realising that helping people achieve their needs in the long term, no more and no less, is at the core to sustained success. Even if it

is not, working in a sector that chooses to work for the benefit of people is doubtless somewhere we would all choose to be a part of.

The service desk case study above illustrates how lean done properly can provide a helpful framework for the humanisation of HE in practice, linking to challenges facing the sector. Lean tools provide a practical framework for the business of making improvements, the humanisation model a practical framework for the business of respecting our people.

For lean thinkers, high-level purpose (as defined in the context of people's needs) is prior. There is the potential for tension in the interpretation of humanisation as placing the needs of the individual as prior to higher level purpose. However, perhaps the tension between the purpose of the individual and the purpose of the organisation is an interesting question; but is it the right question? Like the elements of the humanising framework, while in some ways distinct, lean and humanisation are deeply interrelated.

So lean and humanisation are perhaps a way that the higher education sector can look at practice externally, navigate their challenges, and through doing so, find a way of reminding itself what universities are really for. This would be to not shy away from the complexity of the sector but rather to engage with the opportunities that exist in the beautifully complex and important purposes of our Universities.

Lean demonstrates how business objectives and humanisation are in concert, not conflict, and furthermore how the forms of humanisation and forms of dehumanisation are not contingent upon an act in and of itself but the qualitative nature of that act. The qualitative nature that successful lean springs from is respect for people, from humanisation.

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