

Process versus Operation

By Michael Stickler

Which comes first...Process or Operation? The difference is critical to being successful at Lean. The breakthrough for every successful Lean implementation is appreciating and exploiting the difference between the two. Most people don't, they use these two words interchangeably and they are wrong, they mean different things. The Empowered Performance Dictionary defines:

Operation: as an activity or activities performed on a product or service by a *single* machine or person.

Process: a *sequence* of operations (consisting of people, machines, materials, and methods) for the design, manufacture, and delivery of a product or service.

Lean is about identifying and eliminating the waste caused by the problems that have not been solved. When your people focus on an operation, they may well improve it, but that improvement may not positively impact the process...unfortunately most of the time this is what occurs.