



INNOVATION STARTS WITH PEOPLE

# Continuous improvement as a solution for organisational hassle

TEXT AND PHOTOS: LEARNINGWAVES

Do you know this feeling? That as CEO or manager, you feel that your organisation is under constant pressure to work better, faster and cheaper. You observe various uncontrollable processes and inefficient collaboration structures – also with suppliers. Maybe you thought you could solve this with well-coordinated top-down instructions, but the market and society have become too complex for that. So how do you avoid getting lost in the daily business of putting out fires? How do you get everyone engaged with innovation? And how do you get people motivated?

LearningWaves guides and trains leaders and their teams to collaborate in a different way and to put innovation first. They do this based on the Lean method, combined with the self-developed, tried and tested Learn teaching. Learn helps to substitute organisational hassle with a clear point on the horizon, easily collaborating teams, happy clients, intrinsically motivated colleagues and a better business performance. LearningWaves is located in the Brainport region near Eindhoven in the Netherlands and works for Dutch and Belgian companies in the construction, infra, production, care and service sectors, and in their international branches.



## Innovation as a constant

Erik Giebels is partner and trainer at LearningWaves: “In the current market, innovation is the only constant. You want to be agile and do your work better every day. Therefore sustainability is essential. You need motivated people with expertise to enable innovation. If you take good care of them, they will stay with your company longer. And their work will be more interesting and fun for them. The main question is: how do you engrain this ‘better every day’ mentality into the DNA of your organisation? You start with the people.”

## Raising awareness

“Together with the client, we create smarter processes,” Erik continues. “If the people in your organisation understand why certain changes are improvements, those changes will start to pay off. That’s why we pay a lot of attention to raising awareness and motivation in people. We work based on the Lean philosophy. We complement Lean through our own Learn method with various coaching, communication and organisation models to improve motivation. We teach people to work together in new ways.”

## The baseline: improve client value

With Lean, you look at an organisation like a group of people who execute a series of activities. The result is a product or a service. Some activities add client value (for example, a bridge builder’s

activities are to create a bridge from materials) and some activities do not directly add client value (like acquisition, stock and administration). Lean focuses on increasing client value.

Erik: “For many people it’s a shock to hear that in an average organisation only ten per cent of activities are of the kind that add direct client value. After this initial shock, they quickly realise that every added percentage point is worth the effort. For example, after redesigning their process, one of our clients was able to build a roundabout in one weekend. A fantastic result for the team and the client, but also for all the people who don’t have to take a detour for weeks or even months. Try calculating the economic and social value of that!”

## Making the difference: keeping motivation and energy up

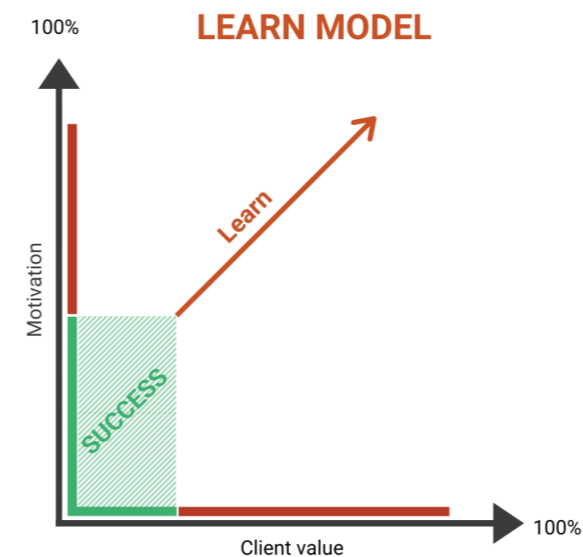
The Lean methods are meant to bring structure, overview and room for the team and management to make improvements. Erik: “Engaging with improvement in itself is pleasant for many people. But simply using methods to achieve dry improvements is too instrumental an approach. Compare this to a top athlete – they constantly fine-tune their technique and are continuously improving. To be able to win competitions, the athlete’s mindset is also important: motivation, passion, flow. The trick is to create an organisational climate

in which employees experience happiness in their work and can bring out the best in themselves. That isn’t easy, and there are some ‘buttons’ you can push. Scientific research shows that intrinsic motivation in employees is stimulated by the degree of autonomy, mastery and purpose they experience.”

## Learn

By combining these elements – optimising client value and stimulating (team) motivation – you create what LearningWaves calls a Learn-climate. The goal is to maximise your score on both axes. That is where an organisation’s success lies. This is only possible if employees and teams themselves continuously strive for improvement.

Erik: “Employees are often much better at improving their processes than managers. They have the practical knowledge and experience, know what’s important, what influences timing, etc.” In a learning enterprise, management has a fundamentally different role from traditionally structured companies. Leaders function more like coaches, who facilitate teams and employees in everything they need to reach an optimised company process and an optimal self-development. Erik: “It’s also more suited for the leaders to be removed from the actual operation, that way they have time to work on the strategy of the company, innovation and large-scale improvements.”



Left: By combining optimising client value and stimulation (team) motivation you can create a Learn-climate.



# LEAD TIME REDUCTION

Results after implementing Learn methodology

Removing and reinstalling roundabout  
**12 weeks**



**NOW 44 HOURS**

Building and delivering 1 house  
**100 days**



**NOW 20 DAYS**

Signing of financial statements  
**Before May 31**



**NOW ON JAN. 15**

Mediation between tenant and landlord  
**Several weeks**



**NOW 2.5 DAYS**

Renovating 1 complete house  
**3 weeks**



**NOW 1 DAY**

Producing aluminum window frame  
**12 weeks**



**NOW 4 HOURS**

Monthly composing 10 reports  
**21.5 hours**



**NOW 5.5 HOURS**

Blood analysis for a patient  
**4 days**



**NOW 3 HOURS**

Yearly walking distance in a lab  
**450 km**



**NOW 45 KM**

Producing facade plate  
**13.5 minutes**



**NOW 3.1 MINUTES**

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**'Now I am a coach instead of the boss,'  
Jan Boom, director and owner, Aldowa**

When we acquired Aldowa, we knew one thing for certain: we will do things differently. Reform a hierarchical organisation into one with autonomy and responsibility. In that process, it turned out that I was very good at what I was doing, only I did not ask myself the WHY-question. I slowly realised that I was constantly spending my day coming up with solutions for others. That took a lot of my energy, and I was not using the potential of the organisation.

Through LearningWaves I learned how to offer insight. To let people come up with their own ideas. To support them as a coach. It gave me so much. I have started to do business differently and by doing so I have also taken more pleasure in it. I have also learned to understand and use the

Lean & Learn methods more effectively. You can see this in the brilliant results: Aldowa is successful and our team is growing. We respect the ambitions of our employees through our common goal of creating striking projects, by thinking and working differently.

Aldowa makes facades, ceilings and artworks with special lines and effects. The company wins prizes and is the New Heroes of the city Rotterdam (innovation prize of the sector organisation). The team realises prestigious (international) projects, like the award-winning Markthal in Rotterdam, Cambridge Road in London and Nordea Bank in Copenhagen.



Jan at Markthal.

To find out more about LearningWaves, visit:  
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