

The Lean Routine

When it comes to improvement, week-long Kaizen events are the approach of choice for achieving big-hitting results. But there's a quick-hitting approach as well – an approach that can be faster, more flexible, and more grassroots in nature.

We call it the Lean Routine. It uses many of the same tools that are put to work in a full Kaizen event. But it uses them on smaller processes and sub-processes. That's the key distinction: With Lean Routine, you narrow the scope of the improvement effort, focusing on clearly defined "pain points" that call for permanent improvement.

Lean Routines FAQs

How long does it take?

Lean Routines are flexible. When properly scoped, they can be completed in one full day – or in five 90-minute meetings over the course of several weeks, or in two half-day meetings, and so on. The breaks in between meetings can be a big positive because they allow for discussion, idea generation, reinforcement, and consensus-building. All of this keeps the momentum alive.

Who is involved?

The process owner serves the key role at the start, working with the Lean facilitator to clarify the scope and develop a charter. This planning step is vital. The team itself should consist of people who do the work of the process or sub-process that's being improved.

How do I get started with this?

First, identify a small part of a process that is a true "pain point." It needs to be in your control or your team's control. Narrow in on specific steps of the process – 8-15 steps is an ideal range, involving 2-4 different functions. The scope should be narrow enough to allow for quick improvement, yet big enough that improvement will make a significant difference.

What are some of the keys to success?

- **Narrow the focus of what you're trying to improve.** The Lean Routine should not be used with large, complex processes that cross many sections or agencies. (With those, you need a full Kaizen event.)
- **Work with a skilled Lean facilitator from the very start.** They can help you scope the project, plan the meetings, and ensure that the meetings run smoothly and stay on track.
- **Plan your way to a successful outcome.** A well-scoped project won't guarantee success, because there are other factors involved as the Lean Routine unfolds. But a poorly scoped project guarantees frustration, confusion, and a lack of results.
- **Make sure that the people who do the work are the people who make up the team.** They have the know-how that's needed to analyze the current approach and identify meaningful improvements.
- **Do the hard work of sustaining the improvements.** While the Lean Routine process moves quickly and has a clear end point, implementation of the changes often requires ongoing work. The process owner has lead responsibility for maintaining the momentum and ensuring that everyone sticks with their implementation timetable.

