

Getting the chemistry right



A project to implement lean manufacturing principles has resulted in a Yorkshire chemical company improving productivity by 40 per cent and saving close to £40,000.

Vickers Laboratories' managers worked with the Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS) to implement an improvement process which covered every element of the business: manufacture, stock, supply, storage and staffing.

Vickers is a speciality chemical manufacturer based near Leeds. It has 23 employees and a £2 million turnover. The company makes solutions for the water industry and for biomedical devices such as contact lenses. Due to the large size of the company's product range and growing levels of business, Vickers had found that stock levels, pack sizes, work-flow and team structure all needed to be reorganised.

Finished goods were categorised by frequency of picking and stored accordingly, reducing picking travelling distances by 25 per cent and increasing storage space by half. Packs were

rationalised into generic sizes, allowing greater visibility and reducing labelling and repacking time. In addition, a make-to-order process was established for top selling products, enabling the company to deliver to customers within 24 hours of order receipt.

A just in time process was introduced with a new packaging supplier, which increased 'on time in full' delivery performance by almost a third to 97 per cent. In addition, packaging storage arrangements were changed, introducing a first-in first-out principle, which further improved usage of space.

The logistical improvements were accompanied by organisational changes which included multi-skilling, one-team working, a reserve hours system which boosts basic pay in return for occasional unpaid overtime, and fortnightly all-staff meetings.

Vickers Laboratories Operations Manager, Steve Foster, said: "The introduction of lean manufacturing has had a threefold benefit: it has improved our customer service, raised our productivity and saved costs. In addition, every employee is clear about what we're trying to do and their part in helping to achieve it".

www.mas.dti.gov.uk



U.K. Methods-Time Measurement Association (2000) Limited

Dear Reader,

We offer training and consultancy skills in all areas of work planning and design, methods change and work measurement. For this, we depend on proven systems whose foundations were laid some sixty years ago, and whose proven philosophies and accuracy of result have been practised worldwide ever since, with new systems added to meet the needs of today's manufacturing and commercial institutions.

Find us on www.mtmuk.org and discover for yourself the advantages of using MTM in one of its systems to improve the real productivity of your own organization.

Our advice is free and all our instructors and approved analysts are qualified both by examination and experience.

We look forward to hearing from you.