

# Mind the Gap

If you've ever been to London and ridden on the famous Underground, you've probably seen signs like these:



While the signs are designed to keep travelers from wrenching an ankle, I believe the idea also applies to Lean Thinking.

## Mind the Gap

Here's what I mean: hold up your hand and spread your fingers wide apart. What do you see? Most likely, you're first drawn to look at your fingers, not the gaps in between.

This is how most people look at process improvement, by looking at the people working, not at the *gaps between people*.

When you take your eye off the people working and put your eye on the product or service going through the process, you quickly discover there are huge gaps between one step in the process and the next. You'll discover work products piling up between steps which only create more delay--a bigger gap.

Your lead time problems are in the gaps, not the fingers. You can make the people work faster, but you'll find that this often makes you slower, not faster, because more work piles up between steps widening the gap, not narrowing it.

## Value Stream mapping

The other sign you often see in the London Underground is a tube map:



While much more interconnected than a typical value stream map, you'll notice that the stations are quite small and the lines between them quite long.

This is true of most processes; the time between stations is much greater than the time spent in the station. As this map suggests, 95% of the time is *between* stations, not in them. If you want to reduce the time it takes to serve a customer, you have to mind the gaps.

### **If They Can Do It In Botswana...**

At the ASQ World Conference last year I happened to talk with two representatives from Botswana. They are using the tools of Lean to *mind the gap* and reduce response times of the police. They are using the benchmarks of the World Health Organization to improve healthcare.

If they can do it in Botswana then you can do it in your business.

### **Here's My Point**

Most businesses have a blind spot when it comes to the best way to accelerate their response time. Stop trying to make the people faster. Stop trying to keep the people busy when there's no reason to be busy. Stop making things customers haven't yet asked for. Focus on the line between stops.

When you do, you get an added benefit: 50% fewer defects. When you stop picking the product up and setting it down and picking it up and setting it down, you reduce the opportunity to make a mistake or miss a step. You get better products or services in half the time.

## **Mind the Gap!**

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