

Lean Leadership



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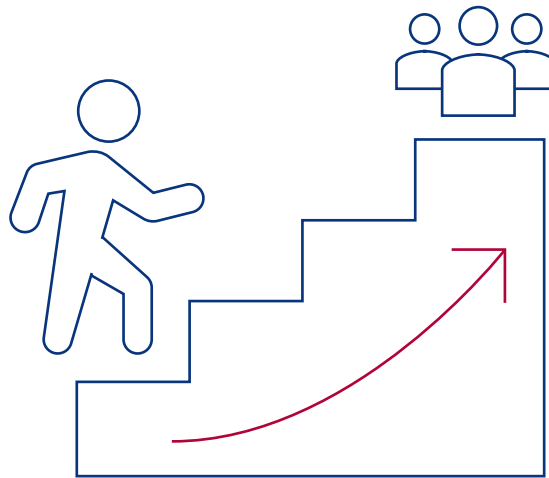
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Introduction

You as Leader, have a crucial role in The build-up & sustaining of Lean deployment at your company to create long-term sustainable results and a culture of continuous improvement.

Lean is a long-term journey that delivers short-term benefits yet requires a commitment to continuous learning and a constant strive for excellence to create long-term, sustainable business results. You as leaders have a key role of 'role modelling' and coaching your people towards this Lean mind-set.



1. Leaders KAIZEN™

Leaders have a key role of “role modelling” and coaching people

Leaders KAIZEN™ (LK) is guiding senior leaders/middle management and leadership teams in their role as Lean Leader with focus on how to deploy & cascade strategic objectives in the organisation and to empower & motivate their teams through coaching, inquisitive leadership and “Go See”.

Leaders KAIZEN™ is a key enabler for aligning the organisations vision and strategy to set breakthrough improvement priorities and implementation resulting in bottom-line business results.

As a leader, you are **a role model for exhibiting the Lean Leadership mind-set & behaviours.**




What does this mean in practice?

2. The role as a leader

Many organisations fail on their Lean journey due to lack of management commitment.

**“Only STRONG management leadership will get the organization on the new path ...
...I utilized my authority to the fullest extent.”**



Taiichi Ohno
“Evolution of the Toyota Production System”

Learning Effort:

Leadership Commitment

All successful Lean Transformations are characterized by COMMITED Leadership & Middle Management who demonstrate role model behavior by participating in Daily Kaizen and enabling successful Kaizen Events

Your role as a leader is to

- Execute your role as part of the bigger picture, overseeing the overall end-to-end, cross functional process with focus on end-customer and business results
- Lead by example: demonstrate the Lean Leadership principles and behaviours (see details below)
- State and communicate clearly the direction - the “what”; convey the purpose & inspiration - the “why” and let your teams develop the “how”
- Promote creativity and teamwork. Support and develop autonomous teams by creating an environment of trust, respect and empowerment build upon intrinsic motivation

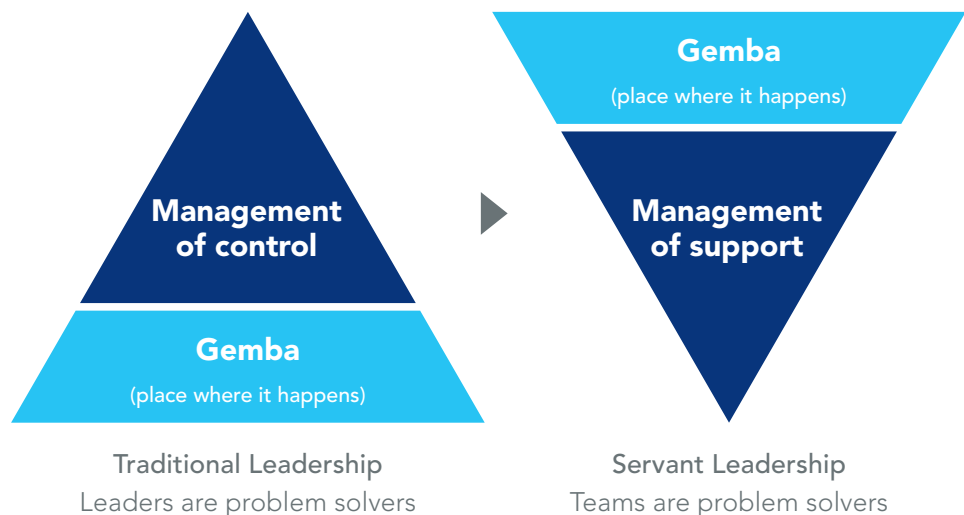
3. What is expected from a Lean Leader

Significant change does not happen by chance. It starts with a conscious decision to change the way of working resulting in changed habits which become part of the new culture.

Changes start with a conscious decision to change the way of working

As mentioned before, Lean is more than tools & techniques. It is a mind-set. It shows-up in our daily interactions with each other & how we work.

Below you see a visualisation of traditional leadership versus Lean leadership.



The left-hand side is a representation of **traditional leadership**, meaning “command and control” where leadership is ‘telling’ the why, what and how results are achieved, implying there is little room for the teams at the different levels in the organisation to take responsibility and decisions. Leaders spend a lot of time on “fire-fighting”.

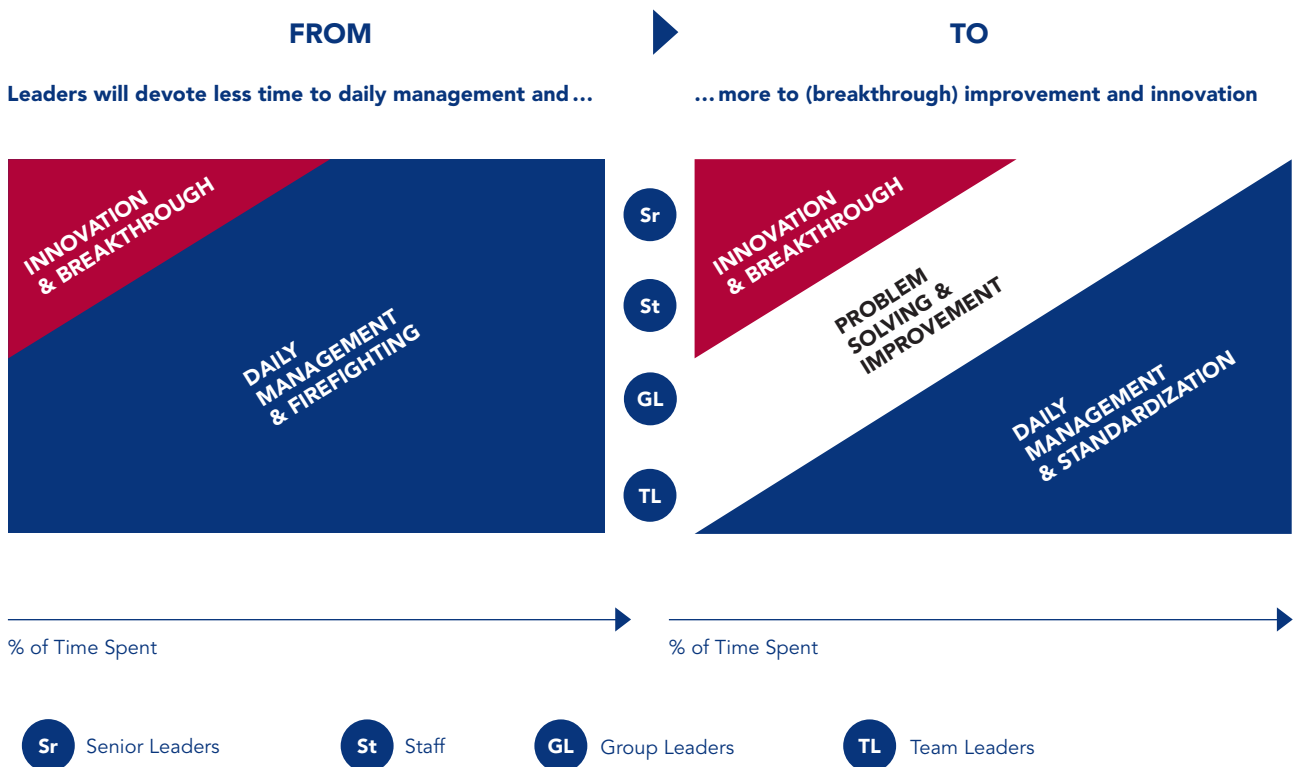
The right-hand side is a representation of **Lean leadership**, meaning “servant leadership” where leadership is setting clear direction on the strategy & strategic objectives yet empowers the teams at the different levels in the organisation to take their own decision on how to execute actions required to reach those targets. Hence why the pyramid is visually flipped; it shows how leadership is “supporting” the organisation yet not telling what needs to be done to reach the strategic objectives. The power of the flipped pyramid lies in creating capabilities & competencies in your organisation, so teams & individuals can respond quickly & autonomously on the constant changes in the internal and external environment.

3. What is expected from a Lean Leader

How to flip the pyramid and what does this imply for the way of working of leadership?

- Traditional leadership does a lot of firefighting and does a lot of mitigation of issues popping up
- The Lean way of working changes your daily agenda. Leaders will spend more time on strategy definition & deploying, (coaching for) problem solving and much less day-to-day activities running the business. These activities are empowered to the teams

The way this is distributed depends on the level of leadership in the organisation.



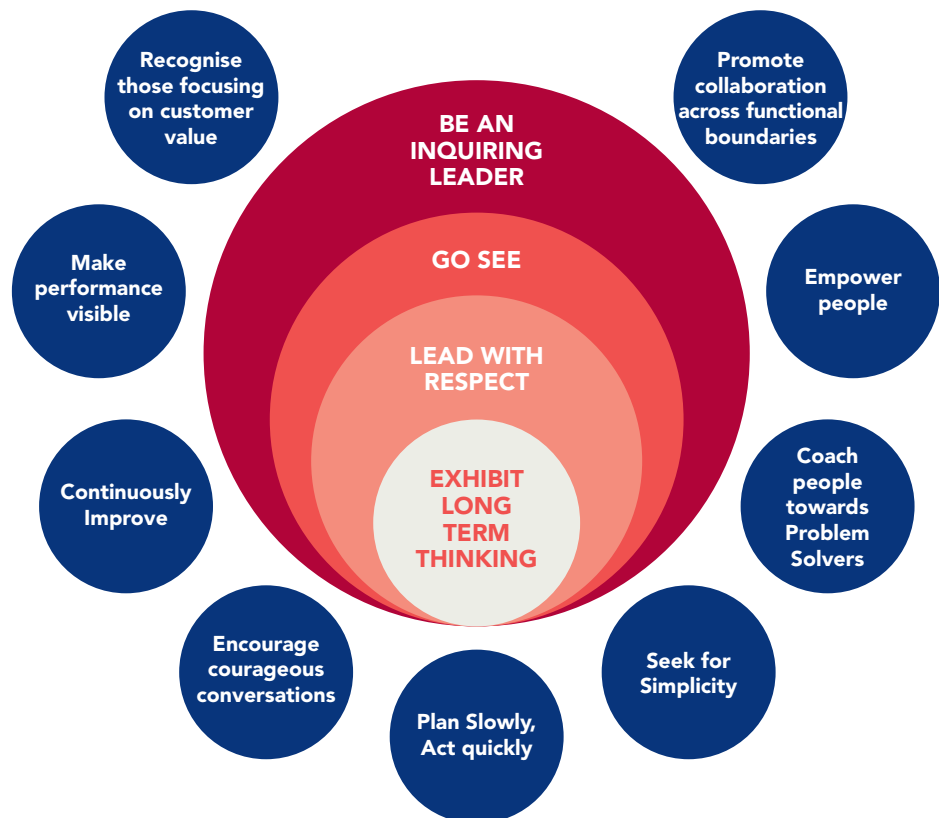
This of course does not happen overnight. This impacts your leadership style and your teams, whom you will need their support to gain the required capabilities and competencies.

Below you see some of the core Lean principles and behaviours, which will help you as leader to flip the pyramid, leading your teams in a **"servant leadership"** way.

4. Lean Leadership behavioural elements

Becoming a Lean Leader starts with a long-term view, setting the direction and creating empowered, autonomous teams for execution. The Lean way is to **go to your teams and see** how they operate for yourself. **Ask questions, listen and observe.** This set of behaviours will guide you to becoming a Lean leader and achieving the results. This set of behaviours is universal and is **at the heart of Lean Leadership.**

The Lean leadership “lotus flower” below describes the key behavioural elements helping you to become a Lean leader.



- At the core, it starts with setting the direction, “**exhibiting Long Term Thinking**”, where strategies, focus and priorities are set, communicated and followed through. This is key to ensure your “flipped pyramid” is stable. If your pyramid will become unstable and your organization will have no clarity on what to do and why
- You emphasize the company values and the boundaries in which the organization operates in a respectful way - “**Lead with Respect**” - being humble and open for the knowledge & ideas of the people in your organisation. Support and develop your teams by creating an environment of trust, respect and delivery through empowerment & employee development

- **“Go See”** as part of leading with Respect, meaning showing interest in what and how people deliver at their workplace and to motivate people to confirm the goals are understood & successfully translated; to motivate people
- Lead through understanding, not as a knower yet as a learner means being an **“Inquiring Leader”**. You stimulate people to think and decide for themselves with respect to running the business without telling them what to do. You ‘listen’ to the people, ask question

To reach the red circle, some key elements are required, which are the blue circles.

2 elements are extremely important to focus on as a Lean leader

Looking at a Lean way of working, 2 elements are extremely important as a leader to focus on: Focus on the customer and promoting end-to-end element, cross functional thinking, which are the top left and top right blue elements of the lotus flower.

- **“Recognise those focusing on Customer Value”** means in essence: do not promote firefighting; yet recognise those people setting up the structure and processes in a sustainable way so customer value can be created in a “continuous” way
- This can only be done if performance is visible, **“Make Performance Visible”**, in a constant way by all people involved in the value chain. As leader this means you ‘lead by understanding’ and create an open and honest environment, allow transparency about mistakes, where mistakes are opportunities to learn and improve
- This implies a mindset of **“Continuous Improvement”**, where ‘red’ performance is improved step by step and stabilised in a sustainable way – so not just containments. Where we also challenge ‘green’ performance: if targets should not be set higher to delight our customers, to identify new ways to create value for our customers and to create customer value in an effective & efficient way
- As mentioned, all of this can only take place in an open and honest environment, where leadership **“Encourages Courageous Conversations”**, where different opinions are valued in a respectful way with the focus on continuous learning and continuous performance improvement

**“Empower People”
to improve and take
decisions within
the boundaries of their
area of responsibility**

- **“Promote collaboration across functional boundaries”** is key to create a Lean culture where we move from a functional way of working – vertical - towards an end-to-end value stream approach - horizontal. Leadership has a key role to ‘lead by understanding’ the impact of the functions left and right of your area of responsibility ensuring clarity and alignment across the functional boundaries
- Even more, you **“Empower People”** to improve and take decisions within the boundaries of their area of responsibility, meaning you as leader give them the ‘freedom’ to come up with their own solutions, even if these are not the ones you thought of!
- This will not happen by chance. You as a leader **“Coach People towards Problem Solving”**, again not telling people what to do yet coaching and guiding people towards creating their own solutions, based on a deep understanding of underlying issues & root causes, and ways of working
- **“Seek for Simplicity”**, especially in an environment where products and requirements can be extremely complex, this does not automatically imply that processes need to be overcomplicated

All of this requires from leadership focus and patience, which is incorporated in

- **“Plan Slowly, Act Quickly”**, underlying the importance of good stakeholder management, tailored communication, constant focus on “supporting” people & teams to develop themselves creating a culture of continuous learning and structured & sustainable performance improvement, focusing on creating customer value in a cross-functional, value stream-oriented way.

5. Summary

This does not happen overnight and requires ingraining new routines in your daily way of working. The consequent application of these routines will result into new habits which at the end will create a culture where the Lean way of working is part of the DNA of the organisation.

**Living the Lean way
of working
as leader speeds
up decision-making
processes**

The desired Lean culture is where leaders & employees have more control over what they do and the processes they lead & perform. Living the Lean way of working as leader will not only make all of us more able to improve, yet also speed up our decision-making processes resulting in better business results & customers satisfaction.

**Good luck on your journey towards
Lean Leadership!**



Kaizen Institute, Ltd.
Global Operations

Bahnhofplatz
6300 Zug
Switzerland

Phone +41 (0) 41 725 42 80

ki@kaizen.com
www.kaizen.com



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