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Continuous Improvement (CI)

Advancing operational excellence in the University through team based, tested methodologies

Our processes will be efficient, visible, and understandable and will deliver the required outcome. The value of CI will be measurable and clearly understood at all levels of the University. Our processes will be easily understood by anyone and every step in the process will add value. It will be possible to take on interdisciplinary projects as everyone will have a common framework and a customer focus. The processes will be run by active teams who seek to continually improve them and the value of that teamwork will be recognised. There will be strong external testimony for UCC as an 'easy' university to engage with.



Strategic Context

The University strategic Plan 2013 – 2017 sets five high level goals. The first four of these focus naturally on goals which are close to the mission of the university namely;

1. Delivering research-inspired teaching and learning with world class student experience.
2. Being a premier European university for research, discovery, innovation and commercialisation.
3. Being pre-eminent in internationalisation, external engagement and contribution to society.
4. Applying best international practice to attract, develop and retain staff of the highest quality and to enable all staff to reach their full potential.

The fifth goal recognises that these (first four goals) cannot be delivered without support. Thus the fifth goal states;

5. Strengthen our infrastructure and resource base.



The Lean initiative sits squarely under Goal 5 and is designated as project number 21 in the Strategic Plan

Project 21's goal is to;

Introduce and apply structured Lean practices to the key enabling processes of the University to ensure optimum efficiency, effectiveness, agility and responsiveness to internal and external needs; prioritise the application of Lean to the programme approval, financial management, intellectual property and contracts process.

Thus Lean is an enabling initiative designed to help build capacity in the University to free resources to deliver on its teaching and research goals. It focuses on processes and on promoting incremental change to achieve its results. Lean, enabled by project management training, is part of the Continuous Improvement initiative which began in 2014. Progress to date regarding training is detailed on the website.

The terms Lean and Continuous Improvement (CI) are used interchangeably throughout this document. A Continuous Improvement Steering Group was established, mandated by UMTO, to develop the CI/Lean strategy and vision for UCC (see Appendix 1 for Steering Group membership).



Vision: What will CI look like in UCC once embedded?

Processes will have changed for the better

Key administrative processes in the University will be more efficient. Processes will be of a high quality and will yield the desired outcome. Processes will be visible, easily understood and every process step will add value. The processes will be run by active teams who seek to continually improve them and the value of that teamwork will be recognised.

Lean will be the Norm

CI will be the normal methodology for approaching most processes – ‘that’s just how we get things done around here’. At least three CI tools will be understood and used by everyone. It will be possible to take on interdisciplinary projects as everyone will have a common framework, a customer focus and be used to working as a team. All new projects will be reviewed from a CI perspective at the earliest stage.

Communication will be two way

A CI website will be informative, up to date and its contents will be highly rated. The website will be consulted regularly by staff. All staff will be aware of the initiative and will be able to cite a number of successful Lean projects. There will have been a number of press articles on UCC and CI. An active green belt forum will support and guide participants. The value of CI will be measurable and clearly understood at all levels of the University. Staff will know who the CI specialists are and where they are located. Communication will be two way via all media.

Staff Development and Recognition

In excess of 30% of support staff will have completed CI training with a green belt in every unit and a number of black belts in place to support organisation wide initiatives. Success will be celebrated in the form of staff recognition awards or a CI annual event. Having CI experience will be seen as valuable for career progression. Whilst CI will be focused on the administrative processes any staff member from other categories who wish to participate in training will be encouraged to do so.

Active Sponsors/Champions

There will be strong sponsor engagement with senior managers able to make a CI ‘elevator pitch’ for projects in their areas. All UMTS members will be actively engaged as sponsors to CI projects. UMTO will be aware of the pipeline of CI projects and support them with the creation of dedicated CI resource rooms. Black belt expertise will be available in-house to support project groups.

Enhanced Reputation

There will be strong external testimony on UCC as an ‘easy’ university to engage with. UCC will be regarded as a reference site for CI with a strong portfolio of local and cross functional projects. CI will generate innovation in how UCC provides services. UCC will be a flagship CI university.

Benefits

The student centred approach to service provision will be underpinned by efficient processes. Genuine improvements will enhance both the student and staff experience with a more team based, less hierarchical, more collaborative approach to work and innovation. Essentially, through CI, UCC should achieve the gold standard in information provision and services which all staff, students and alumni can engage with.



Where did we start?

Work to date on introducing continuous improvement methodologies into Universities has shown that most success will be achieved by harnessing the initiative of early adopters. The following areas have been actively adopting CI/Lean processes since 2014:

- IT Services
- Registrar's Office
- Finance Office
- Medicine & Health

These pilot areas have identified their training targets up to 2017. Other interested areas will find details of the website on how to engage with the CI/Lean initiative and how to access training opportunities.



What can we achieve by 2017?

Not all elements of the vision set out above will be achieved by 2017. Rather, the aim is to gather experience, build capacity, develop a community of trained practitioners and demonstrate the benefit of CI through selected projects.

The targets for each of the pilot areas are set out in Appendix 2 with the overall targets outlined below.

Overall Targets

	2015	2016	2017	Total
Training Targets				
White Belts	44	41	41	126
Yellow Belts	39	28	28	95
Green Belts	25	10	9	44
Accreditation Projects				
	26	11	11	48
Functional Projects				
	11	21	22	54
Cross-functional Projects				
	5	7	8	20



Sustaining CI/Lean

Communication

Since implementing a Continuous Improvement programme usually involves changing human behaviour, it is critical to include a carefully constructed communication plan that identifies and addresses concerns. Initiating transformation of any magnitude across the University requires meaningful dialogue with staff, colleagues and the student body. CI/Lean sponsors and project group leaders must communicate early and often – clearly conveying the vision, strategies and benefits for all concerned. UMTO and UMTS will receive regular reports on all ongoing projects. The CI/Lean website will highlight project successes, signpost supports available to staff and detail the progress being made with continuous improvement initiatives.

The website will also contain the following sections:

- CI/Lean Toolkit – Central repository for agreed UCC CI tools and documents.
- Success Stories – Success will be celebrated by publicising success stories and providing details of other celebratory events such as staff recognition awards or other CI events.
- Frequently asked questions (FAQs).
- Branding: The CI/Lean logo – A visual identity will add impetus and help increase visibility of the overall project.



Figure 1.0 – UCC CI visual identity

Facilitation

It is anticipated that input from expert black belt Lean practitioners will be required to guide and advise on projects. The limited research done in universities to date has shown that facilitation is required to help staff advance. It is proposed that key project groups would have support from an expert black belt practitioner as required.

Sustainability

By 2017 the University will have had considerable experience with Continuous Improvement projects and will have a greater understanding of how CI fits with the UCC culture. It might seem too early to discuss sustainability but experience in other universities and institutions has shown that issues such as sponsorship of CI at senior level, building expertise and embedding the CI mindset need to be addressed from the beginning. The 'invisible' part of the Lean Iceberg Model [see figure 2.0 below] shows that the visible aspects of CI (Processes, Technology, Tools and Techniques) are enabled by the elements under the waterline namely Strategy and Alignment, Leadership and Behaviour and Engagement. Ensuring that these elements are included in the roadmap increases the chances of success for the CI/Lean initiative.

It is now vital that the University is committed to support projects and staff as they learn these techniques and that communication and engagement with the University community is in a structured and constructive way.

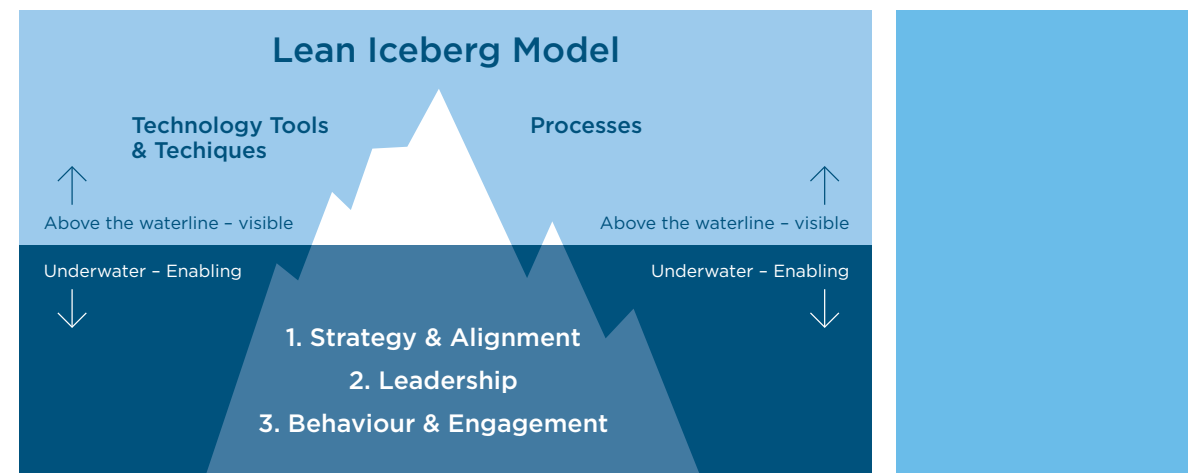


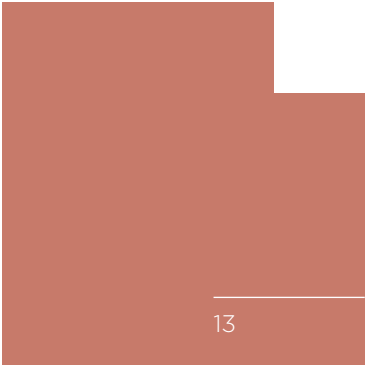
Figure 2.0 – Hines P. *et al* (2008) Staying Lean: Thriving not just surviving pg. 9. Lean Enterprise Research Centre, Cardiff University



Appendix 1

Continuous Improvement/Lean Steering Group

Ms Verdi Ahern	Student Experience
Ms Adrienne Buckley	Finance Office
Ms Mary Byrne	College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences
Mr Ger Culley	Information Services
Ms Sylvia Curran	Department of Human Resources
Ms Margo Hill	Exams & Records Office
Mr Gary Hurley	International Education Office
Professor Alan Kelly	Food & Nutritional Sciences
Dr Maeve Lankford	Department of Human Resources
Ms Niamh McGettrick Cronin	Office of Buildings & Estates
Mr John McNulty	Systems Administration, Registrar's Office
Ms Mary McSweeney	UCC Academy Ltd
Mr Tom Murphy	Strategic Planning Office
Ms Kathryn Neville	College of Medicine & Health
Dr Rónán Ó Dubhghaill	VP for External Relations (Chair)
Mr Tom O'Grady	Tyndall National Institute
Dr Seamus O'Reilly	Food Business & Development
Dr David Sammon	Accounting Finance & Information Services
Professor Eileen Savage	Nursing & Midwifery
Mark Stanton	Students' Union President



Appendix 2

Targets for each of the four pilot areas who will promote Lean

Finance Office

	2015	2016	2017	Total
Training Targets				
White Belts	6	5	5	16
Yellow Belts	16	5	5	26
Green Belts	9	2	2	13
Accreditation Projects				
	9	2	2	13
Functional Projects				
	4	6	8	18
Cross-functional Projects				
	1	1	1	3

Registrar's Office

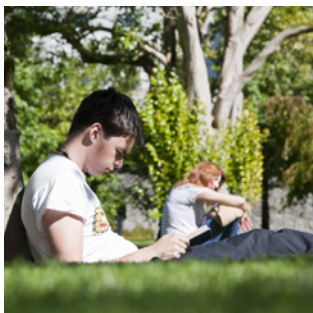
	2015	2016	2017	Total
Training Targets				
White Belts	8	6	6	20
Yellow Belts	9	5	5	19
Green Belts	4	2	1	7
Accreditation Projects				
	4	2	1	7
Functional Projects				
	3	7	10	20
Cross-functional Projects				
	1	2	2	5

College of Medicine & Health

	2015	2016	2017	Total
Training Targets				
White Belts	20	20	20	60
Yellow Belts	10	15	15	40
Green Belts	10	5	5	20
Accreditation/Certification Projects				
	10	5	5	20
Functional Projects				
	3	6	2	11
Cross-functional Projects				
	1	2	3	6

IT Services

	2015	2016	2017	Total
Training Targets				
White Belts	10	10	10	30
Yellow Belts	4	3	3	10
Green Belts	2	1	1	4
Accreditation Projects				
	3	2	3	8
Functional Projects				
	1	2	2	5
Cross-functional Projects				
	2	2	2	6



For further information
please contact:

Dr Rónán Ó Dubhghaill

Email: r.odubhghaill@ucc.ie

Telephone: **021 4903610**

