

# LEAN OFFICE AT A CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents the initial efforts of a construction company to implement the Lean philosophy at their main office. The company has reaped many benefits from the Lean philosophy at its construction sites but it realized that the office was left behind in the process and needed to catch up to sustain the gains reached by site operations. In order to engage the office personnel in a Lean Office initiative, the first step was to disseminate the Lean philosophy in a seminar and brainstorm possible actions to be taken at the office. After that, participants visited one of the company's construction sites to see how the concepts, principles and tools presented at the seminar are used at the site. The process of payment was chosen to be the pilot project for the Lean Office initiative because it was deemed to require urgent action due to its importance to the construction site activities as well as because of the time and effort it demanded from the office personnel. The company expects to reduce the time to process bills and make payments, to reduce the incidence of rework, and to discipline site engineers, construction managers, and suppliers about the new processes to sustain the gains throughout time.

## KEY WORDS

Lean office, invoice, payment.

## INTRODUCTION

The literature presents numerous examples of the application of the Lean Thinking in construction sites (e.g., Barros Neto et al. 2006, Kemmer et al. 2006, 2008) and the gains obtained with the changes based on Lean concepts, principles, and tools. However, the study of the administrative flows that happen inside a company's office and between the office and its construction sites is often overlooked.

Lareau (2003) suggests that there are three levels of administrative processes in a construction company: micro-, macro-, and mega-processes. According to the same author, the micro-processes are related to daily activities and deals with questions such as "how can we reduce orders lead times?" or "how can we reduce the customer service lead time?" Regarding the macro-processes, Lareau suggests that they are

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