

Lean Statements Background & Approach

July 2024



Background

Purpose: Advance and evolve how we think and talk about Lean.

Method: A sub-group of the “Lean for the 21st Century” initiative was formed to discuss and propose an approach

Reason/Urgency:

Lean’s relevance has seemingly declined due to:

- The term “lean” is a questionable fit
- Japanese terminology can exclude people and be too conceptual, leading to various definitions of the same term
- Lean is nuanced and complex
- Lean has been pigeonholed to manufacturing

Audience: colleagues and others in the lean community

Gap

Ideal: perfectly accurate, complete, and articulated definition for Lean

Actual: an understanding that is and will remain imperfect and constantly evolving

PROBLEM: Variation in understanding and describing Lean acts as a barrier to improvement.

Since *The Machine* was published, Lean literature has increased in quantity and scope. The focus has gone from tools, to management and leadership, to culture; and the scope has expanded beyond manufacturing. **Consequently, our practices / methods and understanding has changed over time.**

However, as we have learned, the knowledge itself has also changed. **The original source of truth, Toyota, has evolved.**

Finally, the number of consultants, practitioners, academics and others proclaiming the word of Lean has grown exponentially, while collaboration among these groups has been minimal. Each defines Lean based on their own experiences. **Individuals understanding increases as their exposure increases.**

PROPOSAL / OBJECTIVE?: Evolve the language we use to describe these ideas and build consensus.

HOW: Establish a process for committed group of people to stay in dialogue, to continually check and adjust the language we use.



Activity

A small sub-group was established in December 2023 from the Lean for the 21st Century larger working group.

We have:

- **Evolved the work** through individual contributions and collaboration, including sharing thoughts, reviewing for completeness, providing feedback, asking clarifying questions, and engaging in discussion.
- **Utilized AI** to summarize and synthesize concepts
- **Developed a proposed** collection of statements for consensus to evolve the language we use when talking about Lean.



Path

*Using a **combination of individual and group work**, ideas were drafted and discussed to advance the work.*

1. Gathered existing information (prior definitions, models, ancillary approaches) in a shared location to start discussions
2. Discussed ideal models and definitions which led to a “**This yet That**” format
3. Through **catchball** between individuals and the group, developed paradox statements
4. Shared our approach and gathered input from a **wider audience** of LEI Summit attendees
5. **Incorporated AI** to synthesize thoughts
6. Introduced the concept of **driving curiosity** through the growing depth of each statement level, allowing the audience to dig deeper as they advance
7. Today: Seeking consensus from the Advisory Group on the approach and **direction forward**



Approach

The sub-group vacillated between an overarching statement and a list of paradoxes: Lean is this . . . Yet that . . . Statements.

We created a **collection of statements that would increase the depth** of explanation as one reads. Each level is designed to provide explanation exposing deeper insight yet evoke a desire to learn more. We have proposed:

- A **vision statement** distilling the key elements of the overarching statement that provides a memorable phrase yet conveys the power of Lean.
- An **overarching statement** with additional key points. It's meant to be accessible, aspirational, and anchored in Lean's key principles while emphasizing its transformative, future-oriented nature. This statement is supported by **key points** that further explain the elements of the overarching statement.
- A list of **paradoxes statements** that illustrate the perceived contradictions in Lean thinking and practice. These statements challenge the assumption that two opposing objectives cannot be met simultaneously.