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supports overall
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PLAYING THE WAITING GAME

Lily Tomlin asked the audience in her 1975 Saturday Night Live monologue, “How come when you’re *last* in a line that isn’t moving, and someone comes and stands behind you, you feel a **lot better?**”

Waiting. No one enjoys waiting. Think about when you book a flight. If you want to save time on waiting in line, you are willing to pay to get in the airport’s pre-check line. You buy advanced tickets to the movies. You may even pay to not stand in line at theme parks. Time is money and money is used to pay for less waiting time daily. So, what can we do to eliminate wastes other than throwing money at the problem? How do we play the waiting game and win?

As one of the eight wastes of lean, waiting is a frustrating waste to work with. If you consider waiting in a line you may see the impatience and sometimes the anger and frustration building in the people waiting in the line. In business, waiting to make decisions or to obtain

necessary parts for a project can cause losing the confidence of a customer and their business. It can also cause lack of confidence of your upper management and of the team supporting the project.

Whether we want it or not, we expect some sort of time to be waiting. We just don’t want to wait for what we or our organization need whether it’s waiting on the arrival for a part and especially for a decision to be made. Part delays are sometimes out of the hands of the organization when there is a single source for the part, but decisions are different. Good, bad, or indifferent, a decision can be made. The challenge is getting enough data, information, and especially knowledge to make or advise someone on the decision to make. When decisions are delayed or not made, a process can come to a halt.

Making the decision really comes down to how confident the person is in themselves and their knowledge and understanding of the process or project to make the decision. If they don’t make the decision, the waiting continues causing delays further down the line of the process. The process could also come to a halt and

with that, the process or project cancelled.

So, how can you improve your decision-making to reduce the waiting time in the rest of the process or even just the next step in your process?

Write down what you know. When you write what you know it helps to set aside those items so you can quit thinking about them. It prevents wasting time on revisiting those items and not getting anywhere in your decision-making.

Write down what you don't know. Writing down what you don't know may seem counterintuitive, but it can help you track your thoughts, so you discuss them with others.

Brainstorm with your team. By sharing your decision-making challenges with your team through brainstorming, you are sharing with your team where your concerns are and giving them unspoken cues to allow them to share ideas. You are showing you trust your team's experience and their capability to problem solve. You are also sharing the explicit knowledge you have allowing them to work with everything you have to make the best decision with minimal time spent. By sharing your thoughts and ideas with your team, and the timeline to make the decision, it builds your team up for the challenge to make the decision and reduce any further waiting.

Talk to someone who managed a similar project. This is something that if not done before starting the project may become a lesson



learned for you later. When you talk about your decision-making challenge, if this was something that had to be decided in the prior project, find out how the priorities were set and what other insight they had to make the decision. What did they know that you don't? Was the decision made as part of the planning process?

Once you've done all of this, you may find out that no one is sure what the best decision is and to prevent waiting any longer, make your

decision. It may not be the 100% solution, but you've gone through the thought process, have deadlines to meet, and the wasted time spent waiting may cause more harm than good.

By sharing knowledge at the onset of the project and as needed during a project, wait times are lessened. While it would be a perfect world if every leader or manager had the requisite knowledge and insight to make decisions the moment they are needed to be made, it's not a guarantee. While elimination of wait times may not be possible, it is possible to reduce the wait times enough so there is not a negative affect to the overall process or project.

Remember that working though a decision doesn't have to be done on your own. Include your team or others experienced in the process to share their experience and know-how. By involving others in the decision-making process, you minimize the waiting game and the frustration. ■

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