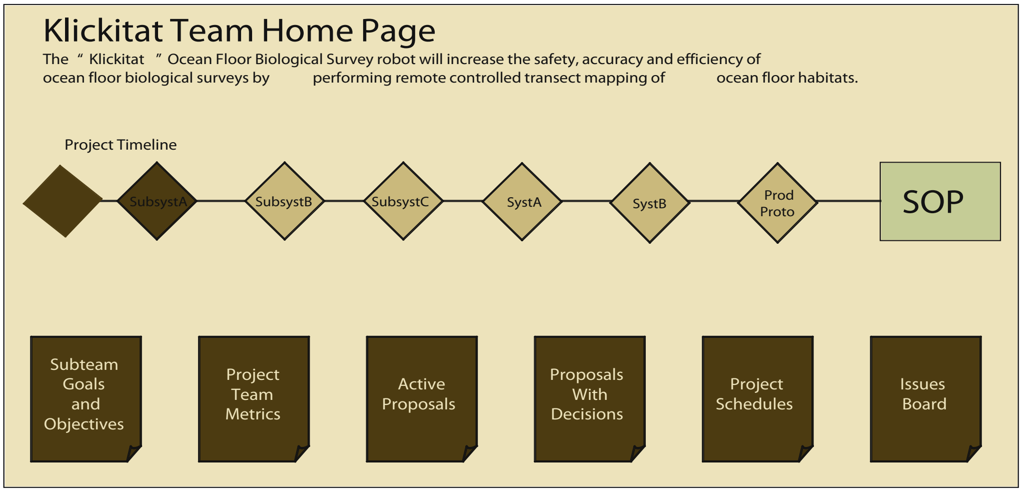
Lean Meetings

Spend less time in meetings to spend more time creating customer value.

by Katherine Radeka



Lean Meeting Management

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Key Takeaways

- Daily stand-up meetings minimize the waste of project status reporting while improving team coordination on value-creating activities.
- "One piece flow" discussion meetings create richer discussion and minimize the waste from revisited decisions.
- Team Information "Pull" Systems can replace status meetings and email copies.

Maximize Time Spent Creating Customer Value

How much time do you spend creating customer value?

Create Customer Value	Unnecessary and Necessary Waste
Deepen knowledge about customer needs.	Create and update project schedules.
Deepen knowledge about the market.	Create and update documentation beyond the product design itself, unless the document enables later knowledge reuse.
Deepen knowledge about product technology.	Conduct meetings to give information and status updates, or to revisit decisions.
Deepen knowledge about supplier capabilities.	Attend meetings to get information and status updates, or to revisit decisions.
Translate customer and market knowledge into product requirements.	Obtain or give approval signatures.
Translate technical knowledge into product designs and tooling.	
Translate supplier knowledge into partnerships.	

In 1991, Takahiro Fujomoto and Kim Clark discovered that the average Toyota manager directly contributes customer value 80% of the time. For a typical U.S. manager, only 10% of time spent at work created customer value.

What's the difference? Toyota sees all of the activities in the right column as waste to be minimized if not eliminated - including most of the meetings conducted in a typical product development organization.

Communicate Status with Daily Stand-up Meetings

The weekly team meeting is a tradition at many companies yet few teams use that time to their best advantage. Rather than lengthy status updates, use the time to quickly update your visual project models - and then move on. Team updates should answer these questions only:

- What did I do last week?
- What am I going to do next week?
- What's in my way?

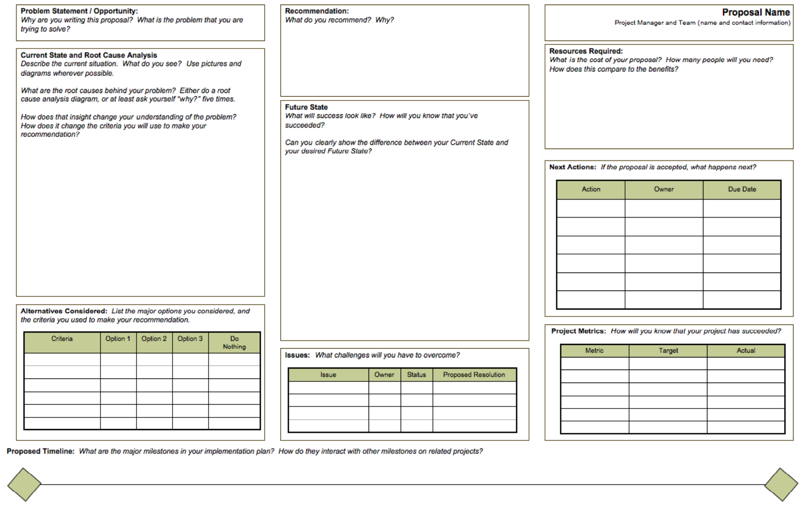
Add issues that arise to the issues board - but do not attempt to resolve them here. Instead, set a time to pull together only those people who need to be involved in the resolution. Some teams set aside a separate block of time during the week for discussing proposals, resolving issues and conducting design reviews. However, each item is a separate meeting with a separate meeting invitation to a specific set of participants for a specific time. On complex projects, or at busy times, a daily update may be better. If this process takes more than fifteen minutes, either your team members are not focused on the three questions or your team is too large and needs to be organized into some subteams.

We often fall into the trap of trying to solve issues in the program update meetings. The only issues that should be solved at a team meeting are those that truly require the participation and input of the entire team. Otherwise, all of that discussion time is waste for everyone who does not need to be involved.

Use “One Piece Meeting Flow” for Discussions and Decision-Making

Why do we batch up our issues and decisions for once-weekly team meetings or once-quarterly project reviews? Why not simply take care of them as they arise?

A leaner approach is to use “one piece meeting flow.” A “one piece meeting” includes everyone who has necessary input into the decision at hand - and no one extra. The organizer sends an A3 or similar brief report ahead of time with the expectation that the attendees will read it in advance. There is no opening presentation because everyone already knows why they are there, and what they need to contribute. There is no time for email because everyone is engaged in the discussion from the beginning of the meeting.



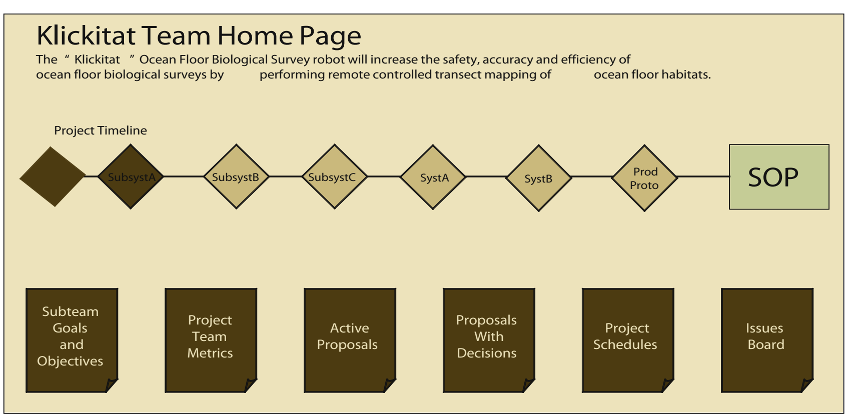
This type of meeting eliminates waste in several ways. There are no extra attendees wasting their time. The team is more likely to have everyone it needs to reach a decision, so the decision is less likely to be revisited. Finally, such meetings can end when the meeting has achieved its objective. How many meetings do you attend that actually end early?

Six Questions for Lean Meetings

- What is this meeting’s purpose and expected outcome?
- If we achieve our outcome, is this meeting going to create customer value? If not, can we eliminate it or accomplish its purpose in some other way?
- Who needs to be there? OK, now who really needs to be there, and who really just needs to know the outcome?
- What materials can we send in advance so that the participants can start creating value the moment we walk in the door?
- Who do I need to talk to 1:1 to ensure that they are ready to participate fully in the decision?
- How can we make it possible for people who did not attend to pull the results of the meeting?

Create a “Pull” System for Team Information

We spend a lot of time in meetings and processing email because it is the only way to get the information we need to do our work. Much of that time is wasted, but it’s impossible to know how much waste there is, since some of the information we receive is highly valuable.



Pull systems for information solve this problem by making it easier for people to get the information they need - when they need it, rather than on someone else’s schedule.

It is surprising to some people that Toyota and other lean companies rely heavily on written reports, especially the A3 report - all that extra documentation doesn’t seem lean at all.

But lean companies know that putting things in writing makes it possible for the reader to get the information “just in time” rather than on someone else’s schedule. That’s more efficient for both the writer and the reader.