

## What Is Lean Manufacturing?

Lean manufacturing is a systematic process that can be implemented to convert a business from one that wastes time, energy, space, and money to one that runs efficiently. Another description of lean manufacturing is using less work while still maintaining top value.

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Lean manufacturing is not a onetime process that ends after all steps are completed. Rather it is ongoing, requiring frequent checks to make sure all improvements are still in place. While it is a continuous process, the effort it takes to maintain lean manufacturing is less onerous than the work involved in keeping up disorganized, wasteful business processes.

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Two of the biggest goals in lean manufacturing are to improve quality and to eliminate waste. Improving quality involves being aware of what customers are looking for as well as continually making a product better, not just to retain customers but to gain more. Eliminating waste means getting rid of or reorganizing items and activities that waste materials or time and provide no true value to the workplace.

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Lean manufacturing includes taking note of the wastes that occur throughout the business. Only when wastes have been identified can they be dealt with. Lean manufacturing organizes waste into seven different categories:

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transport, inventory, motion, waiting, overproduction, overprocessing, and defects.

There are various ways to incorporate lean manufacturing in a workplace.

One is through the 5S system, which first targets and eliminates waste in a work area before organizing the area to be more efficient. It is probably the simplest of the lean manufacturing methods and is easy for getting everyone on the team actively involved.

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Another method is Kaizen, which Toyota is famous for using to become the booming automobile manufacturer it is today. Essentially, the Kaizen method has workers step back and study how their jobs are performed, identifying areas that could be eliminated or improved to make the process simpler and faster. As every person is involved and looking at an individual field of work, that person knows best how to target problem areas and solve them. Together, this makes an entire business run much more efficiently.

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To implement lean manufacturing in your business, you will need to prepare before introducing it to your employees. Once it is introduced, you will need to train them and make them aware of how important it is that they all work together to make lean manufacturing possible. A detailed plan will need to be drawn up for how to train workers and how to effectively integrate—and

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maintain—lean manufacturing techniques. Lean methods can work in any area of a business to help improve production and reduce waste.

