

I always talk about downstream process when I work with clients on their workflow: from concept to production, in forward motion, paying attention to bottlenecks and reverses in the workflow. But what does that really mean?

If you've ever spent any time in lean manufacturing principles you learn faster isn't necessarily better. In fact, steady wins the race in terms of completed, successful product.

To be clear, I participated in a series of labs that demonstrated the principles of lean manufacturing. Everyone in our group was given a station and a specific task to execute. Once our task was complete we were to move the product, we'll call it a "widget," on to the next station.

At the whistle we all worked as quickly as possible to move our product thru the line. After an hour, our supervisor asked us to stop to review our success. Not a single widget had been successfully created and over 50% of the work in progress failed our quality control tests.

What gives? We all worked quickly and efficiently and not a single product? Our supervisor was very displeased -- work in progress was useless inventory. Where did we go wrong?

The supervisor asked us to try again. So we doubled down and worked even faster in the next hour trying to get product out. We only managed a few products out and none of them worked. The rest of the work in progress again failed at a staggering 60%.

So we went station to station trying to find clues. It soon became apparent that not all tasks were created equally. Some tasks required more parts or time than others. Since we were all working at a feverish pace, we soon found bottlenecks in the workflow.

Working faster created more problems and increased the bottlenecks that put pressure on those respective stations. The operators with the bottlenecks felt rushed to catch up and did not complete their tasks correctly.

So in the next lab, we modified two aspects of the workflow. We slowed down being extremely careful to execute our tasks correctly AND we did not advance our product to the next station until the next station was ready for it.

The outcome, a significant increase in completed functional products!

Additionally, quality control tested early in the workflow as opposed to the very end of the workflow allowed us to intercede without wasting a lot of time. Let's face it, when

you catch a problem at the bitter end of the workflow, you know you will have to put things "in reverse" sometimes starting all over again.

Tinkering with quality control checks throughout our workflow also increased the successful production of product.

You know the old adage,

“you never have enough time to do it right, but you always have time to do it over”

This may be the unspoken truth in most organizations, but let me ask you this, are you making any money?

Wasted time = wasted profit