

HRMWE Research Seminar Series 2014-2015

Lean Systems in the UK Civil Service

Wednesday 26th November 2014

4:00 - 5:30pm, Room 2.05

Delivered by

Douglas Martin

(University of Central Lancashire)



Abstract

Lean production systems have been subject to conflicting interpretations. On the one hand, lean is seen as a business improvement approach that has the potential to increase organizational efficiency through engaging the workforce in a process of continuous improvement. By contrast, others argue that lean is premised on exerting increased control over the workforce utilising workers' knowledge against their own interests. This presentation will present research into lean systems in the UK Civil Service exploring how lean is applied in the specific context of that organization.

The research found that whilst lean was premised on a regime of increased control over the workforce, the ways in which lean was used by management in the UK Civil Service were inconsistent and partial. The presentation will illustrate how lean was applied to fit the specific and distinct context of the Civil Service. Its application reflected the political economy of work at the level of the workplace rather than simply view the tools of lean as neutral management techniques. The presentation will explore how a "productive model" approach can assist in understanding how lean was used to elicit greater control over the state labour process within the current economic and political context of government.

The way that lean was used had significant impact on the skills of the civil servants and the relationship between the workforce's trade union and Civil Service management.

The research was undertaken through semi-structured interviews with PCS trade union members working in local offices primarily in the Department of Work and Pensions and HM Revenue and Customs.

About the Speaker

Douglas Martin is a lecturer in Human Resource Management at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston and is completing his PhD in the area of lean working in the Civil Service and the trade union response. Douglas previously worked in the Civil Service for 20 years where he was an active trade union member and steward.