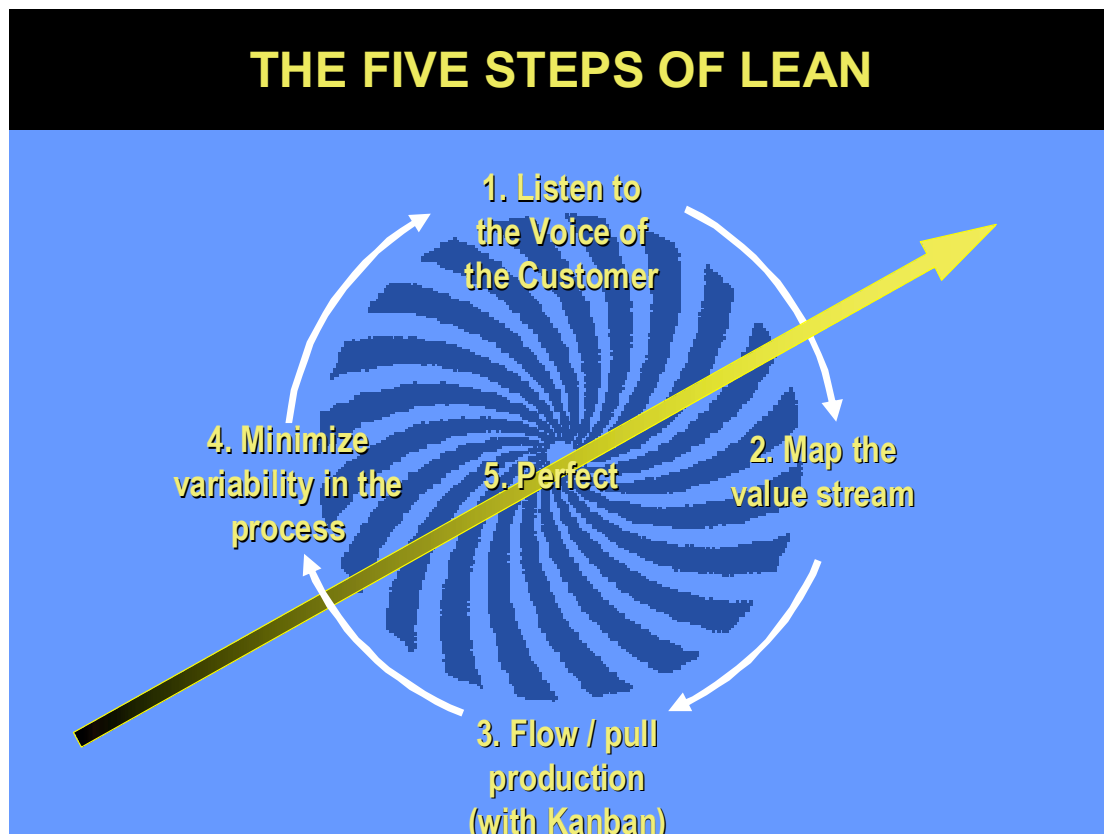




IS AN EMPTY SUPERMARKET GOOD OR BAD?

The arrival of Lean Production, in particular the (positive) impact of Value Stream Mapping, has pushed Kanban into the background. Today Kanban is seen mainly as a card or container system to replenish an inventory called a “supermarket”, which decouples two production stages which do not run at the same rate.

This perception is fundamentally flawed. Kanban still retains its place at the heart of Lean, as Step No. 3. Its objective is to tighten flows to reveal non-Quality problems, thus providing input to Step No. 4 of Lean: minimizing process variability:



The term “supermarket” is the problem: it’s “the location where a predetermined standard inventory is kept to supply downstream processes” (Lean Lexicon, www.lean.org). Supermarket implies plentitude, availability, comfort. This is the opposite of Lean thinking, which implies a limited amount, customer call-offs, and tightening flows.

A Kanban stock—a supermarket—is good not because of the availability of parts but because it reveals the inventory required to cover non-Quality problems hidden in the process. So a “predetermined level of inventory” is not either standard or good: it’s a level to be **reduced**, by removing

regularly a Kanban card or container or square, which will tighten flows and reveal to everyone the next non-Quality problem to be solved.



So the “standard” inventory level for Lean is “one less at a time”, a phrase coined by Bill Sandras of Productivity Centers International (<http://pciconsulting.home.att.net>). He also explains the two types of Kanban—Brand-Name for repetitive products, Generic for non-repetitive products.

Much more than a two-bin replenishment system, **Kanban gives us the power to introduce change into our company culture**. If you’re fast to react to change, you can take out a Kanban each wheel. If your culture reacts more slowly, you can take out a Kanban and reduce your inventory protective blanket every two weeks or once a month.

So a supermarket—or a Kanban stock—is good, because it shows how much waste is hidden in the process. But it’s bad because it’s inventory! Being able to deliver on time **without** any Kanban inventory is the best, because it means we have minimized process variability and solved non-Quality problems.

To help understand and use the brilliant Lean technology, we have written about 40% of our Technical Newsletters on its different facets. The list may be found below. If you would like to obtain some or all of them, let us know by e-mail and we’ll send you the link for downloading.

N°	date	titre français	titre anglais
16	8 février 2004	TRS n'est pas Production	Not Available
18	16 avril 2004	EN JETANT LE BEBE AVEC L'EAU DU BAIN	THROWING OUT THE BABY WITH THE BATH
21	15 juillet 2004	LES DEUX COLONNES VERTEBRALES	THE TWO ROAD MAPS
22	15 août 2004	FLEXIBILITE POUR LE CLIENT MAIS... QUANTITE ECONOMIQUE POUR LA	FLEXIBILITY FOR THE CUSTOMER AND...
23	15 septembre 2004	LA POCLETTE-SURPRISE DE LEAN	THE LEAN GRAB-BAG
26	19 décembre 2004	LEAN PRODUCTION = JUSTE-A-TEMPS MAIS EN MIEUX	LEAN PRODUCTION = JUST-IN-TIME BUT BETTER
27	15 janvier 2005	N'UTILISEZ PAS LE PROGICIEL... MONSIEUR MANQUANT EST LA!	DON'T USE THE SOFTWARE... SHORTAGE HERO IS HERE!
28	15 février 2005	TAYLOR ET LA DENTELLE	FOLLOW TAYLOR OR MAKE LACE ?
30	20 avril 2005	LEAN: RECALCULER LES BOUCLES KANBAN OU LA CAPACITE?	LEAN: RECALCULATE THE KANBANS OR THE CAPACITY?
33	15 juillet 2005	LA FREQUENCE DE REPLANIFICATION SOUS LEAN	WHAT REPLANNING FREQUENCY WITH LEAN?
36	15 octobre 2005	TIRER UN FLUX NON REPETITIF	PULLING A NON REPETITIVE FLOW
38	15 décembre 2005	RESULTATS RAPIDES AVEC LEAN	QUICK SUCCESS WITH LEAN
40	15 février 2006	LA SURCHARGE PONDERALE DES ENTREPRISES	THE OBESITY OF COMPANIES
44	15 juin 2006	LEAN MENHIR	LEAN TOMBSTONE
51	15 février 2007	REUSSIR LEAN : LES 10 SUBLITES	SUCCESS WITH LEAN : 10 TRAPS TO AVOID
53	20 avril 2007	EQUILIBRER LE PERSONNEL A L'INTERVALLE DE PRODUCTION, PAS AU	BALANCE REQUIRED PEOPLE TO THE INTERVAL,
57	16 août 2007	DECOUPER LE TEMPS POUR LISSER LE TRAVAIL ET ACCELERER...	LEAN: USING PITCH TO CUT UP TIME TO SMOOTH THE WORKLOAD
58	17 septembre 2007	UN SUPERMARCHÉ VIDE : EST-CE BON OU MAUVAIS?	IS AN EMPTY SUPERMARKET GOOD OR BAD?