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LEAN IMPROVEMENT THROUGH PROCESS MAPPING

WHITEPAPER

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Although we understand the concept of improvement, we may not have a good understanding of the need for improvement within our own organization. After all, we have processes in place that have gotten us to where we are today. We struggle at peak times with staffing, overtime, congestion and storage space, but maybe we are just at the capacity of our facility. Sometimes we need to lose our comfort level to clear the first hurdle of the improvement process and challenge ourselves to take a hard look at the way we do things today.

Lean improvement can be defined as making a process or operation better by removing wasteful practices.

Once we agree to probe our current operations to identify and reduce any “waste” in the processes, we begin to look for:

1. Redundant process steps.
2. Process steps that are of no value.
3. Process steps to be combined effectively.

Process mapping is a really good tool for identifying lean opportunities.

A good starting approach is to go through each department in the facility, looking at each function within each department. When conducting a process diagnostics project, it is advantageous to get the department manager or lead to walk through each process on the floor. Documenting the process steps, as bullets, works well for this initial walkthrough, as we begin to develop a process map.

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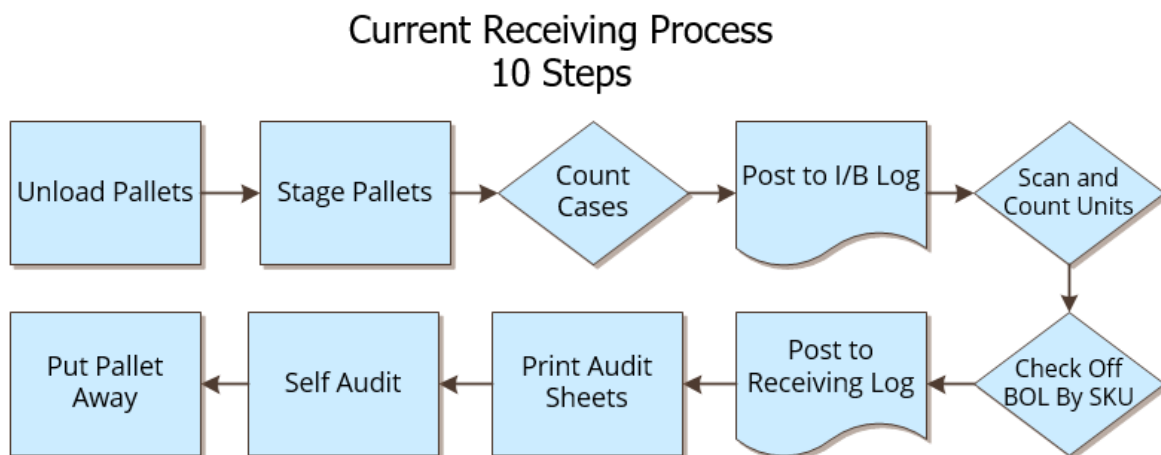
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The next step involves living out on the floor with processes and observing the movement of people and products. Our floor presence provides the opportunity to meet the people who are performing the process tasks. We can get their description of the process and the steps that they go through to accomplish the task. We note any differences between the process flows of management and the associates.

While we are on the floor, we can ask the associates how well the process works? What works well? What would they change? We want to be sure to document the suggestions and note who gave us each idea.

Now, we know the steps in today's current process. The following example of the mapping process is from an actual lean improvement, diagnostic project.

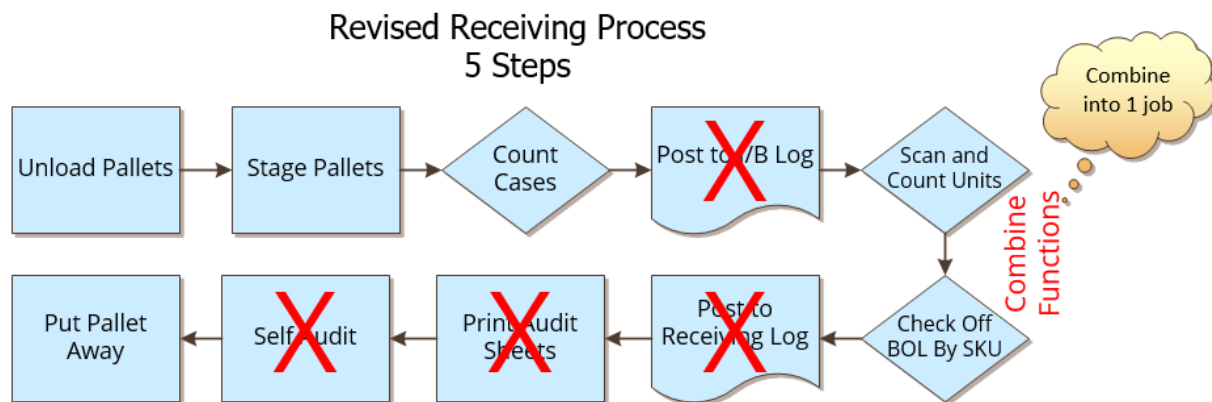
We list the steps on a process flow diagram to map the current process.



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We look for opportunities to keep the goods moving off the dock and into inventory. We eliminate steps, that are redundant or that simply add no value, improving the throughput and alleviating congestion. We combine tasks to reduce touches where possible. In the revised process, below, we propose to eliminate 4 steps and combine 2 separate steps into 1 task, reducing the number of process steps from 10 to 5.



We present our recommendations to senior management with explanations of the changes:

Two of the original steps in the process were to manually log the completion of a process step. These logs were unnecessary because the goods are tracked by the scanning functions.

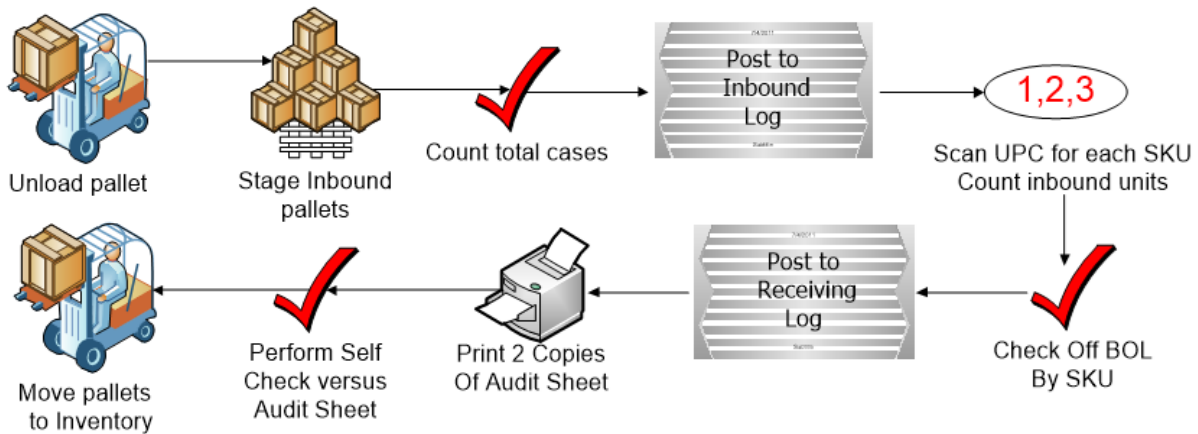
Two other steps were tied to a self-auditing function, which, itself is a redundant function.

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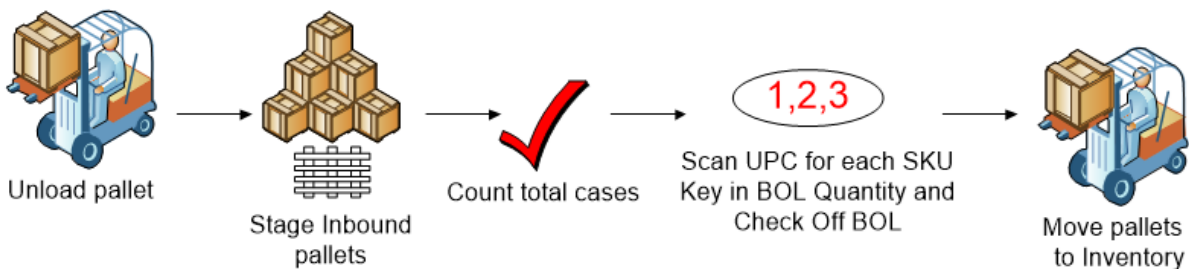
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The illustrations, below, are the process maps that we would include in our executive summary.

Current Receiving Process



Proposed Receiving Process



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