

Case Study

Results of an Argent engagement with a Clinical Pathology Network customer.

Argent Global Services partnered with a Pathology Services company to improve service levels and reduce costs.

Background

A large Pathology Services Network asked Argent Global Services (Argent) to assist in centralizing all testing departments and creating a continuous improvement culture. This client is a single-managed Clinical Pathology Network operating across Lincolnshire, United Kingdom. It services six hospitals, various clinics, a population of approximately 1 million, and over 185 general practices across the largest county in England. The Network processes 4.5 million specimens, performs 20 million tests and generates 5 million test reports every year. Argent utilized Lean principles, along with traditional Industrial Engineering tools, to drive and implement Lean initiatives and achieve performance and cost savings objectives.

Company Fact Sheet

- National Chain Grocery and General Merchandise Retailer
- Serves 1 million people
- Largest County in England
- 185 general practices, six hospitals, and various clinics
- Five histology laboratories in one location
- 20 million tests and 5 million test reports

Objective

The client's objective was to redesign their main laboratory and operations in order to successfully integrate histology services. They had recently consolidated 5 histology laboratories into one centralized location. However, this initiative struggled due to the lack of changes after consolidation; the main lab still operated like five separate labs. Argent partnered with the network to drive and implement Lean initiatives and achieve performance and cost saving objectives.

Methodology

Argent conducted direct observations throughout all operations, utilizing Lean principles and other engineering tools to map processes, identify redundancies and obstacles, reduce waste and provide feedback for improving employee utilization and productivity.

Argent engineers first conducted an operation audit of the histology operations and created a roadmap for improvements. The second step involved developing a new layout design for histology and supporting implementation. Argent then facilitated various system upgrades and enhancements, voice-recognition, electronic ordering, courier route/specimen tracking, etc. Lean training was provided to staff, management, and pathologists; Argent also facilitated Value Stream Mapping and a further defined roadmap. The 5S workplace standardization and organization process used by Argent identified important workstation design and materials. Finally, Argent implemented several continuous improvement initiatives, such as batch-size reductions, setting of production levels, cellular processing and balancing, and general process standardization.

Results

Through Argent's work, the monthly case volume in the laboratory increased from 4,896 to 5,972, which was a 22% change. Monthly block volume also increased by 42%, from 10,061 to 14,268. The client was also able to increase monthly slide volume from 13,693 to 19,811, which was a 45% change. Argent was also able to reduce turnaround time from 8.9 days to 3.5 days, processing time from 28.2 hours to 6.7 hours, and process step reduction (VSM) from 15 to 7.

Production Summary

45% Reduction in Turnaround Time

60% Increase in Productivity

53% Efficiency Increase

98% Quality Improvement

15% Space Utilization Improvement

Shortened Working Day by 15%

After the initial project, the client management maintained focus on continuous improvement and sustaining results, as they had become self sufficient in regulating and improving operations. During this period, Argent provided support for training, special projects, and other laboratory services. When ranked against the other 186 pathology service companies in England, the client demonstrated exemplary performance in all measured criteria. Notably, the were ranked second in workload, first in productivity, and third in cost per request (non pay).

Argent improved the laboratory layout and workflow with streamlined processes, improved travel, reduced damage and ensured better FIFO and inventory management. Additional opportunities were identified throughout the entire value-stream and with Argent's approach to process improvement, implementation and training, the client has experienced sustained benefits and savings.

**Argent Global
Services**

Argent Global Services, founded in 1988, is an industrial engineering and management consulting firm with corporate offices in Oklahoma City, OK. Argent is a recognized leader in the implementation of solutions that increase productivity, enhance service, improve quality and reduce costs. Argent contributes best practice experience from logistical expertise gained by working in various industries where service, safety and quality are paramount.
