

# Lean IT in 3 minutes by Jan Heunks

## The basics

Lean IT is an extension of the Lean manufacturing and Lean services principles, applied in an IT environment. The approach is a way of thinking and acting, focussing heavily on organizational culture. Lean IT is associated with the development and management of Information Technology products and services. The central concern, applied in the context of IT, is the elimination of waste, where waste is work that adds no value to a product or service.

## Summary

Lean IT focuses on maximizing customer value by minimizing waste, where *waste* is work that adds no value to a product or service. The main focus is to achieve operational excellence through improved agility, service quality and process efficiency. It means building a customer and value-oriented culture in which employees engage in Lean IT processes. It also means involving all employees to continually improve services and preserve value with less effort and optimising IT operations and processes supporting the most business critical applications and services. Lean IT has a great impact on the culture of an organization with behavioural aspects such as empowering employees to involve them in the optimization of processes. The goal is to implement a rigorous problem solving process to achieve greater strategic and financial value.

There are many aspects of Lean IT within two primary dimensions:

- *Outward-facing Lean IT*; Engaging information, information systems, and the IT organization in partnership with the business to continuously improve and innovate business processes and management systems.
- *Inward-facing Lean IT*; Helping the IT organization achieve operational excellence, applying the principles and tools of continuous improvement to IT operations, services, software development, and projects.

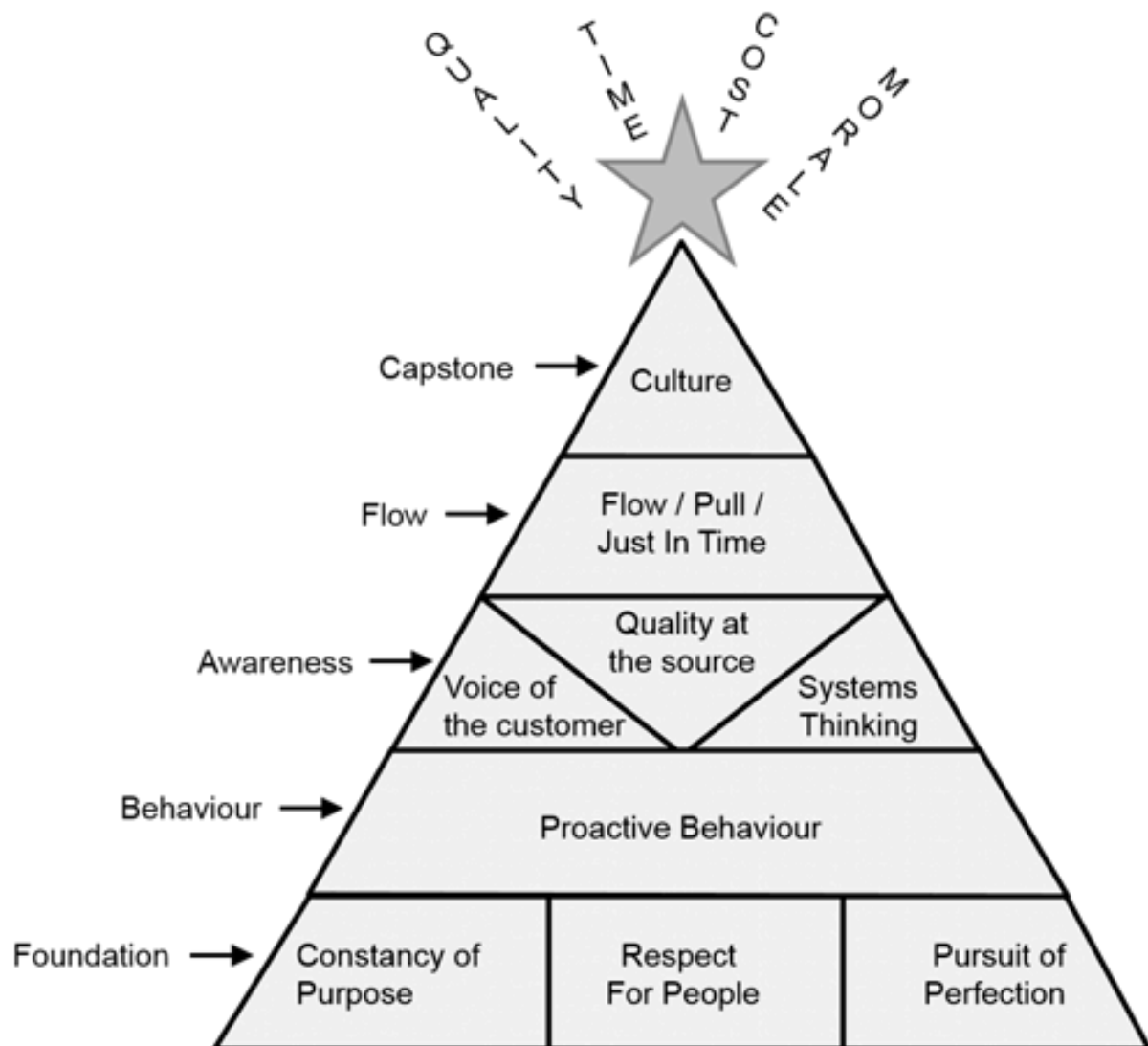
These two dimensions are not separate but complementary. They serve the ultimate objective of Lean transformation: creating value for the enterprise and its customers.

Lean IT is based on enterprise Lean principles, laying a solid foundation at the base. The three foundation elements support a strong social structure; constancy of purpose, respect for people and pursuit of perfection. The second layer is proactive behaviour which means taking the initiative, assuming personal responsibility for the quality of the work and work environment. The third layer addresses awareness, with three essential perspectives embraced by the Lean enterprise: the voice of the customer, quality at the source, and systems thinking. The fourth layer focuses on flow, the uninterrupted progression of materials, services, and information. The fifth layer, the capstone of the principles, is culture, which represents an organization's shared beliefs and values, manifested as attitude and behaviour. Culture is an outcome of behavioural change.

The principal focus of Lean IT is problem solving for the primary purpose of delivering value to the customer, achieved by the systematic elimination of waste throughout the value stream. A five-step thought process for implementing lean thinking refers to:

- Specify value from the standpoint of the end customer.

- Identify all the steps in the value stream, eliminating whenever possible those steps that do not create value.
- Make the value-creating steps occur in tight sequence
- As flow is introduced, let customers pull value from the next upstream activity.
- As value is specified, value streams are identified, wasted steps are removed, and flow and pull are introduced, begin the process again and continue it until a state of perfection is reached in which perfect value is created with no waste.



### Target audience

Any manager, specialist or team of any organization involved in IT process improvement of IT operations.

### Scope and constraints

The scope of Lean IT is to establish a culture of continuous improvement to deliver IT operational excellence and business value to an organization. The IT organization is expected to “align with the business”. That is, IT is suppose to enable business performance and innovation, improve service levels, manage change, take advantage of emerging technologies, and maintain quality and stability, all while steadily reducing operating costs. The scope of

Lean IT must exceed a single function and should ideally be across a whole supply chain to obtain maximum benefit.

### *Constraints*

When an enterprise begins a Lean transformation, too often the IT department is either left out or viewed as an obstacle. One of the hardest challenges a Lean IT team will face is the degree to which individual successes will invariably uncover new problems and greater challenges. This depends the maturity of the business and the IT organization,

**Jan Heunks** is werkzaam bij Key Result en als consultant/trainer/coach binnen verschillende organisaties (in)direct betrokken om performance vraagstukken vanuit verschillende invalshoeken te bekijken en op adequate wijze veranderingen of verbeteringen aan te brengen in een demand-supply en / of regieorganisatie.