

# Lean working and storage in the manufacturing environment

MANY COMPANIES NOW FOLLOW LEAN MANUFACTURING PRINCIPLES – AND THIS HAS AFFECTED THE WAY STORAGE SYSTEMS ARE SPECIFIED AND USED. HERE CLIVE WOODWARD, GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR OF BOTT – THE LEADING MANUFACTURER OF INDUSTRIAL STORAGE SOLUTIONS – EXPLAINS HOW.

The lean concept is not restricted to the manufacturing process, but applies to an entire organisation. It encourages businesses to eliminate waste by minimising inventory and reducing processes that do not add value to the end product. As a result, lean manufacturing has revolutionised how storage is integrated into the industrial environment, demanding greater organisation and a focus on optimised process to eliminate non-essential activities, tasks and materials.

When supplies come in, they must be quickly sorted, checked-in and accurately placed in appropriate storage, often line-side, so no time is wasted looking for misplaced products or tools. In a lean scenario, only necessary stocks are held and the focus is on identifying and efficiently locating fast-turnover consumables, which helps to ensure that staff always have easy access to the right parts and don't run out.

Equally, equipment, tools and measurement devices need to be stored easily to hand for rapid retrieval, whilst being protected/ secured to avoid unplanned repairs/ recalibrations and prevent theft.

There is no set rule for how storage should be integrated into the working environment. It depends on how a business specifically

operates, and what storage solutions will complement its defined processes. There are, however, lean tools that can help companies make the right decisions.

For example, through-flow process analysis involves mapping out how a production line should operate, looking at the current work stations, and balancing work flow. Assessing the detail of the work for each person can enable work stations to be designed around specific needs, to improve efficiency and ensure line balance.

An essential lean principal is to get the quickest possible tool change, for the longest working time on the machine. Having storage at hand that is organised, easily accessed and perfectly suited to the job reduces downtime for machine and operator.

It is also important to have the right storage coupled with the right technology, to increase business performance. Tools and components must be readily at hand and easily identifiable, perhaps with critical items tagged with RFID readable labels to aid easy location. Mobile storage is also growing in popularity, with workers taking tools with them as they move around the plant. Furthermore, having storage specifically assigned to an individual makes it easier for them to find the tools and equipment they need for their job.

As well as being specified to fit operational workflows, storage should also help businesses get the most out of available floor space. If access, for example, is an issue, units with roller shutter doors provide a viable option where there's insufficient room to open doors.

Whether you require wall storage, tool boxes, workbenches, cupboards, cabinets, trolleys or assembly lines, bott has solutions within its vast range to suit almost all storage requirements. In addition, bott offers storage with intelligent locking: ideal for valuable, sensitive or specifically calibrated tooling. Lean is an organisational mentality that is not just about manufacturing. Storage can play an important – indeed, vital – part. To find out more about intelligent storage look out for the latest issue of ERIKS TechDirect or contact ERIKS direct on 0845 006 6000.



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