

OAKWOOD BUILDERS AND JOINERY USED CLIP TO IMPROVE THEIR PLANNING SYSTEMS, INCREASE THE EFFICIENCY OF THEIR SITE OPERATIONS AND ENHANCE THEIR PROFILE AMONGST CLIENTS

THE CLIENT: OAKWOOD BUILDERS AND JOINERY LTD.

5C Workplace Organisation exercise ►

Sarah Fenn, Oakwood's Financial Director, explains how CLIP helped the company to improve efficiency and productivity, foster strong team working and enhance their professional image.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Oakwood Builders and Joinery is a company that has experienced significant recent growth – developing from a small family firm to a larger company with sister companies alongside. The main work undertaken comprises high-level refurbishments for private clients.

WHAT ATTRACTED US TO THE CLIP PROGRAMME

We felt that the CLIP ethos of continual improvement, backed by the CLIP methodology, lean improvement tools and guidance, would support our company's culture of people development and growing with the business.

WHAT OUR EXPECTATIONS WERE

We expected CLIP guidance and tools to help us maintain and enhance our professionalism and forward thinking, and to ensure that we operate as efficiently as possible and to the satisfaction of our customers.

HOW THE CLIP PROCESS WORKED FOR US

With the help of a BRE CLIP Master Engineer we used lean improvement tools to examine our practices and identify improvements, and to improve and visually represent our planning. The tools included:

- **Process Mapping** – work processes are visually represented using colour coded post-it notes to identify who does what – and when, why and how they do it. It is important to fully understand the processes that you are trying to improve.
- **Collaborative Planning** – a structured approach to planning activities that encourages input from everyone involved in the project. The idea is to fully use everyone's skills and experience to identify potential problems and implement solutions. The team produces weekly plans based on what work can be done, and reviews the previous week's plan to highlight areas of improvement.
- **Visual Management** – the details of a project's status are openly displayed so that everyone involved can clearly see its historical performance, its 'here and now' progress and any future potential problems. This highlights any improvements needed, quickly captures snags that can then be analysed and dealt with, spots problems before they hamper progress, and demonstrates to all that the team has the project under control.



Having applied these tools and found them helpful, we adapted them to our particular circumstances to develop, for example, a Visual Planning tool (based on Collaborative Planning) that has since been added to our routine practice. The results of Visual Planning activities have included:

- Excellent reactions from clients of existing projects, and prospective clients who have been shown around projects – this tool has probably helped to clinch a number of deals
- An enhanced professional image for our company
- The much greater involvement of subcontractors in project planning
- Strengthened teamwork as a result of improved communications among team members and a greater sense of involvement.

We have taken a flexible approach to how each site wants to use the Visual Planning tool. Where appropriate, simplified versions are used with whiteboards for action lists or marker drawn plans. Overall, this approach has supported our aspirations to be intelligent builders in a professional, forward thinking company – and it has got people thinking ahead more.

Other CLIP tools that we used included the 5C workplace organisation tool, which is designed to ensure a safe, best-working environment that supports sustainable, quality and cost-effective delivery. We applied it with excellent results to a number of the company's vans, storage areas and offices.

The 5Cs are:

1. Clear out
2. Configure
3. Clean to check
4. Conformity
5. Custom and practice.

The 5C tool has helped us to develop a site-check system. Once a month, two managers audit the sites for health and safety, cleanliness, site set-up and site personnel – the best site gets an extra bonus to share among the team. We are planning to extend the audit to include Visual Planning and materials and waste recycling.

'CLIP has helped us to bring about a change in the culture of the company, which is supporting our drive to improve efficiency and productivity, and enhance our professional image'.

Sarah Fenn, Finance Director, Oakwood Builders and Joinery Ltd

HOW WE BENEFITED FROM THIS INITIATIVE

The CLIP activity has helped us to implement a cultural change that includes enhanced planning and organisation in the company. We found that there was always at least one really good idea to come out of each Masterclass session. Crucially, where things have changed, the effects have proved to be sustainable. Comments from Oakwood staff on the impact of the CLIP activity have included:

- 'I found the target setting really useful and have started setting self-targets for more of my work – estimates for example. Using the 5C in the office was really good – it has helped to make sure everyone keeps the office tidy and well organised. Now all I need to do is a little tidying at the end of everyday to keep it in order which ultimately saves me time in the long run. We're tying our planning boards into the financial reporting, so that we can set financial targets for the joinery and everyone can see whether or not they are hitting them.'
- 'Visual Planning is useful especially at the end of jobs when there is a whole range of different finishing items – it makes sure that nothing gets missed. I have adopted the use of whiteboards for To-Do lists and that is working well.'
- 'Looking at site lay-out, storage, and the use and re-use of materials was very helpful as it saved on time spent looking for things, collecting new or replacement materials, double ordering, waste removal costs, etc.'

Altogether, it has been a very positive experience for us. The CLIP engineer pitched the workshops just right – she didn't dictate what should be done, but encouraged people to focus on the issues of what works, what doesn't and what is needed, so that we could put together a plan for improvement. I would like to thank her for the work she put into this program – all the CLIP sessions have been really useful and mostly good fun too.

FURTHER USE OF CLIP

The changes made to the way we operate as a result of the CLIP activity have proved to be sustainable. Lean improvement techniques that have been adopted, often having now been adapted to our particular circumstances, have been used independently of the CLIP activity and incorporated into our routine practices – our Visual Planning and site-check systems are examples of this.

This project has been delivered with support from Construction Skills Management and Supervisory Development Programme. The fund provides financial backing to encourage innovative ideas that deliver management training benefits across the industry.



▲ Visual planning board

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- CLIP tools can be flexibly applied and adapted to meet the particular needs of a company and of individual sites.
- Clearly drawn up and displayed project plans – Visual Planning – enhance teamwork, and help to involve subcontractors in planning. They also help to demonstrate a professional and forward-thinking image to clients, and encourage better communication and feedback between clients and the project team.
- To gain the full benefits of the CLIP activity, all of those involved must be encouraged to make time away from the daily pressures of work to attend the CLIP meetings and workshops. It is more difficult to get full 'buy-in' to the CLIP tools and principles if they must be explained 'second-hand'. We found that, rather than trying to implement CLIP activities throughout the whole company at once, it was more effective to concentrate on a few areas and then roll this out to other areas once the benefits were starting to show which encouraged take-up by others.

'All of the CLIP sessions have been very useful – and mostly good fun – and there was always a "light-bulb" experience during each one!'

Janis Knabe, Joinery Manager, Oakwood Builders and Joinery Ltd

AN INTRODUCTION TO CLIP

BRE's Construction Lean Improvement Programme, or CLIP for short, is a new approach that aims to boost performance and profitability. Over the last six years CLIP has been adapting lean tools and techniques for use in the construction industry. CLIP has worked successfully with more than 150 construction companies across the construction supply chain, with most achieving productivity improvements of up to 50% in key processes.

CLIP works by focusing companies on improving the quality, cost, efficiency and delivery of a product or service, to achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction. It provides the knowledge and practical skills needed to take the highly theoretical topic of lean construction, and turn it into a practical tool that they can implement effectively.

The heart of each company's CLIP programme consists of a tailored improvement activity built up of our core Masterclass modules. The programme is designed so that a company can pick and choose the range of tools and expertise available in the modules that it needs. In this case study we feature the use of 'the Lean Processes Masterclass'. This looks at ways of improving quality, cost and delivery by looking in detail at key processes during a 3-9 month programme of intensive improvement activities. Plans are then put in place to roll out improvements through the company.