

UCT business Prof to advise on operations management support for government

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Government to implement lean principles to tackle service delivery challenges in SA

A University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business professor (UCT GSB) will become an advisor for the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) within The Presidency to set in motion a programme to improve government departments operations management, with the ultimate aim to boost service delivery in South Africa.

Emeritus Professor Norman Faull, founder of the Lean Institute Africa (LIA) at the UCT GSB, will help the DPME roll out an Operations Management Support Programme on a trial basis.

According to Faull, an effective solution to South Africa's service delivery challenges lies in proper and effective operations management, specifically implementing lean management principles in government service organisations.

"Although lean principles have their origin in the automotive industry (the Toyota Way), they can be profitably applied to hospitals, police stations, schools and other service institutions, which require serious intervention in South Africa," he said. The Institute for Security Studies reports that at least five service delivery protests occur in SA every day.

"We can bring about huge transformation in the way an organisation functions by implementing sound operations management practices and lean principles. Systems speak to us, they speak in a language of problems. If we listen and respond correctly, we can and will improve the system," Faull said.

Tumi Mketi, Deputy Director-General in the DPME said: "We approached a specialist who works with these principles everyday, who understands what they are about and knows how to implement them to support us in an advisory role.

"We all agree that there is a problem with service delivery, and this programme can change that."

The Operations Management Support Programme is still in its initial stages and consideration is given to the most appropriate approaches to foster service delivery improvements while building the public service manager's skills. The Lean approach is one way of initiating and sustaining such improvements.

Mketi said her department will soon embark on a study to review a sample of these approaches in different departments, with a view of identifying what might work best under different circumstances.

She said the DPME will work with a cross-section of departments to establish how they've responded to operations management challenges in order to establish what works well and what not.

"I am very optimistic. But we need to get feedback from those departments who have enrolled for this. We want them to come back and tell us what works and what hasn't, and we can take it from there," she said.

Faull said his appointment in an advisory capacity comes after years of consultation. In 2010-2011 he completed contracts with the Departments of Health and Justice and Constitutional Development. Faull and his team have also successfully introduced lean management principles at several hospitals and courts in some of South Africa's worst districts.

"This (lean management) is tried and tested stuff. It's not something sucked out of my academic thumb," he said, adding that the City of Melbourne has successfully rolled-out lean principles and is frequently held up as an example of best

practice in this area. Denise Bennett from the City of Melbourne will be sharing these lessons at a summit organised by the Lean Institute Africa in Cape Town later this year.

"In essence, lean seeks to eliminate waste and improve processes. The idea is to look for the actions and processes that an organisation must implement to ensure that it is fit and ready for practice. If brushing your teeth each day is personal daily hygiene practice then we are looking for the daily hygiene practices that will make our services run more smoothly," Faull said.

Meanwhile, GSB director, Professor Walter Baets says the school is honoured at Faull's appointment.

"The GSB sees its role very much as an enabler of new ways of thinking and doing in order to improve organisational functioning - and is honoured to have one of its emeritus professors engaging with government in this important way. Prof Faull is one of the longest standing members of faculty and a perennially popular educator and proponent of lean principles," Baets says.

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