



**YORKSHIRE
PRODUCTIVITY**

“...driving manufacturing excellence...”



Case Study

Ashton Seals — flexibility and adaptability through lean



Established in Sheffield in 1866, The Ashton Group of Companies continues to be an independent, privately-owned business dedicated to the needs of its customers.

The Ashton Group is made up of three Limited Companies; Ashton Seals Limited, a leading supplier of O-Rings and associated sealing products; Ashtons (Sheffield) Limited, specialists in Plastic Point-of-Sale Packaging, Promotional and Stationery products; as well as Ashton Corporate Clothing, suppliers of Corporate Uniforms, including Polo Shirts, Executive Shirts & Blouses, Overalls, Trousers & Hi-Visibility Wear.

Both Ashton Seals, through its gasket cutting operation, and Ashtons (Sheffield) have on-site manufacturing and are constantly striving to improve productivity by introducing more efficient working practices.



Lean recognition

Like many businesses, the Ashton Group operates in an increasingly competitive market sector.



The nature of the Ashton Group's market determines that manufacturing is mainly undertaken in small batches to specific requirements.

This, in turn, drives the need for the operation to be adaptable and flexible.

Enhancing the skills of the workforce was identified as a key requirement in achieving more adaptable and flexible manufacturing processes.

To meet the demands of this fast-moving, changing environment it was recognised that a programme of lean implementation would be required.

The Ashton Group selected Yorkshire Productivity to provide

training support tailored to its specific needs.

From the start, the whole team at the Ashton Group embraced the programme enthusiastically.

A total of fourteen members of staff embarked upon a level 2 Business Improvement



Techniques NVQ and a group received specific training focussed on Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) and Single Minute Exchange of Die (SMED).

TPM is fundamental to the implementation of lean manufacturing. It provides a pro-active approach to maintenance where the operator performs much, and sometimes all, of the routine maintenance tasks themselves with the aim of minimising deterioration.



Is Lean Working?

"The process has worked because we have adopted the principles throughout the organisation," commented Paula Penney, Operations Manager of The Ashton Group.

"The whole production team volunteered for training and we have also been able to structure training so that it doesn't affect production".

Particularly pleasing has been how employees are now taking greater ownership of problems and supplying alternative solutions to issues that may arise within a working manufacturing environment.



Paula continued: "Our aim and ambition when we commenced lean manufacturing was to move the company forward."

"Having identified and eliminated non-value adding activities in production, supply chain management and dealing with customers, we are delighted with what we have achieved."

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Paula Penney, Operations Manager, presents NVQ certificates to successful learners at the Ashton Group

SMED provides a rapid and efficient way of converting a manufacturing process from running the current product to running the next product.

This rapid changeover is key to reducing production lot sizes and thereby improving flow. It was therefore a major requirement for Ashton in its quest for flexibility and adaptability.

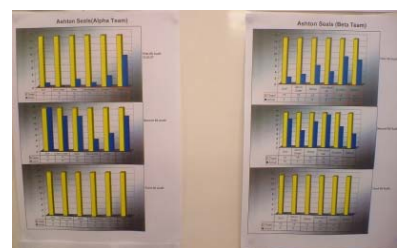
Philip Davidson, NVQ Assessor/IV for Yorkshire Productivity, commented: "The way the company has taken lean on board has been very impressive."



Standard operations have been introduced for machinery, processes have been speeded up by colour coding part rolls for easy identification, walkways have been created and machinery has been

moved to aid improved process flow.

Phil continued: "Change has been implemented throughout the factory and, more importantly, sustained."



"Structured lean meetings have been introduced, a lean champion appointed and all improvements logged on a continuous improvement board."

