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CAPACITY & COMPASSION

How a global network enabled distribution of an oncology drug to 60,000 patients in 35 countries every month

Challenge

Angie received a phone call from her client, a director of outsourcing, who had a substantial challenge. The oncology product that Thermo Fisher Scientific had been packaging for the past few years had already been approved for two indications. Now, the investigators wanted to start treating their patients to see if it would work for other indications. Instead of running a certain number of trials, the client wanted to support physicians and investigator-led trials. To do that, they needed to produce a lot of material quickly and ship it to Thermo Fisher to label, pack and distribute to 60,000 patients in 35 countries each month. Angie's team typically manages projects a fraction of that size on a quarterly basis. Immediately, Angie called the vice president and general manager and head of quality at the facility to explain the challenge. They assembled the team the next day with over seven cross-functional departments and began analyzing the logistics of the global project.

Solution

A project of that scope would usually take eight weeks in production, and Angie's team only had four weeks to get the material in the door and shipped back out.

Together as a team, they came up with creative and innovative ways to cut cycle times across departments. Ultimately, they needed to take a close look at every single process and determine where they could reduce cycle times in each group, to the point where they knew exactly how many units could be produced a minute. The team had about three months to prepare to scale up production time. They scrutinized every detail, process and inefficiency so that they could flawlessly execute the required production time, 24 hours a day. Diving deep into the production activities, Angie's team raised numerous questions to address the cycle time:

- What steps in the process are taking the longest?
- Why are certain steps in the process taking so long?
- Did the team have too many handoffs in a production room?
- Was the line not moving fast enough?
- Were labels falling apart?
- What can be done to mitigate these issues to enhance the flow and the process?

The process engineering team was intricately involved in the project and the collective goal to reduce cycle time. Time studies were performed and enabled the team to cut out wasted time. A training lab was set up in the back of the facility so that the operators could be trained on the equipment. The team was ready to hit the ground running.

Result

Cycle time was reduced by 55% overall, beating their original goals by a wide margin. The production line was running 24 hours a day, often in two rooms, with extra people to support in multiple ways: folding boxes, taking vials out of trays and putting them on a table to add them to the line as fast as possible.

The team was able to meet the four-week turnaround for 18 months straight while continuing to enhance the cycle time and ensure that production ran as efficiently as possible. Continuous process improvement coupled with creativity and flexibility enabled the team to maintain the high standard of quality while meeting the client's needs and timeline. The material was delivered to their patients, without any issues, without any quality problems and without any damage.

Contact us to learn how we can support your project, large or small.