

Report: Business Process Analysis in Legal Aid: How Florida Rural Legal Services Partnered with Toyota to Improve Its Client Intake and Customer Service (Legal Services Corporation 2021)



Many organizations have experience with business process analysis (BPA), a method to analyze a company's processes and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations. In fact, there are multiple methodologies used to accomplish the goals of BPA. A notable one is the Toyota Production System (TPS). TPS was established based on several principles and concepts, including a customer-first

culture, an acknowledgment that team members are the most important resource, continuous improvement, a go-and-see approach, jidoka, and just-in-time. Jidoka—loosely translated as “automation with a human touch”—means that when a problem occurs, the machine stops immediately, preventing defective products from being produced. Just-in-time means making only what is needed, when it’s needed. Under this method, Toyota produces vehicles on an as-needed basis, based on the orders received through its dealers. By doing this, Toyota can keep inventory low while not spending excess labor and time on production.

As part of TPS and following Toyota’s example, Florida Rural Legal Services adopted their eight-step problem-solving method:

1. Clarify the problem
2. Break down the problem
3. Set a target
4. Analyze the root cause
5. Develop countermeasures
6. See countermeasures through
7. Evaluate both results and processes
8. Standardize successful processes

Before Florida Rural Legal Services got paired up with Toyota, it lacked the process uniformity that successful organizations covet. Its offices were working in silos, with different intake being done in each one. Gaps and inefficiencies in the program’s workflow were affecting the quality and quantity of services delivered to FRLS’ clients. After implementing TPS, many things changed. The lead time has decreased, and the number of intakes and closed cases have increased. But the organization’s philosophy and culture have changed, too.

After pairing with Toyota, FRLS started using business process analysis tools in intake, finance, and fundraising. They also started to talk about BPA in management meetings. FRLS changed the culture of its offices by adopting a client-first mindset, examining its process and workflows more closely, not jumping to solutions, tackling tough problems, and always asking “why.”

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