



#SquadGoals

Blending Culture and Technology Helps LeanOhio Keep Moving Forward

A quick reality check: for the LeanOhio team (and for many of my fellow state employees), we're approaching the one-month mark of all this work-from-home craziness. Even now, as I type this, I can almost hear the collective groan from all of you as that reality collides with the feeling that it's been waaaaay longer than that (especially if you have small children at home with you, am I right?!)

Hopefully you and your work teams have had enough time now to get settled in, figure out your new normal, and find new ways of getting your work accomplished. But if your team is still struggling to fire on all cylinders, or if you're just looking for some ideas on how to fine-tune the engine, then allow me share with you how the LeanOhio team has been making it work.

Staying True to Our Roots

Before I dive into the technology we're using, I should first talk about the mindset and the traits of our team that have been a constant whether we're in the office or away from it, and have shaped how we have been using the tech tools available to us.

Obviously, good **communication** is a must for any team, and it's never been an exception for us. While in the office, our most common forms of communication with each other were our weekly huddles on Monday mornings, and the as-needed conversations over cubicle walls or in Michael's office.

Also important to us is a strong sense of **collaboration** for things like working cooperatively and simultaneously to scope events and solve problems, or for getting feedback and suggestions while putting together slide decks or writing these Lean Lifestyle articles. It's obviously much easier to simply fall into working in your own silo when you're working from home, so finding ways to keep our collaborative spirit alive has been especially important.

Accountability to each other and to our given tasks and projects is critical as well. We've previously accomplished this by discussing our progress on tasks during our weekly huddles, and by using personal Kanban boards to make our workload visible to our colleagues.

Finally, we share a deep sense of **community**; not just to our team, but also to our division colleagues and to our extended network of Lean-trained practitioners throughout the state. We've cultivated community through things like our quarterly Lean Leader meetings and belt report-outs, through "water cooler" chats with co-workers on our floor... and I'd be lying if I said I didn't miss those occasional afternoon coffee runs with my teammates (*I'm not crying, you're crying!*)

So... how have we been able to employ technology to stay productive and keep our team anchored around these four critical pillars?

Enter Microsoft Teams

LeanOhio started evaluating Microsoft Teams back in December as a possible way to enhance our workflow and collaboration, and luckily for us it's turned out to be an elegant solution for staying connected and productive while working from home.

A simple way to describe Teams is that it's a lot of different office tech tools rolled into one. At its core it's a chat tool with easy options for calls and video meetings (much like Skype). It's also a solution for file and document sharing with built-in version control (much like SharePoint). It can also work as a task management tool for individuals and teams using the integrated Planner app. It doesn't entirely replace Outlook, but it can do certain things better than email can. For example: quick conversations to get consensus or ask opinions (team members can quickly respond with a "thumbs up" or a "heart" response, rather than having to hit 'Reply All' and type out a response), or having folks contribute edits to a document (you can have your whole team edit the same document *at the same time* and actually see the edits happening in real time, versus the confusion of multiple files floating around when everyone edits their own copy of a file and emails it back to everyone else).

On its surface, Teams is very similar to Slack (which is somewhat popular in the private sector). But for organizations already on the Office 365 platform, Teams is definitely the way to go. Not only is Teams part of Office 365 (meaning there's no additional cost to start using it), but the Office products that you're already familiar with (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc) are easily integrated into the Teams environment, meaning that you don't even have to leave Teams to start a new Office document or make basic edits to existing documents. And even if you want to include folks who are not using Office 365 in your Teams meetings, conversations or collaborations, those folks can be invited as guests and simply use their web browser to participate... all without having to download any software or set up a new account.

Team(s) Work Makes the Dream Work

So here's the inside scoop on how LeanOhio uses Teams to operate on a daily basis and stay true to its core team values.

Any time we decide to start a new internal project or segment of work that involves more than one of us, we create a dedicated *channel* for it in Teams. This lets us contain all the conversations and files related to that project in one central, shared location. If we're starting a new project that includes people outside of the LeanOhio office (such as a Kaizen event with a different agency), then we'll create a separate *team*, which allows us to invite those external stakeholders to collaborate on their specific project without giving them access to our own internal stuff.

For us, the one-two punch of the intuitive, feature-rich chat function and the easy-to-use video meetings have been the life-blood of keeping up our communication with each other while working from home. We still have our Monday morning huddles just like we used to, only now it's over a video meeting. Video meetings also help take the place of in-person work sessions, making use of screen sharing if we need to show a visual or "whiteboard" something virtually. And impromptu video calls stand in for the drop-in conversations that used to happen around cubicles and offices. We've even

made great use of Teams meetings recently to deliver a presentation on value stream mapping to a group from the Auditor of State's office.

Collaboration comes pretty naturally in the Teams environment. For example, in this very moment that I'm writing this article, I can see that Julie has this document open too, and I know that she's able to see these words pop onto the screen as I type them (hi Julie!) If she wanted to, she could start going through and correcting all my grammar goofs before I've even finished the article (effectively removing the *waiting* waste from the process!) And I can also see in the ongoing chat that's tied to our Lean Lifestyle articles that my colleagues are gently reminding me not to get too deep in the technical weeds in this article (I have a tendency for it, I'll admit it)... so thanks for the feedback, team! Frankly though, I think that example is just scratching the surface... I bet we'd even be able to pull off a virtual Kaizen event (and I'll be eagerly watching my inbox for any takers on that offer!)

It's also easy to stay accountable to one another. Aside from updates during our weekly huddles, we also use a simple shared spreadsheet to keep a list of the things we're each working on and provide a weekly summary of the progress we've made. We could use the integrated Planner app for task delegation and tracking if we needed to get more granular, but the spreadsheet works fine for now.

Probably the most fun and satisfying use of Teams for me has been in relation to keeping up our sense of community. Some ways that we've done this include having our first-ever virtual Green Belt report-outs (which were amazingly well attended), and taking part in the "Water Cooler" team that folks from our division have set up so that everyone can stay in touch. Our occasional afternoon coffee runs have transitioned to group chats over Governor DeWine's 2:00 press conferences. Speaking of community, I'm excited to "tease" that we're in the process of standing up something special in Teams for our LeanOhio Network; stay tuned to the usual channels for details to come soon!

To wrap up, LeanOhio has been able to stay on-mission in the midst of this public health predicament by remaining true to its core values and by thoughtful use of innovative tech tools such as Microsoft Teams. While we still have some gaps to cover to get us back to full capacity on the services we deliver (if anyone has any clever ideas on how to run the DOP simulation virtually, we'd love to hear from you), we're definitely on the right track!

For more information on how Teams works, check out the Microsoft Teams training resources at bit.ly/LO-MSTeams. Fellow state employees can also reach out to me directly with questions (scot.burbacher@das.ohio.gov), and I'm happy to share contact information for Teams SMEs from both Microsoft and the State of Ohio.