

Columbia Forest Products



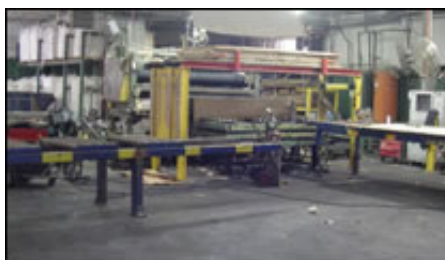
Columbia Forest Products is North America's largest manufacturer of hardwood plywood and hardwood veneer. The company, based in Greensboro, N.C., employs more than 2,100 people and operates facilities throughout the United States and Canada. Much of their hardwood plywood is used by cabinet makers and installed in homes across the continent.

Like other companies in the hard-hit housing sector, Columbia Forest Products has experienced some tough times. But through a partnership with the ILS, Columbia has been able to cut annual expenses by more than \$12 million. ILS helped Columbia achieve the savings by standardizing work procedures and streamlining work flow to eliminate unnecessary steps and speed up production.

Using "œjust in time"œ production techniques, Columbia reduced the time it takes to fill a customer'œ™s order from around 60 hours to fewer than 8 hours - a vast improvement. As a result, the company was able to drastically reduce inventory, which led to a significant savings.

"ILS showed us how to maintain or improve productivity and improve quality with fewer resources," said Bill Duarte, Columbia'œ™s director of lean transformation.

Columbia developed such a close relationship with ILS consultant Parthi Damodaraswamy that it named him an honorary director of lean transformation.



"œParthi has been absolutely critical in our success," Duarte said. "He helped us look at our systems as a whole and helped guide us through our strategic planning."œ

The Strategic Transformation Partnership between ILS and Columbia began in 2006 when Columbia recognized the need to dramatically reduce its operating costs without degrading quality for its customers.Â Through ILS, they have had over 125 people in key positions throughout the company complete the ILS Lean Systems Certification Series.



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Columbia has aggressively conducted Rapid Improvement LIFT (Learning and Improvement Focused Transformation) events in most of its facilities, contributing to a dramatic cost savings in every target area. LIFT events have focused on safety, designing and implementing pull systems, co-locating equipment to optimize plant layout, inventory reductions, internal and external logistics systems, and the creation of an overall guiding Production System - The Columbia Way. They have pledged that no workers will be laid off as a result of lean activities, but are actively managing labour costs through their HR processes.