

## A Lean Project Planner

Guest was Alan Mossman

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## *Implementing Lean Marketing Systems*

Alan Mossman of [The Change Business](#) trained as an architect and worked for many years in management and organization development. He only returned to



construction in 2000 building on his knowledge and understanding of collaboration, systems thinking, quality and lean. An accredited UK based Last Planner trainer; he has coached teams implementing Lean and Last Planner for a wide range of clients in Europe, Africa, and Australasia. From 2004 to 2010 Alan was a founding Director of The Lean Construction Institute UK. He helped set up the Lean

Construction Journal [www.leanconstructionjournal.org](http://www.leanconstructionjournal.org) and was co-editor from 2003 to 2012.

After working in local government and higher education in a variety of roles, he has been a socio-technical systems consultant since 1988. He only returned to construction in 2001 building on his knowledge and understanding of collaboration, systems thinking, variation, quality and lean. Based in UK, he has coached teams implementing Lean and Last Planner for clients in the UK, Sweden, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Alan is regular speaker and facilitator at Lean Construction conferences, congresses and seminars in the US and Europe. His links with colleagues in the global lean construction community enables him to keep up to date with the continuing development of lean thinking applied to design & construction.

## Transcription of Podcast

**Joe Dager:** With me today is Alan Mossman. He's a UK based adviser on Lean Transformation and the Last Planner in design and in construction. Alan trained as an architect and then in management and organizational development. He coaches teams putting the Last Planner to use and making a Lean Transformation working with design and construction teams, projects, and organizations. He's in the business of change, depicted by his company name, The Change Business.

Alan, I'd like to welcome you, and though the conversation today is primarily about the Last Planner, I would like for you to start out by explaining something else. What are the Lean Project Delivery System and Integrated Project Delivery?

**Alan Mossman** Thank you, Joe. Lean Project Delivery System was developed by Glen Ballard back in about 2000. It's a way of looking at the end-to-end process from the initial concept that the client comes up with for a built environment facility of one sort or another. Integrated Project Delivery is a development and adaptation of that idea to which has been added one element and that is a relational agreement joining the parties together. Built environment facilities are created over a period of years and until recently, the contracts, which have governed those relationships, have been bilateral and transactional.

For the same reason that we don't use a bilateral transactional contract for marriage, we use a relational contract. It's now recognized that there's much more sense in using a relational contract for these long-term arrangements where we need to work together to get things done.

**Joe:** How does the Last Planner fit into these?

**Alan:** The Last Planner underpins the whole system. It is like a new operating system for the way work is done. Production is

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managed in a project-based environment. There's lots of uncertainty in projects. From your experience and many of your listeners will know from their experience of working in projects whether they're in banking or in manufacturing or wherever. There are lots of uncertainties. We need something that is going to help us manage and live with those uncertainties. For those people who are used to working with the critical path method (CPM) schedules and so on, Microsoft Project or PRINCE2 or whatever it happens to be. Those tell us what should happen if all goes well. Critical path method doesn't help us manage, when things are going badly wrong.

**Joe:** Would you say that's the basic difference of the Last Planner versus the other project management tools, is managing that uncertainty?

**Alan:** It manages uncertainty. It deals with reality, rather than with somebody's fantasy about how things will work out at some point in the future, which we're now in. It's moving from working on the basis of what should happen, to working on the basis of what can happen. One of the things that happens with the Last Planner system, is that the people who are responsible for doing the work on a day to day basis, are involved in making sure that what the plan says should happen, can happen. They're involved in removing constraints, systematically, week in; week out from the work that's coming down the pipe towards them, and are then involved in proposing the work that they will do next week on the basis of the work that they know can be done. Ideally, that's the work that should be done. But there's no point in putting into production, something that can't be done just because it should be done.

**Joe:** That always sounds good. I know the Last Planner means the last guy in the stream, the one closest to the work is the one that's doing the actual planning, correct?

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**Alan:** That's right.

**Joe:** Can that guy see a big enough picture to be able to determine the schedule? Explain that to me, because he doesn't know everything that's going on around him, and in the project, or maybe he should?

**Alan:** The last planners get to see the big picture because we involve them in collaboratively planning work, three or four months ahead. So that they know what the key hand-offs are, between their own trade and other trades. They also get to know what they need to do, to make it easier for subsequent trades to their work, and they get to tell preceding trades what's going to make it easier for them to do their work. What we're working with here, is the dual notion of customer. There's the customer and the end user, for whom the facility is being created. There's also the customer of the next trade in line, the next person in line. We're building both of those, because in that collaborative planning session, the end user and the client may well be in the room but the next trades in line will also be in the room so that we get to explore and develop and sort out issues that will inevitably arise if we don't plan those handoffs.

That's the first level which we build the ability of the trade foreman to make those decisions. The second is then looking between four and eight weeks ahead at the tasks that are coming up that are going to need to be done and making sure that everything is in place for them to be done. All the information is there, all the materials and other consumables are there to enable us to do the work.

All the tools and equipment and that we will have a safe space in which to do it because one of the interdependencies between trades in a construction site and safety side is you don't want people working at a low level when there are other people

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working at a high level who might drop spanners or bits of kit on the people down below. It's not safe.

We need to plan how people work in space as well as when the work is done so that it can be done safely.

**Joe:** You've somewhat gone over the key conversations in the Last Planner system. Could you just name them and tell me why you call them that? I think you call them, five plus one.

**Alan:** Well, the five conversations of collaborative programming, which I've just talked about and the make-ready process, which is when we start removing constraints and there's a production planning and production evaluation meeting which is where the trade foremen propose the work that they and their teams will do in the next week and they evaluate the work that they did in the previous week so that they can learn from it. In the week in question, we've got daily meetings, what I call the production management conversation. They're very brief. They're generally out on site, stand up meetings, 15 minutes or so to do a quick evaluation of how things are going, do any last minute re-planning because things didn't go quite as well or went better than were previously planned.

Then there's a measurement, learning, and continual improvement conversation which is, in part, part of the production evaluation and planning meeting and in part, is taken outside that where you start to go into root causes and other things like that.

I've said plus one because there's another part of the Last Planner system which is first run studies. First run studies are not, as the name implies, something you do the first time you're going to do something; it's something you can do any time you're going to do something. Even if you're only going to do it once, it's still worth doing a first run study even if it's just virtually to ensure that when you do it, you do it well.

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A first run study, you're making a patient bedroom in a hospital. The first time you do it, you get the video cameras out, and you just observe people doing it. You do it slowly, and you gather information so that you can then get together again and review how it's gone and plan how you're going to do it better.

You may have a pre-meeting before you do it the first time just to plan how you're going to do it that first time. Then you observe, gather data, and using plan-do-check-act, the Shewhart cycle. You systematically improve the way you do it.

If it's something like a patient room in a hospital where you're maybe doing 500 of them or 200 then it makes sense to stop after you've done the first 10 and after you've done the first 50 and after you've done the first 100 and just see if there are ways in which you can improve the way that is done.

**Joe:** Is that the Lean part of it? What's the connection between the Last Planner and Lean?

**Alan:** Last planner is not Toyota tool because Toyota is basically not involved in project management. They are involved in serial production. In construction, if we want to apply Lean--many of the well-known Lean tools--we first need to stabilize the system. What Last Planner does is to help us stabilize the system so that we can then begin to apply the other tools, 5S, and other well-known Lean tools to the project based production process.

**Joe:** Can you apply something like SMED to construction?

**Alan:** Not directly. But you can take elements of SMED thinking and use them to help manage the transitions between one trade and another on the site. And to help reduce the amount of time that any one trade spends on the job, and you can do that in the design office as well. For those of your listeners who don't know what SMED is, it stands for "Single Minute Exchange of Die." It's the process that--I think it was engineer Ohno developed--to help

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reduce the amount of time it took to switch from producing one product on a particular piece of machinery, to producing another product on the same piece of machinery at the required quality level.

**Joe:** One of the things that you mentioned in a very good PDF that you put out. I think it's called "The Last Planner: Collaborative Short Term Production Planning," is the promise conversation cycle. Can you explain to the audience what that is?

**Alan:** Think of a customer and a provider, or a potential provider. The customer makes a request to the potential provider. That request, in a well-run system, will initiate a conversation, a negotiation about the conditions of satisfaction of that request and the date by which those conditions of satisfaction ought to be met. As part of that conversation, the provider may need to go and talk to other suppliers of their own and have a similar conversation to this conversation that we are talking about.

If I'm the provider, I might need to go to my material's supplier and say, "Can you supply?" Make a request and the material's supplier then wants to clarify conditions of satisfaction, the delivery date and so on.

We get to a point where one of the three useful things can happen. The first is that I as a provider say, "Yes, I can do that." The second is that I can say, "Yes; I can do that, provided you let me have the specification or the drawings or whatever it is that you want me to work with by this date." There's "yes," "yes, if."

The other useful response is "No; I can't do it." Because that's a very clear signal to the customer that they've either got to change the deadline, they've got to change the conditions of satisfaction, or they've got to find somebody else who can do it. I've got early warning as a customer that something needs to shift.



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But, let's suppose I said, "Yes." I then go ahead with production. I've made a promise, and now I set out to fulfill that promise. Once I've delivered on the promise, it's important that I declare completion. When I've declared completion, it is a signal to the customer to show him or her that I have done what they wanted done. Hopefully, at the end of that process they will declare satisfaction.

Now, this promise cycle is completed entirely in language. There is a request, there is the negotiation, there is a promise, there is a declaration of completion, and a declaration of satisfaction or dissatisfaction as appropriate.

What is missing, in my view, in a lot of construction, is that because of the critical path method, there is not enough time spent on managing promises, managing commitments. It's all coming from directives. You will do this. You will do that. So that the project manager is telling people what to do rather than ensuring that the people on the project understand what needs to be done, so that they are in a position to make offers and to make promises about what they will do.

The collaborative planning, collaborative programming, make ready, are foundations for Last Planners to make promises about the work that they will do next week, because they've got direct involvement in preparing the work to be done.

**Joe:** What's happened to business of getting something done? All these meetings, all these back and forth and everything, am I really getting more done? If I got to get a project done, don't I have to take the reins and move forward?

**Alan:** Are you talking about yourself as project manager here?

**Joe:** Yeah, maybe.

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**Alan:** You can push projects. If you push projects, just like if you try to push production, you'll screw the system. If you pull projects, in my experience, they go a lot more easily because people are taking action based on understanding rather than because they've been told to. Just like in a Lean manufacturing environment, pull is a far more potent way to manage production, than ever push, was. I think it's no different in construction, in project-based production.

**Joe:** Can the Last Planner be used in manufacturing or other disciplines?

**Alan:** Last Planner can be used in any project based environment, I believe. It has been used in the performing arts. It's been used in software engineering. Mary Poppendieck talked about it many years ago. In Lean software development, she talks about it. It's been used in aerospace design. I believe it's been used in aerospace manufacture. It's certainly been used in the building of yachts and small motor cruisers and not so small motor cruisers as well. So, again, another example of one off production.

**Joe:** What would you think would be the biggest of obstacle of starting to use the Last Planner?

**Alan:** What I experience in the construction sector is the old patterns of thinking, the un-Lean thinking, getting in the way. So that when a project doesn't go the way everyone expected it to go, senior management will then sometimes come down and respond as if it was being managed in a traditional way. That undoes a lot of the work that the local management have done in trying to engender the new way of thinking, which is the basis for operating in a Lean way rather than in the traditional way.

**Joe:** Pretty much how I just said it before, it's the way that you ruined it, right?

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**Alan:** Yeah, you've ruined it by doing it the old way, rather than the new way. Then the Last Planner represents the new way, the Lean way.

**Joe:** What would be some of the steps I would need in preparation to apply the Last Planner? Because I can't just one day wave the wand, and say, "Let's start," can I?

**Alan:** You can. But then I think your question still applies. Once you've waved the wand, what do you do next? You need change at two levels. You need change at the level of the project. You need people having these conversations in a systematic way, on the project. That's going to take some training and a lot of coaching. You also need change at the level of more senior management, people who supervise the project manager. This might be at corporate level. You need an understanding of how this new way of managing projects is different, and how it needs managing in a different way. If you don't do that, then back to the previous point. It's very easy for corporate management to come in when things go wrong, and make things more difficult rather than easier. There needs to be coaching at both those levels.

**Joe:** Can you tell me what Villego is, and how you use it?

**Alan:** Villego is a simulation that gives people experience of using the basic conversations in the Last Planner process, within a five hour period. It's a simple, building task. They're building a small house, a villa, out of the Lego. The first time they do it, they do it the way they've always done it. Then we introduce the Last Planner, and then we ask them to build it the Last Planner way. That very simply is the basis of it, and it gives them experience of the collaborative planning. A little bit of experience of make-ready, and of the production evaluation and planning, and of the measurement opportunities for continuous improvement, even in that short period.

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**Joe:** I know you're a member of the Lean Construction Institute, and you support the formation of the communities that practice in a number of European countries. You actually hosted the Lean Construction network on LinkedIn, and I think the Lean Design Forum, too.

**Joe:** That's right.

**Alan:** Is there a Last Planner group on the LinkedIn, too?

**Joe:** There is. It's a sub-group of the Lean Construction network, so you need to join the Lean Construction network before you can join the Last Planner users' group.

**Alan:** Is that where you would guide someone to learn more about the Last Planner, and Lean Construction?

**Joe:** I think the LinkedIn groups are a good place for people to start because they enable people to ask questions, and get support from people with experience. I've found that there are a number of people who are very willing to chip in with ideas and thoughts about how to help people move forward. There's also the Lean Construction Institute, has a group on LinkedIn as well, a good group there. I work hard to restrict the amount of blatant advertising and promotion and so on in the groups that I host. I hope that when there are conversations, discussions going on, they are real discussions and that people will get the value from them. They're not going to get deluged with masses of new material, which, frankly, I find a waste of time.

**Joe:** Well, we've covered a pretty broad spectrum of subject here. Is there something that you would like to add, that maybe I didn't ask?

**Alan:** I think a lot of the points have been covered, as you mentioned in a document that's available for download. You've

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got the reference there on page one, if you could put that into whatever note you send out with the podcast.

**Joe:** Alan, what would be the best way for someone to contact you?

**Alan:** I think probably Alan Mossman, all one word A-L-A-N M-O-S-S-M-A-N at Mac.com.

**Joe:** Do you have a website?

**Alan:** I do. It's TheChangeBusiness.co.uk.

**Joe:** I would like to thank you very much, Alan, for your time. This podcast will be available on the Business 901 blog site and the Business 901 iTunes store. So, thanks again, Alan.

**Alan:** Thank you very much indeed, Joe. Have a good day.

**Joe:** Thank you for listening. Visit us at the [leanmarketinglab.com](http://leanmarketinglab.com).

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Joe Dager is president of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

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