

Mid-West Lean Network

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026

Wednesday, 11 November 2026

'Lean in Support'

Supporting Support Functions

Venue: The Rine Hotel,
Newmarket on Fergus, Co. Clare

#midwestlean

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Beyond the Production Line: Connecting the Lean Ecosystem

Most organisations focus their Lean efforts on the production floor. However, if your support functions aren't operating at the same level, your business isn't Lean - it's constrained. Delays in procurement, misaligned planning, unclear communication, and reactive office workflows quietly undermine even the most efficient production lines. The result is longer lead times, higher costs, and missed delivery targets.

Lean in Support is designed to address this gap.

This one-day conference, divided into 3 Pillars for end-to-end lean, will showcase how leading organisations connect operations and support functions through Lean/Operational Excellence – building a common language, a holistic cross-functional view, and a culture that makes continuous improvement sustainable.

Pillar 1: Communication - Creating a Common Operating Language

When production and support functions interpret key concepts differently, delays and errors follow. This session focuses on aligning terminology, expectations, and standards so that requests are understood instantly and executed correctly - reducing rework and improving flow.

Pillar 2: World View - Managing the Whole, Not the Parts

Organisations don't fail in silos; they fail at the connections. A delay in procurement, a scheduling mismatch, or a gap in workforce planning impacts the entire value stream. We will explore how materials, logistics, planning, engineering, HR, and L&D collectively influence performance, and how to optimise them as one system.

Pillar 3: Culture: From Firefighting to Continuous Improvement

Support functions are often caught up in reactive work, constantly solving urgent problems. This session shows how to apply Lean tools such as root-cause analysis to administrative processes, enabling teams to prevent issues, improve workflows, and actively support production performance. This session will show how culture in the enabler of Lean in support (leadership, behaviours, routines).

Conference Programme

Conference Chair: James Martin, Continuous Improvement Facilitator, Atlantic Aviation Group

08:30	Registration and Networking
09:00	**Welcome and introductions** Helen Downes, CEO, Shannon Chamber James Martin, Chair, Mid-West Lean Network Saoirse Colgan, Head of AI, Digitalisation and Operational Excellence, Enterprise Ireland



Session 1 — Communication: Creating a Common Operating Language

09:30	**Connecting Every Voice - From Shop Floor to Senior Leadership... and back again** Dave Melia, Senior Production Manager, Aerogen
09:55	**Lost in Translation: Bridging the Communication Gap** Ann Sheahan, Managing Director, Entellexi
10:20	**Agentic AI: Enabling End-to-End Organisation Flow** Brian Hanly, Co-Founder & CEO, Brightbeam
10:45	**Q&A with Presenters**
11:00	Coffee/Tea Break

Session 2 — World View: Managing the Whole, Not the Parts



11.15	**Managing Behaviours & Mindsets, not just the end goal** Nicky Flanagan, Senior Operations Excellence, Kinisla
11:40	**Continuous Improvement Beyond the Manufacturing Floor** Eric Hennessy, Senior Director of Production, Boston Scientific
12:05	**Continuous Improvement in Wider Value Stream of a Manufacturing Plant** Dr. Gerard Grace, Director of Business Excellence, Edwards Lifesciences
12:30	**Q&A with Presenters**
12:45	Lunch and networking

Session 3 — Culture: From Firefighting to Continuous Improvement

13:45	**Making the Invisible Visible** Marie Clifford, Managing Director, ATC Group
14:10	**From Mission to Metrics: Connecting our Purpose to Everyday Performance** Frank Keane, CEO, Vitalograph Group
14:35	**The Culture Advantage: Creating the Conditions for Continuous Improvement to succeed** Tom O'Carroll, Director of Manufacturing Ireland, Zimmer Biomet
15:00	**Q&A with Presenters**
15:15	**Problem Solving Challenge A presented by local secondary school**
15:25	**Problem Solving Challenge B presented by local secondary school**
15:35	**Keynote Speaker: Micheál Geraghty, Vice President Operations – EMEA, Coca Cola Concentrate Supply**
16:05	**Remarks from Anchor Sponsor** Pat Burke, Vice President and General Manager, Cook Medical
16:15	Closing Remarks – Helen Downes, CEO, Shannon Chamber



About the Presenters

Conference Chair

James Martin, Continuous Improvement Facilitator, Atlantic Aviation Group & Chairperson, Mid-West Lean Network



James Martin is a Continuous Improvement Facilitator with Atlantic Aviation Group and has more than 35 years' experience in the aviation maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) industry. Beginning his career as an aircraft mechanic before qualifying as an EASA B1 Licensed Aircraft Engineer, James transitioned into Lean and continuous improvement in 2008.

Over the past 15 years, he has led Lean transformation initiatives across Europe, the Americas and China, including developing the Lufthansa Technik global Visual Management standard, which has been implemented throughout its heavy maintenance network. His expertise spans visual management, problem solving, leadership development and organisational transformation.

Combining deep operational experience with international Lean leadership, James is passionate about helping organisations use visual management to change behaviours, improve decision-making and achieve sustainable performance improvement.

Speaker Profiles

Dave Melia, Senior Production Manager, Aerogen



Dave is an experienced manufacturing and operations leader with almost 30 years' experience in the medical device and life sciences industry. Beginning his career as a shift production operator with Boston Scientific in Galway, Dave has built his career through a broad range of operational leadership roles spanning production, training, manufacturing engineering, operational excellence and business transformation. This practical, hands-on experience has given him a deep understanding of what it takes to build high-performing teams and deliver sustainable operational improvement in highly regulated manufacturing environments.

Dave has held operational positions with Boston Scientific (across two separate tenures), Merit Medical and, for the past five years, Aerogen, where he currently serves as Senior Production Manager with company-wide responsibility for Operational Excellence and Environment, Health & Safety (EHS). He has successfully led large manufacturing teams, implemented transformational improvement programmes and has supported the rapid growth of Ireland's leading indigenous medical technology company Aerogen.

Ann Sheahan, Managing Director, Entellexi



Ann Sheahan is Managing Director at Entellexi, a high-technology small firm (software development). Ann has over 35 years' experience working with people and teams at all levels in organisations of all shapes and sizes, delivering operational excellence as well as lean and digital transformations. Her experience spans working with small companies with support from the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), small and mid-caps through Enterprise Ireland as well as large companies through the IDA. Ann also works with EU institutions monitoring funded programmes for the benefit of SMEs across the EU. Ann lectures and mentors Masters students at Irish universities on Lean and Six Sigma, problem solving and statistical process control.

Brian Hanly, Co-Founder / CEO, Brightbeam



Brian Hanly is the co-founder and CEO of Brightbeam, the integrator of digital intelligence. Brightbeam integrates digital intelligence into regulated enterprises so completely that AI becomes second nature, meaning, fully embedded across technology, process and culture, and integrated with the human expertise, judgement and accountability that regulated industries depend on. Brian is passionate about helping companies and their people be the best they can be; he has set Brightbeam's core identity on the aim of being the most helpful company in the world.

Nicky Flanagan, Senior Operations Manager, Kinisla



Nicky graduated from UCC with a degree in Food Business leading on to the Kerrygroup Graduate programme in 2013. Working through various operations roles across Charleville, Listowel & Ossett (Near Leeds) where he is currently based since 2015. He is Lean trained by Toyota executive residence in the University of Kentucky. Nicky began branching into Continuous Improvement (CI) roles in Kerrygroup covering sites In Ireland and the UK since 2022. In his current role, he is tasked with facilitating the CI strategy across the newly branded "Kinisla" business across Listowel, Charleville, Newmarket, Portadown, Coleraine & Ossett Dairy plants.

Eric Hennessy, Senior Director of Production, Boston Scientific



Eric Hennessy is a senior operations and manufacturing leader with more than 25 years of experience in the medical device industry, including over 20 years with Boston Scientific. Currently serving as Senior Director of Production, he managers production within the Galway site and manages the Operational Excellence team on site.
Eric has worked in several functions within the operations organisation, including Manufacturing Engineering, Project Management and Production. He has successfully managed multimillion-dollar programs, including the transfers to and from Galway.

As a strong advocate for Continuous Improvement within the manufacturing environment and business support functions, Eric is always looking to enable and grow the continuous improvement culture within the site, by educating teams, system development and growing a culture of teams looking to improve their areas.
Eric holds a Bachelor of Engineering (Mechanical Engineering) from the University of Limerick.

Dr. Gerard Grace, Director of Business Excellence, Edwards Lifesciences



Dr. Gerard Grace is an experienced professional in best practice deployment in operations management, lean Six Sigma, asset management, TPM and Class A in manufacturing and transactional processes. His primary degree is in Industrial Chemistry and he has a PhD in chemistry from the University of Limerick (UL). He is also an experienced Master Black Belt. Having run and mentored hundreds of improvement projects, Ger has learned a lot about what works (and doesn't!) in real life situations. He transferred this experience into tailored green belt, problem solving and TPM programmes, which he delivered in multiple locations.

Ger's key strengths are in problem solving, detailed data analysis capabilities combined with clarity of communication, facilitation, and ability to interact with people at all levels of the business. His interests outside of work include his family, mountain biking, dogs, philosophy and anything outdoors.

Marie Clifford, Managing Director, ATC Group



Marie Clifford is Managing Director of ATC Group, based in Shannon, Ireland, a company that designs and engineers workspace and flow solutions for manufacturing organisations, with particular expertise in regulated industries including medical device and pharmaceutical manufacturing. Her work is centred around a simple principle: Make Work Flow. This philosophy extends beyond equipment design into operational thinking, workplace culture, communication, and organisational behaviour.

Under Marie's leadership, ATC Group has evolved from a traditional engineering business into a behaviour-led Lean organisation focused on improving flow across both production and support functions. Marie is also founder of The Lean Company (TLC), a business focused on providing practical, standardised Lean tools that help organisations improve flow, communication, and workplace organisation without unnecessary complexity.

A strong advocate for people-first Lean, Marie believes that sustainable operational excellence comes less from tools alone and more from behaviours, ownership, standards, and daily routines. Her particular interest lies in the intersection between people, culture, leadership, and operational performance, especially how support functions and production teams can operate as one connected system rather than isolated departments.

Frank Keane, CEO, Vitalograph Group



Frank Keane is the CEO of the Vitalograph Group, having joined in 2004 as the General Manager of the Ennis, Ireland site. Vitalograph was formed in 1963 and designs, manufactures, and supplies Class II respiratory diagnostic medical devices and accessories to primary, secondary and tertiary care as well as equipment, services and software systems for clinical drug trials globally and has completed over 280 trials to date. The company employs 450 globally in the USA, UK, Ireland, Germany and Japan.

Before joining Vitalograph, Frank worked with Parthus Technologies (2001-2004) as the General Manager of the GPS chip division. Prior to that, he worked with Artesyn technologies (1995-2001), a US multinational, as Global Director of product marketing and R&D Manager. Previous roles were in R&D and R&D management in several companies from start-ups to multinationals, including Intepro and Burr-Brown.

Frank has a B.Eng (Electronics) from UL (1986) as well as an M.Sc (Mgnt) from TCD (2003) and graduate diploma in strategic marketing from the Wharton School of Business at Penn State.

Tom O'Carroll, Director of Manufacturing Ireland, Zimmer Biomet



Tom O'Carroll is an experienced and inclusive leader, with a demonstrable track record of implementing change and delivering results through people and process. He is committed to the guiding principles of integrity, accountability and developing talent to strengthen the organisation. He continually seeks out value propositions to both organisation and customer and through engagement, collaboration and innovation, he delivers results that facilitate growth and foster a winning culture.

Pat Burke, Vice President and General Manager, Cook Ireland



Pat Burke is Vice President and General Manager at Cook Medical, in Limerick. With over three decades of leadership in electronic and medical device manufacturing, Pat brings deep expertise across engineering, operations, facilities management, customer service, supply chain logistics, and distribution. His career includes key roles at Sumicem Optoelectronics, Dell, AST Computers, and Intel, where he built a strong foundation in high-tech and regulated industries.

At Cook Ireland, Pat leads strategic initiatives that drive innovation, operational excellence, and global competitiveness. He is known for fostering collaborative teams and delivering results in complex, fast-paced environments. Pat holds a Bachelor of Engineering in Electronics from the University of Limerick.

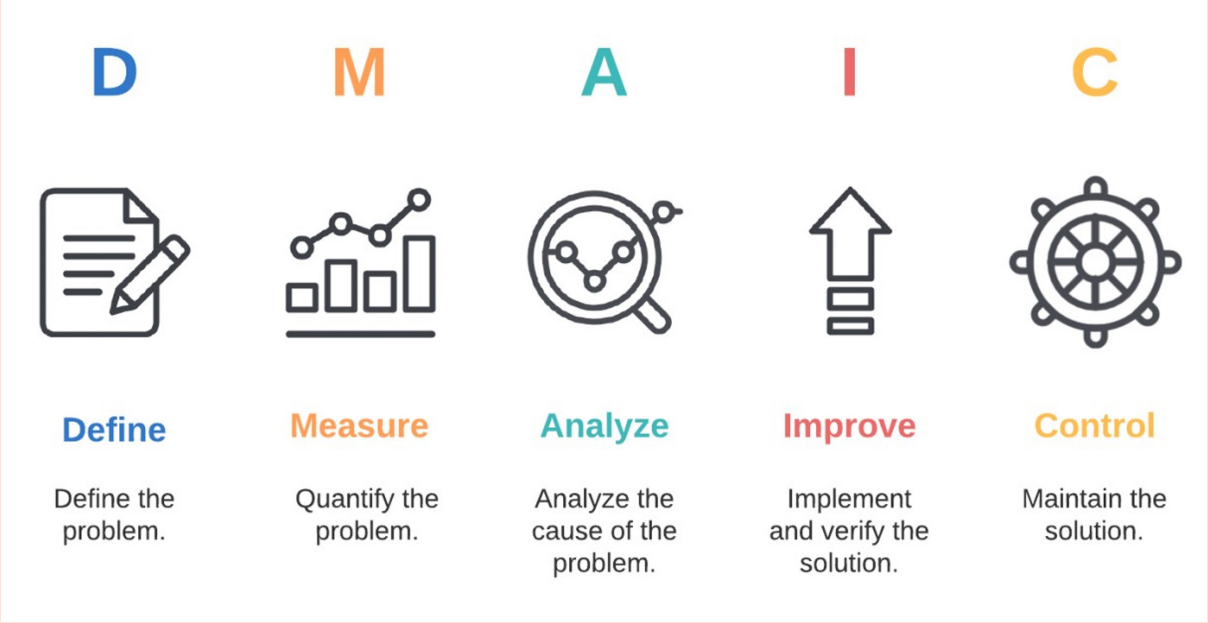
Keynote Speaker

Micheál Geraghty, Vice President Operations – EMEA, Coca Cola Concentrate Supply



Micheál is currently Vice President of Operations - EMEA for Coca Cola Concentrate Supply. He has managed complex manufacturing operations for more than 30 years in both the semiconductor and beverage industries and across countries in Africa, Asia and here in Ireland. Micheál holds a degree in electronic engineering from the University of Limerick and is a past president of the Irish Centre for Business Excellence.

Students Have a Challenge - Can Your Lean Expertise Solve It?



NOTE: Students from two Co. Clare secondary schools will outline a problem(s) they need help to resolve. The students will give context to the problem(s) and seek a volunteer(s) from the audience to work with them to resolve the issue. The outcome(s) will be presented at a Mid-West Lean Network event in Q1, 2027. The problem (s) will be presented at 15:15.

Mid-West Lean Network

The Mid-West Lean Network has developed considerably since its formation in November 2016. There are now in excess of 130 member companies in the Network, deriving benefits from the 54 Lean-focused workshops, and 6 conferences, 2 visits to Toyota Motor Manufacturing, UK, and site visits to Seating Matters and ATC.

This Conference is the culmination of the 2026 calendar of events.

Be part of it.

BOOK YOUR PLACE

To book your place at this Conference, log onto:
www.shannonchamber.ie/events/mid-west-lean-network-conference-2026/

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