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LEAN THOUGHTS

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The Culture Thing!

Our thanks go to our good friend, a founding father of AME , Prof. Emeritus, Dr. Robert Hall, Editor-in-Chief of AME's flagship publication Target magazine for his permission to share his message with you - Thanks, Doc.

In a recent survey, AME members said that their hottest topic is working culture. Art, music, and tribal anthropology may characterize ethnic culture, but what about working culture? Anthropologists agree that, like jazz, words inadequately describe any culture to someone not directly experiencing it. We "dig it," or we don't. Much about culture is implicit – sensed – not explicitly discussed. And the culture hardest for us to see and describe is our own, like that old conundrum: Does a fish see the water it swims in?

Despite the caveats, an emerging definition of working culture is, "How we do things around here." It is the collective behavior of people using common habits, words, goals, systems, and symbols; and interwoven with processes, technologies, significant events, training – and a slew of other stuff that no one can explicitly gather in mind at once. All this melds and clashes to form our present working culture.

In addition, different individuals bring to the workplace their own uniqueness, ethnic culture, and life experience. From a managerial view, the quickest, easiest way to impose order on this mess is by command-and-control. Hierarchies form naturally, both in nature and in human society. Children on a playground establish a pecking order pretty fast.

If work isn't complex, command-and-control gets it done. It worked well in close-formation warfare. Generals with a "commanding view" of a battlefield ordered into formation troops who abided by that famous line derived from Tennyson, "Ours is not to question why; ours is but to do or die."

By the end of the 19th century, close-order formation battles had gone the way of the cannonball. Individual soldiers had to employ more and more personal judgment. The military began to evolve away from detailed command-and-control.

In a complex environment, command-and-control breaks down. Bosses get overloaded. They take on staff – bureaucracy. Decisions may be better considered, but they take time. Control becomes more indirect, by systems like budgets. If quality performance requires tending to a host of details, staff and management bog down in that too. Capable people doing first-line work have to do it – in factories and elsewhere. But for this, they need systems of rapid lateral communication, like lean, high-visibility operations. High visibility should also prompt everyone to engage in process improvement daily, but they learn to do that only if leadership does more than "implement lean tools." They must develop people to the maximum, creating a working culture to seize and overcome every problem. "Lean tool deployment" is symbiotic with developing a working culture in which all people constantly see and solve problems.

In this light, why is Ford's Model T line obsolete? Ford engineered a lean physical flow, but ran it by command-and-control. Not only factory workers, but many others did only rote work. Managers, staff, and skilled trades did nearly all the process thinking.

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Where "Lean Thoughts" Become Reality



The first Model T had 812 part numbers and no variations. Today, vehicles are much more complex; no two of them built on the same line may have exactly the same combination of features. Even little errors cause rework – or much worse. Completing each unit fault-free requires constant mental engagement. The need to constantly improve processes is obvious, but staff and management direct episodic process improvement. Befogged by their work role legacies, they can't discern their major responsibility, which is developing workers to constantly improve processes.

The intent implicit in the Toyota Production System is to stimulate people to think constantly – a "self-running, self-improving" system. Everyone, not just managers, can see what's happening, and workers can whip problems at a more detailed level than staff. Ideally, even every bobble from a standard process by either man or machine should prompt why questions. That's a new work culture. Creating this culture has been termed, "nemawashi," thoroughly preparing enough soil for a transplanted tree to grow.

Such growth implies that a learning culture must permeate an entire company – or an entire enterprise. Excellent production doesn't grow in isolation; it dies if a product is poorly designed. Customer satisfaction results from enterprise-wide performance, from initial customer contact to end-of-life product disposal. To grasp the scope of this, try mapping the customer experience from beginning to end, if you can. Or map the path of all material from "dirt to dirt," or "cradle to cradle." The need for a "lean learning culture" in a total enterprise becomes obvious, but conventional business organizations can't begin to see this, and even today's lean companies can't begin to do it.

Can a working culture be transformed? Yes, but only if we realize that implementing lean is really planting the roots of a new working culture tree. The principles underlying TPS apply to any kind of work. Lean tools help apply those principles where the objective is exact replication, time after time. Not all work has that objective, and tools may vary; but all work involves processes, so all of it is subject to learning. Some learning is individual; some is organizational; and some is process. Process learning is another way to describe process improvement. For example, we might learn how to create high-efficiency, easily-modified vehicles lasting a century or more in service, a process whopper in scope, in which initial production would be only one small phase (a green version of the fifteen-year old three-day car scenario.)

Reality is that tackling the tamest version of any such ambition takes an enterprise-wide working culture revolution. In this issue, the Plug Power story describes a company consciously transforming its working culture to attain a vision closer to here-and-now.

Yes, a culture for working excellence can be created, totally changing "how we do things around here." **However, leadership to sustain anything that sweeping has to come from "the top." Vacillation by new ownership or new management can confound it. An enterprise half one thing, and half another, isn't pursuing excellence.**

Robert W. Hall, Editor-in-Chief, AME's Target Magazine.

2007 HOT CONSUMER PRODUCTS

From Jim Pinto's newsletter

Hey, what new hot widgets are you going to buy this year? The Consumer Electronics Association show in Las Vegas showed a plethora of products - new HDTV, cellphones with video and touch screens, multicore computing, ubiquitous broadband and third-generation cellular networks.

As digital TV prices fell, sales jumped to more than \$23B. Now all those digital TV consumers want content that will show off their new gadgets. This year it will arrive through the Internet and the likes of Youtube. Already I'm receiving more Youtube links via email than I get with jpg pictures.

As digital TV and cellphones converge with the Internet, improved device management and navigation become necessary. In the home, remote controls have become unmanageable - the arrays of buttons on different devices and the on-screen menus are maddening. Also, as smart phones become smaller, with more features, the interface needs change. Apple is setting the pace by eliminating hard buttons in favor of on-screen dynamic manipulation of icons.

Voice control interfaces are becoming surprisingly accurate. You'll be seeing more voice-command in automobiles this year.

And soon, you'll simply be telling your TV which channel you want to watch, when to turn up the volume and when to mute.

And lots more things you didn't think you really needed.

PC World - The 20 Most Innovative Products of the Year:

<http://www.pcworld.com/article/id,128176-page,1/article.html>

Forbes - The Hottest Technology Of 2007:

<http://tinyurl.com/3y2vgr>

Consortium Event Schedule



Tour Workshop Conference

January	February	March	April	May	June
<p>T</p> <p>Wednesday 24 <u>Eaton Electrical</u>, contact Joe Fisher, JoeRFisher@eaton.com</p> <p>W</p> <p>La-Z-Boy Corporate Monroe MI February 14 & 15 <u>Enterprise Value Stream Mapping</u> How to use the VSM tools to map admin processes. Contact Richard Kunst for info. Richard.kunst@la-z-boy.com Register at www.ame.org</p>	<p>T</p> <p>Wednesday 14, <u>CFN Precision</u>, contact Paul Kaulback, pkaulback@cfn-inc.com</p>	<p>T</p> <p>Wednesday 21, <u>Nestle Waters</u>, contact Mariela Castano mcastano@perriergroup.com</p>	<p>T</p> <p>Wednesday 18, <u>CTS Corp.</u>, contact Bob Garces, Bob.Garces@ac.ctscorp.com</p> <p>C</p> <p>Lean Design & Development Conference Wed 18 to Fri 20 Chicago Contact www.iirusa.com/lean</p>	<p>T</p> <p>Wednesday 16, <u>Stackpole CSD</u>, contact Don Barber Don_Barber@stackpole.ca</p> <p>Consortium Shareshowcase</p> <p>Saturday 05 <u>CGL Guelph</u>, Contact Cindy Grolleman Grolleman@canada.com or Dave Deskur daved@cglmfg.com</p>	<p>T</p> <p>Wednesday 20, <u>Morrison LaMothe</u>, contact Tony Vita tvita@morrisonlamthe.com</p> <p>C</p> <p>AME Regional Conference Mon 18 to Thur 21 Edmonton, Alberta Contact www.measureupforsuccess.com</p>
July	August	September	October	November	December
		<p>T</p> <p>Wednesday 26, <u>Kraft Foods</u>, contact Hanif Jivraj hjivraj@Kraft.com</p>	<p>T</p> <p>Wednesday 10, <u>CGL Manufacturing</u> contact Dave Deskur daved@cglmfg.com</p> <p>C</p> <p>AME National Conference Mon 29 to Friday Nov 2 Chicago Contact www.ame.org</p>	<p>T</p> <p>Wednesday 14, <u>Messier-Dowty</u>, contact Mike Smith Mike_Smith@Messier-dowty.on.ca</p>	<p>T</p> <p>Wednesday 12, <u>Orenda</u>, contact Brenda McIntosh brendamcintosh@orenda.com</p>