

## Slow Down ... Go Faster

*Most folks feel that if they and their organizations are not working at a fever pace nothing is being accomplished. This can be a significant error of judgment ... we know the following phrases but have you ever taken the time to abide by them ?*

*Haste makes Waste !*

*Take Time to smell the roses !*

The economic turbulence of 2009 created frantic panic in most organizations. Organizations operated at a frantic pace plugging holes, reorganizing the troops and attempting to implement quick fixes to nagging problems.

Unfortunately the implementation of Lean is more about changing the culture and the way people think and act than the actual adoption of tools. Often what I see is what I describe as Veneer Lean the visual adoption of tools without creating the depth within the organization to have truly changed the DNA of the organization.

For example, I cannot count how many times I have gone into an organization to be shown with admiration that the organization has implemented a Kanban system. Upon further inquiry we actually see that the organization has just implemented a 2-Bin system ... this is not Kanban ... so please let us call it what it is. A good Kanban system can have multiple signals within the value stream to insure a steady flow of materials to the point of use in spite of the procurement lead-time.

In other cases, organizations have embarked on a 5S+1 journey which is nothing more than a disciplined house cleaning under the banner of a fancy phrase. Proper Workplace organization is a tactile engineered assault to reduce walk, improve ergonomics while reducing search time and eliminate wanderitis of employees.

I am fully aware that Lean has now become the latest buzz word and we are now being overrun with Lean Experts. In many of these cases someone has visited a facility that has implemented some Lean practices goes back to their organization and hands the mandate to implement to an individual that does not have the knowledge or skill set but has been empowered. In these cases I can guarantee that in a couple of years their Lean implementation will be described as a failure which will be a blemish to the Lean community in general.

Just like if you want a piece of solid wood furniture, it takes time to grow the tree that produces the wood that will be crafted into a heirloom piece of furniture. Others will just purchase a piece of furniture that looks Good, but is just a few pieces of particle board covered with a thin skin of veneer to give a false appearance.

But how do we avoid creating a false appearance of Lean? It all begins with observation ... a lot of observation and then a ton of Reflection before implementing action.

An excellent method of observation is to employ the use of Enterprise Value Stream Mapping.

Where Lean Thoughts can become Reality

*"Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow."*

Ronald. E. Osborn

## Standing in the Circle

Running an Enterprise Value Stream Mapping event allows your folks to be removed from being “IN” your organization to being “ON” your organization. During this event folks need to walk, interview and document the entire value stream. The value of a mapping exercise can be significantly enhanced should you decide to add “Outside Eyes” from venues such as; suppliers, customers or fellow members from your consortium.

A favourite way of observation was shared by Robert “Doc” Hall in a Target Article ...

### **Standing in the Circle**

Ohno coached his budding TPS leaders to carefully observe reality by drawing a chalk circle on the floor, telling them to stand in it for several hours observing reality, mind wiped clean, undistracted by things seemingly more important to do. This practice in intensive observation imbued them in kaizen thinking, which was necessary before they could coach others.

Kaizen is the core of TPS. All other techniques promote kaizen by maximizing the number of opportunities to practice it. Kaizen is learned primarily by doing; classes merely familiarize people with techniques.

Developing a few experts helps a little, but the power of kaizen is multiplied many times if the experts coach everyone else to see and solve problems. Reality is that no one becomes an expert with magic answers. The power is in the method.

Process visibility reveals problems to anyone, not just managers. When something is amiss, *workers* can quickly determine the cause and take action. Process visibility also stimulates everyone to think of still more ways to improve it. Thus empowered by the method, workers learn to self-manage processes and spontaneously improve them.

Visibility – thoughtful visibility – is a tenet of the Toyota Production System. Empty-headed gawking is insufficient. Ohno’s basic problem solving method was “to ask why at least five times,” which means that he didn’t ask people to literally confine themselves to the circle, but to dig through the clutter to see the essential problem.

Very small processes, like Integrated Circuit production, cannot be seen directly, so they are made largely through data and remote control. But even with fully gowned workers and minute processes, process visibility reveals a remarkable amount of waste.

Large dispersed processes cannot be seen all at once. When flow charting (or Value Stream Mapping) a large process, people must communicate precisely, or someone must travel around to see reality. Staying in touch with reality is the important part. The only way to be sure that a chart is up to date is to review the process frequently. In large processes, like automotive engineering change systems, someone is likely to be tinkering all the time, so that at any instant, no one knows how it really works.

The stand-in-a-circle exercise is good anywhere, for example, when studying customers’ evaluation and use of a product. It works on docks, in offices, and everywhere else.

Merely installing visibility tools doesn’t accomplish their purpose, staying connected with reality and remaining curious – always asking why and identifying problems. That takes constant practice. Although careful observation can be cultivated into a habit, it is never simple. Toyota veterans know that when observing a process for the first time, it takes several hours – sometimes days – to develop an initial grasp of it. (Seeing nothing happen in many hours may be a marvelous discovery, not a waste of time.)

“Standing in a circle” is taking the time to understand reality before acting. It is not creating some kind of model, in software or otherwise, and seeing if it works. It also counters the instinct of managers (and others) with so strong a bias for action that they always want to be making something happen – even if it is wrong.