



MODERN
MANUFACTURING
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In Search of the Right Machine



MECHATRONICS:
DRIVING EFFICIENCY IN
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WHY DOES **COMMON SENSE** ELUDE DISCRETE MANUFACTURING?

Lean Manufacturing has long since been a proven way to achieve effective improvements in productivity, quality, and lead time by eliminating waste. Surprisingly though many discrete manufacturing organizations are still shying away from it. The following fable serves as an eye-opener for those yet to embrace the philosophy that means pure gains.



Source: Magic Wand Media

Once the Sales Manager had converted the customer order into a Visual Signaling Card at Mysore Kirloskar Hubli factory and placed it in its location on the assembly line, the entire execution thereafter was completely handled and controlled by the workmen. The production and procurement processes in the execution did not need the involvement of any supervision or managing, thereby leaving the Supervisors and Managers time to hone and improve the systems further. The workmen

ran the pull production like a symphony.

A not-so-uncommon story

The above is an example of an organization that brought in the Lean Manufacturing System. To drive the point home it's important to narrate this little fable which beautifully highlights the difference between lean and discrete / conventional or somehow / anyhow manufacturing organizations: Everyday a small Ant arrived at work and started working immediately. He produced a

lot and was happy. The CEO – a Lion – was surprised to see the Ant working without any supervision. He thought if the Ant could produce so much without supervision, wouldn't he produce more if he had a supervisor. So he recruited a Cockroach who had extensive experience as a supervisor and who was famous for writing excellent reports. The Cockroach's first decision was to set up a clocking in attendance system. He also needed a secretary to write and type his reports. He recruited a

SANJEEV
BAITMANGALKAR
Principal Consultant –
Strategy &
Lean Management
Stratmann Consulting
sanjeev@
baitmangalkar.com



Spider who archived and monitored all his phone calls. The Lion was delighted with Cockroach's reports, and asked him to produce graphs to describe production rates and analyze trends so that he could use them for presentations at Board Meetings. So the Cockroach had to buy a new computer and a laser printer, and recruited a Fly to manage the IT department.

Meanwhile, the Ant, who had once been so productive and relaxed, hated this new plethora of paperwork and meetings, which used up most of his time. The Lion then decided that it was high time to nominate a head of the department where the Ant worked. The position was given to a Cicada whose first decision was to buy a carpet and an ergonomic chair for his office.

The new person – the Cicada – also needed a computer and a personal assistant, who he brought from his previous department, to help him prepare a Work and Budget Control Strategic Optimization plan. The department where the Ant worked was now a sad place, where nobody laughed anymore and everyone was upset. It was at that time the Cicada convinced the boss, the Lion, of the absolute necessity to start a climatic study of the environment.

The Lion then reviewed the charges for running the Ant's department and also realized that the production was much less than before. So, he recruited an Owl, the prestigious

B-school grad and renowned consultant, to carry out an audit and suggest solutions. The Owl spent three months in the department and came up with an enormous report in several volumes that concluded "The Department was Overstaffed".

Guess who the Lion fired first? The Ant! Because he showed lack of motivation and had a negative attitude!

Like it or not, such thinking / decisions / actions / direction prevails in varied forms in non-lean organizations even today. This is also what happens when a lean leader either leaves the organization or is asked to leave, and the new management has no clue about how the lean leader's routine and behavior led or contributed to the successful transformation of the company.

The lean benefits

Employing lean philosophies is no rocket science and embracing them promises immense benefits in productivity and quality. Then why, one wonders, does common sense elude discrete manufacturing organizations?

Below are certain things listed which, if implemented, can aid to succeed in becoming lean:

- The top management must lead in building the lean culture. Their management style must change to make room for the principles and philosophies of lean manufacturing which they must live every day.

With over a hundred tools and techniques to choose from the lean tool basket, becoming lean should be the number one strategic goal of an organization from top down.

- Disruption from successfully implementing lean processes usually comes from the top management. By practising the above, they become enablers rather than disruptors.
- The most difficult situations or when you think you are too busy to think of lean are the best times to embed a lean culture.
- The intent to become lean gets realized when it ceases being a mere statement.
- With over a hundred tools and techniques to choose from the lean tool basket, becoming lean should be the number one strategic goal of an organization from top down.
- Merely implementing the tools will never make a company lean. Managing them routinely is what ensures an organization's success.
- Companies that consistently practise lean, succeed in getting better results and grow well organically, gaining a competitive advantage.
- It's the workers who run lean production, and the others improve systems, bring in new designs, innovate with new ideas, processes, reduce inventory, improve the workflow, build competitive advantage, enhance customer satisfaction etc.

While you mull over the common sense question and the above pointers, keep in mind that the CEO of a true lean company is also an Ant, never a Lion! 

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MAGIC WAND MEDIA INC
BRANDING – PUBLISHING

M: +91 9740048390 / +91 9870401498

E: murali.sundaram@magicwandmedia.in

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