



MANAGEMENT BRIEFING

Thinking of 'Going' Lean? Know why most implementations fail before you start.

A great deal has been written about the multiple operational and financial benefits that can be realised through the adoption of lean methodologies, yet the path to operational excellence is rarely trouble-free. It seems that the majority of attempts to implement lean production end in disappointing outcomes and declarations like:

- "Lean doesn't work here"
- "Our industry / product is different"
- "It wouldn't work with our people"

Why is this? Is lean only suitable in certain circumstances or is something else going on?

The key missing ingredient in many attempts to introduce Lean is that a lean implementation is as much about *changing behaviours* as it is about introducing new models and theories of work.

The majority of Lean concepts are relatively easily grasped and do not require high levels of technical ability or large budgets to implement. However, once these ideas have been introduced we need to ensure that the anticipated benefits are realised and this is done through sustaining the desired behaviours at all levels in the organisation. It is here that many implementations fail; sustaining behavioural change is not easy.

If you are considering embarking on a lean implementation then it may be worth reminding yourself of the 'golden rules' of successful change (Source – John Kotter "Leading Change")

- 1. Establish a sense of urgency.** Why are you doing this implementation and why now? In successful change programs the majority of employees know what the 'burning platform' is.
- 2. Create the guiding coalition.** No single person can do this alone, not even the CEO. Create a team capable of removing roadblocks at all levels and in all circumstances.
- 3. Communicate the change vision.** The 'burning platform' provides the stick – but you also need to provide the carrot. What is in it for the employees? How will the organisation be improved?
- 4. Empower action – at all levels.** Lean Companies expect at least one change idea implemented everyday for every employee. The majority of these ideas are not approved by committee!
- 5. Generate quick wins.** Nothing succeeds like success. Turn talk into action - show people that it works, celebrate success and find the next opportunity. Kaizen events are a great way to do this.
- 6. Consolidate gains and produce more change.** Build a program one success at a time. Consider a pilot approach with a managed roll out, for example.
- 7. Anchor new approaches in the culture.** How do we ensure that new ways of working become 'the way we do things here'? Here think management systems: What is the process? What are appropriate performance indicators? How often are results measured and reported? How do we communicate results?

To conclude: It has been shown that Lean thinking brings significant and sustainable financial and operational benefits in a wide range of industries and organisations. However, to realise these benefits in our own companies we need to move beyond the models and theories and implement the daily practices that are key to sustaining a lean transformation; we must understand that most implementations fail because they underestimate how difficult it can be to sustain behavioural change.