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ARE WE BETTER OFF ALONE?

The ideologies and 'isms' competing with lean; better with or against them?

Organisations and interviews featured in this edition include: National Instruments, Umicore Autocat, Tier Link Limited, Metcam, Valeocon Management Consulting, Lincoln Financial Group, Tecla Consulting and University of Buckingham.

IN THIS ISSUE:

From lean to operational excellence: studies in success: How lean has transformed over the years and spawned its shoot-offs. Are they greater than their predecessor or do they lend themselves to the improvement of all?

12 common mistakes that minimise project impact and how to protect against them: Those niggling errors all businesses make that can seriously harm the bottom line and lead a successful lean implementation to fail.

Applying LSS to save the planet: Can lean save humanity from the disaster of its own making?





Out of the blue: In search of excellence

Bill Bellows presents his new column, *Out of the blue*, which highlights concepts associated with an integration of ideas from W. Edwards Deming, Russell Ackoff, Genichi Taguchi, and Tom Johnson, amongst many other systemic leaders. With applicability to improving how individuals and organisations think together, learn together, and work together.

The aim of these articles is to present concepts which appear to be “out of the clear blue sky,” yet could be immensely valuable to lean practitioners.

As a consumer, my introduction to the Toyota production system began in 1989 with the purchase of a Toyota pickup truck. After a few days of test drives of US and Japanese trucks, the decision came down to two models, one by Toyota, the other by Nissan. Although I had test-driven US trucks, my disappointing experience with US cars, not to mention my wife’s disappointment with US cars, led us to buy Japanese, not American.

Only later did I realise our eventual first purchase of a Toyota product, to be followed by five more Toyota products, coincided with the year in which Motorola announced six sigma quality and a team from MIT, led by James Womack, Daniel Jones, and Daniel Roos, published the results of a five-year study of the future of the automobile, titled *The Machine That Changed The World*.

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After several years of driving the Toyota pick-up, I began to realise the higher reliability of the truck’s components; from the electrical system to the air conditioning system to the engine coolant system, none of which needed replacing when the truck was sold after 14 years. I wish I could say the same for the purchase of a Toyota mini-van in 1998, for which the automatic transmission suddenly failed after six months of ownership, with less than 10,000 miles of accumulated use, on Christmas morning. Worse yet, 80 miles away from home, stranded on a motorway, and in need of a tow truck. Much to my chagrin, when buying the mini-van, I declined the extended service option after reading a little known account of the snap fit assembly

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of Toyota that reinforced my admiration for their production system.

As explained in my 2009 LMJ article, *Reflections on the fabric of the Toyota production system*, the snap-fit story of Toyota was reported by David Kearns, the CEO of Xerox from 1982 to 1990, in his 1992 book, *Prophets in the Dark*.

Frank Pipp, an assembly plant manager for a Ford Motor Company factory, routinely instructed his staff to purchase competitor's cars. His plan was to have the final assembly team disassemble these cars and learn first-hand how they assembled. At that time frame in Ford, if two connecting parts could be assembled without the use of a handy rubber mallet, these parts were known as snap fit. The remaining parts required mallets to assemble. To Pipp's amazement, one car purchased was 100% snap fit. He did not believe the results and instructed the team to repeat the assembly operation. They did and found again the Toyota product was 100% snap fit. The time frame of this story was the late 1960s and the discovery was not lost on Pipp. In contrast, he noted the "Dearborn people," from Ford's corporate offices, were invited to look over the truck themselves and witness the assembly team's discovery. According to Pipp, everyone was very quiet, until the division general manager cleared his throat and remarked, "The customer will never notice." And then everyone excitedly nodded assent and exclaimed, "Yeah, that's right" and they all trotted off happy as clams."

In my first Out of the Blue column, I would like to present a down-to-earth contrast between compliance excellence and contextual excellence and offer readers insights on the significance of this distinction. In simple terms, compliance excellence is revealed by posing questions about the completion of tasks. For example, were the trash cans placed at the curb last night? Did you clean your room? Did you complete your homework? In each case, the inquiry about completion of a given task has only two answers, yes or no. The task is either complete or incomplete, pass or fail. A part or component receives the quality stamp of "good" or "bad." There are no shades of gray when it comes to compliance excellence.

Compliance excellence is also revealed through questions involving counting. By way of illustration, one might be asked about the distance to the nearest beach, airport, church, or DIY. Whatever the answer, 10, 30, or 50, measured in units of time, as is often the case in Los Angeles, or in units of length, such as kilometres, Compliance excellence infers each unit of measure is identical to the other units; all miles are the same, all seconds are identical and, therefore, absolutely interchangeable. Compliance excellence discloses detached answers; yes or no; as well as

discrete answers, 12, not 13. No matter the answer, differences (variation) in elevation along the route, kilometre to kilometre, are ignored, as readily as the differences between Valencia oranges while counting them to fill an order for a dozen. Contextual excellence provides awareness of the variation in how a task is completed, as well as awareness of the differences between items being counted. Contextual excellence reveals the infinite number of ways a task can be completed or the infinite number of ways a requirement can be met. In doing so, contextual excellence divulges shades of grey. Upon integration, these carefully accumulated differences appear in use, revealed by components that perform better, as I experienced with my Toyota pick-up truck.

Another simple illustration of the difference between these modes is revealed by replies to the statement, "List five things needed to wash a table." The most frequent answers include water, cleaning solution, bucket, sponge, a person, and, perhaps, someone to clean the table. More often than not, the replies do not include needing to know how the table will be used, once cleaned. Guided by such awareness, contextual excellence is about aligning the varying degree of cleanliness of the table with its intended use, shifting from the table is clean to how clean it should be.

In reviewing the articles in this edition, I encourage readers to be ever mindful of the contrast between compliance excellence and contextual excellence. While compliance excellence offers advantages when the independence of counting is essential, contextual excellence provides utility in the ultimate use of interdependent parts, components, and tasks. From building rocket engines to operating a city government, what opportunities for snap fit integration could be revealed by shifting one's excellence focus from compliance excellence to contextual excellence?

Love Bill's columns? Hear him speak at the LMJAC in Amsterdam, July 8-9. Go to lmjannualconference.com for more details.