



How can I introduce Lean when it has failed before?

BY DR. TIMOTHY D. HILL, PH.D., CLSSBB, PMP

One question that I'm often asked is, "how are we going to roll out our new Lean efforts when we've tried to adopt Lean before and it failed?" This goes for any other approach to continuous improvement that has failed in the past. Firms that have had world-class manufacturing, TQM, Six Sigma, TPS and even Lean have had a rather mixed history of successes!

There are basically two conditions I've seen. They've occurred about equally. They are:

1. They've tried it a long time before.
2. They've tried everything under the sun.

They've tried it a long time before. This is when they've tried Lean before and probably had some hit-and-miss successes, but they were never sustained. I'd give them a three out of five Ss because they failed to standardize and then sustain their Lean gains. They may have sorted (Seiri), kept things in their proper place (Seiton) and then cleaned the workplace (Seiso), but they failed to maintain the above three principles and standardize (Seiketsu). Not only that, they likely failed to sustain the efforts – to practice self-discipline and respect for fellow workers (Shitsuke). Getting to three out of five Ss is still pretty good, but without the last two, your Lean efforts will be doomed to failure.

They've tried everything under the sun. The other condition that I've run into comes about for any of a number of reasons. They've had a change in senior leadership and therefore a change in their continuous improvement activities. It could be that Lean was run like a project and when it was "done" it was time for another continuous improvement effort.

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It could be that they tried to change too much at once, management pushed something down or even that they were too scattered in their thinking. Regardless of why Lean was part of "everything under the sun," they've already tried it and are reluctant to try it again.

In this case, there are some things that you've got to emphasize.

1. Lean is about making quick changes quickly! When you're just starting, you need to be able to show evidence that Lean works. You'll need this evidence to demonstrate to the people who are from the "show me state" as well as the CAVE people (Citizens Against Virtually Everything!). It's not like dealing with people that will be good with change; you've got to demonstrate that Lean will work in your environment. In all of the cases where I've delivered Lean, presenting people with data that Lean works is the best way to win over the "show me state" and the CAVE people. Schedule some quick wins before you tackle any larger issue. Do a quick 5S (not 3S), a rapid improvement event or even a quick value stream map. Celebrate the successes after you've met your goals, or when you're close to meeting your goals.
2. Lean is 20 per cent tools, 80 per cent culture change. Many Lean trainers emphasize the tools and the language of Lean. Terms like Hansei and Yoko-

tan discussion, heijunka boards, Overall Equipment Effectiveness and the like will scare the uninitiated away! Learn to phrase your Lean words in terms that fit your organization and culture. I've watched others fail at Lean because they did not take the existing culture into count. While many people are familiar with terms like kaizen and value stream mapping, don't take it as an article of faith. Do introduce them to root cause problem solving because you'll be able to change the culture from reacting to everything to one of asking why. If you can get them to ask why five times, you'll start to change the culture. I find that showing them how an A3 works is also a great way to start to change the culture.

3. Keep it simple, stupid – standardize and sustain! Follow the KISS rule and always keep your Lean deliverables simple. Keep them connected to the main goals of the leadership (so that you can do effective Hoshin planning), keep them apprised of progress with simple visual tools and celebrate your successes as they occur.

I've included senior leadership members at the start and training of the Lean delivery so that they can be seen to be participating and a part of the solution. I've also had them make a short presentation about what their goals and aims are for Lean.

When it comes to reporting out on

a team's progress, I've gone as far as making small spreadsheets that show the various progress on things to date, who's doing what and what their deliverables are. Those spreadsheets are very simple and visual. I also use that spreadsheet for my own project management and for communicating with the senior leadership.

If you can do these three things, then it won't really matter how well (or poorly) your organization introduced Lean in the past. You'll be able to tell them that things will be different now and make it stick! 🍁

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Question from the floor...

QUESTION: I'm sure you've had this question before. I can't seem to get my employees to get started in a standard work initiative. They're OK with doing a short-term kaizen or 5S, but they've got all kinds of excuses for not doing standard work. Can you help?

ANSWER: Yes, I can! I've heard it all, from "that only works for the Japanese" to "we tried it once and it failed." Although, to be fair, most of the time I hear it now from healthcare. They say that they're dealing with people and people aren't cars. While they're right, people are NOT cars, they still have to go through a process. It's not right that medicine just "wings it" and it's not right that you do, either.

In his book, *The Birth of Lean Conversations*, Taiichi Ohno once said, "Improve things little by little. Make sure that the process that caused problems this morning doesn't cause problems this afternoon. The way to increase your hourly production volume is to recognize problems when they occur and to make the necessary improvements to prevent them from recurring."

With standard work, checklists or best practices, you'll be making sure that the "morning" problems are taken care of permanently and don't become "afternoon" problems!

As Masaaki Imai, a mentor of mine, once said, "Good kaizen depends on the active cooperation of your employees. You might think you're on the right track. But unless your employees are taking part actively, you'll never get the full potential of the improvements. That's why we're going to keep working on this until the people in the workplace think we've got it right."

From the bookshelf...

Follow the Learner: The Role of a Leader in Creating a Lean Culture By Sami Bahri

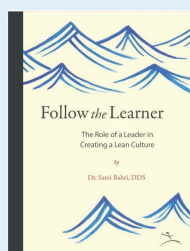
This book is a 2011 Shingo Research Prize winner and it deserves to be one. It details the introduction of Lean to a dentist's practice and nicely emphasizes the differences between looking at processes from the practitioner's view as opposed to the customer's or the patient's view. The nice thing about this book is that we've all had to wait at the dentist's office, so when Bahri asks the following questions, they're asking the same ones that many in manufacturing have asked.

1. What does it really mean to be a "learning organization?"
2. What does it take to get the people in a non-manufacturing environment to think of work in terms of flow?
3. How do you build a culture based on lean principles and lead that culture as it continuously evolves?

Bahri describes how he and the staff in his dental practice tackled each of these questions and how their organization transformed their work and

thinking from a traditional batch-and-queue approach to one focused directly on the needs of the patient, not on the needs of the practitioners.

The book is organized into three sections – Creating the Practice, Leading the Transformation and Discovering the Principles of Lean Leadership – that describe a personal and professional journey in terms that anyone, at any level, can learn from.



It explains the technical changes that they made in the way that they scheduled and treated patients, as well as the understanding of the human interactions needed to make this new model succeed. Along the way, it demonstrates the universal application of Lean concepts and methods in an environment with which we are all familiar. It is both a long way from the traditional manufacturing roots of the Toyota Production System and a simple extension of same.