

The mental barriers of lean

During my time as a lean coach I have always been surprised with the stereotypical reasons for not trying lean. There is almost a mental block which says to some people that lean is purely an automotive tool which must be used on an assembly line and cannot possibly succeed in any other environment. There are always 3 key phrases which make me smile at the start of a lean project, and as yet I have never worked with a company where they have not been used.

1. We don't make cars here!!
2. You will have never worked in a company like ours; we are different to anybody else!
3. We've tried it before and it doesn't work!

I am sure that all of you will be able to relate to at least one if not all three of the above statements and probably put a face to someone within your organisation who will use one. Now the question is how do you handle them? Do you take the stance of 'work with the 80% who want change and leave the rest to catch up'? Do you try and reason with them and show areas where there has clearly been a successful change program? Or do you bring them into your team as a challenge because if you can convert them then the rest of the organisation will be easy!

I have always found that these statements are born out of fear more than any malice and it's that fear of change which scares people with lean. So once you understand the fear you can deal with it. Whilst working within aerospace I was told by several people that 5S doesn't work and adds no value to their business. This was because one of the management team had been to a seminar on lean and had picked up on 5S, upon returning he set his supervisors the task of carrying out a 5S workshop, which they promptly did. What they had failed to do was involve the team members of the area in any of this so it was a management tool, which they had no impact upon and so no responsibility. The only changes they saw were tools removed from their area, the layout changed and they were asked to sweep up more frequently (well for a week or two anyway), so to them lean was a failure based purely on a bad experience. This is far from an isolated incident but it shows fully how a little knowledge can be dangerous.

To get over this hurdle you need to build trust and involve people from the start, clearly display and share information and responsibility. 5S if owned and driven by the team will always impact positively your 5 main KPI's of safety, quality, cost, delivery and people and can very quickly give demonstrable improvements which your team will be proud of and give them the confidence to try something else. *(Not bad for an automotive tool!!!)*

Companies that fail with lean fail due to a lack of engagement. Only by involving, training and working with your team from the outset will Lean work in your business!

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About the author



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Simon is an outstanding individual with a proven track record within global organisations of achievement in lean project delivery, continuous improvement and business transformation.

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