

## **COPING with RESISTANCE to CHANGE**

Steve Krar

Lean has been successfully implemented by about 25% of businesses and companies throughout the world with amazing results. An important part of any successful Lean project is to expect and overcome resistance to change because without worker acceptance, any process improvement is sure to fail. Therefore, proper anticipation and understanding the approaches to various resistance tactics is important to success.

In implementing Lean Continuous Improvement changes, there must be a cultural change that must occur where workers and management work together as a team for the common good and where failure will not be accepted.



The main reasons for resisting changes are:

- **Loss of Control of the new Process** – staff is used to the old process and they may have less control of the new process.
- **Wondering if Change is Good** – This is especially a factor if management does not clearly show their full support of the change.
- **Not Enough Information** – when operators are faced with surprises they did not expect.
- **Loss of Face** – Some employees who supported the old system may feel embarrassed.
- **Not Enough Knowledge** – Some employees may feel that they do not have enough knowledge or training to work under the new system.
- **Loss of Employment** – The possibility of future layoffs if the system works well. Inform them that an efficient operation will ensure and possibly increase employment.

Here are several approaches that can be used to counter these occurrences.

### **Ignore the new process**

- Those who react this way to change simply believe the new process will go away if no one uses it.
- Any process change will certainly fail if it is not indoctrinated into business behavior.
- Make the process impossible to ignore. This can be done by tying the success of the process to personnel training plans, annual review, and other well-established business processes.

**Fail to completely or accurately understand**

Proper training is critical for ensuring people adapt to a new process, especially when they have become accustomed and experienced in another process. Specifically, try:

1. **Clarifying communication:** Examples include newsletters, email, and brown-bag lunches.
2. **One-on-one training:** Some accept change better in a smaller setting, this allows them to ask questions and gain acceptance at their pace.
3. **Checklists/cheat-sheets:** These offer helpful advice and guidance to those who may be unclear about the process. The tools can be small enough to place on a postcard next to the PC or located on the Intranet as a quick reference.

**Disagree with the validity of benefits**

The validity of the change can be strengthened by recommendations from independent sources. Evidence that other companies or departments have been successful with similar efforts can assist in gaining acceptance.

**Criticize tools or software applications**

Another common point of resistance is to cite the inflexibility with the software tool or application that supports the process. Ensuring that there is a feedback loop for tool enhancements is important.

**Exceptions**

Allowing exceptions to the change in process typically is a way to ensure failure. This has the potential to spiral out of control as others attempt to be granted the same exceptions. Worse yet, others will attempt to expand exceptions.

**Delay the Implementation**

Others attempt to delay the implementation with suggestions that this is not the right time for change. If the process improvement truly has business benefits, the sooner the implementation is established the sooner business value can be realized.

**Management Challenges**

One of the greatest challenges management faces in implementing Lean program is ensuring that real behavioral change takes place at all levels of the organization. Even the most well-intentioned, fair and respected management team, without the enthusiastic embracing of the changes planned, will watch their plant change back to old and familiar ways.

### **Suggestions for Change**

1. Develop a shared vision of where the company is headed over the long term, and make it clear how the Lean program can result in more employment.
2. Involve management, union, and shop committees early to stress that Lean must be a joint effort on everyone's part to become more efficient and ensure employment.
3. Have workers offer suggestions how productivity can be improved for the company to remain competitive in the world.
4. Create a communications plan that keeps everyone informed and provides a feedback for those managing the Lean program.

### **Where does Change Start?**

Lean projects should be started by first having a positive attitude - one that says, ***“Together we can find a solution to every problem”***. Change must start with the suggestions of **everyone** in a company to a program of Continuous Improvement, firstly in how their own work can be made easier and more efficient with little or no waste. Secondly in improvements that will have a positive effect on the financial health of the company; it is **not a case of working harder, but working smarter**. Workers and management joining forces and working as a team that has a definite goal of improving the workplace to make it more efficient can accomplish this.

### **The Human Side of Lean**

Lean applies to everyone in the company and the secret to its success is how well management has identified its personnel as to how each person may react to change since employee development is essential to the success of a Lean program.