

LEAN MANAGEMENT RADICALLY QUESTIONS MANY CERTAINTIES OF CLASSIC LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR.

For lean transformation to be successful in the long term, managers must therefore reflect on their leadership role and their behavior in dealing with employees right from the start. It is often necessary to overcome resistance and psychological blockades. Trust thus becomes a core resource in the change process.

THE QUESTION OF TRUST

Actually, everything went according to plan. The manufacturing system was systematically further developed according to lean principles, the employees completed the corresponding method training courses and the first pilot projects were successfully completed. After one year, however, the disillusionment follows. After initial successes, the project stagnates. Targets are not met, causes of errors remain undiscovered and processes are not continuously developed further.

BEYOND OPERATIONAL PROCESSES

This course of the project is prototypical for numerous lean initiatives that focus exclusively on the introduction of methods such as shop floor management or TPM at the process level and thereby neglect essential aspects of leadership behavior. As a result, at many points in the organization, lean practices encounter per-

sonal leadership behavior that is incompatible with key principles of lean management. As a result, the internalization of processes according to lean principles does not function properly across the various organizational levels and ensures that frustration or blockade attitudes arise at various points in the organization (see figure 2).

A lean transformation process must therefore address not only the optimization of manufacturing systems, but also a change in the roles and behaviors of managers at all levels of the organization. This includes three central dimensions of leadership behavior:

Dealing with errors

While in other countries, such as the USA, an open approach to dealing with errors prevails, Germany is one of the nations with the lowest fault tolerance. As a result, the willingness to take responsibility for mistakes is hardly pronounced. For fear of sanctions, mistakes are therefore often not openly addressed or even actively covered up. From a lean perspective, however, mistakes are of

elementary importance. Because only on their basis existing processes can effectively be evaluated and optimized. Managers must therefore establish a positive error culture and signal to employees through their behavior that errors are necessary elements of the improvement process.

Transfer of problem-solving competence

In this country, the image of the manager as a problem solver, who “manages” certain grievances or difficulties in areas from above, still prevails. The lean approach, on the other hand, represents the principle of personal responsibility, which enables employees to independently develop solutions to problems in their area. Managers must therefore learn to delegate responsibility for solving problems to their employees and encourage them to take more responsibility through feedback and active communication.

Catchball procedure

While in classical organizations target agreements are usually simply broken down from top to bottom, lean management relies on feedback processes, through which targets must first be discussed with the level below and confirmed by this level. This ensures that objectives are achievable and that the necessary resources are actually made available to achieve the agreed objectives. Managers at all levels must therefore ensure that these feedback loops are adhered to in their area and, in turn, demand this feedback at the next higher level.

BREAKING OPEN INTERNAL RESISTANCES

Many of the above-mentioned aspects call into question the traditional attitudes and behaviour of managers over decades, closely linked to the fear of losing influence or status. It is not unusual for attempts to break down these patterns to trigger resistance or blockades that can spread to all levels of the organization and endanger the success of a comprehensive lean transformation in the long term (see figure 2). This makes it all the more important to actively accompany and support this change process from the very beginning. The willingness of managers to change depends on three central factors:

External pressure to change

The higher the external pressure to transform one's own organization or area is perceived - for example through collapsing margins or new competitors - the higher the willingness to critically question existing role and behavior patterns. Conversely, areas that are in a good economic position usually have a higher resistance to change. This development is fatal above all because the conditions for a change project become more difficult the tighter the economic and temporal leeway becomes. It is therefore important to create a sense of urgency.

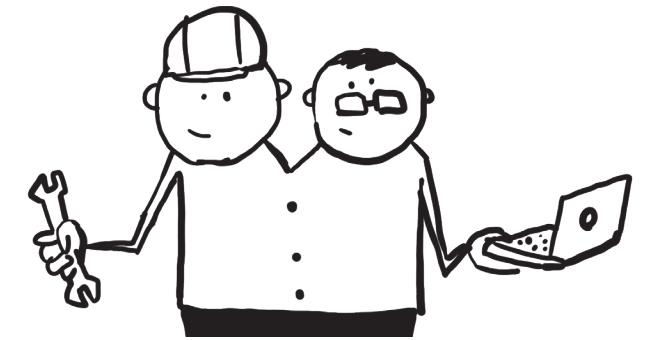
Internal resistors

The longer executives in the same position are occupied with the same tasks, the higher their inner resistance to overcome learned

behavior patterns is. Starting from certain positions, the probability for role changes decreases thus ever further, since the high-level personnel remain in the same position over ever longer periods. In such situations, methods that enable a change of perspective and give the opportunity to question one's own role and behaviour patterns are particularly important.

Time

The more solid the roles and behaviors in an organization are, the longer it takes to break through them. In such a transformation, people go through different phases before adopting a new behaviour. (cf. Kübler-Ross curve). Time thus becomes a success factor in the transformation project in two respects. On the one hand, managers themselves need time to overcome their own role patterns and behavioural routines. On the other hand, because they should give the change project enough time to unfold, even if the results are not immediately visible.



ALLOW A CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

In order to win the managers as strategic partners for the project and to promote their personal willingness to change, they should be actively involved at an early stage of the project with the help of training. A particularly promising tool in this context are Gemba workshops in which managers observe the processes on the shop floor level and work out where value creation or waste actually takes place. On the one hand, this change of perspective should help to better recognize waste in the manufacturing process. On the other hand, it increases the visibility of the manager on site and thus creates trust and credibility for new forms of work. However, this only works if the actual behaviour of the local manager is in line with the propagated principles of Lean Management. If this is not the case because, for example, important error analyses are not carried out in favour of manufacturing volumes, this can lead to a loss of trust among the employees.