LARGE SCALE LEAN

IF YOU WANT TO OPTIMIZE NOT JUST A SINGLE PLANT BUT AN ENTIRE PLANT NET-WORK, SPEED IS OFTEN THE DECISIVE FACTOR. In this situation, an agile approach that draws on existing best practices not only promises a rapid roll-out of optimization measures across the site, but also lays the foundation for a continuous improvement process. Networking becomes a decisive success factor.

If one tries to optimize a single plant according to the design principles of lean production, the procedure is usually relatively simple: After an inventory has been taken, a pilot project is started in a selected area and then rolled out throughout the entire plant. The findings from the project can then be transferred to other locations.

But when it comes to improving processes at over 200 locations worldwide, as in the case of a steel group for which ROI has introduced a global OPEX program, this linear approach reaches its limits. Instead of piloting process improvements individually and rolling them out gradually plant by plant, the project team opted for an agile approach.

COPY AND PASTE INSTEAD OF IN-HOUSE DEVELOPMENT

The first step was to take stock of all global plants using rapid assessments and standardized diagnostic tools. On the one hand, this internal benchmarking served to derive the focal points or the thrust of the improvement measures. On the other hand, it helped to identify existing best practices in the individual plants. On the basis of the knowledge gained in this way, a common framework was then created that contained general quality principles and methods and served as a strategic operational framework for the various measures on site.

Instead of developing and piloting their own solutions, the project team decided to fall back on existing best practices, which were adapted

for the other locations according to the copy and paste principle. This enabled time and costs for piloting and propagation to be drastically reduced and area-wide improvements to be achieved quickly.

CENTRAL CONTROL - LOCAL ANCHORING

This parallel rolling out of improvement measures across a large number of locations requires a strong central authority in which rollout, guideline and further development competence is anchored. It is responsible for ensuring that projects are effectively implemented on the ground and for ensuring that the defined standards with regard to key figures and processes are adhered to on site.

At the same time, however, it is important to anchor the target systems in the local organizations on site and to build up the appropriate know-how and competencies that will enable them to independently further develop their manufacturing systems or certain methods. The tail unit approach offers a possible model for this: individual plants are selected from the global network in order to further develop certain methods, such as TPM or digital shop floor management at the site, to test them on site and - after they have been declared standard - to bring them into the area via networking and sharing.

NETWORKING AS A SUCCESS FACTOR

Effective best practice sharing thus becomes the central success factor for the global scaling of

Lean and OPEX programs. Various methods should therefore be used to promote networking between the plants:

Using digital platforms, such as SharePoint, processes can be stored quickly and easily online and shared with the other plants following approval by the central authority. However, the fact that an active exchange actually takes place requires a high degree of discipline and fixed rules, which in turn must be monitored and executed by a central instance.

In addition to this, physical networking events should therefore be initiated at which the operative managers meet regularly and deal with different methods from the Lean or OPEX construction kit. One example of this is the "Speed Dating for Best Practices" method set up by ROI for a customer in the automotive industry: Each participant has a quarter of an hour to present his best practice example. Due to the many interactions, interesting interfaces can be quickly identified and deepened in further rounds. In addition to these temporary networking opportunities, it can also make sense to regularly exchange managers and deploy them in other areas or locations. Such a management rotation helps to evaluate existing structures differently from the external perspective, to introduce new ideas and to counteract the Wagenburg mentality.