

NEW WAY OF THINKING



DIGITISATION HELPS US TO TAP INTO THE CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF OUR EMPLOYEES

Jochen Kärcher, Senior Vice President at Bosch Blachach, on the role of managers in digital shop floor management

Is the classic monitoring and control function of management losing importance and how does this manifest itself in shop floor management?

The leadership role is changing dramatically. We are currently seeing a transformation away from classic control to a coaching process. The manager proactively accompanies the improvement process. This is another reason why communication in shop floor management is becoming increasingly important. The manager no longer controls, but guides and supports the employees in the improvement process. There-

fore, it is not only a change, but rather an improvement. Until now, the manager has spent far too much time gathering the data needed for the improvement process. For an initial analysis, digitisation makes the information more easily accessible and much faster available. The time saved can now be used for personal dialogue with employees and for accompanying them during the improvement process. Last but not least, this increases our competitiveness, as the main task of our managers is to tap into the creative potential of our employees. We can only achieve this by intensifying communication, and in no case by reducing it.

To what extent are the demands on shop floor management staff changing?

Employees are now more strongly encouraged to contribute themselves and their ideas. In this context, I am talking about a positive effect triggered by the qualification profiles of our employees, e.g. dual training. More interesting job profiles open up completely new opportunities for skilled workers, as proactive participation is expected. This increases the value of the employees, who are virtually our first line of defence at the plant.

In the Smart Factory, intensive networking across the various departmental boundaries is central. To what extent does this change the classic pyramidal organisation?

The classical work will continue to be in a hierarchical structure, because here it is a matter of linking business standards. When changing business standards and optimising business processes, however, we have to proceed differently. Up to now, departmental boundaries have sometimes hindered us in order to generate corresponding effects. Therefore, working models must change. We are working together more across functions in agile teams. The focus is less on control and more on the underlying improvement process. Especially if you want to change business processes, this can only be implemented with cross-functional cooperation.

Is the leadership role changing in the context of closer cooperation between OEMs and suppliers?

This is a good question. First of all, you have to ask yourself the question about the cooperation model of OEMs and suppliers: Is it more of a partnership model or is it based more on price? Some of our customers still focus strong-

ly on the cost aspect, especially in commodity business. All in all, the cooperation of tier 2 and tier 3 suppliers as well as that of a tier 1 supplier with an OEM must change, because there is still great potential to be exploited. We are therefore intensively pursuing the goal of maintaining a partnership and trusting cooperation with all our partners in the value chain.

Is creating this basis of trust one of the key challenges for leadership?

Through digitisation, we can easily identify a variety of problems that would not arrive in the classic hierarchical reporting chain. The question is how to deal with them. Our view is that every problem is an opportunity for improvement. However, as problems increase, people sometimes tend to become overwhelmed. Here, the organisation must be trusted to solve most problems independently, i.e. without the hierarchical way. It is also important to prioritise tasks: one should not assume that every problem can be dealt with immediately in the form of deviation management. I believe it is important at this point to note which hierarchical level in the company or which management level is responsible for which problems. It is also important to focus employees more quickly on the

issue of problem solving. We can only counter competitive changes by working on our competitiveness. Therefore, problems must also be solved.

Then you see the role of leadership in problem-solving processes rather than in monitoring and controlling tasks?

That is the bottom line. We as managers are not tasked with explaining deviations, but with solving problems. In doing so, we must take advantage of the benefits of digitisation and give employees more personal responsibility again. It must be clearly defined who is responsible for which type of key performance indicator in the company in order to achieve the goals.

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