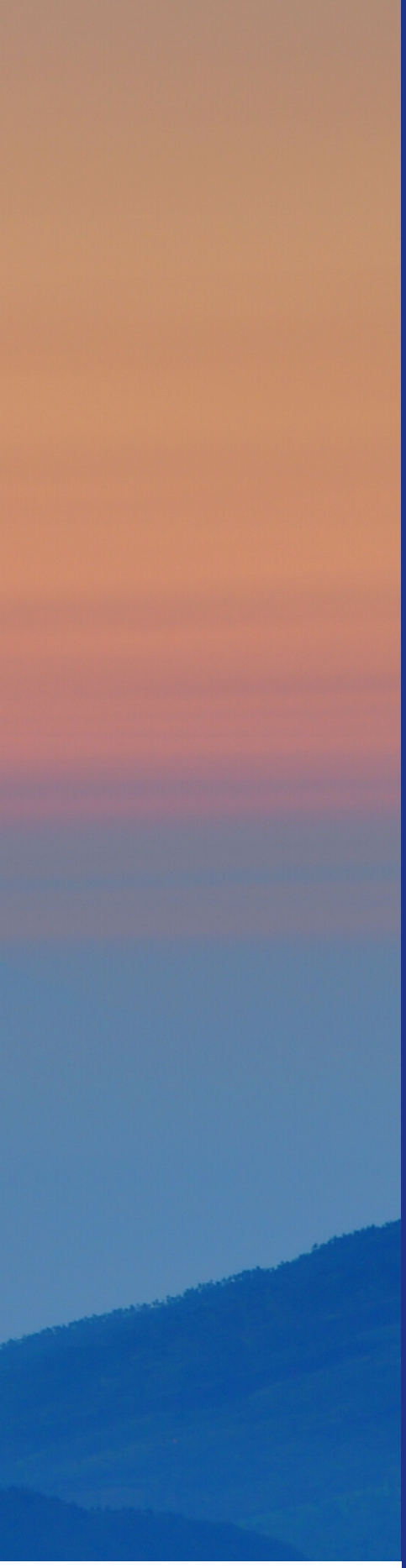

MARCH 2020

Learning Together

Lessons on Leadership, Problem Solving, & Practice

LEAN TRANSFORMATIONS GROUP

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LTG

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Introduction

Lex Schroeder

I believe Lean has a productivity problem... Or, to be more specific, the lean community has a storytelling problem because so far as I've observed, most people still think that lean thinking and practice is about increased productivity and efficiency (not even increased *effectiveness* or better *performance*).

I get it. As a young editor at The Lean Enterprise Institute whose only entry point to lean thinking and practice at the time was care for the environment to start—I *really* liked the idea of fewer wasted resources, etc.—I respected most of what I was learning about Lean, but didn't feel connected to it. I didn't see how it connected to other schools of thought or other powerful change methodologies that I was starting to believe in, like living systems theory for example, because I never heard these stories. That is, until I spoke with and read the work of teachers who were interested as I was in telling stories about learning and relationships (and how people can solve problems and work through conflict in teams and organizations) rather than stories about how to "do lean," as my colleague Jim Luckman has written (See "Doing Lean Versus Becoming Lean").

A consistent lack of these more human stories about the people doing the "value-creating work," using lean thinking and practice to better deliver on individual or organizational purpose, *alongside* other excellent systems thinking and change-making concepts and *toward* larger societal aims, I believe, is one reason why so many people still think of Lean as a fairly hollow "continuous improvement" program rather than what it really is or could be. Alas, *care-based, relational, storytelling* work has also been undervalued since the beginning of time.

This is why I'm excited about the stories in this reader. These are stories about people across a wide range of industries and at different levels in their organization who want to approach their work differently, perhaps with more curiosity, precision, or perhaps rigor. First and foremost, they are stories about wiser approaches to leadership and problem solving—*in part* through lean thinking and practice, but not *only* through lean thinking and practice.

The articles you find here are written by some of my early teachers who have become colleagues and friends. I feel privileged to have learned from and now edited the work of Jim Luckman, Karl Ohaus, and David Verble and to have begun to work more frequently

with Robert Kessiakoff and Tom Shuker. These are pieces about improving systems and processes, sure, but they are also just about what it means to approach work with a spirit of inquiry, creativity, and perseverance. They are about Lean and complexity science and good, old-fashioned, difficult-but-worth-it teamwork. More than anything, they are readable, practical pieces about how leaders and teams can begin to think differently… often with more distance from their work (i.e. taking work less personally and looking at the facts rather than opinions) while simultaneously becoming more thoughtful and showing their work (and their team members' work and their team members themselves) much more respect.

As the world gets more and more excited about things like Lean Startup, Agile, participatory decision-making methods, and other "Lean-adjacent" methodologies (in a way that is too often mostly just divorced from the longer history of lean thinking and practice and other schools of thought), I am proud to present these articles on those *values, assumptions, and behaviors*—as my LTG colleagues have been saying—that drive more resilient learning cultures and help people solve problems.

Whether you are in manufacturing, software, healthcare, or another field, these values, assumptions, and behaviors are quite often the same. Call the ideas you find here "lean" ideas or call them something else. Whatever you call them, my hope is that you carry some of these lessons forward with you so that you can learn from the hard-won experience of these excellent, generous teachers as you seek to improve your own work, in your own unique context. Please enjoy these good reads and please reach out to us with your thoughts.

Doing Lean Versus Becoming Lean

Jim Luckman

This article was originally published in July 2014 on The Lean Post at lean.org.

We live in a world where organizations address opportunities for improvement by rolling out programs. These programs are defined, deployed, and tracked for adoption. The idea is that cultural mindsets, tools, and policies are things that should be *applied* to organizations. Programs are often defined at the senior levels of the organization, deployed by the middle managers, and expected to be adopted by the lower level employees. Programs are thought of as a solution to a problem, a solution that–if applied to the whole organization–will fix the defined problem.

For example, many companies "do Lean" to achieve a cost cutting objective. Many lean efforts follow this program methodology. Unfortunately, we know that the program method of deployment is not successful. Over 70% of change efforts fail and most of these use some form of program thinking for deployment. And we know from experience that Lean is fundamentally driven by a change in company culture, not a methodological "application" of the lean tools.

We call the program method of deploying Lean "doing Lean." Doing Lean will leave you frustrated and lacking sustainable change. You might be "doing Lean" if you've done the following:

- You might be *doing Lean* if you have tied the program to cost savings
- You might be *doing Lean* if you count the number of Kaizen events each year
- You might be *doing Lean* if you are tracking the number of people who have gone through lean training
- You might be *doing Lean* if you expect to win a Shingo prize in a year
- You might be *doing Lean* if you have delegated Lean to a central continuous improvement group for deployment
- You might be *doing Lean* if you are assessing each function in your organization and giving them a score for adoption

What's the alternative?

Let's begin with the idea that Lean, at its most fundamental level, *is about creating a complete organization of problem solvers who are engaged in solving the right problems at the right level every day*. To accomplish this, leaders must focus on the development of the people and the system to be successful at problem solving. This concept is not typically built into our organizational cultures, and therefore requires determined daily practice from all employees–from senior leaders to frontline workers. This concept requires that the entire organization, each level and each function, understands its role in solving value stream problems that will aid the company in achieving company success.

The process of learning how to problem solve requires selecting small groups, defining problems for them to solve, giving them some guidance on how to solve their problems and following up with a disciplined process of PDCA for continued learning. Let's call this alternative process "becoming lean."

You are likely "becoming Lean" if you're doing the following:

- You might be *becoming lean* if your leadership has selected specific problems to be addressed, a small part of the organization is learning new problem solving skills to address these problems, and rigorous PDCA discipline is practiced to ensure learning and continuous improvement.
- You might be *becoming lean* if you have small groups of people who are getting excited about how they have been given responsibility for their improvement efforts with clear, measurable and continuous reinforcement from leadership for their efforts.
- You might be *becoming lean* if you understand your business is comprised of interconnected value streams designed to provide value to the customer, and you are beginning to align your business system to support improving your value streams
- You might be *becoming lean* if the leaders can define your annual goals in terms of value stream performance gaps and select the correct parts of the organization to address these gaps based on effective problem breakdown
- You might be *becoming lean* if your managers know how to solve problems and understand their role is to develop their employee's problem solving capability working on real problems

- You might be *becoming lean* if you notice people learning the basics of problem solving, and this is growing organically across the organization without your intervention
- You might be *becoming lean* if you notice the dialogue between people is more respectful
- You might be *becoming lean* if you feel trust building and greater safety in exposing real problems

There are many differences between "doing Lean" and "becoming lean." Most important to you and your organization is the focus on addressing customer needs, more engagement from all employees, and faster, more effective cycles of learning designed to solve problems and improve the nature and value of the work.

Moving from "doing Lean" to "becoming lean" is more than just a change in organizational objectives. It requires a mindset of curiosity and experimentation, a commitment to learning and reflection, and a willingness to focus on and build high quality relationships among the individuals in the organization. Sometimes "just do it" may be the right answer, but when it comes to Lean, true change comes from becoming a new kind of organization.

The Leader's Dilemma: Becoming a Learner

Jim Luckman

The impulse to tell people what we "know" is so deeply embedded in each of us that we rarely think about how often we operate in the mode of being a "knower". The alternative to telling people what we know is to be curious, to listen, to make observations, and to try to understand the thinking of others. When we do this, we are "learners."

In his article, "Confessions of a Recovering Knower," Brian Hinken, challenges us to ask ourselves if our knower impulse is limiting us. He addresses what it means to be a knower versus a learner. Leaders, he says, are more likely to be knowers than learners because of the cultural expectations of most companies. People are usually promoted for knowing their functional area and their ability to provide solutions to their problems. But leaders who act as knowers actually limit their ability to accomplish what is important for themselves and their organization.

Here's how:

Limited Engagement. A knower will never fully engage their organization. Employees will defer to a knower-leader, failing to add the value for which they have been hired (i.e. creativity, knowledge, problem solving expertise). And when employees do offer up ideas, those different points of view get lost. Employees eventually quit doing their own thinking and expect to be told what to do.

On the other hand, if the leader is a learner, she engages with people on a different level, inviting different points of view and allowing her team to agree on an approach that arises from the collective understanding of the problem situation. As a result, employees are more engaged in their work. They become more dedicated to understanding and solving the problem under these circumstances.

Consider a recent example of a knower-senior leader who was responsible for a software project. After a review, he was faced with the fact that his project was failing. He needed significantly more money and a one year extension in order to successfully complete the project. With some critical self-reflection and after receiving feedback from his organization, he came to understand that his team members had actually been telling him what he wanted to hear (and failing to bring fundamental problems to his attention). He was the knower in the group, so people had feared sharing any insights

about the challenges of the project. So he changed his approach and began acting as a learner, modeling learner behaviors—observing the facts, asking for others' opinions, listening carefully, and staying curious. This helped reset the project team for success. He had to remind himself daily to ask questions and be supportive of the development of the team's problem solving capability.

Limited understanding of the problem. A knower is unable to fully grasp the problem situation. When we think we know something, our minds automatically filter out all other information, limiting our ability to make good decisions. Without embracing different points of view and engaging in deep inquiry to consider the real depth of a problem, our quick actions tend to aggravate the problem situation rather than to address its root causes.

Becoming a learner can create a new awareness of our complex world. Consider this metaphor. When the Hubble Telescope was positioned beyond earth's atmosphere, we were suddenly able to make observations that created an entirely new understanding of the earth and the larger universe. Hubble helped cosmologists determine the age of the universe to 13.7 billion years, clarify the ongoing rate of the expansion of our universe, and understand the effects of black holes. Hubble contributed to a huge leap in our ability to see the complexity, adaptability, and expansion of the universe. In a way, becoming a learner has this same effect: it allows us to see our complex problem situations more completely.

In observing leaders, I've seen how knower-leaders limit their organization from learning anything beyond the narrow scope of their existing knowledge. Frequently, this limitation causes a function to be optimized to the detriment of the larger organization. Sometimes, the company will go out of business because they failed to acknowledge the new customer expectations or competitive threats. Enabling the entire organization to acquire external information and react through effective problem solving processes is critical to ongoing company success.

Dropping the Knower Habit

Have you ever been sitting within arms-reach of a candy dish while you're reading a book? Next thing you know, you have consumed a handful of candy without realizing you've just consumed 500 calories? Habits like these are driven from an unconscious part of the brain called the striatum. These automatic behaviors are stored in "chunks" and become a permanent part of the brain. Fortunately, there is an "air traffic controller" part of the brain, too, located in the prefrontal cortex that can observe these habits and

begin to control them. One key understanding of behavioral scientists is that it takes practice (rigor and repetition) to overlay and eventually replace existing habits.

How do we practice acting like a learner if habitually we act as knowers?

Set Your Intention. Declare your intention to practice becoming a learner. Select a small problem area and think more deeply about the problem; why it exists and who should be involved in helping you address it. Ask yourself what you know and really don't know about the problem. Acknowledge your limited knowledge of the situation and purposefully shut down your own thinking to encourage the thinking of your team members. Listen carefully and ask open ended questions to extract their understanding of the problem. Allow them to define the problem for you. Recognize that through this continued practice, you will expand your understanding of the problem situation and grow the engagement of your employees.

Take Action. Ask your team to run experiments to clarify the problem situation. Start small. Keep focused on what you know and what you need to know. In a team meeting, capture the collective thinking. Decide together on new experiments and write down actions and responsibilities. Make the time frame short, preferably one week.

Reflect. After you and your team have followed through on the experiments, reflect with your team on your efforts. Capture what actually happened, both validating and invalidating your hypothesis. Agree on what you and your team have learned. Create a new plan with new action steps and allow your project and learning to evolve. Repeat this process regularly with your team.

Learning to learn, difficult as it is, is the leadership practice that can make the difference. Leaders who have gone through this process with their teams not only demonstrate remarkable improvements in performance, but also a sense of personal ownership, responsibility, and pride. It takes courage and discipline for leaders to embark on this habit changing journey, but the rewards are well worth it.

Manager Employee-Communication: What Neuroscience Tells Us

David Verble

A previous version of this article was originally published in June 2017 on The Lean Post at lean.org.

We have an innate social need to be connected to and accepted by others. It is as strong as our instinct for physical survival and is in fact part of our drive to survive through cooperating with others. We experience the pain of social loss (e.g. rejection, exclusion, humiliation, bullying, disrespect) in the same ways and in the same places in our brain as we do physical pain. The same chemicals are released into our brains in both cases, but we are able to forget the feelings associated with physical injury more quickly than we can forget those due to the loss of relationship or group connection. This suggests how critical the social side of our lives was and still is to our survival.

Research conducted by social psychologists Naomi Eisenberger, Matthew Lieberman, and others suggests that the way we describe social loss (e.g. *"She broke my heart," "I was crushed," "It was like a kick in the head," "It was a blow to my pride," "He cut me deeply."*) is an indication of the overlap between how our brains experience the emotional aspects of physical and social injury. Functional MRI images show two regions of our brains are activated when we are physically hurt, one for the bodily sensations and the other for the feelings that accompany the injury. Images of people experiencing simulated rejection or memories of close personal loss show that same feeling region is activated by social pain. Our response to social threats (including loss of status or acceptance) brings us right back to primitive times and our only two options of "fight or flight." Since we can't do either at work without losing our jobs, the typical third option is to freeze, which is typically followed by actions ranging from withdrawal to trying to undermine the source of the pain covertly. At work, the threats to our social well-being usually come in the form of what is said, how it is said, and how it affects our standing in the group.

According to Meghan Meyer, Kipling Williams, and Naomi Eisenberger, we now know that using functional MRIs, researchers have identified several social situations in which our neural network that responds to threats is activated. These include conditions and actions by others that either:

- lessen our status or appearance of competence
- make us uncertain (because we lack information or clarity as to what is expected of us)

- seem to us “unfair” or
- make us feel we are not accepted by groups that are important to us or that we are losing key relationships.

We react defensively to threats or “injuries” in these areas in both our personal lives and in workplace social systems with equal emotion. For this reason, at the most basic level, the forms of expressions a manager or leader uses in talking to an employee have profound social implications for the employee’s relationship with the manager, the work group, and the employee’s work.

Here are three common examples.

First, commands, demands, public feedback, or rebukes all provoke a threat response in our brains, even if we are not able to push back outwardly. There is evidence that commands or demands have the effect of lessening our sense of responsibility for what we do have to do in response. A closed or leading question frequently feels much the same as a command. Coming from a manager or leader, it essentially communicates, “This is something I want you to agree to or accept.” It is experienced as being talked down to, which puts the receiver in a lesser position and lessens his or her ownership of the action or ideas he/she has to accept. Both direct commands or feedback and questions used as implied commands are threatening to our social standing and competence. They produce some degree of pain and withdrawal.

The experience of being asked an open-ended question, however, is very different, especially after we get over the initial shock. The shock is because the experience is both novel (it doesn’t happen very often) and challenging (we have to think!). The social implications are generally positive, if a bit stressful, especially after we learn that someone actually wants to listen to us! We realize we are seen as a) capable of thinking and b) having valuable information and ideas (status) and c) being on a par with the questioner (acceptance). Open questions or challenges in fact activate the reward system in our brain. These positive effects, however, are negated if the leader’s response implies there is a “right” answer to be found.

There is yet another side to our social lives at work and away from it. Experiences in the same areas where we can feel threatened (e.g. around status, competence, predictability, belonging, and being treated fairly) can also bring us pleasure. The neural reward network in our brains releases hormones that make us feel good when we are

- asked to join a group or collaborate with others
- given meaningful responsibilities and clear expectations

- recognized for our competence or contribution
- accepted or shown approval
- treated equally and fairly

These feelings reinforce our drive for positive social relationships and increase our sense of connection to, and responsibility for, others as well as groups in our personal lives. They also increase our commitment to shared goals and our engagement in efforts for the common good at work.

It would seem to indicate that there is risk for leaders who do not focus the social side of their roles (how they talk to, treat and relate to employees) in the same way they do the results-oriented side. Here is the research that reinforces that possibility. As Matthew Lieberman writes for *Harvard Business Review*, in a 2009 survey conducted by James Zenger, 60,000 employees were asked to identify characteristics of a "great leader." 14 percent identified "being strong on results-focus" as a "great leader" behavior. 12 percent identified social skills as a characteristic. However, 72 percent saw being strong on both behaviors as characteristic of "great leaders." Sadly, but maybe not surprising, less one percent rated their leaders as being strong with both of the characteristics.

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Coaching is Work

David Verble

In fact, coaching is almost always hard work, at least when it is actually helpful and effective. Coaching is not about making ourselves feel good through sharing knowledge and wisdom; coaching is about helping others arrive at their own knowledge and wisdom. As a coach, I'm hyper-aware that I want to be "value-added" to my coachees and the efforts they have already made to improve their own work. Unfortunately, being helpful in this way is seldom as easy as it sounds. Why? As coaches, we have to watch the ways we can be misguided by our own very human habits and instincts.

Indeed, some of self-inflicted barriers to being effective as coaches are hard-wired parts of our human nature reinforced by culture. For example, the fast thinking part of our brains leads us to believe what immediately comes to mind as fact. Expressions such as the following "program" our expectations for what it means to a good manager or leader:

- "Good leaders are decisive."
- "The manager's job is to decide, plan, delegate, and control."
- "As a manager, you are supposed to know what needs to be done."
- "Leaders who acknowledge uncertainty and ask for help lose the respect of others."

Similarly, here are some of the instinctive, habitual responses that I see decrease every leader's effectiveness. (You may have heard yourself say some of these things).

- As coaches, we tend to assume that we know what's going on in a situation someone tells us about or what's going on with another person just by observing their behavior. *"I know exactly what you're talking about! I had the same problem with an employee three years ago. Have you gotten HR involved?"*

- Based on our assumptions and first impressions, we jump to judgments, conclusions, and solutions. *"When a team starts taking sides like that you've got to step in quickly, sit them down, and tell them it's going to stop before it turns into real conflict."*

- Once we believe we know what needs to be done, we tend to stop looking for facts and seek evidence that confirms the ideas we already have. *"Don't you see!*

That's exactly what he wants you to think? Of course he says he 'didn't know that was the process.' You can look at the training records. I bet they'll show that he had to know."

- While we may think we are good at listening, most of us lose contact with what another person is saying within just a few seconds. Instead, we mostly listen to our own "self-talk", the chatter of our own personal ideas. This naturally leads us to interrupt others to express our potential solutions. *"I know that's what they said, but I doubt that's really the cause. I've seen lots of breakdowns like this and all of them could have been avoided if people were doing the preventive maintenance when it was scheduled."*

- When we start to "coach" another person, most of us tell people what to do rather than ask open-ended questions to first learn what they know and think about their own work or problem situation. *"I think it's important to show people who's in charge. You're the project manager. They signed off on the plan. You can't let them talk you into changing it now!"*

- When we do think to ask questions of our coachee, we tend to ask "sneaky tells," or yes or no questions, that subtly point to what we want people to do or think. *"We've asked Purchasing to let us check with the supplier first. Nothing's going to change if you have another meeting, will it?"*

Why are these responses so ineffective for dealing with problems? Consider the impact of the following scenarios on the coach-coachee relationship (not to mention the coachee's learning):

- Your coachee has already been working with HR about an employee issue and is miffed that you would assume she/he wouldn't know to contact HR.

- Your coachee knows about the situation with the team and the disagreement is complicated, with legitimate points on both sides. After listening to you, he/she is concerned that you would suggest a solution so heavy-handed and simplistic.

- Your coachee realizes that you are arguing for assumptions that you have made about his/her employee and believes that you aren't interested in hearing what she/he knows and wants to first explain about the situation.

- Your coachee is irritated that you have interrupted what she/he is trying to tell you about the problem situation. You jumped in with your own idea without listening to him/her describe what she/he thinks is going on.

- Your coachee feels “talked down to” and believes you are essentially taking over the situation (the real problem solving thinking) by telling him/her what to do.

- Your coachee realizes that you are telling her/him what you want them to do and feels insulted that you think he/she isn’t smart enough to figure something out.

In these cases, what are the chances that your coachee will actually find you to be helpful? Far too often, people feel disrespected and lose respect for and trust in their coach. To be clear, few coaches intend to be this directive or condescending. Most sincerely want (and try!) to be helpful. But as coaches, we do coaching the way we’ve seen it done before. We are just more eager to share our own ideas than to listen.

Now, if a person genuinely does not know how to do something, then we need to tell them what they need to know and show them what we know how to do. That’s teaching, and it’s different from coaching for development. Coaching is helping others improve their ability to do something (that they know how to do and are able to do with some proficiency). With this distinction in mind, compare the coaching behaviors below to the ones earlier. Consider how these may help a person think differently about his/her work:

- Rather than assuming you know what’s going on in a situation and acting on your assumptions, pause and ask, “What do I really know about <u>this</u> situation?” Then ask for more description of the situation from your coachee’s view. Then ask what help she/he wants. *“We’ve all had employees with performance issues. Maybe if you describe his/her responsibilities and behavior in more detail the situation will be clear. Then you can say what help you want from me.”*

- Before taking a flying leap into a solution based on your intuition, check yourself by asking, “Why might I think my experience or idea will help in this situation?” Then ask your coachee what he or she knows or has seen. *“So the project team is divided into two factions that don’t agree on how to proceed. What do you know specifically about what the split is about and how it got started?”*

- If you find yourself trying to convince a problem owner (or yourself) that your solution is the absolute right one, try to remember, the more we try to “sell” an idea, the more we take over the problem solving thinking for others. It’s also the

way we take on responsibility for the problem. *“I’m sure you’ve checked his claim that he didn’t know that part of the process. What more have you learned about the circumstances when the mistake occurred?”*

- Actually listening to what your coachee tells you is the most respectful thing you can do. Show that you are truly listening by acknowledging what you hear to confirm that you understand. *“The breakdown occurred at one of their processes, but they’re saying that the cause was a part that was welded wrong back up the line. But you think that from what you saw, it’s more likely the robot crashed because they weren’t keeping the arm lubricated? What did you see that gave you that impression?”*

- Ask questions to prompt your coachee to recall more of what they already know. *“I understand how frustrated you are that he didn’t follow through on his part of the plan like he promised and then acted like he didn’t know what you were talking about. How did he react when you said you had the plan with his initials on his part?”*

- People recognize when they are being manipulated by “sneaky tells” and tend to find this disrespectful. Ask open-ended questions to communicate that you are genuinely interested in what your coachee knows. Make a real connection and don’t only focus on the problem! *“We know Purchasing wouldn’t let you talk to the supplier about adjusting their schedule last time. What are your thoughts about how to approach asking them this time?*

The big idea here? Refrain from assuming that you know more than another human being does about their own work! When you can do this, you shift how you talk with people, ask so many more questions, and help everyone (yourself included) learn. Simple, right? Sure. But again, doing this consistently is hard work.

Why are some of our coaching habits so hard to break? Research tells us that habits are neural pathways in our brains laid down over time, which is also why they are easier to make than break. The more instinctive and unconscious our habits, the deeper the “ruts” they have already made in our brains. We can’t erase our habits, but we can make them become less automatic with disuse and replace them with new learning about new, more desirable habits. As a coach, the key is to not beat yourself up if you find yourself acting on old bad habits. Instead, consciously experiment with more helpful and effective coaching behaviors. Then seek your colleagues’ observations and feedback to help you build your coaching habits and improve your capabilities over time.

Really Good Leaders Don't Mind Being Questioned

Karl Ohaus

As a coach, it is a great day when a client shares an observation about their work and in a single moment, I know that I have made a difference.

In June, I was honored to accompany a group of 19 executives on a Lean Enterprise Institute (LEI) learning trip to Toyota and three of their vendors in Japan. As a longtime LEI faculty member and student of Toyota myself, the opportunity to witness 70 plus years of Toyota Production System refinement in person was incredible. Even better was observing how this group reacted to what they saw, hearing the questions they asked, noticing the details they picked up on, and listening to how they translated what they saw into questioning their own leadership and management assumptions.

Back to the moment that made me realize I had made a meaningful difference in someone's work life... A couple days after returning home from Japan, I was talking with one of the executives on the trip just to say hello. With over seven years of experience with lean thinking (and a journey that has had its own ups and downs), I was looking forward to hearing his reflections.

Here is more or less what he shared (I'm paraphrasing):

> *"Our hosts did not talk about 'respect for people'; they demonstrated it through actions. At every site they were engaging the people who were doing the work to be a part of the changes (kaizen) being made. Processes were designed to be ergonomic and easy to perform, and everywhere we went, expectations were clear and measurable."*
>
> *"Over the four days and four companies we visited, we did not see a single maintenance person working on a piece of equipment… Operators were given a process that was stable and that worked."*
>
> *"I saw people improving processes to improve quality, cost, and delivery everywhere…"*
>
> *"The degree to which value creators were actually creating value was amazing. The system providing people with the information, materials, and equipment (and process) they need to keep creating value."*

> *“I could see it… the top to bottom alignment of purpose to actions to improve ‘performance to purpose.’ All of this was visual at each level and in every department.”*

I expected to hear observations like these, but this next one is the one that really made me think… My friend said that he “could tell how people on the trip were comfortable having their assumptions questioned and were comfortable questioning themselves.” Seeing new working practices that challenged what they were doing led them to reflect and try to understand their work better (and take their own work to a new and higher level). He shared with me that this is what I have been coaching him to do, and it was on this trip that he felt it really paid off.

This meant something to me because this is just not something we are used to seeing in most organizations: leaders who are used to being questioned and more importantly, who can also question themselves. To achieve the kind of performance we saw on this trip in Japan takes leaders who are humble, who take the time to watch what is really happening, and who reflect on their role in what is actually happening. It also means having the courage to forever experiment.

As leaders, practicing these behaviors requires real grit. It is easy to be a knower and tell people how they need to do better or can get better; it is a whole lot harder to lead a team while continually reflecting on how we can be better ourselves.

When Problem Solving is Just in the Air

Karl Ohaus

For Lean to become transformational, management needs to create the conditions where problem solving is not a separate activity, but rather an essential part of everyone's daily work.

When I talk about this with colleagues and clients, many people say, "Hold on, we are problem solving all the time!" But are you really problem solving? or are you just reworking things and adapting so that the system can still work without you ever actually solving the real problem?"

My LTG partner Tom Shuker was part of an executive team from GM that had the opportunity to work at the GM/Toyota joint venture New United Motor Manufacturing, Inc. (NUMMI). Tom's lasting impression of working at NUMMI was that he loved going to work every day simply because problem solving was just "in the air." When I talk with Tom about his experience, his face lights up. For Tom, working at NUMMI changed the way he thought about work.

More than anything else, what Toyota was able to create at NUMMI was a system of management—which managers brought over to the States from Toyota in Japan—that made meaningful problem solving simply part of the job. This is so different from the approach we see at the majority of U.S. organizations where problem solving feels like a special event or is directed by a special group that is really only a small subset of the organization's workforce.

Why do I believe organizations tend to struggle so much with problem solving?

1. **No Clear Problem Statement** – Most leadership teams fail to take the first and most important step when it comes to creating a culture of problem solving: a clearly defined problem statement based on a measurable gap in performance of the organization's primary value steam at the point of delivery to the customer. The same thing goes for other supporting value streams at their delivery point to the organization's primary value stream.

2. **Problem Solving Happens in a Silo** – Leadership teams so often assign responsibility for continuous improvement to a person, department, or trained specialist. Without clear direction as to the real organizational gap (core problem to solve) the party responsible for problem solving is left to measure improvement simply based on activity levels. For example, teams trained, events

held, boards put up, areas that have been through 5S, centers of excellence visited, standard work documents written, etc. In some cases we see the responsible party select key performance indicators to track, but these KPIs are not usually relevant to the problem or the delivery of value to the customer. They also have little meaning to the people who are doing the work.

3. **Lack of Stability** – And lastly, leadership teams too often ignore fundamentals like level demand, product mix, and equipment reliability. These are the things that create a stable environment for problem solving. Without paying attention to them, team members are left to spend most of their time working through what are essentially self-inflicted "problems" (that have nothing to do with solving a problem for the customer).

To arrive at a work culture where problem solving is just "in the air," I believe team members to share two core assumptions:

- Lean requires problem solving by the whole organization, with the health of the whole organization in mind.
- The role of leadership is to create the conditions in which meaningful problem solving can take place.

What are these conditions?

- Clearly defining problems to solve (not clear solutions to "implement")
- Establishing flow (information, work, materials, movement, etc.) to expose problems
- Measuring and sharing information on "performance to purpose" (again, of the primary and support value streams as part of doing the work)
- Creating a safe environment for employees to experiment

It's important to note that by the time Tom went to work at NUMMI, Toyota had been perfecting their management system for at least 40 years. Toyota's leadership team learned how to create a culture of problem solving as a result of working inside Toyota (following the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Adjust) cycle of learning) and from studying flow productions systems outside Toyota (i.e. automotive, airplane, and ship building). Tom's positive experience at NUMMI was a reaction to a system that leaders had consciously refined over time and that is continuing to be refined still.

This of course brings me to the last and most important point about organizational problem solving: Creating a meaningful problem solving culture takes commitment to continuous learning and consistency of approach!

Who can you call on in your team or organization to work with you to create both of these things?

How to Find a Business Performance Problem Before It Happens

Karl Ohaus

For the last 20 years I have been teaching teams at organizations large and small to use the information they generate (good or bad, especially “bad”) as feedback to improve their processes. It’s harder than you might think.

In manufacturing and service, here are some examples of information gold mines of useful information that too often get ignored:

- Warrantied products returned by customers that are sitting on the shelf waiting for analysis
- Paperwork (Applications, orders, invoices, documentation, records, etc..) with missing, incomplete, or wrong information
- Drawing defects found and corrected by designers / engineers
- Parts, supplies, paperwork, documentation, orders, assemblies, schedules, etc. that get reworked
- Customer calls coming into call centers (more rework of broken processes)
- Everything that’s in the scrap bin
- Employees who leave
- Customers who leave

The list goes on.

Learning to see a defect as “abnormal” (thus requiring continuous improvement or Kaizen), developing methods that detect defects as close to the problem as possible, and having a person on the team who is responsible for the defect (who is treated with respect)—these are all ways to start working with these sources of precious information that will make your work processes stronger. They also happen to be some of the most important attributes of a true “lean thinking” organization, whatever your sector. (By respect in this context, I mean respecting a person’s ability to solve the problem and giving them the responsibility to run experiments to solve the problem effectively.)

Here’s an example.

It was three years into my own lean learning journey, and I was starting to feel pretty proud about my understanding of lean thinking and methodologies. Around this time, I was also invited to visit the Denso alternator and fuel injector plant in Tennessee (Denso is a global automotive components manufacturer headquartered in Japan). While touring the shop floor, we stopped to look at a machine that was producing a small part,

a simple bushing for the alternator line. As the parts dropped off, they went into a second machine that 100% inspected the parts for three critical dimensions: length, outside diameter, and inside diameter. From my understanding, this was definitely not “lean”, so I asked my guides from purchasing and plant management to explain why 100% checking was even acceptable.

I was totally thinking I had arrived at a “Gotcha!” moment! The response that followed was so revealing that it forced me to reevaluate many of the assumptions I had for myself as a leader.

First, my guides acknowledged that this was an interesting question. This made me feel respected. Then they let me know that there was a process owner for the operation—although it had been running unattended at the time—and that they would defer to the person who owned the process. In short order, the process owner (let’s call him Sam) came over to the machine and asked me to repeat my question. Sam also said, “That’s an interesting question,” and told me he would explain.

Sam reached into a drawer close to the machine and removed a 2-inch thick notebook. “10 years ago, the process had many problems,” he said. “There were many, many defective parts every day, so we added the machine to check parts and stop the process when a defect was found.” Sam continued, “We needed to see how and why the process made bad parts.” Next, walking me through several A-3 problem solving documents in the same notebook, he said, “Kaizen, Kaizen, Kaizen.” A few pages later and now it was only a few bad parts per month. Again, more Kaizen. Then it was only a few bad parts per quarter and so on. Then he arrived at their current state: No bad parts for the last two years.

“Please understand. The machine’s purpose is not to sort out bad parts,” Sam said. “Its purpose is to stop the process right away so that we can see cause of defect and improve the process!”

Time and time again, Lean has taught me to be humble! Here was a team that knew how to work with the information it generated.

I had a lot to think about at my hotel that night…

- How many places did my own organization sort, rework, or discard parts? (A lot).
- How many times did we really see this as an opportunity to improve our process? (Not often. Sure, we did corrective action reports and root cause analysis when it got really bad, but not with the mind of true continuous improvement).

Then more questions occurred to me…

- Do we show respect for people who question the way we do something?
- Do we also show genuine respect for the process owner and let them answer questions about their process?
- For every process owner, how many other processes does this person also manage?
- What level of defect does our organization just totally ignore?

My head was ready to explode thinking of all of the opportunities for improvement in my own organization that as leaders, we were essentially choosing to ignore as well as the opportunities for new learning and knowledge that we were just letting slip by. The focus of process ownership and the drive this gives the entire team—both of these things were missing in our current organizational structure.

20 years later and I realize now as I realized then, these are fairly simple concepts, too…

- “Pass no defect forward.”
- “Detect defects as close as possible (time and location) to where they happen.”
- “Create ownership so that someone does something when a defect is found.” (both in terms of short-term containment and corrective action and in the long-term to address root cause)

Building an entire team of people who have the will to live by these concepts every day, however, is hard work. This requires team members to transform many of their basic assumptions about how work gets done and how things actually improve, especially leaders. When I returned home, I knew I needed to change as well.

What did I do as first steps to transform my own organization? First, we moved quality checks to be time-based, not quantity-based for production. Every hour, every process would have a quality check by both the operator and an inspector. The inspector came to observe the process and if a problem was found, team members would immediately work on short-term and long-term corrective action processes. Each process also had a process owner who would be notified of an abnormality. This person owned coordinating and documenting the problem solving. In engineering, we created better and more frequent quality and process checks which then triggered problem solving on the tooling design processes. Most importantly, I changed my own thinking as a leader about what I accepted as normal, including how I wanted to engage the workforce to create a sense of pride in process ownership.

Fast and Fun Product Development? Slow Down for a Minute

Jim Luckman

Google the phrase “fast and fun.” You’ll find that this describes things like video games, products for learning languages, and even simple steps for cleaning your bathroom. Whatever your industry, it is hard to imagine the long and tedious process of developing new products—under scrutiny of the leadership of your organization of course—being described as fast and fun though.

Still, if you change your thinking about product development, product development can not only be fast and fun, but provide unimagined value to your company. What smart product development is really about is delivering extremely high-quality products in short, fast timeframes. Let’s see how to do it.

It’s really a matter of coming to learn a new framework for product development:

1. Slow down and think. Engage your organization.
2. Change your perspective to create knowledge.
3. Get rid of things that slow down learning.
4. Learn, then execute (the sequence is important).
5. Fix your current process (don’t use other people’s solutions).

First, slow down and think. Engage your organization.

You have been on a treadmill, mindlessly working on trying to produce that good new product in the timeframe given by management, marketing, or your boss. How do you jump off the treadmill, or at least slow it down enough to begin practicing a more effective process for product development?

In his 2011 book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman helps us understand the two thinking systems of the brain. System 1 “works easily and automatically and doesn’t take much effort: quick judgement based on familiar patterns.” This is the system you most likely are currently using to develop products. You are thinking about and working on the next possible solution, and not much thought is going into the development process. What you’re not doing is looking for a more effective way to develop that product in the first place. Your engineers are working hard at coming up with the best solution and are simply using the process given to them, following the steps defined in a staged development process. But a different kind of thinking is needed to create the

new product and improve the development process while simultaneously using all the intellectual capability of your entire organization.

To do that kind of thinking takes System 2. Kahneman reminds us, this takes more thinking; it takes persistence, requires refined focus, and operates methodically. I know what you are thinking. “I don’t have time to slow down and think about the process!” Well, wait a minute. First, let’s think about what product development is and why such careful focus is needed.

Change your perspective to create new knowledge.

Product development is about creating new knowledge more than anything else, not new products, yet we manage the process by focusing on tasks. Many of us use some form of stage gate process that has well-defined deliverables to be completed at each gate review. We do our best to complete these in time for a report-out to a steering committee or leadership group. In parallel with preparing for that gate review, we run tests on our latest “Hail Mary Pass,” something that we hope will fix the design problem related to a performance or quality problem.

Now, instead of this task-based approach, a wise process for product development instead is focused on attempting to create new knowledge, learning fast, and closing design gaps… and more than this, doing so *in a methodical process* that harnesses the collective thinking of cross-functional teams. This process should be guided by the questions that need to be answered, this month, this week, and today—all with agreement by the team. Consider the process of product development as being the fastest way of getting answers to the questions that will help you create the right, most robust product. It is about learning fast, very fast. Fast and fun, right? Anyway, fast is important now because you want to get answers to your next set of critical questions.

So how do we stay focused on the right questions and reduce the time? Let’s continue.

Get rid of activities that slow down learning.

When did you complete your first detailed design? What did you know (and not know) about the product when you had your first design completed? How many design versions/revisions do you have? How many changes were made? How much time was wasted?

There are three big delays in most product development processes:

1. New directions from management or responding to emergencies causing delays in your current development process.
2. Waiting for suppliers to provide components, designing and building new parts, and running tests.
3. Rework, Rework, Rework (Re-running tests, making new parts, etc.)…

The idea here is to pay attention to these delays, capture them, and begin running experiments to reduce them. Fast and fun! Ok, not really. But it can go a long way toward reducing the pressure and time to market. Now we're getting somewhere faster.

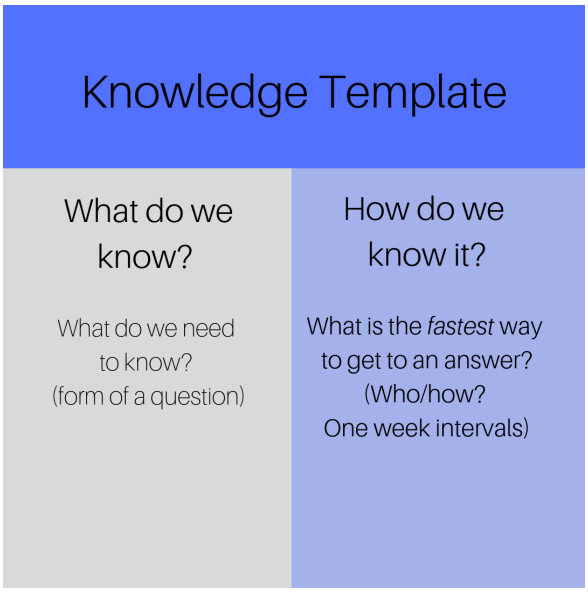
Let's focus on item 3, and why we have so much rework. If much of your time is lost because you are redoing something, this likely means that you did not put first things first. You do not have a process that reduces the delays of rework. Most teams barely have any process at all.

Learn first, then execute.

Think about how much time you lose because you don't close your gaps in knowledge before you begin your detailed design. What are these gaps? There is the information you need to create a great product. This may include important market information, critical customer needs, required supplier capabilities, certain manufacturing processes, and certain technical requirements based on physics fundamentals. For example, it is important to know when your product will exceed its usable life based on the root causes of fatigue (from temperature, humidity, stress, and force, etc.). I don't care what industry you are in, detailed design should *only come after a thorough and critical exploration of what you know and don't know about what your design needs to be*. Some people use "FMEA - Failure Mode and Effects Analysis," but often it is done as a task, as part of passing a gate review and is often performed too late, after detailed design. Instead, this should be used as the guide for your learning journey.

Not so interested in the learning journey for its own sake? I think it's pretty cool, but ok, just use the following template with your team to keep track of your team's ability to create new knowledge. At the end of the week, you should be able to lead your team in a reflection on their work. Which questions have you all been able to answer? Which actions have been completed? Then create a new template for next week with the next set of questions you need to answer and decide which actions you'll take to get

answers. (Ahem, someone needs to volunteer or be assigned to each action to get the questions answered).



Fix your current process. (Don't use other people's solutions.)

It's easy to look to other people's solutions to fix your product development process. Six Sigma, Lean, QFD, DRBFM, Design Thinking, Stage Gate Reviews etc. are all popular "solutions". There are some good ideas in each of these methods but, if you "deploy" or "implement" these across your organization, then you are imposing solutions, not solving problems. You are only adding these to and on top of your current processes, often adding complexity and confusion.

The alternative is to start where you are now and use value stream thinking and problem solving to make changes to your processes by engaging your team members in improving your current process. Pick a few teams currently in the early stages of development and run experiments on reducing the delays and rework. Structure the process to learn first and only then execute and create a process based on fast PDCA learning cycles. Fix problems by getting cross-functional teams together to perform real, old-fashioned problem solving. Very fun!

Where else is the fun?

Years ago I read the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's book, *Flow: The Psychology of the Optimal Experience*. We all know the experience of flow. Think about athletes who do remarkable things and how often we describe them being in a "Flow

State.” When we’re in flow, we are totally focused, and we lose track of time. When you and your team work together to solve problems fast, this can create the equivalent of that flow state. Csikszentmihalyi says it’s all about setting goals, becoming immersed in your activity, paying attention, and learning to enjoy the immediate experience.

When you do it right, this team-based knowledge creation process for product development is all about this kind of flow. From my experience working with teams in product development, when people are truly given the opportunity to work together at solving problems, are challenged to go find the answers to the most important questions fast, and are recognized for their contributions, everyone on the team goes home after work each night more satisfied and energized for the next day.

Product development becomes focused, more intentional, faster, more profitable, and definitely more fun.

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Why Most Organizations Aren't Using Toyota's Most Powerful Performance Improvement Tool

David Verble

Why do we in North America so often struggle (and frequently fail) with our lean efforts?

When lean community members reflect on why Americans struggle to understand Toyota's approach to business, we tend to focus on cultural issues in the organization. For example, I notice that we talk about issues relating mostly to unsupportive senior leaders or uninvolved line managers who focus too much on short-term results. I want to discuss smaller ways that assumptions about management and performance improvement contribute to our failure to learn from Toyota.

I worked at Toyota North America for 15 years. Part of my job was to study Toyota thinking and practices in Japan and introduce them to North American leaders, managers, and executives. And indeed, since leaving 19 years ago, my colleagues and I have found it difficult to get lean thinking and continuous improvement efforts to take root and produce sustainable results in the U.S. Still, I have coached many American leaders across a wide range of industries and types of businesses on core Toyota business and operational concepts and practices including value stream mapping, use of the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycle, A3 creation, problem solving, lean leader role and behaviors, coaching for development, strategy deployment, and change leadership. For this piece, I want to discuss frequent misconceptions about "Value Stream Mapping."

First, this is not what Toyota calls it. The Value Stream Map at Toyota is just a "Material & Information Flow Map" and another performance improvement tool. The North American name "Value Stream Mapping" does, however, capture two key aspects of the practice. "Value" puts emphasis on the purpose of the work process being mapped, which is to create and deliver something that is valued by a customer. "Stream" highlights the means of satisfying the customer or the flow of the desired value from beginning to end of the work process. So the term "Value Stream Mapping" is fine, but other things concern me about how many people use value stream maps.

I see many Current State maps posted in project rooms and tracking centers, but these are often dried, dusty, and outdated (or they are stored in an old Excel spreadsheet tucked away in somebody's computer). These Current State maps also tend to be by themselves with no Future State design maps in sight. Why make the Value Stream Map, then? What value do they add other than to show that you've done one? The real

purpose of this form of process mapping is performance improvement. The map is a problem solving tool for identifying, prioritizing, and addressing problems in workflow that affect performance as measured, first and foremost in terms of effectiveness in delivering the workflow (timing, quantity, and quality) to the customer. Cost is a separate issue, and efficiency is a concern that comes only after delivery. This is because the business needs to be able to deliver value for the price the customer is willing to pay in order to make a profit and survive. In Toyota practice, the real reason to create the map is to find ways--either through problem solving or workflow redesign--to improve output performance. Effectiveness always comes before efficiency.

I see some organizations use value stream mapping as a means for performance improvement, but in many cases, the priorities for improvement are reversed. There is too little attention paid to overall performance (output). The map is created and used to do “waste-walks” (to identify examples of the seven or eight non-value adding work activities) and thereby reduce costs. This may sound like a good thing, but it still misses some key points. First, removing cost without looking at its role in the overall workflow may actually make the customer delivery situation worse. Second, waste is usually a symptom of deeper problems in the underlying workflow such as instability, variation, and overburden. Just removing waste in the work process does not address the cause of waste, and waste is likely to just return or crop up somewhere else.

An even greater concern than waste is where there are conditions in the workflow that act as barriers to smooth and continuous flow. Output delivery to customers as promised (a key to repeat business) depends on work proceeding through the process (value stream) in a stable and consistent flow. Removing individual examples of waste may or may not serve this larger purpose. Also, this generally overlooks what are often the greatest sources of instability and waste: issues in scheduling and information flow.

How do I suggest we use Value Stream Maps instead? I can describe two ways I saw Material and Information mapping used at Toyota.

Use Value Stream Maps to Inform Performance Improvement and Deliver on Strategic Priorities

A unit or area manager is expected to create current state maps of their processes and use what they recognize as barriers in flow and quality to create annual plans for performance improvement. These plans are meant to focus on contributing to the operation’s hoshin (or strategic) priorities for the year. The manager systematically addresses barriers based on priority, assigning leaders and problem solving teams

responsibility for removing individual barriers one at a time. As this problem solving process occurs, the current state map becomes an evolving representation of all work processes. It changes with each cycle of continuous performance improvement.

Use Value Stream Maps to See Performance Problems Clearly

I first saw this happen in a weekly performance improvement activity called a Jushiken. In this case, a special problem team (either for urgent performance improvement or leader training) comes together to address a significant workflow issue in a value stream. Team members work with operators in the process area to map the flow, do work balance around operations, identify and conduct rapid experiments with spot kaizens, and, if needed, design and test process redesigns.

The critical point to stress about both of these activities is that their purpose is not just to improve performance; it is to build and stabilize sustained performance capability… Which reminds me of a piece my Lean Transformations Group colleague Jim Luckman wrote called, “Doing Lean versus Becoming Lean,” for The Lean Post. In short, “doing lean” is just doing stuff with lean tools and practices. This seldom gets you much closer to “being” lean. “Becoming” lean requires purposeful use of lean tools to improve performance and build performance capability. This requires not only lean doing, but lean thinking. Similarly, doing something (like mapping materials and information flow) “because Toyota does it” should never be the goal, nor is it sound lean thinking reason. The goal should always be improved business performance. When we forget this, we have learned little of what has made Toyota successful. As Toyota executive Teruyuki Minoura said at an auto industry conference in Tokyo in 2003, the Toyota Production System really should be called the “Toyota Thinking System.”

Perhaps one reason we in North America struggle so much in our lean efforts is because we forget that the lean tools, concepts, and practices we are trying to use are not “plug-ins we can insert” to become lean; they are the product of the lean thinking Toyota has done to solve their operational and business problems. Perhaps the reason why Toyota isn’t struggling to get sustained results in any of its global operations, including those in North America, is that they are still doing the lean thinking we just haven’t learned to do yet.

The Transition to Lean Leadership: How a Problem-Solving Culture Takes Root

Jim Luckman and David Verble

There are few leaders with more responsibility, and often more frustration, than lean continuous improvement coordinators and facilitators. As we have pointed out in Lean Enterprise Institute workshops, when these change leaders start sharing some of their challenges, their companies have placed an incredible amount of faith in them and their CI teams. These teams typically consist of one, maybe three, sometimes five, but very rarely any more than 10 members. And they're expected to "transform" an organization (with 500, 1,000, 5,000, 10,000 or more people)!

On a day-to-day level, what most CI leaders want from management is more active participation in CI events and more consistent support for work on CI projects. And when their managers and executives are involved, they would like for them to act less like traditional managers and to think and behave more like CI leaders. It is only human nature, of course, to think that things would be better *if only certain people* would do what we want them to do. But, as anyone who has ever expected someone else to change knows, asking others to change (and complaining when they don't) just doesn't work. The only person we can ever really change is ourselves, and even that is far from an easy task!

That's not to say that line managers and business executives—particularly those who have been promoted and rewarded in a traditional management environment based largely on their problem-solving success—cannot change their default leadership responses. They can shift away from giving top-down commands and solutions to a more engaging and collaborative way of addressing problems that both gets results and develops people. The behaviors and perspectives of traditional management are deeply ingrained habits and assumptions that cannot be turned off and replaced by throwing a switch. We will suggest, based on our experiences, that traditional managers and executives can focus on and practice three behaviors to help them personally make the transition.

1. **Grasp the actual conditions of problem situations.** Don't jump to solutions or accept when others go straight from problem recognition to solution. Grasp the actual conditions of problem situations, first-hand whenever possible, and insist that others clearly describe the problems they are trying to solve. Rather than assuming you know enough about the nature of a problem situation, go to the

gemba (wherever the work processes are) and try to understand the sources of performance problems yourself. Look for and ask about the problems, often caused by variation in the way the work is being done. Look for bottlenecks and rework that prevent the work from flowing from start to finish. And when you are at the workplace, engage those who work in the process to learn what they know about what is actually happening and ask them for ideas for what needs to be done.

2. **Show respect for what you employees know, think, feel, and can do.** If you do not allow employees to share their observations and ideas with you as though you are a peer, you will not be able to fully grasp the problem situation and may never know things you need to know. Connect with people one-on-one at the level of their personal interests and concerns. Practice “Humble Inquiry” to learn about the problems they encounter in trying to do their jobs. Ask questions that don’t assume you already know the answers or that seek specific responses. Recognize that employees will often give you the answers they think you want unless you show them you genuinely believe they have insights and the ability to solve the problem.

3. **Pay attention to how employees talk to you (and each other) about problems.** Do your employees seem hesitant to speak frankly about the what, when, where, and who of problems? Do they “polish” their problem and project reports and gloss over details to avoid criticism or blame? If so, teach employees to compare standard or plan to actual and talk about why there are differences. Push them to reflect on what they know about why the differences exist. And make it safe for employees to self-reflect and consider how what they did or did not do might have influenced their results. This is best taught by modeling this yourself.

These behaviors will go a long way toward creating a management environment that can grow into a problem-solving culture. The following signs will indicate that your transformation is contributing to a transformation in the organizational culture:

- Problems are resolved the first time and do not recur as often. Actions taken to address problems are based on a better understanding of actual operating conditions in addition to where and how problems at the process level are affecting performance.

- Employees do more self-initiated problem solving because they feel they are not only allowed, but *expected* to respond to problems within the scope of their jobs. Employees also feel respected for their knowledge and capability in doing so.

- An atmosphere of trust and safety exists in which problems can be exposed and employees can implement countermeasures, which they run as “experiments” without concern for the consequences of speaking up or failing the first time.

There’s a reason why we refer to shifting to the leadership behavior described above as a “transition” and not a “transformation.” Absent a moment of blinding revelation on the road to Damascus, it takes time to unfreeze old habits or behaviors, try out new patterns, practice them, and make them your default responses as a leader.

Learn more about Lean Transformations Group Partners and LTG Current Workshops

JIM LUCKMAN

Jim Luckman has unique expertise at the intersection of executive leadership development, lean thinking, and complexity science. He likes to solve complex business problems and help others do the same, as he shares in his new book, Transforming Leader Paradigms (Routledge, June 2019). Based on over 10 years of research, the book is a deep dive into how leaders can reshape their own thinking in order to change the trajectory of their organizations. Much of Jim's career has been about this very challenge: learning which assumptions keep leaders stuck in a cycle of "Blanket Solutions Thinking" and which assumptions help leaders develop new habits based on "Problem-Solving for Complexity." For over 25 years, organizations large and small (and from nearly every industry!) have called Jim for guidance and support on leadership, management, and improved business performance.

Featured Workshop: Transforming Leader Paradigms

Jim Luckman and his daughter Elizabeth have co-created a powerful leadership development methodology based on Jim Luckman and Olga Flory's 2019 book, *Transforming Leader Paradigms*. Ideally designed for groups or teams of 10-12, this highly customizable program includes both online learning and in-person workshops designed to help leaders experience a transformation in their thinking about how to lead people in organizations. Leaders will learn how to redefine their role from aiming to control employee behavior to creating the space and conditions for employees to contribute their valuable ideas for organizational growth. No matter your sector or the size of your organization, you will learn how to engage team members in making this whole company shift to a new paradigm of leadership in service of problem solving for complexity. Every leader (or person who aspires to be a leader in their organization) will learn how to accelerate learning for improved performance.

KARL OHAUS

For lean to become transformational—for people to actually get something out of it and for lean to meaningfully improve business performance—management needs to create the conditions where problem solving is not a separate activity for team members, but an essential part of everyone's daily work. This is why continuous improvement is so hard; it often means developing a new and very different organizational culture. As an executive coach and facilitator, Karl Ohaus's focus has been helping ambitious leaders think about how to teach lean thinking and problem solving so that team members make performance improvement work their own. In his 20+ year career, he has worked with such organizations as American Licorice, United Plastic Fabricating, Mayo Clinic, Ecofiltro, and more. He particularly enjoys working with humble organizations (teams that understand they always have something to learn), and he makes sure to keep his sense of humor along the way.

Featured Workshop: Creating a Foundation for Sustainable Business Performance Improvement

This 2-day workshop is designed to teach front line supervisors and employees at the base of your organization how to work together to solve problems and improve your most critical business processes. Two to four weeks prior to the workshop, we will conduct an on-site visit with you to observe the current state of your operations and deliver a brief introduction to the lean process for your management team. During this meeting, we will work together to understand your organization's real business problem and discuss why it is important to solve.

From this initial meeting, we will develop the content and determine the participants for the 2-day workshop. The 2-day workshop is educational and hands-on, aimed to address real problems in your workplace based on your real business needs. Ideal for 20 participants max, it will help your team begin to solve problems in workflow right away. Read more.

DAVID VERBLE

David Verble, a veteran of Toyota North America, is among the first to bring Toyota's unique and highly effective problem solving methodology (known as "A3 thinking") from Japan to the United States. Indeed, this was David's first assignment at Toyota in Georgetown, Kentucky (Toyota's first wholly-owned plant in the U.S.)... to capture this unique approach to strategy development and problem solving and share it with a Western audience. This incredible opportunity and learning experience has led David to helping organizations and teams all over the world strengthen their problem solving capacities. David has been working as a performance improvement consultant and leadership coach since 2000 and, in addition to his work on A3 thinking, is perhaps most well-known for his work on humble leadership and effective coaching.

Featured Workshop: Coaching A3 Thinkers

In our outside of a work context, our tendency as human beings is to look at others' attempts at problem solving, find the holes in their stories, tell them what we don't like and what they need to change, and even tell them what *we* think are the right solutions. When we take over the problem solving (and problem solving thinking) in this way, we inevitably become the problem owners. As leaders in organizations, employees can't help but let us do this either, given our position. This workshop proposes a radically different, much more effective way of managing team members. It introduces core skills for coaching A3 creators/owners not just on the content of their A3s, but in such a way that as leaders, we don't take away agency and problem solving thinking from others. This not only shows respect for our team members and the work they do every day; it builds tremendous trust and goodwill. This workshop is highly interactive and leaves plenty of time for Q&A.