

Viewpoint on Manufacturing:

Maybe You Don't Need a Lean or Six Sigma Program !

By: Don Havas - President, Applied Technology and Science, Inc., a provider of and temporary Manufacturing Engineering and Production Troubleshooting services.

No, you don't need to invest in creating a Lean Manufacturing Culture in your company or establishing a company wide Six Sigma Program. Clearly, if you are happy with the performance of your company, if you already have a program in place that is improving your metrics everyday, if these popular programs can't meet your goals or if you just plain "don't have the time" (maybe because you are busy solving the problems), well then don't invest in a Lean or Six Sigma program.

Over the years, I have seen companies that have, indeed, operated using bits and pieces of these programs without realizing that they were doing just that. One company didn't call it 5S, but the plant manager expected the workplace to be orderly and clean at all times. He walked the floor and called attention to even a scrap of paper on the floor. At another company, parts flowed through the work cells one piece at a time and changeovers occurred automatically. Inventory between work stations was kept to a minimum. They did not call it Lean Manufacturing; it just made sense to them. By the way, the stated company goal was to have parts move through the production line from dock to dock in one day or less.

But there was one company that had run into a wall in trying to reduce the level of warranty returns. That company embraced a Six Sigma program to take their quality to a higher level. For this company, it was a major program to change the level of expectation and the way quality problems were handled. It was a culture change. But for this company, such a change was necessary to meet the goals the company had set for itself, i.e., to meet the level of performance the company leadership sought.

So it is not important that you formally implement Lean Manufacturing or Six Sigma or TPM or any of the other programs that are around. What is important is to have set the goals for your company and to encourage and drive your people in all possible ways to work to meet those goals.

That is not to say that the Lean Manufacturing techniques and the Six Sigma techniques would not help you meet those goals. Both of these popular programs have an excellent toolbox of analysis techniques and operating methods that can be called upon by your people to achieve the goals you have set before them. 5S methods for instance improve operating efficiency and productivity by eliminating clutter so that the necessary tools and parts are readily available and problems are readily identified. Lean methods in addition to improving productivity are also excellent for driving down the Work-in-Process inventory and speeding the order to delivery cycle time. SMED, Single Minute Exchange of Dies, which is often considered part of Lean Manufacturing, works to improve productivity, reduce Work-in-Process inventory and speed the order to delivery cycle time by significantly reducing changeover times. TPM, Total Productive

Maintenance, is about reducing the unplanned equipment failures that leave operators standing around and the ensuing disruptions to the production schedule.

No you don't need a Lean or Six Sigma program. You just need to know your goals, make sure your people know your goals and then drive your company to use whatever tools best help them and you achieve those goals.

Applied Technology and Science, Inc. is a provider of Manufacturing Engineering assistance for companies with assembly operations when there is a need to train their people on the tools to improve or troubleshoot their manufacturing operations. Working with our Strategic Partners we can also help you implement to best tools to achieve the goals you have for your plant floor operations. Please visit our website at www.appliedtechnsci.com for more information or call us at 610-850-2769 to discuss your needs.