

LEAN MANUFACTURING

Making the lean journey

OVER the last five years, lean manufacturing has become more or less mainstream in the newspaper industry, according to Matthew Peacock, managing engineer for Vision in Print (ViP) and one of the speakers at the recent Wona/NS seminar which was held at Newsprinters' Knowsley plant.

"It is seen as a very effective way of bringing change into organisations, reducing costs and improving customer service," he said, all essentials in what Peacock described as 'testing but rewarding times'.

In his talk, Peacock concentrated on 'implementing lean' and how to make it successful. He said that with lean manufacturing it is essential to involve and motivate all employees and to continuously focus on adding value to increase customer service. He continued: "You also need to understand what waste is – in all its forms, not just materials – and so work out how to eliminate it. By doing this, you can increase competitiveness which is ultimately about increasing and sustaining profit and that's why we are here".

The lean manufacturing model described by Peacock has five basic elements – vision, skills, motivation, resources and action plan. These he called 'the ingredients for change'. Taking vision first, he said that this is basically about 'What do you want your organisation to achieve', something which needs to be understood by all employees who also need to understand their role as individuals in achieving the vision.

The vision need not just be to make money. It could actually be to survive this year by minimising costs. Or maybe, it is the need to move into

another market sector or to take on new technology.

"I actually think that to develop a clear idea of what you want to do in the business in the first place is quite hard," said Peacock. "It also must be applied throughout the whole organisation. It is not just about the factory floor".

The same is true of the skills element including foundation skills such as workplace organisation, distinguishing value added from waste, developing and using standardised methods, using data to drive improvement and visual management. There are also techniques which can be applied to specific areas such as make-ready reduction, asset care optimisation and statistical quality tools. As Peacock pointed out: "Unless people are actually trained in these skills and have confidence in them and know where to apply them, you are off to a false start. You will not get the information unless people throughout the organisation understand the foundation skills and that applies all the way through management and staff as well as the shop floor".

Having said that, each level of staff have different roles. For example, the main responsibility of the operators is to apply the standard methods.

"You don't want them to have a new adventure every make-ready. You want them to follow standard processes. They also have a very important part to play in suggesting improvements since they know a lot about what is going on," said Peacock.

The main task for team leaders, on the other hand, should be to facilitate and implement the improvements, as well as to ensure that the standard methods are applied

Over 40 newspaper executives attended a recent Wona and NS seminar at Newsprinters' Knowsley plant on Merseyside to discuss cost control and improved efficiency, key words in today's challenging climate as **CARYL HOLLAND** reports

and the operators know how to do them, while a large of part of middle management's involvement is to give support, plus audit and encourage rather than implement. This leaves us with senior management whose main role according to Peacock is to monitor and encourage process improvement and be supportive of it.

When it comes to motivation, Peacock said that it is important to create an environment to support the vision. It requires a stable management and direction, and 'anchor draggers and smiling assassins need to be reformed'. In other words, 'have the right people on the bus'.

Two-way communication at all levels is essential. To achieve this, Peacock advised walking the shop floor, listening twice as much as talking and doing what you say you'll do. He also said that success should be acknowledged and celebrated.

Moving on to resources, Peacock explained that it is not just about money. Although this helps, the critical elements are people and time.

"It is all about actually making people available to pull yourself up by your bootstraps," said Peacock. "It is really very hard at the start. It takes dedication and commitment but once you have got things going then time becomes more available and it all gets easier".

Peacock said that management must have time to develop the strategy and plan, monitor the results and communicate. The improvement teams should have an appropriate mixture of skills, attitudes and personalities, while individuals should have time to



● Lean machine: Newsprinters at Knowsley

acquire relevant skills, as well as implement ideas and improvements.

Concerning the final element in the lean manufacturing model – the action plan – Peacock said: "The main thing here is having a plan which integrates with what you want to do with the business. If you just make a spot improvement in one area without too much thought, this will in due course be drowned by all the other things which are happening in the business. It needs to be part of a constructive process.

"Having a pilot improvement project is not the same as just having a dabble in one area. You need to apply such projects to processes which have a significant impact on the business and have a reasonably assured future. It is really about the first step on a journey.

He concluded: "The action plan needs to have clear accountabilities and achievable time scales. KPIs should be used to review progress...

"You need to check to see whether what you have achieved was what you expected. Nine times out of ten it is not. In that case, you need to do something about it. Look at how you can improve

the process. If, on the other hand, it works well, standardise it".

Newsprinters at Knowsley started its lean manufacturing journey some two years ago as was explained at the seminar by Steve Whitehead, who at the time was manufacturing manager at the plant. (He has since moved to a senior position at Newsprinters' Broxbourne plant). He said: "We have spent a lot of money on technology in Newsprinters but more importantly is the investment in the skilled and dedicated workforce. Certainly, it is the people that drive our business".

Knowsley example

Since it is impossible to improve without performance measurement, in 2007 Knowsley introduced three main performance measurement themes. These covered effectiveness – 'how we use our assets'; costs – 'are we controlling costs and therefore maximising profit?'; and customers – 'are we keeping our customers happy with our service and print quality?'

A number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were introduced all based on KISS (keeping it as simple as

possible). These included manufacturing efficiency based on a percentage global measure; output per productive hour; web break performance per 100 reels; breakdown performance based on percentage attended hours; setting targets for newsprint waste, and plate, blanket and ink costs; on-time delivery; quality complaints and response times; and completion of PM schedules.

However, as Whitehead admitted, making measurements was all very well but "How we behave is fundamental to our success. Performance needs to be measured not just on what we do but how we do it".

A list was therefore drawn up of behaviours that needed to be encouraged and those that needed to be avoided.

"The list has been narrowed down to seven for our day to day operations though this is not exhaustive," said Whitehead. "They are honesty, motivation, commitment, flexibility, respect, responsibility and dynamism. These are fundamental to success".

Having described the fundamental principles, Whitehead

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● Steve Whitehead takes delegates through the lean journey (above) and right



● Nick Schiller, far right, spoke of 'good ideas for hard times'