PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: Sustainable Lean: The Story of Cultural Transformation
Author: Robert B. Camp
Publisher: CRC Press - Productivity Press Book
List Price: US$29.95  Format: Soft Cover; 175 Pages
Publication Date: 2013  ISBN: 978-1-4665-7168-6
Reviewer: Ira Barash  Review Date: July 2013

Introduction to the Book

Jim, the general manager for a manufacturing facility of Freedom Electronics, a fictional company, narrated the story of his desire to improve profitability in the manufacturing facility through Lean manufacturing. The plant produced $200 million in revenue per year. The first attempt at Lean was to hire consultants. The consultants implemented Lean and saved the company $1.6 million in a six month timeframe while they were on-site. The team of consultants’ involvement was terminated. Over the next couple of years without the consultants being in place, the plant reverted to its old ways of not satisfying the customer, sloppy performance and low earnings.

Jim meets Frank, a Lean Manufacturing Consultant, who was hired after he convinced Jim through hard work and a change in culture that Lean would work. Frank told Jim on their first meeting that most Lean efforts fail because the firms were not able to sustain the effort. He promised Jim if he was hired that he would provide the necessary tools and knowledge to sustain the Lean environment after he left. Jim and Frank worked together with his staff to incorporate lean in a compressed timeframe of three and one-half months.

Overview of Book’s Structure

The book outlines the processes that Frank as the consultant introduced. In response, Jim and his staff took the necessary steps to change the business. First, Frank has Jim and the departmental directors build a paper airplane using a long conference table to mimic the manufacturing facility. Mistakes of over-production, poor quality, over-and-under utilization of people along the assembly line, poor inventory control, too long of a production line and working above the allotted time were made during the first attempt.
The second attempt is much more successful after Frank worked with the group of managers and introduced Lean concepts.

Over the next few months, Lean and its concepts were introduced into the plant with great success. Changes were made in the plant. No one was fired. Working back from the customer, a value stream map was created. Problems were solved by looking at all of the manufacturing stations as a whole. Employees worked together to solve problems. Problems that could not be solved by the employees were elevated without repercussions.

The warehouse was changed to place each completed product in a specific color coded spot with enough inventory for the weekly shipment. Customers were convinced to receive regularly weekly shipments. Packaging was color coded so it matched the spot where it was to be placed. Warehouse and shipping staggered the deliveries to customers to improve flow. Kanban cards were created. When a shipment was made by the warehouse manager, the Kanban card would be returned to final assembly and more product would be assembled and the color coded spot allocated for the product would be replenished. After the assembly was reconfigured, Key Performance Indicator (KPI) boards were placed throughout the plant to indicate how each department was doing. Performance - good and bad was reviewed. The main board contained company performance KPIs. The biggest change was that managers were asked to lead not manage.

**Highlights: What’s New in this Book?**

The book presented lean concepts in a story book format. Mr. Camp, the author, interlaced the components of lean, while maintaining an interesting story line. In every chapter, the life of Jim, the manager, evolved. The most interesting aspect of the story was his realization that he had to change himself from being a manager to becoming a leader. In addition, he had to change the company culture through his management team.

Mr. Camp chose to tell the story through Jim’s eyes rather than simply presenting theories and practical experience about Lean. This view allowed the reader to feel the experience as well as learn about Lean. In my opinion, the author did an exemplary job by creating this vision, keeping the story line going and interlacing Lean concepts.
Highlights: What I liked!

I liked the presentation of the book. The characters in the book are real-life people who you would meet in any manufacturing facility. The change in culture and sustainability at the plant became the major focus.

The people and how they felt at each step were combined to show how difficult it is to change work habits to achieve success. The plot showed how management at the plant had to change and adapt in order to insure success of the implementation. Everyone had to work together from the plant manager to the shop floor worker. All had to believe in the concept or it would not work. Any disruption like a change in leadership would cause the plant to revert to its old ways.

Finally, this author liked learning about Lean and read the book twice because there was so much valuable information. Concepts were presented including the requirement of trust, eliminating waste in all areas of the plant including the office, Kaizen (“change for the better”), 5-S (sort, straighten and clean, scrub (sweep), standardize, and sustain); “U” and “O” shaped production lines, Kanban physical and visual signals, Kanban board, and the importance of upward and downward communication including a plan for training for every level were introduced. There was an enormous amount of useful information presented to the reader in an interesting way.

Shortfalls: What was Missing!

I felt like the book kept me interested from the start to the finish. The first one hundred pages covered the introduction and the training of the management team using the paper airplane example. The next fifty pages were about the transition in the plant. I felt like this transition to lean at the plant level could have been covered in more detail.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Any manager who wants to have an introduction to Lean concepts in an easy to read book told in a story format. It included enough detail to show the benefits and difficulties of implementing and sustaining Lean. The lesson learned at the beginning of the book was that hiring a consultant to implement lean concepts is not enough because the staff must be trained thoroughly and buy-in to the concept to insure sustainability. In addition, the senior leadership must be in full support because of the huge change in culture and expense that is required.

Conclusion

This book was terrific. It was short and full of facts that were presented in an easy to read story form. The best part is that the emotions of the leadership team, and the
consultant were included. The good and bad feelings of the people involved are such a huge part of the cultural change that it is imperative to understand these feelings.


Editor’s note: This book review was the result of cooperation between the publisher, PM World and the Dallas Chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI Dallas Chapter – www.pmidallas.org). Publishers provide the books to PM World; books are delivered to the PMI Dallas Chapter, where they are offered free to PMI members to review; book reviews are published in the PM World Journal and PM World Library. PMI Dallas Chapter members are generally mid-career professionals, the audience for most project management books. If you are an author or publisher of a project management-related book, and would like the book reviewed through this program, please contact editor@pmworldjournal.net.
About the Reviewer

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Ira Barash is married and employed by VisionIT in a contractor role working at HP as a project manager. Previously, he worked for two years as a contractor at Capital One Financial through Strategic Staffing in the mortgage application and infrastructure areas. Barash received his PMP® from the Project Management Institute (PMI®) (2012), a certificate in Project Management from the Graduate School of Management at the University of Texas at Dallas (2007), a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) in Finance from Wright State University (1989) and a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) in Quantitative Analysis from the University of Cincinnati - Carl H. Lindner School of Business (1976).

From 2010 to 2012, Barash was Volunteer Commissioner for the City of Plano on Community Relations Committee. He and his wife actively support the Plano (Texas) Symphony Orchestra through volunteering and financially as a Virtuoso Member. He is a member of PMI, the PMI Dallas Chapter and Toastmasters. He recently presented a paper, Use of Agile with XP and Kanban Methodologies in the Same Project, at the 7th Annual University of Texas Dallas Project Management Symposium on August 15, 2013 in Richardson, Texas.

Ira’s passions are to be a terrific husband, have challenging work assignments, live a healthy lifestyle including traveling, exercise, writing and supporting of non-profits financially, and by volunteering.

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