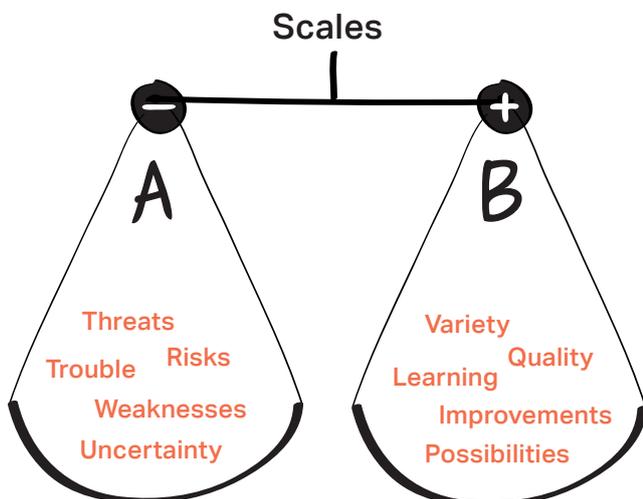


Disobedient employees

Looking for an obedient employee?
Think twice! An obedient employee
requires ten times more management
effort than a committed one. So you
should favor having the latter ones
on your team who act on their own
initiative and take responsibility.
Commitment does not happen by
chance; it cannot be ordered or
forced, but calls for a thinking pro-
CESS. by Jaakko Laurikainen



Lean Management is widely used to create a competitive advantage. As in any change process, Lean programs only lead to improvements if employees are committed to implementing the changes.

Naturally, we often try to be efficient and do not want to waste our or our employees' time. Thus, we simply give them some information and believe that knowing the facts will be enough for their buy-in. Only later do we wonder why they put so little effort into executing our marvelous plan.

For creating commitment, it is important to consider both the thinking and knowledge processes. Part of the thinking process is to make people understand the background and what the alternatives are. Understanding is created by asking them first to participate in the process and then giving them a possibility to influence and bring in their own ideas. Only afterwards will people move on to the next necessary step of accepting the issue. The final stage in this cognitive procedure is that people become committed.

A tool to create commitment

Usually, a Lean improvement plan is conceived by a small team, but a bigger group of people needs to be committed to working in the new way. This is why in our projects, we invite all people concerned to a meeting and present the plan. We then use a tool called »scales« to make everyone participate. We ask the following question: Concerning »issue X,« what A) confuses, puzzles, does not work, creates problems and B) what pleases, benefits, creates opportunities at the moment? The participants take a piece of paper, draw a line down the middle, and write »A« on the left and »B« on the right side. Then they write down any answers that come to mind. Afterwards, we collect the answers on two flipcharts: one positive, one negative. The participants rate the answers for themselves and decide individually if their personal scale tips to plus, minus or equilibrium. If the scale tips to the plus side people are ready to pay the price for change and the minuses no longer create negativity. An equilibrium tendency can be used to emphasize the importance of the pluses. If the scale tips to the minus side, you should focus on discussing all issues with a »both/and« attitude instead of the usual »either/or« attitude. This will make people see that every issue has two sides and will ultimately create commitment for the project. ●