

# The Missing Link

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## The importance of good teamwork in lean projects

Development projects based on lean philosophy boom. However, many lean projects find themselves in big trouble. They do not meet the targets, the intended changes do not happen or if they do, they happen too slowly. Accomplishing real changes in production seems to be the most difficult problem. Successful implementation of lean is only possible through team-based organizational development.

by Juha Kontiainen

During the implementation of the typical lean project 5S, lean boards are installed, lean coordinators trained and then the project may kick-off. Then it seems that everything stops – no big changes happen, and if still, they need a huge effort.

In our experience, the problem is mostly neither due to a lack of lean philosophy knowledge or technical skills, nor the wrong use of tools, nor a missing project plan. The problem has two main reasons:

- a lack of commitment caused by poor leadership,
- and a wrong development focus of the leaders.

### **Do I work with people or for them?**

Leaders often concentrate on developing the work of their subordinates. However, a leader should rather help his team to develop their work than do the development work himself. If he does, he ends up in a selling situation, trying to sell a new working method for example. What is the normal reaction of a team? Are they cheering? No. Because nobody likes to be told how to do a job? People are ready to think and analyze the process, to plan and evaluate new methods, to develop their work and to participate in the development. But they are not so keen on buying solutions from others. ►



understanding  
intelligence



attitude  
feeling



commitment  
will

»The difficulty in lean management is often not a matter of skills and knowledge, but how to organize development work.«

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### **Develop leadership**

Leaders should focus on planning how to introduce changes and lead changes into the organization, what kind of thinking processes are needed to create employee commitment. For example: How can we continuously improve leadership development for our employees? How do we as leaders improve our own leadership skills? What does lean management mean in leadership? How can we improve our skills in order to eliminate lack of commitment?

### **You can't buy commitment**

We cannot give or create commitment for others; we do not receive commitment via orders, we cannot buy commitment with money. The only chance is to create place and time for the internal commitment process. We have to focus on three mental processes: intelligence (how do I understand this), feelings (gives direction for our attitude) and will (shows our commitment).

Leaders should give their subordinates the possibility to create understanding from the presented facts through their own thinking process; why, when, how. Supplying bare facts is not enough. We need to ask how people understand them, what they see in them, what is important, new and difficult, what happens when we succeed and what if we fail? A leader can lead the thinking process; give focus and direction for any thoughts by phrasing good questions.

Most leaders stop at the intelligence level. But it is not enough for people just to understand. It is important to get deeper, to know how people feel about the issue, what their attitude is, what they think they risk,

what they are afraid of. If there are too many negative feelings, it is hard to be committed. If there is a big concern (e. g. can I keep my job in the future), building commitment is difficult, impossible for most of us. We also need to know what people are committed to. Would they make a turnaround project in the entire factory or rather plan a development project in their own production line? There is a great difference.

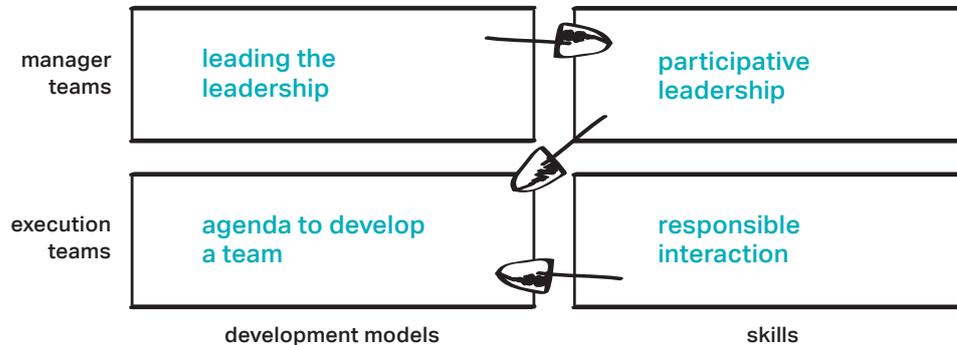
### **Important working units**

In lean philosophy teams are the important working units. Teams are often built only for production work, based on shifts or production lines. However, this can cause problems later when responsibilities are assigned for certain development areas. It does not make sense to have three teams developing the same production line, all at the same time.

The bigger problem in team structure however, is the structure of leadership, supervisors, managers, team leaders. What is their working unit? Where is their team? They often experience that they are bossed by top management who throws the ball at them, expecting them to take care of the lean project. But who is worried about their commitment and development?

If there is no leadership development, sooner or later the organization comes to the point at which development stops. When that happens, leadership is often based on individual capabilities, and one's own interest to lead people. The missing link is leading the leadership. Effective leadership development only happens in real life. Some education and skill development is needed, but the real work is done within the leading teams.

## Different teams with different skills for an effective development process



### Organizing team-based development

It is very important to understand the roles, to clarify the teams' focus areas, and to understand which skills are required. Two types of teams are needed in an effective development process. The execution teams with a concrete responsibility, e. g. production, maintenance, sales (without leadership function) and leaders' teams (supervisors, managers). Both need different skills and development models (see illustration).

#### Skills for execution team members: responsible interaction

Execution teams develop their own work. When they get a chance to impact their own work, they need to take over responsibility. For that, they need responsible interaction skills. These include problem solving skills and tools, as well as skills and behavior to organize effective meetings. Execution team members often do not have a routine in attending meetings, so they have to learn how to cope with different opinions, how to make decisions, follow up results etc.

#### Development model for execution teams: agenda to develop a team

The agenda to develop a team and its work is like a platform that the management creates mostly together with people. It is a living roadmap, a place where management can drop new tasks. This agenda is also a follow-up tool to show where teams are in their development. Subjects come from lean; often 5S is where all begins. Agendas can vary from team to team but the basic structure and the subjects connected to team dynamics development should stay the same.

#### Skills for manager team members: participative leadership

To support their own teams to develop, managers at all levels need skills to get people to participate, to involve them into implementing lean projects. There are simple but handy tools that can easily be learned. In the toolbox of Processive Leadership Skills you find 10 practical tools that you can use in dealing with change. For example, when you meet resistance, you need new ideas to solve a problem, or you have to deal with challenging individual leadership situations.

#### Development model for manager teams: leading the leadership

The goal is to provide a structure for leaders to ensure that the company's objectives are conveyed into the individual units. Leading the leadership means that manager teams first need to ensure their own commitment to the tasks. Secondly, they have to plan how to actually bring the objectives to the teams, turning them into actions. Thirdly, a success evaluation is required: Did we get the processes done? Have we met the goals set? What have we learnt, what shall we do differently next time? In order to accomplish a real leadership development in a company – actually, to accomplish continuous development of leadership, the tools that we use range from action learning and coaching to sparring.

Presently, I am working with several companies that are on their way to put lean into practice. I have experienced, that the difficulty in lean management is often not the skills and knowledge on lean as such, but it is more an organization issue on the development work and leadership. ●