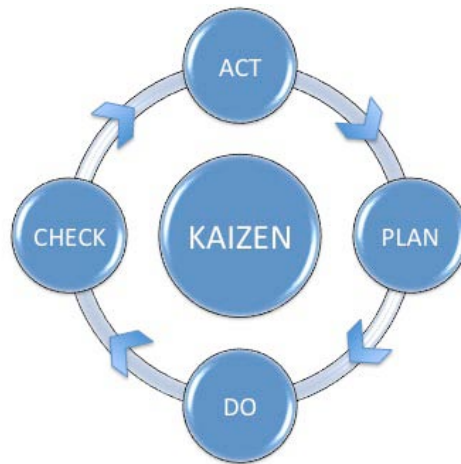


Carry on Kaizen

I had a very pleasant lunch at the Best Factory Awards last Friday; it's good to see manufacturing in the UK is still alive and making good progress. My old friend Patrick Mroczak, Operations Director at Aimia Foods, won lots of awards as usual. First in three categories and a 'Highly Commended' is exceptional by any standards, especially given the professional scrutiny and site visits by the Cranfield judges. Aimia Foods has won numerous awards over the years and a tour round their plant shows why it has received such honours. For example, many years ago, the Aimia Foods Continuous Improvement team needed to persuade staff to segregate waste so put in place an entirely robust procedure. They didn't just provide colour coded bins; they replaced the white floor tiles that the bins sat on with colour coded green and brown ones that matched the bins, ensuring everything was easily identifiable and placed in its correct location. This was Kaizen, or 'change for the better', implemented effectively and with high levels of success.



Unfortunately, manufacturing in 2011 isn't all about success. For many manufacturers stress levels are increasing to danger levels. No one can be really sure where the debt situation is leading. If it wasn't so serious it could be seen as amusing for the Americans with \$14,708,551,833,446 of debt (at 8:58 GMT 03/10/11) to be lecturing Europe on our own debt crisis.

It's against this background that I thought I'd provide some light humour by way of a 'tongue in cheek' review on how not to run a Continuous Improvement Team. Unfortunately it is a tale based on a true story, but please allow for some poetic license.

Here we go... "Carry on Kaizen":

Dear Boss,

'The Blond' has been reading those lean books again; either that or the new £1,500 a day lean consultant has suggested we may be able to improve the plant if we implement 'measurement processes'.

Totally unnecessary given that each day we have orders to fill, and by late evening, often before midnight, we finish most of them. OK, the plant supplier did rate the equipment at single shift for our output, and we sometimes have to flood the plant with agency staff, and pay extra overtime, but not for every order. And yes, we do get a lot of customer rejects, but 'The Blond' is almost over the £100k fine we got from that S&M supermarket because we got the date code wrong...

I think we do pretty well; our engineers may not appear to do much but they really motor when we have a breakdown, and Roy is brilliant at temporary repairs to get us to the end of the shift. Malcolm did say, letting everyone leave when the orders complete is a shame as then no-one is around to make a permanent fix, but I'm not sure that's critical, and you should see the team spirit down the pub after work.

Talking about agency staff, the other day, this guy, really, and I mean really, hit the fruit pie line feed conveyor with his fork truck. It took Roy and his lads seven hours to get the conveyor back into shape. 'The Blond' went ape and issued final warnings all round. Then the buck passing started with Training having the final say; apparently he had the FLT certificate but I heard it was for a Massey Ferguson. Really, how hard can it be to drive an FLT?

Someone said 'The Blond' should spend more time down on the plant; maybe see some of the problems. Better kept upstairs I reckon; less shouting and it means that no one sees how bad it really is on the shopfloor.

So, this measurement thingy, yet another new idea we're not too worried, we buried the last 'initiative' in double quick time. Good job this lot never follow anything through.

Anyway, must go, customer audit tomorrow, better go and paint something.

Sid James, C.I. Manager

Ok – so this is a slightly exaggerated account of a poor Continuous Improvement programme that has a low level of engagement and is lacking the basic foundations for success. But often in times of stress and uncertainty, the basic Measurement and Kaizen procedures are overlooked for more adventurous money saving tactics that look good on paper, but fall short when they aren't embedded into the organisation and sustainable. When the pressure is on, it's a good test of the basics; do the plant, people, and process cope, or does everything, from resourcing to product, start going wrong?

Saying that your team or organisation is running the latest initiative is not the same as actually practicing (and then honing to perfection) the new procedure or process. The 'doing' and 'checking' parts of the 'acting, planning, doing, and checking' cycle are important, and the difference between 'lip service' and 'award winning'.



Alan France, Operations Director of Idhammar Systems, has extensive experience in lean manufacturing with a background that includes several years as Engineering Systems Manager for the largest food company in Europe. A systems specialist, he now consults on the importance of underpinning lean initiatives with realistic targets and sound metrics.

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