

Why LEA? – December 2002

We live in curious times. Despite the consumer boom, manufacturers everywhere are struggling and jobs are migrating to Eastern Europe and the Far East. I just returned from Germany, Denmark and the USA (for the AME Conference in Chicago) where the picture is similar – worried manufacturers with a renewed interest in lean.

Recessions are good times for implementing lean. Indeed sales of *Lean Thinking* picked up again in the UK last year (where 40,000 copies have been sold since 1996). And the UK Government's excellent manufacturing strategy has spawned many new initiatives to spread lean to smaller firms. But while we have the demand and the willingness to deploy lean techniques, we are still woefully short of people who can really lead firms beyond the basics, which is where many firms get stuck.

In truth lean really starts when you begin moving things. When you start unscrambling your product families and creating value streams that flow in response to levelled customer demand. In my experience this only sticks when a manager is given the responsibility for reconfiguring each value stream and for persuading the functions to support their efforts to do the right thing. This involves a different kind of leadership, as well as helping colleagues learn to see their own value stream. These skills go way beyond the specific tools in the lean tool kit, such as SMED (single minute exchange of die) and *kanban*. They are still in very short supply. And they can really only be taught by people who have done it themselves.

We don't have much time to close this gap. I have been thinking for some time about how to accelerate and deepen the learning process in the UK. About how to create a knowledge base from which lean implementers can pull advanced lean knowledge, as they need it. And to figure out what they need to know next. This need is not limited to manufacturing; indeed I have been in touch with many people in industries as diverse as healthcare, defence, construction, consumer goods and services, all going lean. They all need this kind of help.

So I have decided the best thing I could do is to establish the Lean Enterprise Academy in the UK, as a non-profit education and research organisation. Its objective will be to develop and teach the core skills to those leading lean transformations and to those who teach these skills to others. In other words, it will pass this knowledge on and train the trainers. Our success will be judged by whether you can take the next step on your lean journey when you return home.

We are fortunate in that we can draw on the already considerable resources of the Lean Enterprise Institute in Boston, founded by my co-author Jim Womack. LEI have an ambitious programme of publishing workbooks and conducting public and in-company workshops on the building blocks of the Lean Business System across North America.

LEA will begin on January 21-23, 2003 by hosting our first lean workshops in the UK. The workshops will be given by expert instructors from LEI in the USA – many of whom learnt from the source of lean practice at Toyota. These will be the start of a programme of workshops and networking events throughout the year. Our new web site (www.leanuk.org) already offers all the LEI workbooks for sale in the UK.

I hope you agree this is an important step for lean in the UK. I would welcome any offers of help and suggestions on what we could do. I hope at some point we may be able to help you. Please feel free to forward this message to fellow lean practitioners.

With best wishes

Daniel T Jones
Founder and Chairman
Lean Enterprise Academy