



LEAN MANAGEMENT JOURNAL

Dec/Jan 2015/16 | www.leanmj.com

THE BIG ISSUES

Questions, answers and discussion on the important matters affecting the world of lean right now.

Organisations and interviews in this issue include representatives from: Industry Forum, Suiko, Cranfield University, Colombia University and the University of Strathclyde.

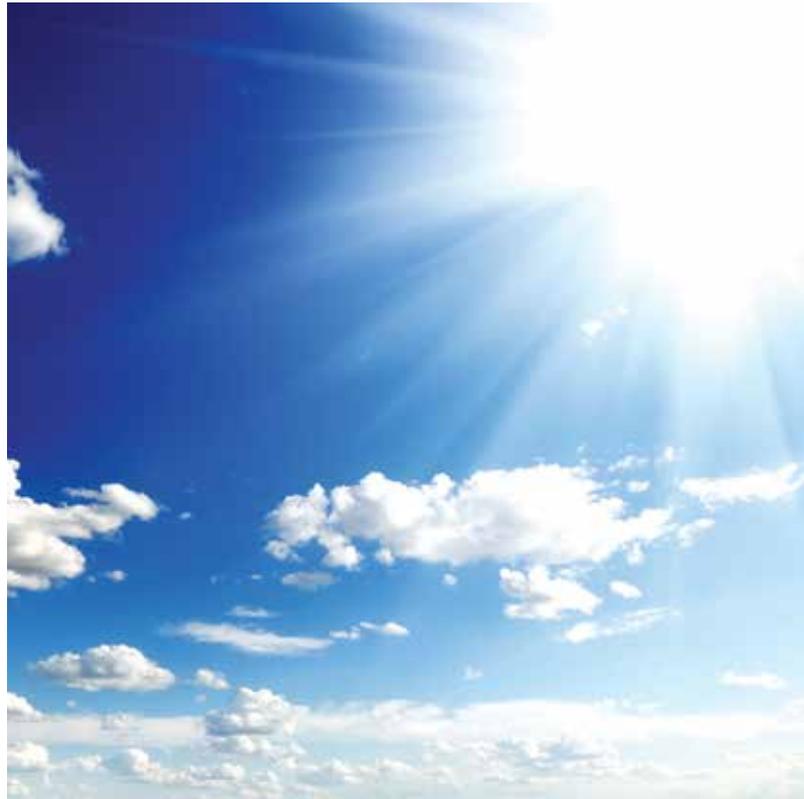
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How Communication Cells can Change an Organisation:
how a daily chat can make massive changes.

Visual Management/Visual Workplace- What's the difference?:
the difference between the two and what they do.

Three Ingredients to Transform your Business Operation:
how to change your business for the better with these three simple tricks.





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Out of the blue: Vision Therapy

Ian Fleming had a concise vision for James Bond, one he shared in a memo when Dr. No was being filmed. According to producer Cubby Broccoli's autobiography, Fleming's vision of Bond was of a "blunt instrument wielded by a Government Department. He is quiet, hard, ruthless, sardonic, fatalistic." Fifty years later, Spectre offers a reminder of Fleming's vision of James Bond's likes and dislikes, including a fondness for martinis, "shaken, not stirred." With my own fondness for martinis, unable to discern a difference between shaken and stirred, film critics and fans can weigh in on the need for corrections to Fleming's original image of Bond.

Long before Fleming's vision of agent 007, eye glasses provided corrections to anyone who could afford vision treatment. While there are no records of an inventor, historians have traced the use of glasses as a form of vision therapy to 13th century Italy. With agreement on timing, others credit first use in India and China. Five centuries later, British optician Edward Scarlett added rigid sidepieces to allow glasses to rest upon one's ears. Fellow British optician, James Ayscough, wasted no time in adding hinges to the sidepieces.

While glasses provide an external form of vision therapy, ophthalmologists have

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been offering surgical solutions since 800 BC, noting Sushruta in India as the first cataract surgeon. As with optometrists in their steady advances to eye glasses, ophthalmologists have advanced their state of practice of vision therapy, from tools for earlier detection of glaucoma to corneal transplants.

More recently, developmental optometry offers a new solution space for vision therapy. Sometimes referred to as behavioral optometry, practitioners treat their patients, including our son, with a wide variety of hand-eye coordination exercises. In so doing, developmental optometrists have expanded the size of the vision system used by optometrists and ophthalmologists, the eye itself, to include the optic nerve and brain.

With this introduction to advances in vision therapy, building upon Fleming’s version of Bond as an example of a vision, I hereby offer my own form of vision therapy to students and practitioners of lean. Similar to developmental optometry, my proposal builds upon a reflection from author and educator, Myron Tribus, that “What you see depends on what you thought before you looked.” What if, suggests Tribus, our vision is always constrained by our current thinking?

My therapy was instigated by the essential vision of lean, as explained by Womack, Jones, and Roos, in their trend-setting book, *The Machine That Changed the World*. As with Fleming, these authors articulated a vision; namely “A lean organisation understands customer value and focuses its key processes to continuously increase it. The ultimate goal is to provide perfect value to the customer through a perfect value creation process that has zero waste.”

What can be said of an organisation with zero waste? How does it respond to an ever-changing world? And, what can be said of achieving perfection? Unlike Utopia, is there wiggle room for

improvement? Upon asking questions such as these, seminar students were unable to describe what it would look like in a facility tour. In parallel, I came upon a story that matches my vision of an organisation that manages resources with contextual excellence, marked by the ability to define quality in terms of relationships between parts and tasks, not parts and tasks taken separately, as is often the norm.

The story came from David Kearns, former CEO of Xerox, in his book, *Prophets in the Dark*. Kearns credited the account to Frank Pipp, a Xerox colleague who shared the experience of serving Ford as a plant manager. In his benchmarking practice, competitor’s cars were procured, disassembled, and re-assembled. If two parts could be joined without a rubber mallet, it was “snap fit.” The majority of parts required mallets. To their amazement, one of

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the cars acquired in the late 1960s was entirely snap fit. Upon repeating this astonishing assembly of a Toyota pickup truck, they realised they were not hallucinating. With this story as a backdrop, my vision therapy terminology for an organisation such as Toyota is a “Blue Pen Company.” In a simple dual-mode model, a “Red Pen Company” represents the converse of a “Blue Pen Company.”

Building upon Pipp’s contrast between Ford and Toyota, my vision therapy begins by asking seminar attendees to imagine that they have just returned from visiting two companies – the Blue Pen Company and the Red Pen Company. My description follows; “The Blue Pen Company is where I go every week to

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buy one blue pen. They are the sole source of blue pens, their only product. Likewise, the Red Pen Company is the sole source for red pens, their only product. Every week, I buy one. The pens are identical, other than in colour, comprised of two parts, a body, with ink and a writing tip, and a cap, to enclose the tip. Both cost \$1."

With this introduction, participants are instructed to take a sheet of A4 paper, draw a large rectangle and subdivide it into four cells, with a left and right column (labeled Blue and Red Pen Company, respectively) as well as a top and bottom row (labeled "physical" and "people," respectively). Next, I explain that "trip report" observations about each company's "physical" environment will be added, on my prompt, to the top two cells, with observations about "people" placed in the bottom cells.

Continuing with the exercise, I offer this explanation for the trip report, "Consider that you have recently toured both companies, each for two weeks. With laser-like focus, you made notes about the physical features of both companies during the first week in each, when the entire staff was on holiday. With laser-focus, you also made notes about the staff during the second week in each, when they returned from holiday." Before the cells are filled, a bonus element of discernment is offered; "The cap and body of the blue pen are easy to separate, known as "snap fit." The red pen cap and body can only be assembled with a hammer and separated with pliers. In next five minutes, record the highlights of your trip reports in the four cells."

In conducting this vision therapy exercise for 18 years, across several continents, with wide varieties of audiences, the trip reports are amazingly similar. The physical characteristics of Blue Pen Companies often include "neat, clean, organised, open doors, and the use of round tables." People are routinely described as "having fun, enthusiastic, friendly, inventive, engaged, and curious." By contrast, the physical attributes of Red Pen Company typically include "chaotic, disorganised, dirty, dark, with rectangular tables and closed doors." People characteristics will include

"fearful, disengaged, rigid, and quick to blame others." When queried, seminar attendees consistently estimate that most organisations, in their experience, are Red, not Blue, kept in business by other Red Pen Companies.

With extensive experience in using this exercise, I have used it to imagine the operation of a Toyota plant, having never visited one. Upon comparing my own trip report with the accounts of colleagues with familiarity in touring Toyota's facilities, my vision therapy descriptions of a Blue Pen Company are well aligned with their first-hand reports.

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While the compiled visions of a Blue Pen Company are not far removed from the "trip reports" collected by Womack, Jones, and Roos, the explanations are vastly different. I am also reminded that what I see depends on what I thought before I looked. I think of Toyota as an organisation with a refined skill for managing resources, from parts to people to processes, suppliers, and customers; as a system. I am unsure of how a focus on perfection in parts and a zeal to eliminate waste, with a deep foundation in Frederick Winslow Taylor's Scientific Management, can explain Toyota's achievement of a 100 percent snap fit automobile in the late 1960s, let alone their status today. While the fastest way to transform a Red Pen Company to Blue is to use spray paint, I suggest a surer way, albeit a more challenging journey. Infuse awareness of contextual excellence in how all resources are managed and do so with a constancy of purpose. My collection of LMJ articles; past, present, and future; offer insights on this road less traveled. Far more vision therapy is provided in books and articles by authors including Russell Ackoff, Genichi Taguchi, Tom Johnson, Gipsie Ranney, and W. Edwards Deming.