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While Fluke customers seem to be enjoying 2010 more than 2009, they can't really say the falling knife isn't still falling. Most are seeing growth—*though not at the production levels they had in early 2008* . They tell us they're being hit from all sides.

Orders are up and they're working hard to meet demand. Resources are down, however, and supply chains must be rebuilt. Technicians laid off in the recession have frequently moved on, taking years of experience with them. Those who are left have no time for preventive maintenance. They're too busy keeping things running, up to three shifts a day.

This dynamic isn't going to change overnight. There's a lot of talk about a "New Normal" across all aspects of the economy, where we don't ever return to "The Way Things Were." Executives remain cautious about building headcount, as indicated by still high unemployment numbers. For manufacturers, the new model means sustained high productivity and lean operations.

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"But wait," you say. "Lean isn't a new concept. Many of us in the U.S. have been running lean for decades, in order to stay competitive in a global market. What's different?" Take a look at the survivors.

The survivors are those who invested in sound practices up front, from routine maintenance to training to safety. Plant managers, however, have been relying heavily on that operational backbone for many years now; it's stretched pretty thin. At the same time, market share is switching hands, going to those who can produce high-quality goods on time in this environment. Uptime and reliability are now crucial. So how do plant managers maintain their high productivity and quality levels while increasing output? Yes, they are investing—*in both*

human and mechanical resources
—but they're doing so very strategically. Things are still uncertain. Profits have not fully returned. These facilities need productivity gains on the scale that accountants achieved when they replaced green eyeshades with Excel spreadsheets.

The survivors are also typically those who believe in innovation—*and practice it daily*. If that meant investing in R&D during the recession, they did it. If that meant finding new markets, they went there. Fluke's own experience as a manufacturer has been no different. We've survived not just because we make great tools, but also because we're lean, productive, strategic and innovative. And it shows in the tools we created during the recession.

The latest Fluke test tools now do things that were impossible to do before. We are continuing to innovate, designing ever-easier-to-use solutions that drive productivity. As an example, we've recently introduced a new tool that crunches thousands of pieces of vibration data to produce a diagnosis that previously only a highly trained expert could achieve. Another product created during the recession, a multimeter with a detachable wireless display, allows tests that once required two technicians—*one to operate the controls and another to read the meter at a distant location* —to be done by just one.

All of these tools were designed with input from the survivors: our customers. These are the people who are running hard and lean; who need to do more with less and who will continue to succeed. We're right there with you. **MT**

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- Terry Buzbee , *President, Emerson Process Management, Fisher Division*
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- Mike Hawkins , *Global Brand Manager, Mobil SHC Brand, ExxonMobil Lubricants & Specialties*
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