

## Executive Outlook 2012: Preparing For U.S. Manufacturing Growth

Written by Tribby Warfield, President, North America Commercial, Gates Corporation  
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As a global company, Gates Corporation recognizes the importance of manufacturing in local economies for local consumption, and is committed to meeting market demand—*wherever it may be*.

Our manufacturing in the U.S. has been strong for our entire 101 years, and with over 50 years in both Canada and Mexico, our North American manufacturing continues to be the main source for our North American customer base.

Because many of our customers are expanding their stateside operations, we need to be proactive and prepared for the anticipated demand growth that will certainly impact our operations. I see reshoring as an opportunity for Gates and other manufacturers with operations in the U.S. to evaluate current processes and technologies and invest in increased automation, productivity improvements and training and education.

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The influx of new production means that now—*more than ever*—it's crucial for manufacturers to adopt Lean Manufacturing principles and put robust sales and operation planning processes (S&OP) in place to tie commercial demand to delivery expectations. The Commercial organization must clearly communicate market demand to Operations, creating a downstream process for assessing the raw materials and workforce needed to successfully meet and manage any impending increases.

At Gates, we continue to invest in product process and productivity improvements. We have built a Continuous Improvement culture that incentivizes and rewards our associates for identifying opportunities to create efficiencies and reduce overall costs. Beyond this, we document and share key best-practice processes and methodologies across our global teams and facilities.

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Reshoring notwithstanding, knowledge sharing and communication are imperative. Training initiatives need to be viewed as critical as any HSE investment. As the experienced, technical, skilled workforce dwindles, we need to ensure that retiring employees share their knowledge with the younger, inexperienced generations. Now is the time to take education in-house, and reinvest in internships, apprenticeships and on-the-job training programs.

Gates provides Leadership, Education and Development (LEAD) training and a Supervisor Training Excellence Program (STEP) to create leaders who drive our culture and are equipped to educate and inspire our employees. We also provide ongoing Lean Manufacturing training to ensure employees are properly applying our processes. In fact, some of our customers have asked us to assist them in implementing and optimizing their own Lean Manufacturing processes.

Ultimately, it's cross-team communication and cross-company collaboration that will help the U.S. manufacturing industry improve its infrastructure and ready its workforce for a period of sustained growth. **MT**