Robert M. Williamson, Strategic Work Systems, Inc. If I've heard it once I've heard it a thousand times: "*I'm getting confused*" with all the talk about Lean Manufacturing, Lean Enterprise, Six Sigma, equipment reliability, Total Productive Maintenance (TPM), ISO/QS9000, the learning organization, and on, and on. "*What's it going to be?*"

From my perspective it's not an either-or question. Why does it have to be one improvement program at a time, fully implemented, over three to five years? What we really need is to systematically identify and eliminate the causes of poor performance using the appropriate tools or techniques—in a sustainable manner of course. I've said it before, and here it is again: Focus on results and change the culture along the way.

Our culture has a history of looking for the "silver bullet" or the "secret ingredient" to successful equipment management. We tend to single out one improvement program and go whole hog to implement it. A giant leap of faith—hoping that equipment will perform better, last longer, and operate at lower costs. Then the "new program" comes along and interrupts what we started. We never seem to fully realize the fruits of our former labors before we have to shift gears. Or, in some cases, we start seeing the results but are unable to sustain them because the new initiative-of-the-month has priority.

Can it be that the top decision makers are so desperate for improvement that they keep looking for another, and another, and another silver bullet?

In the late 1980s the term Lean Manufacturing was coined by a researcher in the international

motor vehicle program at MIT when comparing many of the mass-production approaches with the Toyota Production System (TPS). But since then, as Lean concepts started catching on, they often were taken out of historical context and the maintenance elements fell by the wayside. The silver bullet syndrome again?

Just last month, Portland, OR-based Productivity, Inc. hosted its 6th annual Lean Management and (12th annual) Total Productive Maintenance Conference in Detroit. This was the first time that a maintenance improvement theme (TPM) was brought into the context of Lean Manufacturing, Lean Production, and Lean Enterprise that I can recall. This combination of two previously separate, and seemingly unrelated, improvement strategies has laid another big foundation stone for yet another breakthrough in Lean thinking and equipment and reliability improvement. But the significance of this combination may be overlooked by the Lean consultants.

Yet, just a little over 30 years ago Japanese automotive supplier Nippondenso realized that until you address and systematically eliminate the causes of poor equipment performance you cannot deliver to your customers just in time, nor improve quality levels, nor lower operating costs, nor improve profits. In 1969 the ideas of TPM facilitated by Seiichi Nakajima helped take the TPS to the next level. Since the TPS was focused on the absolute elimination of waste to reduce manufacturing cost, TPM was designed to systematically identify and eliminate equipment losses (downtime, inefficiency, defects).

We have an opportunity. As maintenance and reliability professionals we need to help our "Lean thinkers" understand the relationship between getting Lean and equipment reliability and performance improvement. It's not one or the other, it's both. You cannot have a Lean manufacturing facility without reliable equipment. Conversely, you can have reliable equipment without Lean. But the key to sustaining equipment reliability comes in building a capable infrastructure—one that not only supports and encourages equipment reliability at all appropriate levels but links reliability to the needs of the business, to deliver business results. That capable infrastructure is essential for sustaining any improvement initiative—including Lean.

Until we help lead maintenance and reliability as a core business strategy, our efforts will remain just another maintenance program. It's up to those of us who understand maintenance and reliability methods to collaboratively build the bridges between our reliability improvement efforts and Lean transformation efforts in our plants and facilities. Planned, preventive, predictive, proactive, total productive, and reliability-centered maintenance are known and proven.

Let's start undoing the "Lean confusion" while it's still in its infancy. The foundation stones are in place. **MT**

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