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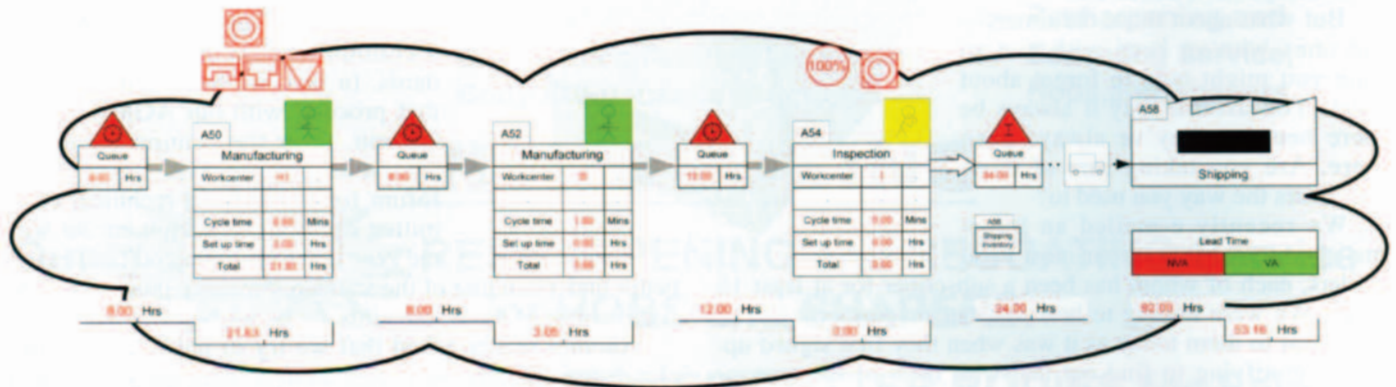
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Enterprise Excellence: Are We There Yet?

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Abby Dress, associate professor, Long Island University



When the term, “what you see is what you get,” is applied in the computer industry, it means that users or customers are able to see their end results without the encumbrances of complicated software code that enables this function. Software works behind the scenes ultimately to produce transparency and the desired effects. In many ways, this concept should be extended to the relationships that exist between suppliers and buyers and even among internal company departments.

Wouldn't it be efficient for customers to qualify new suppliers based on what auditors see in the respective facilities of suppliers? Or, what companies tout as facts are indeed real and do not need to be certified or reviewed periodically? Obviously, the ideal would be for processes throughout the enterprise to be performed to stated specifications. This way the product matches the paperwork, and the paperwork reflects a trustworthy and capable manufacturer. Exacting performance means that employees contribute to

profitability and, at the same time, make the company environment flexible, efficient, predictable and safe.

Frequently there are challenges. Perhaps, opportunities arise suddenly, new markets open up, or problems need to be addressed. Other times, new or different technologies require evaluation, adoption or training. To achieve enterprise excellence means thoroughly proofing and transforming an organization so that it can solve and take advantage of quality, cost, schedules and risk issues for current programs, while allowing for the potential of new ones. Some managers today are so mired in the day-to-day battles that they do not have the luxury to take a hard look at their businesses.

However, a deep look within and across programs and departments can be enlightening, so much so that from this visual review an organization can adjust and build the collaborative setting needed. Maybe this observational process should be called company soul-searching. It's easy. Simply take

a look around first. Is the company's enterprise or culture right—are the right people with the right skills and responsibilities in place, are the processes right, and are the right technologies in place—to satisfy the customer's needs?

Maybe this is difficult to assess quickly, but observation is the first step, and this can be very revealing. Are materials piling up? Are some machines idle, or are some people standing around awaiting the next run? Are supervisors spending too much time giving instructions on the production floor with the result that actual production times are reduced? Or maybe the inspection department is a bottleneck and actually is holding up product ready to ship due to slow, final inspection requirements. The flow and the capacity for handling materials throughout the manufacturing process itself are critical to enterprise excellence.

When you take a look around, you really see how the business is work-

ing. Just as importantly, you also view what perhaps is not working. There is no question that customers and their buyers want to be assured of specific results, and depend on suppliers to provide them. Yet, why should buyers review supplier processes to confirm quality metrics, when this really should be a function performed by the supplier itself? After all, isn't a company supposedly responsible for a finished part or product that is delivered on time and one that measures up?

Of course, delivery schedules sometimes can be delayed unavoidably. Communication is key when this occurs, but what happened to account for the delay? Who is in charge to handle complaints? Did a delay occur because a product was not routed properly or materials were not ordered in time? Maybe the supplier committed to an unfeasible or unreasonable schedule just to acquire the business? Was the timing at the outset determined arbitrarily without regard to when the customer really needed the component? Or, did the customer and supplier negotiate operational capabilities and schedules, using tools like Kanban or other demand flow techniques, so that everything would mesh and arrive in a just-in-time fashion?

Precipart fosters an atmosphere of continuous improvement using a range of quality standards and strategies. From lean and Six Sigma practices to spaghetti diagrams, failure mode and effect analysis, and kaizen events, managers are encouraged to mistake-proof their processes and offer suggestions for improvements, and this includes departments other than manufacturing ones, like sales, too. Buy-in to the process is fully integrated throughout the company due to participation by senior managers and regular meetings dedicated to improvement discussions and decisions. Held every four to six weeks, this quality system team is charged with problem-solving for improvements. Some companies, which do not have senior managers involved for immediate decisions, have representatives to champion the process. At Precipart, a full-time continuous improvement manager facilitates the solutions with the full participation and support of its president. It is a

dynamic, ongoing process.

Metrics have helped companies foster collaboration so they can develop plans to achieve enterprise excellence. Motorola was one of the first companies to identify these principles and adopt them. Since then, its methodologies and practices have been embraced by many others around the world as companies have sought to transform themselves into agile organizations of excellence. Precipart regularly compares actual production times with its quoted times and seeks improvements, looking for simple efficiencies to enhance performance. Ultimately, any improvements translate into better customer relations in multiple ways.

In a sense, the idea of enterprise excellence should involve a different mindset; it should transition beyond defect reduction to one of performance improvement. Its approach should be to capitalize on past successes and collectively focus an organization on its strengths. Then a company is equipped and flexible to address problems, capture opportunities, adapt to changing requirements and technologies, and evaluate associated risks.

That brings up some remaining questions: Is your plant such a safe environment you would let your family work there? And, of course, you would buy products from your facility, right?

No matter how good an organization becomes, it cannot become complacent or accept that it is good enough. It must be driven by a never-ending passion for optimizing the customer experience. A passion not just for improvement, but for an understanding of the drivers behind business cost and customer satisfaction and a constant focus on improving those metrics.

Excellence within an enterprise should be visibly evident. Everything has its own place, so that when you look around, it looks like everything is orderly, and the production flow appears to be running smoothly. That is why customers are impressed when they visit any audit supplier plants that have embraced enterprise excellence. Everything is transparent: What you see is what you get. ⚙



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