

Buy or Rent?

The Value of Self Discovery

Have you ever noticed that people treat possessions that are truly their own differently from those that are not? For example, people will do things with a rental property or hotel room that they will not do in their own home. Similarly, people will treat a rental car differently from their personal automobile. The fact of the matter is people more greatly value possessions that are their own. This applies to ideas as well.

A Personal A-ha Moment

In the mid-1980s, I was very excited about the 'World Class' and 'Quality Management' principles that I was learning at the time. I eagerly worked to apply them to whatever processes in which I was involved. Excitement turned quickly to frustration as application became problematic. People just didn't 'get it'. "Why don't they see what I do, that these concepts can really help?" In fact, the frustration was not resident in me alone, but also within those I was trying to influence. One day, a process engineer with whom I worked, sat down and acknowledged the situation. He said, "You are clearly very enthusiastic about these concepts. You come in with an attitude of here's what we are going to do." Then he asked, "How has it been working?" "Not well", I responded. "That's right. You're frustrated. We're frustrated. I believe that it is your approach. You need to teach us the concepts, and allow us to figure out how best to apply them. It might be different than what you were thinking, but that is OK, as long as it works out in the end." He went on to describe this approach as the 'Value of Self Discovery'. People will assign greater value to those ideas that they discover themselves. Therefore, they will be more committed to following through on them. He concluded, "The likelihood for success will significantly increase as a result." I thought this over for several days and came to the realization that the person was correct. I pledged to change my approach going forth. Experience since has shown that there is a deep truth to the expression 'Value of Self Discovery'.

There are other expressions that are variations of this theme. 'Not invented here' is one such example. It applies to people who resist ideas, to varying degrees, that are not their own. People of all ages usually do not like being told what to do. It takes away their sense of freedom, and people in general value their freedom. The level of resistance can vary from mild to even self-destructive. Other factors come into play that determine the level including but not limited to; the amount of insecurity that an individual feels, a sense of ownership to the 'status quo'. Nevertheless the truth underlying the 'Value of Self Discovery' remains.

Yes, There is More Than One Answer

There is another important aspect to the 'Value of Self Discovery'. It implies that there is more than one way to go about any change effort. This includes the various Lean 'tools'. Often Lean practitioners are reluctant to adapt particular tools for fear of undermining their use. In fact, all of the tools can and should be adapted based on existing

circumstances, which can vary from organization to organization, or process to process. Numerous cycles of learning are necessary to determine what will ultimately be effective in a particular work environment. As with any 'journey' there are multiple possible paths to a destination. The one that will be most effective is the one that people commit to, which is usually the one that they choose. Therefore, flexibility can and must be afforded in any change effort.

Leaders Must Be Flexible

Leaders often must be reminded of the importance of being flexible when undertaking change efforts, both large and small. Too often, a lack of flexibility leads to significant resistance from members of the organization, resistance that could have been lessened, or avoided altogether. Just like when you input a destination to a map or GPS system. Most often it responds with multiple paths, from which you choose. Of course, during the journey circumstances can arise that require a change in course. The same can be said for the practice of Lean.

Summary

Reflect on past change efforts undertaken in your organization, both major and minor. Were the desired results achieved? Were changes made sustained over time? What was the level of 'buy-in' from the people impacted? Now consider the approach that was taken. Is there a relationship between approach and results? What can we learn from such reflection? Perhaps it will start you on your own journey of self-discovery.