

INITIAL EUPHORIA TO SUSTAINED CHANGE – MAINSTREAMING LEAN CULTURE

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1 BACKGROUND

Lean construction philosophy was introduced in a large industrial project of a leading organisation about two years back. The drive by the top management, augmented by efforts of the Lean champions in the project team, helped the project team to transition from the conventional project delivery method to the Lean Construction method. Though there were many hiccups and mood swings after the initial success, sustained efforts ensured the continuance of Lean practices. The present study looks at the developments in Lean implementation in the Project over time, based on observations on such dynamics and understanding the strategies which might help to mainstream Lean philosophy introduction in other similar organisations and construction projects.

2 OBJECTIVES

Further to an earlier study which looked at the initial learning curve, the present study is aimed at understanding the organisational dynamics and other factors which help in sustaining the initial momentum towards comprehensive implementation of Lean construction in a project and in the organisation.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To address these objectives, a detailed case- based research approach was adopted in this study. After the initial take-off the mentoring coach observed the sustained practice of Lean concepts in the project as well as in the organisation. The mentoring coach also observed the development of Lean culture in the various construction teams over time. Data for analysis included primary observations by the research team, minutes of meetings of the project team under study, a survey questionnaire addressed to the team members and one- on- one interactions with various team members. The various observations made from time to time were analysed by the mentoring coach and corrective courses were communicated to the project teams for steady progress on the Lean road. Decisions were made on the basis of data collected from different methods/ sources and not from any subjective view points.

4 FINDINGS

As the project was being conceptualized and designed, Lean construction philosophy was introduced progressively in all the phases of the project. Various techniques such as 5S, Big Room meetings, Last Planner System, PPC (Plan Percent Completed) monitoring, etc. were introduced

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progressively in the project. As the Project transitioned from the Design stage through Procurement stages into Construction stages, many challenges were encountered on account of inter-team dynamics as well as extraneous factors, and Lean practices tended to get diluted. The observations made by the coach, which were the basis for the corrective courses of action, covered various aspects such as (a) Organizational structure (such as sustaining the changes in organizational structure, overcoming traditional working in individual compartments, involvement of the top management, the changes in the Lean championship team), Procedural aspects (such as the transparency required in organisational processes, proactive determination of challenges in implementing Lean in design and procurement phases, challenges in the involvement of different divisions with their own individual processes) and Organizational behaviour and culture, (such as entrenched hierarchical factors).

Strategies that facilitated the mainstreaming of Lean culture in the organisation were also studied, such as the role of Lean steering team, the role of demonstrable initial successes, the role of human resources development training exercises, the role of technology, the role of top management buy-in, the availability of neutral Lean mentor/ coach, etc.

5 SUMMARY

The study illustrates some key aspects related to organisational structure, processes and culture which can pose significant challenges or enable mainstreaming while implementing Lean construction in a project or in an organisation. It was noted that changing the organisational structure or introducing tools did not pose significant challenges if the top management was fully subscribed. However, a change in processes is relatively difficult to achieve in an organisation. Finally, the organisational culture is a significant factor in the transformation to a new paradigm. Though the team members adopt a new philosophy in the short term, the deep-seated beliefs would resurface over time and if not re-aligned to the new philosophy continuously, would pose significant challenges in transforming to Lean culture. Strategic planning by the top management is required to surmount these challenges. Such strategies might include demonstrating and celebrating the initial successes achieved with Lean philosophy to reinforced trainings to transform the organisational culture. The use of technology and tools such as Digital workflows, automated reporting and alerting tools, etc. might help in improving the effectiveness of Lean and also help transform the team. Top managements should strategically plan such interventions to effectively mainstream Lean culture in an organisation.

