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Insight
Breaking through the Lean wall with situational coaching

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Changing behaviors through situational coaching

Hitachi Consulting has extensive, cross-sector experience in Lean transformations and has supported clients at various stages of their Lean journey. In our view, Lean Leadership continues to represent the biggest challenge for organizations in creating and sustaining a continuous improvement culture.

It is challenging because Lean is fundamentally different and requires seeing new things in new ways based on transformative thinking. Lean requires a change in how we think, work, behave and lead. Many organizations understand what they should be doing differently, and implement the relevant Lean processes, but few know how to transform the leadership behaviors throughout the organization to fully realize the value of Lean (see Figure 1).

Changing behaviors is a long process and, just as with kicking a bad habit, an abrupt change or withdrawl is rarely effective over a longer period. Depending on their current behavioral profile each individual will experience their own personal improvement journey on the way to the target Lean Leadership behaviors. Behavioral change needs to be approached incrementally, taking on one or two behaviors at a time, as any more than that will prove overwhelming. It requires real commitment and is done most effectively with the support of a coach.

The concept of coaching is one that people may be most familiar with from a sporting context where the quality of coaching can make the difference between winning and losing. Likewise, in business, coaching is a key enabler for individuals and teams to reach their full potential. Coaching enables us to both tap into the discretionary effort that each individual in the organization has at their disposal and to secure maximum employee engagement in the organization.

As in sport, where the most talented players do not necessarily make the best coaches, business leaders often need to develop the skills required to be good coaches. Fortunately, coaching skills can be acquired, by practising them, time and again, in real "Genba*" situations, reflecting on the outcomes and initiate improvements. This process is best facilitated by an experienced coach in a real-life context or, in other words, situational coaching.

Situational coaching is a key element of an effective coaching program, aiming to provide a safe and supportive environment to guide leaders through their own personal development journey in the context of their daily activities and continuous improvement. It gives leaders an opportunity to reflect on their behaviors, develop their self-awareness and understanding of their role in creating an environment where a Lean culture can flourish. Situational coaching supports the leader in becoming a role model for Lean but also to encourage others to deepen their understanding, to think and focus on the key things that will make a difference.

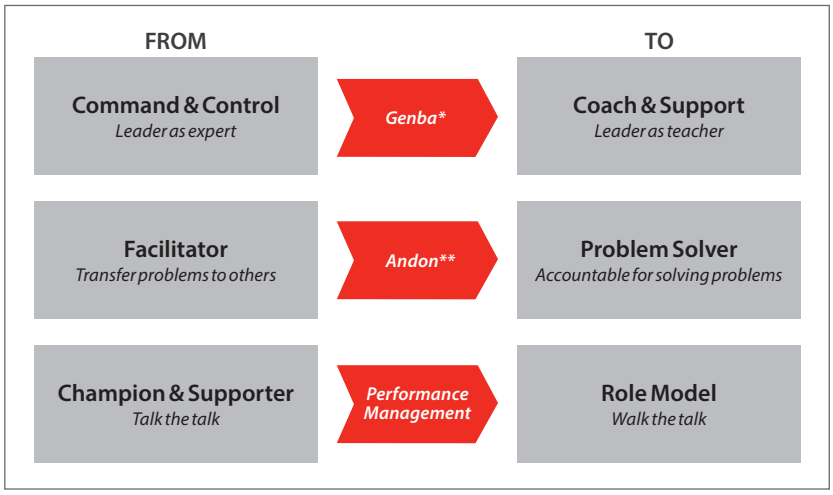


Figure 1. Target Lean Leadership behaviors

** Genba refers to the place where value is created*
*** Andon refers to a system to notify management of a problem and request the necessary support*

Cascaded coaching model

Effective coaching is just one of many different leadership aspects, but it is an essential practise to create and sustain a Lean environment and culture. Leaders with a strong coaching focus will have behaviors that are in line with observing, listening, encouraging and mentoring.

Our experience at multiple clients reinforces the view that Lean leadership behaviors are "the gap between Lean tools and Lean thinking" and organizations can realize huge benefits by embedding existing tools and methods in Lean behaviors.

To help our clients bolster their Lean Leadership behaviors, Hitachi Consulting has developed a cascaded leadership coaching model (see Figure 2) which:

- Deepens understanding of Lean and Lean Leadership vision, principles, methods and tools
- Provides practical coaching in applying these principles, methods, tools in real-life situations
- Builds the overall leader competence in leadership and management aspects of their role

This coaching model focuses on aligning and developing Lean Leadership behaviors consistently throughout the leadership hierarchy. The role of the Hitachi Consulting coaches is to advise senior leadership, develop the clients internal coaching capability and ensure that tangible improvements are being realized. Potential client coaches are assessed on both their coaching and Lean knowledge and specific training and on-the-job support is provided as required.

It starts with deep and narrow coaching, connecting a complete chain of the organization top to bottom. With this approach the impact of individual behaviors both up and down the organization can be observed and affected.

Coaching then continues to spread across the organization, firstly adding more teams, then more departments until each leader in the organization has had the required dedicated coaching support. Yet even without this supported coaching, the change in leadership behavior is already having effect on the greater population.

Once the benefits of Lean Leadership behavior become evident it becomes "infectious" and a pull is created in the organization, quickly generating a critical mass of new leadership behavior, achieving sustainability way before full deployment is complete.

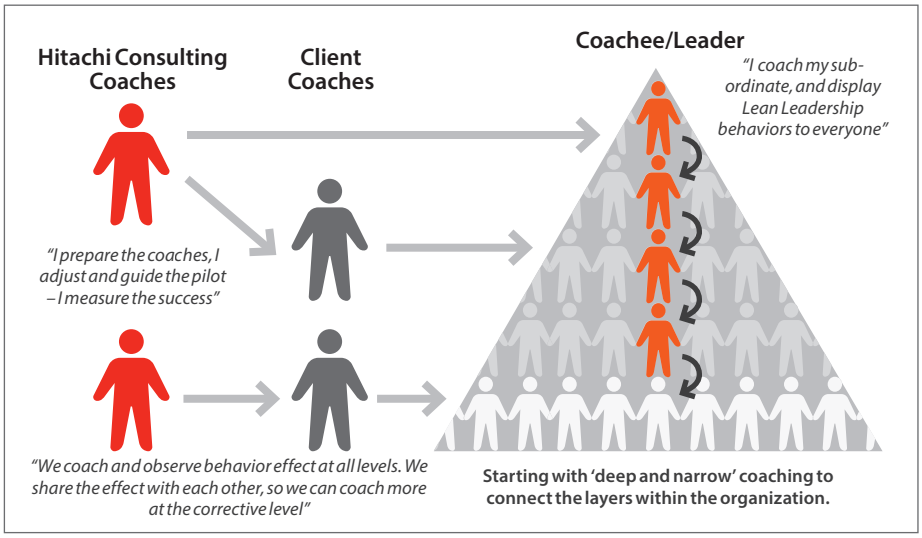


Figure 2. Cascaded coaching model

Although Lean thinking can be applied consistently, it is important to understand that individuals at different levels have specific responsibilities (see Figure 3) with respect to implementing Lean and these need to be coached appropriately.

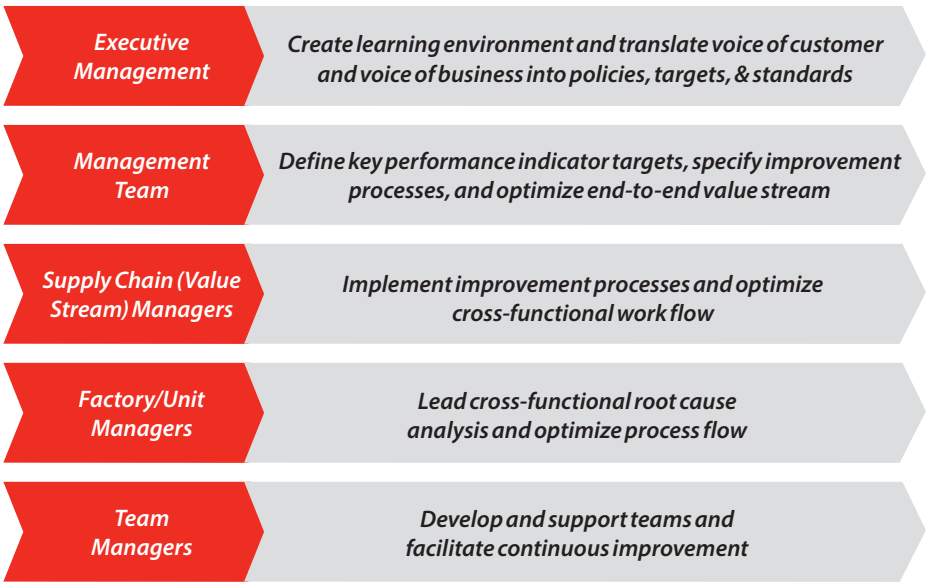


Figure 3. Lean responsibilities per level

The model focuses on developing the coaching capability of the leadership team and key elements include strong executive leadership, expert coaching capability, trusted coaching relationships and situational coaching in a Lean context. It targets rapid but long-lasting cultural change, wherein the Lean Leadership behaviors have become the norm or routine. At that stage coaching becomes commonplace, not only between leaders and their teams but between peers, at all levels of the organization.

To summarise, the key characteristics of situational coaching are:

- A supportive environment to guide leaders in the context of their daily activities
- Practical coaching in applying Lean principles, methods, tools in real-life situations
- Trusting coach/ coachee relationships developing leadership reflection and self-awareness

And the main benefits are:

- Inspires everyone to deepen their understanding of Lean with leaders as role models
- Transforms the leadership behaviors and encourages people to fully engage
- Closes the gap between Lean tools and Lean thinking

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