

**Proc. 449: Employee Participation for Continuous Improvement in Fertiliser
Production and Marketing,**
by: G Freeman.

Discussion following the presentation of the paper:

Peter Whelan, *Irish Fertiliser Industries, Arklow, Ireland:*

Considering the example you gave of the finished product packaging operators, you spoke about the empowerment of them and the fact that initiatives didn't need to be all individually approved by management. What was your experience of the difficulty of co-ordination across the different teams, for instance one team may be doing something that could be at variance with what another team was trying to achieve? How many teams do you have?

Geoff Freeman:

We have six packaging teams. The example on the packaging lines was actually a management-identified problem, so therefore it was a quality improvement team; the team didn't just decide they were empowered to cut out a packaging line! They had been asked to investigate that so it was a quality improvement team not a small Kaizen group.

The second question was about managing with six shifts; it's a big problem. This quality improvement team was cross-functional and they were meeting regularly and getting on well as a team. The people that they knew in other shifts obviously showed an interest in what was happening and that went well, but then there were the other shifts who weren't quite so well informed, or more particularly it was the manager supervising that shift who wasn't so well informed or didn't care so much. The middle management was the crucial point. So our Training Manager was facilitating that process and he spent a lot of time with middle managers making sure they understood what was going on. We also encouraged the operators to become trained in first-line maintenance and it was that which got every shift involved, because they then understood what the project was about. But if there are six shifts there is often a "not invented here" problem - one shift will say "it was our idea" and the others will say "well it wasn't ours - we don't agree". It is a challenge to get people involved, we just work at it! Does that answer your question..

Bob Stannard, *Hydro Agri (UK), Immingham, UK:*

Perhaps I could make a comment regarding the last question if I may. I think you touched two issues and one is across-shift communication which from a Kaizen viewpoint is a challenge to all continuous process operations. Documentation plays an important role in this. The PCDA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) books allow the next oncoming shift to see the ideas and there is always the facility for them to comment on the original suggestion and the original improvements. That way at least everybody can share in their ideas and their improvements which is very important from a Kaizen viewpoint. One shift comes up with a problem, other shifts can comment on the ideas and that way

you can get a common level of understanding. I'm not pretending it's easy, however. You can clearly get communication during handover between shifts but when you get the diametrically opposed shifts it takes a while to settle in and it's part of the culture.

You also talk of the challenge of middle management and I think anybody starting a continuous improvement process must recognise that it's middle management, and there I am really talking about first-line supervision rather than management, that feels themselves most under threat. The traditional role of middle manager/first-line supervisor is to be the fount of all knowledge and he can immediately feel himself threatened as he asks "what am I here for if I don't have the knowledge and can't answer all the questions and solve all the problems". I think it's also necessary before starting on this process to look at your organisation and at the number of layers to make certain that the empowerment is at the appropriate level, because, as you say, it is often this level of supervision that stops the improvement process working.

Peter Baldwin, *Retired Consultant, UK:*

I want to confess that when I was doing consulting 20 years ago in factories and asked by top management to solve problems I usually did it by going and talking to the people on the shop floor, they gave me the answer and I told the boss! (Laughter).

The Chairman thanked the speaker.