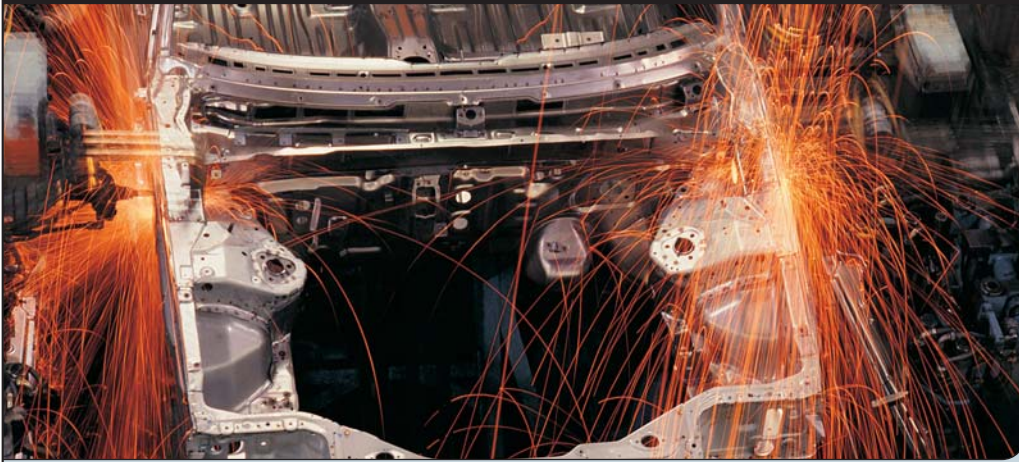


MARK LANE finds out the Forward Vision approach is transforming the fortunes of the manufacturers it serves

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vision of how things could be: a picture of what their business could look like from a process point of view together with the significant cost savings there for the taking with new disciplines, processes and business practices.

"We've also been doing a cultural and organisational analysis: looking at the layers in the structure and roles and responsibilities of people; interviewing people at different levels to understand what drives them on a daily basis. This tells us what needs to change from a people perspective to support the future vision of the business.

"So there are two key and complementing outputs: that from the output from the process analysis and that from the people analysis. The eventual result may well be changes in job roles, business processes and so on but before the training actually starts for the workforce, we will take site management through a series of seminars on lean principles and the required supportive culture. Then, when their workforce start developing the new skills, the management has the knowledge to coach them and enable it to happen."

It's an extensive, thoughtful and progressive approach which illustrates perfectly what Forward Vision is all about. Moreover, it's a million miles away from the text book-based, one-dimensional methods practiced by so many management consultants and training organisations.

That this is the case should come as no surprise as Forward Vision is a company of some pedigree. Its co-founder and director, Ed Handyside, was formerly responsible for management development at Nissan's Sunderland plant – the most productive car factory in the western world. Moreover, Forward Vision's practitioners are recognised experts in production, engineering, quality assurance, personnel & development and logistics.

They take a simple yet effective approach to client issues, summed up by Ian, who says: "All our interventions are designed to enable clients to both increase profitability and preserve employment. That's what we're about and the reason we exist."



For more information, please visit www.forward-vision.co.uk



Lean business – it's a phrase that has been used often enough over the past two decades, usually in conjunction with UK Industry plc. But what does it actually mean and how can organisations exploit lean manufacturing principles in order to be more profitable?

These questions could be asked of any number of "experts" but perhaps it would be more instructive to go to an organisation that has actually achieved some very real results by introducing the virtues of lean principles to a host of client organisations.

Ian Scurfield is a director of Forward Vision Ltd, a business that provides operational support to companies facing specific product and process problems or who simply wish to increase capacity, improve productivity or delivery performance or reduce costs – without engaging in high capital spending.

He says: "Lean business is an often-misunderstood concept. What it boils down to essentially is about satisfying and delighting customers at minimal cost – with minimal consumption of resources: people; materials; energy; wear and tear on machines. As such our starting point is not so much efficiency per se: a word that means different things in different organisations but quality and delivery, the things that reflect customers' needs.

"Grasping the logic of lean is one thing; practice another. Typically, we find businesses driven by measures of

performance that are diametrically opposite to what lean is all about. For example it is quite common to see behaviours driven daily by measures relating to volume achievement, labour efficiency or plant utilisation that may have little to do with what commercial customers or downstream processes either need or want.

"Another common problem is a consuming fascination with complex and sophisticated technology and systems to improved business: a form of cheque book management as opposed to a practical, process-orientated approach to improvement."

Which is where Forward Vision comes in. As well as providing operational support, the company also offers a range of unique operations management programmes which can be tailored to the individual needs of clients.

It sounds impressive but how does it work in practice? A prime example comes from Forward Vision's extensive work with the food and drink industry in recent months. Ian takes up the story: "We have been working with a supplier to Tesco producing chilled products from two manufacturing sites. We took a small team of managers from different disciplines and helped them study the whole business on both sites, looking at process management and value streams, from order in to goods out, and looking at costs right through the process.

"With some coaching and training, these managers were then able to create their