One of the most important initial decisions for executives to make when implementing lean in their supply chain is the selection of the Lean Implementation Manager. What do you look for when identifying who can best lead your efforts in transforming your current operations to a lean operation? Most organizations first look for operational competency. Some organizations use operational competency as their sole criteria. Although operational competency is one of the criterions, it is neither the sole or most essential critical success factor. The list of the ten critical success factors below were developed out of working with previous implementation leaders and those things that helped them in being more or less successful.

**Learning Centered** – most managers got in their position for knowing and giving direction not taking it and therefore are not very learning centered. This is the most important critical success factor to look for in the person you are selecting to lead your transition. They need to be confident in themselves that they do not have all the answers, but will have the tenacity to get the answers, to understand at a deep level what makes lean work in an organization. Researching what lean means across a supply chain and within the functional disciplines of the supply chain and how it applies within their organization is a key challenge of this individual. Usually lean appears at an organization sooner than it is needed or wanted and usually comes with skepticism of whether it is right for their organization. This manager needs to be able to formulate the answers to the questions and skepticism if your transformation is to be successful.

This leads to the second key critical success factor – **Curiosity**. Curiosity is a key characteristic of a learning centered leader and one that appears to be in short supply. This curiosity usually manifests itself in a person’s willingness to experiment. Testing the new ways over and over until arriving at a way (new rules) that work for their organization; understanding the business to a level of detail that will lead to understanding the emerging patterns of the business that were previously viewed as random and/or uncontrollable; willing to study things that sometimes lead to dead ends and knowing that its part of the process for identifying the most efficient rules for solving the problems of doing business the new way.

What I have seen in too many leaders in this position is for them to apply their authority by eliminating or reducing what needs to be done because they deem it as unnecessary. This usually occurs without any pursuit of information to clarify its need and often done out of ignorance and justified as being too difficult or too time consuming. In turn the implementation is compromised due to lack of data or poor data resulting in poor decision making or an ineffective implementation. As Thomas Edison said, “**Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”**
The Key Critical Success Factors of a Lean Implementation Manager

**Accountability/Integrity** is the third critical success factor. Here the implementation manager must have a high level of professionalism and creditability. They must have the ability to set the example and lead others. You can have most of the other critical success factors, have minimal or no creditability and not be successful.

The fourth critical success factor of this leader is a person with excellent **Listening Skills**. Seeking out people, asking questions, clarifying their understanding of what others are telling them. Most leaders are not good listeners. In most organizations the ones that are noticed are the ones doing the talking so most organizational cultures reinforce poor listening skills; also receiving feedback is sometimes perceived by the leader as telling them what to do, resulting in defensive.

The effective leader for this role is one that seeks out information and knowledge and experiments to identify the new rules that will make lean successful in their organization. **Leading Courageously** is the fifth critical success factor. This person will need to deal with the questions: Why isn’t this solving our problems quickly? And It looked promising, but where’s the payoff? One of the key roles of the Implementation Manager is to ensure that Senior Leadership and key groups are engaged and aware of the process and results throughout the implementation phases.

Often times, a junior manager is put into this position and does not see it as their role; undervalues the importance of this activity or see it that less interaction is better to put off criticism or additional requests. Several managers have wanted to send out e-mails and consider the communication adequate. For the success of this transformation, this manager will need the capability to communicate with senior leadership and other groups on a one on one and group level on a high frequency level.

You will want the type of person that will pass negative information upward and report on both successes and failures. Holding their staff accountable rather than protecting them will result in better short term and long term results. Thinking ahead on what the critical issues are and what must be done to address them to be successful will impact the ability to stay on schedule, within budget, with the results and timely engagement of the senior leadership. This person also needs to balance process oriented focusing efforts on the customer and operational metrics and be willing to educate and develop the leadership on the importance of this balance.

Most Implementation Managers that we have come across are weak in these areas. Senior leadership must have Leading Courageously and passionately as an expectation of the position or the communication will occur randomly with a wide variation of collective knowledge on the transition.

A complementary success factor to Leading Courageously is **Shaping Perceptions and Beliefs**. How this leader can shape the perceptions and beliefs of organization members across various departments/groups and thereby affect how these individuals will interact with this change initiative and one another will determine how acrimonious or harmoniously the organization travels through the culture change of the organization. This position has an enormous impact on people's perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, and relationships with others. Ultimately, these perceptions and beliefs can enable or constrain the way that people behaved when the groups encountered serious obstacles and dangers throughout the implementation.
Persistence is the seventh critical success factor. After passion gets your organization started, persistence is what carries it through. There have been several brilliant, creative, passionate managers who came up with great ideas but lost interest when it was time to slog through the implementation. Ultimately, they designed great plays but they never put the points on the scoreboard.

Analytical Skills is the eighth critical success factor. This leader needs to have the basic analytical capabilities and appreciation for fact based decision making. Some of the capabilities one should look for in a candidate are the application of statistical and variation analysis tools i.e. histograms, scatter diagram, Pareto charts, run charts, control charts, standard deviation. We have come across leaders in this role that do not have an understanding or appreciation statistical tools and are often times intimidated by their need to apply these tools in a lean environment. Other capabilities that would be beneficial are Value Stream Mapping, SIPOC Diagramming, Process Flow Diagramming, and Operations Diagramming, Cause & Effect Diagram.

Computer Skills is the ninth critical success factor. Even in this day and age there are people that find themselves in this type position without the basic computer skills so while they are trying to lead a transformation they are trying to acquire basic software skills. This causes missing schedules early on in the project until they and their staff build the basic skills. Some of the basic software that this manager should have a functional capability on is Excel, Power Point, Project, Visio, Word or like software.

Knowing the Business is the tenth and last critical success factor – most project managers we have worked with have this one. Sometimes it works as a disadvantage because they themselves are too anchored/invested in the current state.