Module 3: Adaptability and Flexibility
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   (not ;-) ) Academic Controversy

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1. Introduction

Duration of the module: 60 min (aprox.)

Why focusing on Adaptability and Flexibility?

*Competitiveness* is more and more the real challenge for business players. Metalworking sector players are no exception.

In the actual competitive world, manufacturing structures and technologies circulate more and more easily - and become quickly available for everybody. Thus competitiveness is getting more and more a matter of *details* and of the *last meter before* the finish line.

In the 50ies, the world record man of 10.000 m. – the URSS champion Vladimir Kuts - detached the second arrived by one whole track lap =1400 m. In 2015 the Olympic gold medallist, the UK champion Mo Farah wins by 10 centimetres: a life’s vest advantage.
Why focusing on Adaptability and Flexibility?

Competitive advantages are concentrated in the **crucial moments of manufacturing process**. And these moments are in the hands, brain and heart of single individuals. Or better, they are in **single individuals attitude**, which can be more or more oriented to a team-working approach.

Team-working means being focused first on the final process output; second on the single working partners’ needs.

The whole manufacturing process final need is **Adaptability** to the external Clients’ needs. The teamwork essence is a **Flexible activity** attitude by single individuals during their daily work.

**Spread individual Flexibilities build Company’s Adaptability: the key competitive advantage.**
Module Objectives

This Module **aims** at sensitizing single individuals

- to be **oriented to a co-operative approach**

and

- to **understand why to adopt it**, by practical individual-and-group experience.
The Module provides:

1. The present **introduction** and **objectives** definition

2. As content development, a proposed tool, as a **practical experience**

3. The **practical experience** itself, run and supported by a video

4. As a **summary**, some focused comments, in order to make the practical experience process, meaning and learning contents better understood.

5. Some links to get more deeply into the Adaptability and Flexibility topics.
2. Theoretical contents

Adaptability, Flexibility, Competitiveness

In order to be competitive, companies must be Flexible
In order to get a flexible company, its individual members must be adaptable
Individual Adaptability: 2 main concepts

1. Mind concept:

To live the idea of “always being in the Client’s shoes” being Client both:

- the External Client, coming from the market and
- the Internal Client (the colleague), coming from the company itself
2. Daily operational approach:

To be ready to **Change**

- Change the job focus
- Change the planned times
- Change the planned priorities
- Change the specific task
- Change the usual tools
- Change the working team
- Change the machinery to use…
Co-operation is not the normal output of working together

For several reasons – including historical manufacturing management experience – single individuals have been generally inclined to work focusing on their own single job. ...And NOT as members of a team.
The importance of single employees and workers have become gradually more and more relevant.

This can be shortly recalled by some simplified steps.
At the beginning of the industrial era, the most spread theory was the so called **Taylorism**

It was a theory - or rather a philosophy - oriented to achieve as more as possible by single workers.
The players on the market were relatively few. Manufacturing companies could decide what to propose to the market.

The market was (relatively) open to buy anything new. In other words, the market was "a horse which was always ready to easily drink".
The practical consequence of that on the manufacturing side was that Companies were very focused on **quantitative** objectives. They were much more focused on manufacturing techniques, on machinery and on times and methods analysis, than on people’s contribution.
Then individuals were seen rather as “machine components”. They had just to do what they were ordered to, within some very hierarchic structures.
When the market became more open, it also became more important for business players to know in advance what the market was needing.

Companies had to adapt themselves to these new needs. In such a kind of evolving scenario, \textit{competitiveness became more important}.
Company leaders needed to get feed-backs from the market.

The role of some collaborators, particularly those at contact with the market, gradually became more important.
The industrial evolution gradually brought to an even stronger competitive atmosphere, where not some impersonal “market needs”, but the single Clients needs had to be considered.

They are here deliberately proposed by a humour approach... ;-)

Competitive advantages have become more and more linked to a quick and personalised service. Products and services became more and more linked to the single client needs. And speed in service and high customization became the real competitiveness keys.
This basic evolution went through the so called “Total Quality Management” new Culture.

In this new atmosphere ”people were asked to think”, since they had become the basic competitive asset for companies, including metalworking sector ones.
In this spirit, every worker or employee is asked to consider him/herself as a supplier and a client of each colleague.

This is the “Internal Client Philosophy”
The Total Quality Management spirit

The magic formula: *Give everyone a CLIENT*

THE VALUE CHAIN
The basic concept of the Client philosophy is a right way to understand **CO-OPERATION**

Co-operation means to do one’s best in order to get into the Client’s shoes some way forgetting one’s personal needs.

Transferring such a concept into a working practice is the essence of **Individual Adaptability**.

This Adaptability approach will become - when adopted by everybody at the different company levels - a very competitive **Company Flexibility** asset.
The experience we are going to propose you is a way to “live” the difference between making or playing a job just in order to do it, or doing that by a really co-operative attitude, where everybody is aware of the colleague’s needs and so s/he is aware of the whole team needs.
Well done!
After having read these theoretical contents, it’s time for you to show how adaptable you can be…

Let’s start!
Activity 1: (not) Academic Controversy (40’)

Lifelong Learning
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1. Introduction
2. The mainframe
3. The body of the experience
4. Play your role!
Nothing is more practical than a good theory  (Kurt Lewin)

1. Introduction

Now we will take you at the core of a still living-and-kicking Italian metalworking company, which experienced an interesting and hard situation some years ago. We believe such an experience can be considered as an emblematic example.

The company needed to adopt a market flexibility approach in order to survive. Its efforts aiming to market and manufacturing flexibility were successful as the result of an inner adaptability approach. Several managers and employees working in the company adopted such an approach after a forced and painful itinerary, imposed by the external market situation.

We tell the story by an anonymous approach and with some small adaptations to the training needs.
2. The mainframe

1.1. The SMALL RIVER company was one of the first industrial players in its country (Italy). The company’s activity was air conditioning devices manufacturing. Devices were initially some simple units, particularly designed for being inserted in a window glass. They were actually named “window-conditioners”. They could fit both single houses and other buildings windows. So their use was very general and spread out, rather universal.

1.2. In the first years of the product life the company was in fact monopolist in the national market. SMALL RIVER could easily sell a large amount of simple conditioning units: hundreds of thousand pieces. Thanks to standard pieces big orders, it was possible to plan manufacturing. The supply chain and the purchasing process were simple and clear; the production and manufacturing plan linear and easy; administrative and financial follow-up were fluent too. Designing was meaning just adapting the initial product in view of simple variations. SMALL RIVER had actually become a mass manufacturing company. Managers were working in a relaxed professional atmosphere.
Unfortunately for them, and for the *SMALL RIVER* itself, new players come to the market. They proposed a basic innovation, having several facets: competitor products were customized for specific clients: hospitals, schools, factories, single and multiple houses included. This innovation needed a new approach in designing, selling, planning, manufacturing, managing the administrative and financial side.

1.4. Relationship amongst *different* responsible managers and employees - and between section and section - worsened and worsened week by week. Workers said that, due to continuous change, the company organization, before well ordered, had later degenerated and had become a mess.

1.5. The Owner and the Board of Directors tried other inner solutions, but finally considered necessary to appoint a new general manager, coming from outside the Company. After trying to sensitize the high, middle and low management to change, *the new Director was compelled to fire 13 managers during one year and to hire 13 new ones*.

1.6. Later the company improved and became successful again.
Activity 1: (not) Academic Controversy

Great!

Now you can get into the body of the experience!

Notice
The practical learning activity is proposed in connection with the TIM Platform Forum.
4. Play your role!

Now we ask you, as trainee, to imagine to be in different roles within the SMALL RIVER company, as suggested by this paper. Then, we ask you to reply to the proposed questions, both by a **simple choice** (mark “X”) and by **motivating your reply**.

...Clear? Let’s start playing your first role!
1. Seller role

During 3 years, you have been the sales manager of Small River Company.

You have been using a catalogue with clear standard products. While being at the potential clients premises, where in the past time you could get orders very easily, now several potential clients tell you something unexpected. “We are getting some very customized proposals by some new competitors of yours. They are better fitting our specific needs!”.

This has a strong impact on your job.

What do you do, on the internal side?
Please, choose one out of the three proposed options, and motivate your choice.

- a. You try to talk to the Owner or to somebody in the Board of Directors, also if you are not easily in touch with them. “Since I am in touch with the market, I can first realize things are changing”. So you encourage the Ownership to go in depth with the problem. “In view of a future success, and of a more flexible company approach, I am adaptable, so I can contribute to promote a change, in connection with the market changes”. You also say you can contribute for example in a pilot action (if necessary also investing part of your time) hoping some other colleagues of yours can do the same.

- b. You are aware that changing the product, which is already so well established, is quite impossible in your company. You are sceptical on a potential action aiming to promote change, since you know that in other circumstances the company has been very rigid. Then you try to get in touch with some competitor company, offering them your knowledge of the market network.

- c. You get in touch with some single colleague, for example among those having a technical role in the designing and manufacturing process. You ask him/her which opinion they have about the problem of this change you are meeting in the market, outside the company. You encourage your colleagues to raise some other colleague awareness about the problem, clearing you believe if the company does not make sales, everybody will then suffer from the general too rigid situation.

Please write down your choice and reasons in the TIM Platform Forum
2. Technical office member role

In the last years, you have played an important role in designing your team “masterpiece”: the window-conditioner product, which has done the wealth of SMALL RIVER company during the last years. In these times you just have to do some small adaptations to it: just a routine work.

Suddenly, you hear one day at the coffee machine from a salesman and from the administration colleague who are discussing together, that company sales are going down. “We believe – they are arguing – this is due to a couple of new unexpected players on the market. They are proposing a new competitor products range”.

What do you do, as you hear these “rumours”? 

Activity 1: (not) Academic Controversy
Activity 1: (not) Academic Controversy

Please, choose one out of the three proposed options, and motivate your choice.

- a. You believe that a newcomer has too little experience to be better than the “champion product” your team has performed to design and to manufacture in so many pieces. You talk about that rumour with a friend of yours, out of the company, paying attention in order to avoid that the rumour become a piece of news – bad news – within the company.

- b. Immediately, as you hear there is this potential threat by competitors on the market, you get to your friends in other company sections, in order to make an alliance aiming to consolidate your traditional but still young product. You believe you should “defend the tradition” from at-all-cost-innovators attacks. You understand at a first glance that changing your product would mean a revolution for the Company organization, with no clear ending output for the product (and also for you personally).

- c. You believe that change is the essence of business today, but you are also aware you do not have the power to influence the situation. You quickly understand that if the subject will be dealt with, there will be a sudden struggle between traditionalists and innovators. Since you have recently been at a seminar about change management, you sincerely believe that business must be flexible, ready to change. However, you are also aware that in order to get a flexible company as a result on the market, you need to train people, in order to get them open to adapt themselves to the evolving external scenario. Then you try to sensitise somebody who could have enough influence to organise a problem analysis and discussion within the company.

Please write down your choice and reasons in the TIM Platform Forum.
3. Manufacture planning role

In the last years, you had the responsibility to plan the manufacturing process flow (purchasing and production function). Until now, you had several hundred thousands similar pieces to make. So you could plan since the beginning of the year the correct time management, both for machineries and for working people. Now, you should think of a new perspective: you will be asked to provide the market with different kind of products (big conditioners for large buildings like hospitals or schools, smaller ones for small houses in particularly warm towns, and traditional ones, the usual window-conditioners).

Thus, the manufacturing process will be much more exposed to mistakes, breaks, and other inefficiency risks. This is connected with your personal specific role, and your main colleagues’ one. Thanks to the production process simplicity, until now they have been acting as your “personal partners”. Now the situation will fatally become more open to a conflict…

What do you do, then?
Activity 1: (not) Academic Controversy

Please, choose one out of the three proposed options, and motivate your choice.

a. You feel too old to totally change the manufacturing process. Then you consider interesting to grow some young collaborator. You decide to propose to the Owner himself to appoint a young engineer to renew the internal organization structure. Maybe a third line level potential leader, jumping over the second level ones, too used to traditional rhythms and procedures. You also propose him to start a sensitization training activity, in order to allow the Company to count on a group of fresh people to give a new speed and flexibility to the manufacturing process.

b. You are involved in the daily manufacturing process, but you rather monitor a well ongoing activity, than daily driving a production process. The situation is like that as a virtuous output coming from your professional efforts. Today, since things are fluently ongoing, you just need to check some weak points and times. You are aware that the main part of workers employed in the manufacturing process are elderly people, with high fidelity standard, but low inclination to change. So, you promote a meeting not only involving manufacturing people, but also administrative ones, sales and marketing people, and also the financial responsible. In this meeting you explain that the most important business resource is external to the business itself: it’s the market, which will buy the produced pieces. The market is continuously changing, so your company’s proposals need to change too, according to the market evolution. In other words, THE COMPANY MUST BE FLEXIBLE. And in order to be flexible, a company needs to count on ADAPTABLE PEOPLE.

c. You surrender to the basic change needs you understand are coming on, and you decide to leave the Company and (maybe) to stop working, in order to give room to a new generation of managers.

Please write down your choice and reasons in the TIM Platform Forum
Good job!
You have completed Module 3!
4. Summary

Thanks to this proposed experience of role-playing, you have passed through the “war-path” of a business crisis.

A crisis generated by too rigid business concepts and organization attitudes. For the company, the risk is a death risk. So you can realize that Rigidity – the opposite concept, towards Flexibility – is involving every organizational role within the business structure.

Single business members, as individuals, should get an Adaptable attitude, in order to get, by a shared action, a Flexible company.

It is also evident that single individuals attitudes are not enough strong and effective, in order to get a company Adaptability. This needs awareness raising and sharing actions from top to bottom, and a spread, new sensitiveness.
If you have arrived until this point, you can get a deserved award.

…Congratulations!

This experience is similar to a Treasure Hunt, in which you participated, looking for the final Treasure. The most precious Treasure, here, is the itinerary you have done, without stopping during it, since you could have found it too hard!
4. Summary

Links of interest

http://usemyability.com/resources/skills_abilities/flexibility-and-adaptability.html

http://work.chron.com/demonstrate-adaptability-job-15407.html

http://www.taylorollinson.co.uk/assets/Competencies.pdf