

-- Speaker 0 00:04 Make it right. The manufacturing podcast, Albert Einstein is widely credited with saying the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results. Even if you realize you keep making the same mistakes yet you don't deliberately change some things, you'll probably keep repeating those mistakes. What if there was a way to learn the things you should avoid and at the same time learn things you should repeat because they've helped you succeed? Well, there is a way and that's why my guest today believes companies should be investing time in lessons learned and knowledge management like going through a simple process of gathering and cataloging the lessons learned from projects, tasks and activities and then sharing and embedding that knowledge and alternative approaches into the way they go about their business. With over 30 years of experience in manufacturing and global operations, having led companies and worked internationally with supply chains across time zones and cultures, semi on caliber, which is also a speaker, an author and a LinkedIn learning instructor for global projects and operations.

Speaker 1 01:14 He's a busy guy and I'm really glad Sam to have you back on the podcast. Thanks for joining us again. Oh, thank you. It's great to connect with you again. This is a great opportunity. Thanks. Well it's, it's great to have you and you know what they say, right? Hindsight is 20, 20. So in your 30 plus years of manufacturing, have you seen companies collecting and cataloging the positive and negative lessons that they've learned from projects and are they keeping that information available for future reference? Yeah, actually yes, I've seen some, uh, John, so I've seen some larger, very well managed, uh, companies that actually have this, um, clearly defined in the strategy for growth. Uh, and, and, and, and it, it actually ties back to the way that they grow exponentially. Yeah. That differs with, with others. Often the smaller mid size companies that grow organically, uh, that are focused more into the day to day that don't have that in there in the strategy.

Speaker 1 02:17 That's, you know, one of the, one of the key reasons they are smaller and often don't grow as fast. Um, I have to say also that even those, that, uh, that I mentioned that do have this, they, they focus a lot on the technical no how on their technical knowhow on the intellectual property, uh, and capturing that kind of stuff. But I, I, I still think that there's an opportunity for even additional growth for every company when they start capturing lessons, learn with, uh, behaviors and cultural things. Like, you know, what values and mindsets are present when things are going well and vice versa. What mindsets, behaviors, what,

Speaker 2 03:00 what's the communication and processes that are happening when things are actually not going well. So there is a lot of this happening, there is a lot of this capturing happening, but there's still a lot to be done actually. So it's, it's, it is a challenge and it's a good challenge. <inaudible> so I'm guessing that some of these smaller companies don't do it just simply because they don't think that they should or they don't even realize that they should. Is that the case? Huh? Yeah, I've seen a lot of different reasons, you know, um, typically the, one of the biggest reasons I hear is, Oh, we don't have time to do, you know, they believe when they're saying that, that only when they're taking action where they're doing things is when they're adding value. Uh, I've heard from some of these a thing, you know, just talking about this is like not doing work, uh, in, in some, uh, companies I'd been told by, you know, depending on the internal culture, they say, you know, just talking about mistakes can only create trouble for people.

Speaker 2 03:58 Mmm. And others, you know, this typical thing, this is not my job. And they say, well, you know, capturing lessons learned, it's not my job. I think that the number one reason I would say is that leadership in those companies is not asking the complete, uh, you know, to have the complete picture. They're not asking all of the questions. If leadership doesn't make this a priority and if the leadership doesn't make this important, uh, then it's just not going to happen. Because, you know, they day to day, uh, stuff is just going to take ov --

-- er. It's, you know, the busy work. So, um, so, you know, those are the, those are the typical things. And uh, uh, what I tell what I tell everybody, I said, you know, you've got to shift from, we don't have time to do it to this. We don't have time not to do it.

Speaker 2 04:46 And that's really the, the, you know, the, the, the shift that people start to see this is so important. How well I think you're in Canada. Right? Okay. That's all I have. I think there's a, there's a story, actually, there's a story about two, uh, two hunters in Canada, if you care to hear, to hear that they hired her, you know, these two hunters, they smiled, they hired a small propeller plane to take them to a remote area of Canada. The pilot drops them off and he tells him, remember a only moves, only one moose because the plane has a weight limitation. A and, uh, we can't take off with you with both of you and more weight than that. So, you know, so there was a weight limitation is telling that. So the hunters go off hunting and the, you know, the plane takes off a few days later, the plane returns to pick them up and the pilot notices the two hunters are standing by <inaudible>.

Speaker 2 05:42 So the pilot confronted them and say, I told you guys only one votes, you'll have to leave on a, otherwise we won't be able to take off, you know. And uh, so one of the hunters response, Hey, you're just a chicken. Last year, the pilot that brought us, let us take two moose on the plane. Then after some arguing, the pilot allows them to bring the two most on the plane. But when the plane starts <inaudible> take off, they run out of runway and the plane crashes. Well, every one survived. And then when they came to one of the hunters looks around and says, Hey, where are we? Eight, uh, to which the other one Hunter replied, Oh, I'd say about 200 meters from where we crashed last year. So, so, you know, so this is, you know, this is one of these things that, you know, when we're, when we're talking about this, and so what are these typical stories where madly they just didn't learn their lesson and, uh, I mean, they could have died, but, uh, that's, you know, that's, that's a kind of the kind of the thing that, that we always bring up.

Speaker 2 06:45 But at the end of the day, I mean in, in manufacturing, I've seen this happening, uh, in, in, in a couple of company. I'll know one specific story, uh, that I don't think was funny actually. Uh, working with a team of engineers and, uh, that were responsible for building equipment for a company. <inaudible> almost every project they built, the machines were unreliable. They weren't making repeatable, stable processes there. We actually called them, okay. Called him out saying, all you're doing is building machines to build scrap. And, uh, it, it just, it was just crazy until they started doing the lessons learned, uh, and, and found out what the, you know, what the issues were that things started to improve. But it, it was just, you know, just doing the same, doing the same and uh, and building machines the same way and thinking the same way until they did lessons learned and, uh, and, and the story changed for the better.

Speaker 3 07:44 Wow. That's kinda scary when you think about it. To repeat and repeat and repeat and yeah, like making machines to create scrap that, that's not really very good. Right? So how can this whole whole process be done actually simply and easily? Because each project is a series of <inaudible> tasks. You want to identify the valuable lessons learned through the process. So how do you go about cataloging that?

Speaker 2 08:08 Well, a cup, a couple of things. So look, every project, as you say, is a series of steps and tasks. And actually in project management per se, there is, there is a lessons learned module. It's just the people don't take the time, as I mentioned before, they don't take the time. They don't make the effort often to actually do the lessons learned. Ah, and even if, if, you know, if you're not into a very, uh, strict project management regimen, uh, there's a simple process that, uh, I've actually facilitated for, uh, for companies, which is, uh, just gathering the teams, having them write out on sticky notes or on, on flashcards individually what they thought went well, uh, and separately they want, you want them to write down separately <inaudible> what they think, uh, didn't go so well that could have gon --

-- e better. And you want him to do it individually, independently so that you can avoid groupthink.

Speaker 2 09:06 We then facilitate or anybody can facilitate them coming together in groups of, you know, five, maybe six. You don't want to go above six in smaller groups of about six. And then have them, each of them participate by giving what they thought went well. Having the conversation and asking why they think it went well. It's as easy as that. It's, it's, you know, it's one of these things that is very simple. It does take some time. You know, bashing could take maybe a couple of hours, but what's a couple of hours invested, uh, when, when you can, you know, gain that, um, easily with, uh, with what you learned. Um, and the biggest, the good questions, the better questions there are the wise because the wise are where are you going to get the mindset? What was actually the, the, the, the systemic, what are the systemic issues, the underlying issues, both good and bad that you want to repeat when the w what it's the good and that you want to avoid when it's the bad. So it's really simple lessons. Uh, it's almost like a five. Why session, uh, with a different focus. So, so that, that portion, that part of, uh, lessons learned, that part of knowledge captures is pretty simple.

Speaker 3 10:16 And why is it so important to do this right away when a project is just completed? Besides from the simple idea that everything is kind of fresh in your mind?

Speaker 2 10:26 Yeah. And yes, and that is, by the way, what you mentioned, it's fresh in your mind. It's recent. And that's important because cause and effect are, are very close, uh, in time. So it's easy to recognize things, but often teams are going to disband. Ah, so you have a team, a project team, uh, today, and they disband that for the projects that's done. This means that people go off to take part in other projects and then you lose the opportunity to actually, um, reflect on, on these two questions, what went well and what could have gone better. Mmm. And so it's, it, it, by doing it right away, you start building in, uh, the big D word. The big D word is discipline. And this is, this is the, you know, the, the, the, the, the discipline to actually put it into practice, uh, in every, uh, in every project.

Speaker 2 11:21 And by the way, it's not only at the end of the project, it should be at every phase of the project. You could do lessons learned that capture knowledge at the beginning of the middle, and of course, at the end. So there's opportunities there, but that, you know, the main, the main reason is that today, you know, you're going to have a teammate of X, you know, some people that are going to just move, move away and you want to make sure that you, uh, capture the knowledge while they're still there. And while it's fresh,

Speaker 3 11:45 you mentioned, you know, using flashcards or sticky notes when they have this, this meeting to, to, you know, break down how the whole project went. I'm to know among those five or six people that you say participate, did they generally all agree

Speaker 2 11:59 or is it, no, no, no, no, they don't agree. And that's the, that's the whole point. You know, you want to have that conversation. Yeah, you're going to, you know, you're going to have people challenging each other. And you know, what the biggest, I guess the, the, the, the, the key is to make sure that you're challenging people so that they're addressing facts, not, um, you know, not just opinions and hearsay, but actually, you know, you're asking where did you see that? When did that happen? Show me that data. You know, it's, it's, it's really challenging them to make sure that they're, they're putting factual things on there, observed information. When did it happen, where did it happen? Mmm. And so, yes, they don't agree, but if you can provide the where and when, then you have a convincing way of, of saying, yeah, it is something to learn from. So that's a, that's a good question. Oh, Janet. Yeah.

Speaker 3 12:52 I'm thinking about, you know, when, when we're trying to, to do knowledge management, I think one of the things where people or companies rather really lose knowledge is when a person is retiring or leaving a company, do many companies actually have a career debrief with people who are exiting to cover that vast array of knowledge that they have that would be leaving the company? --

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Speaker 2 13:17 Yeah. And I, you asked, you know, if it's many companies, I can't say, I don't have the statistics to say, yeah, your ne my experience knocked. Um, but that's just, you know, my experience where I, I've seen it happen in, in, uh, in, uh, in two companies, uh, where I'd been involved. Uh, and, uh, they, you know, we've called on, uh, experts that actually from the outside that know how to be brief, uh, the people that are going to go into retirement. And we, we've had people that reject giving back, giving the knowledge. Um, but it's a, it's a specific type of interview. It's very inter, it's very structured. The questions are structured to ask for, you know, depending on what you're trying to gain. Uh, most of the time where I was involved in it was technical knowledge. Uh, so it was, you know, a lot of engineering type of stuff.

Speaker 3 14:05 Okay.

Speaker 2 14:06 That needed to be recorded, specific details of a process. It's specific details on a product and uh, you know, very specialized areas. But I, I really can't say if it's, if it's, uh, if it's out there now, I think it's important to, I would say it's an opportunity and that's why, why aren't we doing it? And is it, is it part of our human resources effort that we need to, uh, include in there and say the whole life cycle of the, of the employee because it's value, uh, that is going to be lost. You know, it's just an asset and it's going to be lost. Yeah. It's an opportunity definitely to, uh, to explore.

Speaker 3 14:44 Yeah. And I, well, I, I guess ultimately, uh, people who think about possibly doing that sort of thing, that career debrief with everybody who's exiting the company, they're going to be thinking, okay, what's exactly going to be gained from spending this time collecting and cataloging this information? So what do you see as that gained for a company?

Speaker 2 15:06 Oh, well, yeah, it's a, if you, if you're going to just go out there and try and, uh, and learn and try and learn, that's fine. But you know, if somewhere in your company, somebody has already been, has, has already done it or somebody already knows how to do it or a better way of doing it, then you wouldn't be wasting the time. Right. If you have, if you had access to knowledge, you know, that, that, that, uh, that, that somebody has

Speaker 2 15:36 and uh, you know, capturing it before somebody leaves you, make sure that you have that you don't know if you're going to use it in the future. And, uh, it's funny, but in one of those instances, uh, th th th the knowledge was being that was being captured and downloaded okay. From, from a certain individual, it was like, Oh, you know, it's like, why didn't we know this before because we would have avoided this and that. So it's like you said, hindsight, 20, 20 right at the beginning. And, uh, it just, uh, it's amazing the opportunity lost there. So it's, I think it's something to look at and, and promote as a, as a, as almost as a leadership, uh, one of these leadership platforms and say is one of the things that you want to promote inside your company.

Speaker 3 16:21 So once you start gathering all that information and that knowledge, how do you keep it and maintain it and make it accessible to the people within the company rather than just having like, technically these encyclopedias that are sitting on a shelf that nobody uses anymore.

Speaker 2 16:39 Right? Yeah. Yeah. And so that, and this is, you know, this is the information age. I mean, so we're in a much better place today. Uh, then we were, you mentioned encyclopedias. I mean, I, I'm, uh, I still remember encyclopedia Britannica and, uh, and I think it was the world book or something like that. I'm that, I'm that old. Uh, so we're, we're actually in a good place. And so it's, this is w T you know, to answer your question, this is work between your it group, uh, the people in every area and, uh, interacting with all of the processes and include this as an additional process, um, and in your company. Uh, and so what, what you're going to look at is, you know, the <inaudible> <inaudible> yeah, just look at, I think it's called the SharePoint. I think it's, it's one of those, uh, typical or, or small platforms that a lot of people are using something as basic as SharePoint or, or a, an interactive spreadsheet that people can actually populate would be a a beginning.

Speaker 2 17:41 The --

-- important thing is to, is to agree on how to categorize the knowledge because you're going to have people searching, right? Yeah. You have to categorize by topic, by functional area, by project type. Uh, you could actually, you know, it could be product process. Uh, you know, you could good sit down first and start categorizing. How are you going to do this? The other thing is it that's important is to tie it back to the people that are actually doing the input. You want to make sure that <inaudible> they are writing the knowledge in a way that is understandable enough, but that it can be tied back to them in case there's additional questions when somebody is actually going into the database to look for, has this been done before? Tie it back to the experts so that they can connect with the experts, um, and uh, and make it very searchable.

Speaker 2 18:31 You want to, you know, and, and that's, that's the beauty of, of how Google works and all these other platforms that you just make it easy to search. So you gotta you know, that's, that's, that's what you're thinking when you're categorizing. So, um, so that, you know, those are, those are the things that, that, that you want to look at. I've seen some, uh, some, uh, uh, companies do it really well. Like I said, they do it really well from the technical side, uh, but you could use the same platforms to add all of the <inaudible> other, you know, the, the, uh, the values and the mindsets and the communications side and, and that sort of thing into, um, into that. But it is, you know, it's an it people process, um, type of thing. And again, going back to leadership, it's something for leadership to promote.

Speaker 2 19:22 Mmm <inaudible> and you know what, one thing I tell some of the people that I've coached, it says, you know, ask the questions I'm asking, you know, if you're a leader, ask the questions. W, you know, have you looked up to see if somebody else has done this before? And if a leader is asking that question, it starts prompting the whole team to think, Oh, well, that's something we've never done before. Uh, so let's, you know, start, uh, let's start, um, capturing and working on this. So, and it's never too late. So, yeah. So how do you actually know that this process works? Cause you, you must have seen it working somewhere. Yes, yes. Actually, not too long ago, actually, very recent, uh, in a, in a <inaudible>. So this is a, typically, this was in a new product development, R and D, uh, type of environment where company had the launch, let's call them for new, uh, machines, advanced, uh, type of machines.

Speaker 2 20:20 Uh, and, uh, they, they, uh, they actually, we were, we were called in because when they launched the first in a series of the four, um, they experienced a very costly launch. It was expensive. There was a lot of issues with quality. They missed the, the deadlines. Um, customers were not happy. So we came in and we did some analysis and some things, but we started doing the lessons learned for them. And, uh, when they launched the second a machine, um, they're called the collaboration inside the company and with their vendors had improved dramatically. So they launched the second machine. It wasn't flawless, but there was less, uh, scrap. They were more on time. Quality issues were about 50% reduced. Um, the workshops continued and when they did the third machine, it was almost flawless, very nice launch. Um, it didn't cost them a whole lot more than it should have.

Speaker 2 21:26 They were on time, quality was good. And recently they launched the fourth, and that one was closest to flawless, uh, execution and all of this, or let's say a lot of this was tied back to the fact that elaboration, improved coordination, improved alignment, improved, uh, from a lot of the different work that that was done in the teams and a lot was from the lessons learned. They actually had the discipline to, uh, to, uh, meet, do the lessons learned and transfer that knowledge and share that knowledge to the other teams. Uh, so I would say that it, it does work. It's, it's a, it can be very successful and I'm strongly recommended so I can see this nice labor lading, um, with continuous improvement. Oh yeah, yeah, absolutely. It's a part of continuous improvement. So recently, uh, I recorded a LinkedIn learning course that is the three, um, it's a, it's called <inaudible> problem solving and a three as a methodology kind of --

-- the make in the six Sigma.

Speaker 2 22:35 But I liked, I liked the 83. It has a module at the end, uh, the eighth step because I use a nice step, uh, a three process, uh, that actually has a lessons learned, a feature where at the end of the, of the, uh, of this, uh, continuous improvement project, which is a problem solving project in this case, uh, there's a sharing of lessons learned, uh, across the enterprise, uh, with everybody in the company. And, uh, and so that, that's, uh, that's one of the things that I tie back to continuous improvement. And it's, you know, for me continuous improvement is very PDCA is plan, do, check, act based. And, uh, I do see a lot of companies doing plan, do plan, do, uh, and they don't spend a whole lot of <inaudible> time in the, in checking and then checking is where the learning happens.

Speaker 2 23:25 That's where you can be learning and then gaining value and adding that value into your processes. Uh, and so I, I'd just like to say that continue, you know, continuous improvement. It's too often seen as something to do on the shop floor for manufacturing production processes. Uh, but today in manufacturing there's projects happening everywhere. Um, you know, either developing new products, new processes, um, plant expansions. And so there's projects happening all the time. And I think that's where we could do continuous improvement by embedding and ensuring that the teams are disciplined enough to do the lessons learned, uh, and, uh, and be able to then replicate the good behaviors and avoid the bad. So that's, um, you know, that's how I tied back to, uh, to CIA continuous improvement. Yeah. So what are some key takeaways that you can leave with listeners who might actually like to get started on this path of knowledge management?

Speaker 2 24:29 So I would say run a pilot. Okay. I love, I love, um, getting people to try and the best way to do this just to run a pilot and don't have too many ex, you know, don't create too much expectation. Um, let's say we're working on this project. We've had these issues in the past. Let's just run a pilot and do a lessons learned. Mmm. You know, right after we're done. And, um, let's see what we can pick up on. Uh, also anybody can take the lead. It doesn't have to be anybody specifically. Uh, it doesn't have to be the project leader. It could be anybody. It could be somebody in quality. It could be anybody in management, right. They could take the lead and run this and uh, you know, and, and just try it because one of the things I see all of these processes do a lot is, is kind of a side benefit, which is creative cross functional team collaboration, which is missing.

Speaker 2 25:29 You know, everybody talks about silos and whatever. So you've got nothing to lose. Uh, I think there's everything to gain, run a pilot, go online, look to these processes. Mmm. And, and just, uh, and just do it and then follow the, you know, follow the lessons learned, the project management, the project management philosophy, and just follow the lessons learned process and uh, and just do it. It's the best way to web to get in and try and you'll see the benefit. I think it's really interesting because when, you know, we were talking about the career debrief and you had said, you know, a lot of companies don't do it, but there's that person who's walking out of the company with all of this information. And then you mentioned, you know, the one company saying, how come I never knew about these things? You know, if you have that information sitting there, you know, somebody in your company knows one piece of the information <inaudible> another person and the other side of the company needs some. How's it a piece of information that you bring those two people together, you could find something magical happening with those two bits of information. Right? Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah, this is a that's exactly, that's exactly right. And uh, you know, it's just, uh, I would say

Speaker 1 26:43 at the end of the day, I would say it's just another source of waste if we don't do it

Speaker 1 26:47 because it's just an opportunity lost and the other way to look at it, if, if you do do it, you could be adding value <inaudible> to your organization. So it's um, yeah, it's just a, it's a, it's a pity that we don't focus too much on that and uh, hopefully we can wake up to see this opportunity and um, and take the challenge an --

-- d run a pilot and start, start this whole process. Yeah, I think it'd be well worth trying a pilot. Sam, thank you so much for, for taking the time to chat and to share your experience with us. I really appreciate it. My pleasure. Janet. Thank you very much for the opportunity. Oh, you're welcome. Sam Yankelovich is a continuous improvement coach. He's an author, a speaker, and a LinkedIn learning instructor. You can also check out his earlier, make it right. Podcast number 54 and 55 where he discussed why it's so important to pay attention to how you communicate when crossing cultures and time zones.

Speaker 1 27:42 I think you'll find that one really interesting as well. That's our show this week. Please check out our Twitter and LinkedIn feeds that are on our podcast page and subscribe and share this podcast with your friends and colleagues through iTunes, Google play, Stitcher, Spotify, and YouTube knowledge share this podcast. The mega Ray podcast is brought to you by Kevin sneak, leadership advisor and author of the bestselling book and make it right, five steps to align your manufacturer, your business from the front line to the bottom line. Until next time, I'm Janet Cheesman. Thanks for listening to the makeup right podcast.

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