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Q. How complex is your new product environment?

A: Fleetguard Filters is a tier 1 component supplier to key OEMs in the country. The company has a large design, development and testing set-up for engineering filtration solutions and products. We also have to depend on relatively unorganized tier 2 and 3 suppliers to support us in new product design efforts. Our products have to fulfill several conflicting requirements ï¿½ they should be able to meet new filtration targets, keep vibration low, adhere to pollution norms, and be compact. Before overhauling began, at any point of time, we would have about 150 projects being executed simultaneously by independent teams. The environment was chaotic; resources were stressed. Going home late and working on holidays was the norm. Things changed dramatically after implementation of the flow principles of TOC (Theory of Constraints).
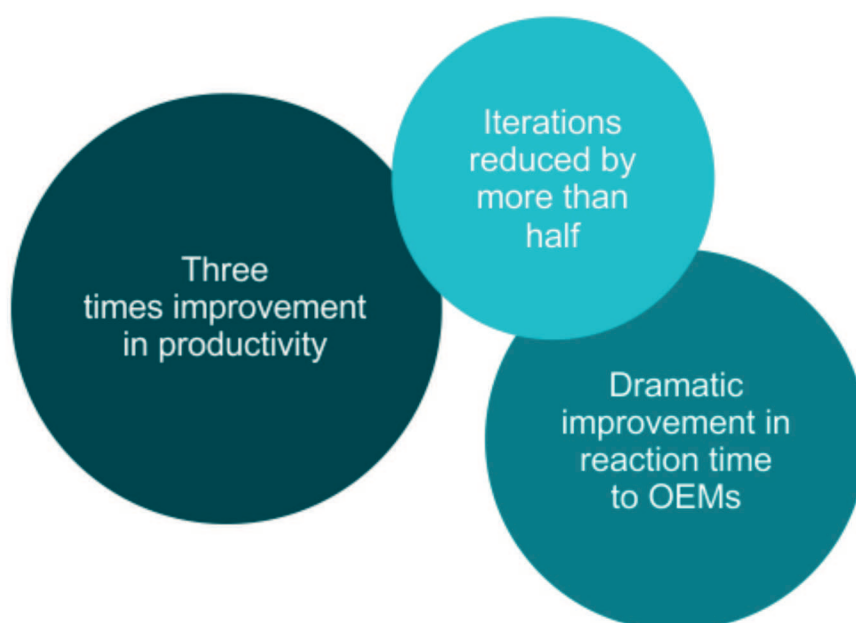
Q. What were the challenges in implementing the new paradigms?

A. The most challenging aspect was reducing WIP. Our consulting partners, Vector Consulting Group, insisted on freezing nearly 75% of running work in various departments to reduce WIP. It was a frightening proposition considering we were already running late. Vector showed us that not everyone works on all tasks. There is always a waiting list and an active list. The real problem is that in an environment of frequent priority changes, these lists are different for different resource groups, and they change daily causing overall desynchronization. Through simulations they showed us that the step of freezing, and establishing common priority, was less risky as compared to the status quo.

The daily management rule was also most difcult to implement as most managers rarely understood the difference between delegation and abdication. The comfortable practice of issuing a task deadline and checking with subordinates only close to the deadline had to go; we had to bring in the culture of daily management. We also had difculty enforcing the rules of strict closure criteria gates, there was always a temptation of diluting them. However, once we stood by the rules, and people saw the benes, these rules became part of the organization's DNA.

Q. What are the results?
A. We started the implementation with Vector Consulting Group about two years back. Apart from the great advancement in numbers, what I like best is the decline in stress levels of people, and improvement in overall harmony.