

Clear and measurable goals are at the center of a book that is capturing Japanese readers.

Manufacturing projects have been replaced by supply chain projects as we outsource more and more manufacturing and services. We need help. Is some on the way?

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Japanese Projects

There is an interesting article in the Economist that describes the recent popularity of a novel about a high school student in Japan who takes the job of a gofer for a lackluster baseball team. The title of the book is "What if the Female Manager of a High-School Baseball Team Read Drucker's Management." It is a book emphasizing the principles of Peter Drucker's 1973 book, Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices. The basic theme of the book is the necessity for business to maintain clear and measurable goals.

The surprising part of this story is that Drucker wrote the book some 37 years ago and his message is increasingly resonating with the Japanese who are still struggling to recover from their lost decade.

What does the popularity of this book have to do with project management? In Japan projects have gone off track. They have failed to produce the kind of breakthrough products, services or competitive processes that have placed it at a disadvantage to South Korea, China, Brazil,

Russia and other emerging nations.

Projects often exist for their own benefits while the real reason for the project ... business goals ... go unnoticed. As the book suggests, the goals have to be clear, measurable and address the bottom line. In baseball the bottom line is winning games. Isn't it amazing that we need a book to remind us of this? But the real truth is that teams often just play the game and forget that winning is the real objective.

Are More Manufacturing Projects in our Future?

First the United States lost the clothing manufacturing business, then came shoes, then automobiles and now high tech manufacturing. According to the Economist more than 49 chip factories closed down since 2000.

Are these losses inevitable and are we in the process of losing the knowhow to make almost everything?

First, countries like Singapore have subsidized manufacturing for many years and the

United States has not. While this is admirable in a country of very independent and creative entrepreneurs, it has not helped to maintain expertise or to preserve manufacturing jobs.

In an article in Bloomberg's Business Week, the founder of Intel, Andy Grove, makes a lot of sense when he suggests that the United States must start subsidizing new manufacturing opportunities. He uses the example of wind turbines. While much of the

research behind this technology occurred in the United States, manufacturing has now moved to Asia, and in particular China. The US now makes a small fraction of wind turbines.

It may be however, that the US is waking up. To suggest that labor rates are too high here is not enough. New processes are not entirely dependent upon labor. Indeed, they have a significant automated component. It's not too late but we need help.