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MANUFACTURING A CULTURE OF IMPROVEMENT

Due to the pressures of everyday business, too many UK manufacturers are 'heads-down and hands-on' and losing the race against foreign competition as a result, according to a leading industry figure in the South East.

David Seall, Chief Executive of EEF South, the organisation that leads the DTI-funded Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS) in London and in the South East, believes that while expert help exists, many companies are currently under so much pressure that they fail to implement the lean techniques that could improve competitiveness.

Mr. Seall was commenting on a new study conducted by AIM, the Advanced Institute of Management Research located at London Business School, that shows the positive effect of MAS interventions inside companies.

"The support and expertise exists – but too few small and medium-sized manufacturers are taking advantage of it," he says.

The AIM study proves the business benefits of MAS interventions – and highlights how such programmes can motivate an entire workforce.

Chris Voss, Professor of Operations and Technology Management and AIM Senior Fellow, led the AIM survey team as they analysed the short-term impact and longer-term sustainability of MAS programmes in a detailed study of seven manufacturing businesses.

Commented Prof. Voss: "Without exception, MAS specialists generated enthusiasm inside the companies we analysed and delivered excellent results – what is more open to question is whether the improvements will be sustained and embedded into corporate culture over the longer term."

Prof Voss recommends that MAS activity be focused on business change rather than on education and training in the tools of lean manufacturing.

"The MAS intervention model is successful – but the programme needs to go further to enhance sustainability. For example, we found very little evidence that small and medium sized manufacturers have the necessary metrics in place to measure performance and therefore to track progress. In many companies, before MAS specialists arrive there is no measurement at all taking place."

MAS activity in London and in the South East does now include greater reference to improvement over the longer-term with the establishment of numerous best practice clusters.

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“However, the biggest issue we face is that too few manufacturers are making use of the expert support available,” says David Seall, “and too many do not possess a culture of improvement - nor understand the benefits lean techniques could deliver. The support exists, we just need to continue to encourage manufacturers to use it.”

www.eef-south.org.uk
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Notes:

1 **EEF South** is the region’s leading employers’ organisation – the Regional Centre of Manufacturing Excellence – meeting the needs of manufacturing, engineering and technology-based companies across London and the South East (including Hampshire, IoW, Sussex, Surrey, Kent, Middlesex, Berkshire, Hertfordshire and parts of Essex, Oxfordshire, Dorset and Buckinghamshire).

The organisation exists for the benefit of its members and focuses on delivering services that support business success, by employing acknowledged experts in a number of business critical areas, notably employment law, health safety and environment, information and research and business improvement.

EEF South is a voice for manufacturing with central and regional government, working with other bodies to communicate the value of manufacturing to the wider economy and to create an environment conducive to success.

2 **AIM Research** is funded by the ESRC and EPSRC and was launched in November 2002. AIM's mission is to improve understanding of management's contribution to organizational performance, and thus UK well-being. AIM's more specific objectives are: (i) to conduct research that will identify actions to enhance the UK's international competitiveness; (ii) to raise the scientific quality and international standing of UK research on international competitiveness; (iii) to expand the size and capacity of the active research base for UK research on management; and (iv) to develop the engagement of that capacity with world-class research outside the UK and with practitioners as co-producers of knowledge about management and other users of research within the UK. For more information on AIM visit www.aimresearch.org