From Position-Based Authority to Pull-Based Authority

Lean management is neither a simple top-down nor bottom-up process. Rather, it is a dynamic system in which processes are well-defined, and individual responsibility is clear (and placed at the "lowest" possible level, where the work is taking place). As a result, responsibility and authority, which are generally assumed to be neatly bundled together, are revealed as separate and distinct.

Lean managers focus on responsibility and ownership, which means keying on "doing the right thing," as opposed to authority, which deals with who has the *right* to make certain decisions. As a result, decisions are made by a fundamentally different approach. The authority to make decisions is not established by hierarchy or titles. Rather, the owner of the A3, through the process of producing the dialogue, takes responsibility to *get decisions made*.

Responsibility ≠ Authority

This dynamic relies on the gemba-based approach to planning and problem-solving, which emphasizes that those who know the work are the right ones to participate in the conversation. Thus the responsible person uses the process of gathering facts and involving individuals to establish the authority needed to get the work done and the decision made.

Another counterintuitive aspect of A3 learning is that the process of coaxing agreement from key stakeholders becomes the means of gaining the authority needed for any plan or action. The conventional wisdom is that agreement is ordered by the person with the authority to command others into alignment. Agreement in a lean organization emerges from the inclusive process, which in turn produces authority. Essentially, authority is created by framing the issue properly and gaining agreement.

This process places great emphasis on generating sound, well-vetted proposals, rather than on making decisions from on-high. In essence, no one is telling anyone else what to do. Such a way of acting avoids much of the gridlock of centrally organized, top-down organizations. The lean company operates on a shared understanding of the desired corporate direction; and the workers are then free to explore the best possible real solutions to problems that they themselves know best.