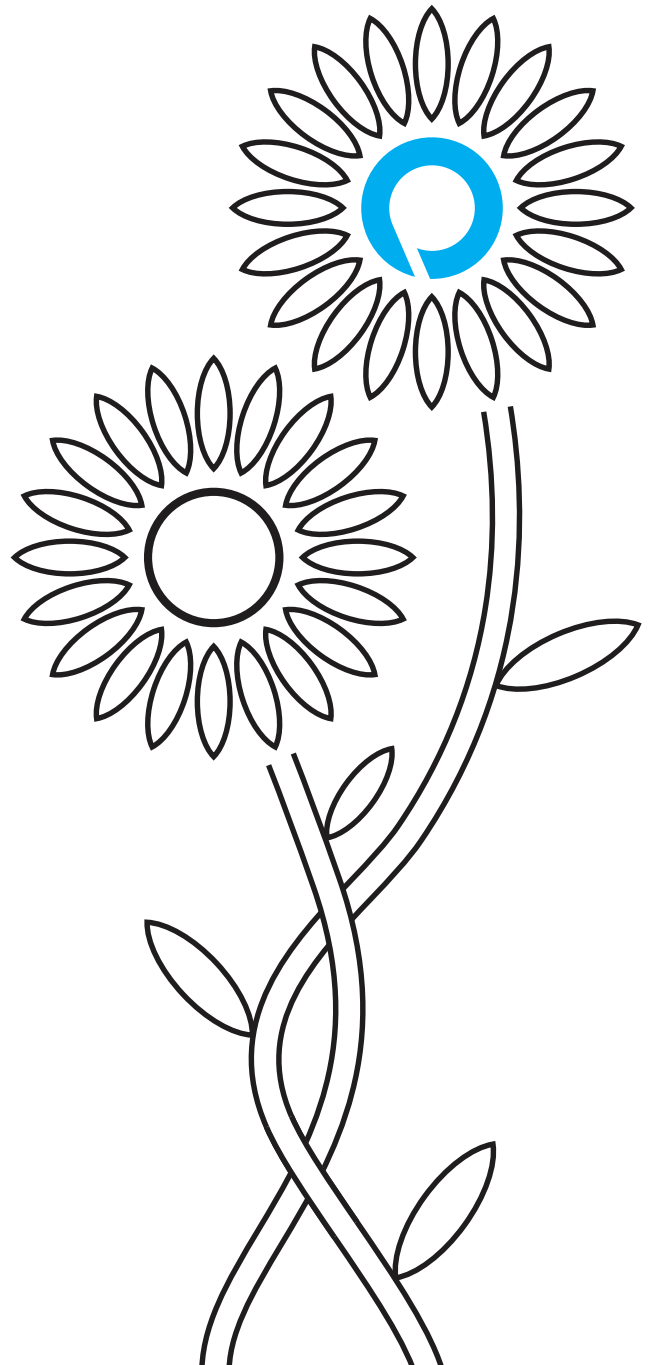

Women in Leadership: Doerthe Heinrigs

Doerthe Heinrigs was certain from the beginning that her career would be in the Manufacturing industry and although she has had a varied career in a number of organisations, she has stayed within the industry. It is her passion and belief in Lean as a tool that has allowed her to become a successful leader in Lean Administration. Her approach to implementing Lean into an organisation is to allow the employees to realise their thoughts and make their own conclusions so that they have control over the process. Her key aim of involving everyone at all levels has meant that she has garnered respect in an industry which is predominantly male. Throughout her interview, she places importance on being **adaptable and growing**, whether that be using varied methodologies to get the best outcome or accepting a challenge in the form of a new role.



Q&A with Doerthe Heinrigs

Q

Can you outline your career path and how you got to where you are today?

A

Let me start with what I originally learned. In Germany we have a strong apprenticeship system where you study and work for typically a three year period after school, so I went to study as an industrial clerk and from then already knew that I wanted to work in Manufacturing. After that, I started working in the Supply Chain area at General Electric (GE) and I was absolutely clear that I knew my career path but in reality that didn't come true. I have a strong background in Six Sigma now because they asked me if I was interested in becoming a Six Sigma Black Belt. Although I was unsure and didn't really buy into it, my boss at the time asked me if I felt as though I was firefighting the whole time and didn't have time to do anything else during my day and I had to agree. After the three year programme at GE, I worked in the transactional area of GE so Sales and Marketing and Customer Service. This was the foundation of my Continuous Improvement career. After that I moved to Danaher Corporation. I heard that they took a different approach to Six Sigma and instead of running a project over months and months, they run 5 day Kaizen events which was so attractive to me. Within the first three months of joining, I was living and breathing Lean and Danaher and built an understanding that Lean goes well beyond Manufacturing. This made me very passionate about the admin side of things as it made me realise that I am interested in the end to end of a business and always want to see the bigger picture. I don't think that you can be a good business partner if you send your employees just to one area of the business, for example, if you are just looking at operations as your scope, you aren't able to see the bigger picture. After Danaher, I went to a SME whereby the CEO is an ex-Danaher person and he was keen to recreate a similar system for their company. Nothing was in place currently and it was a completely fresh start as I was one of the first people to join the company where I stayed for 7 years. After this, I joined Phillips as I wanted to take an opportunity that was global. Also all of my background was B2B but I was excited to gain experience in B2C. Although it was still in a manufacturing environment, it was very different which brought new challenges. It showed me that successful transformation requires strong leadership and it needs certain leadership behaviours to already be present or to be readily adapted to make it sustainable and successful.

Q

Manufacturing is a male dominated industry. Why were you so set from the beginning that you wanted to go into this industry?

A

It is because I developed a passion for Lean and Continuous Improvement. I think the most obvious and the most easy to access is the Manufacturing environment as the sense of urgency is there. You see the results right away as it is tangible, you can show people and they are more open minded than perhaps in other industries.

Q

In your career you would have come across people who are reluctant to embrace change and implement Lean. How do you get these people on board with changes that are happening?

A

I have adapted my strategy throughout my career. If I split the hierarchy into three, into top management, middle management and then the workforce, I think the most difficult layer to change is the middle layer. The top leadership decided to invest in Lean, they are the people who wished to implement a structure like this, so they will be mostly on board. Typically there is some alignment that has happened in the top leadership level. The workforce feel the pain, day in day out and so once they understand that you are not there to get rid of their jobs, you are there to support and understand them and eliminate waste they face in their work and you ask for their input, they are mostly all interested too. The middle layer are the most difficult ones as I think that they feel they were responsible in finding and solving these process issues themselves, so they feel as though they have failed. They may also think that we are too much of an influence on how they are running their teams. Also, people who have something to hide are most afraid of implementing Lean because although their numbers are fine and they can hide behind these normally, they can't when their whole process is scrutinised.

In overcoming this, involvement is key. I usually start with Lean training just so people can understand why the change is happening as many people believe that Lean is a headcount to see where they can cut employees. I've been lucky that all of the companies I have worked at have wanted to grow and not reduce numbers but this was my choice as I don't think that Lean should have connotations of firing employees but instead, evaluating processes and process improvement. Kaizen events are very good at winning people over because you work together and you identify what isn't working in the process – so who can really disagree with that? You can notice when people start to realise that Lean is a good thing for them. I make sure to step back a bit and let the team work together and come to a conclusion so that I am not dictating plans to them and they are coming up with ideas themselves as they are the most important people and they know exactly how their process works. After this, it still takes time and it isn't necessarily easy but once everyone understands what is in it for them, you go on the journey together.

Q

What is your favourite Lean methodology?

A

This is really difficult to answer as there isn't one methodology that I like to facilitate more than others – you have to do them all at once. Otherwise it doesn't work. Companies make this mistake all the time by planning out different methodologies for different years, or only use one methodology at a time but this doesn't help. There is no standard recipe for how to implement Lean, whether that's the whole company or separate business units within a company. You have to customise Lean transformation based on the customer needs. Kaizen is an important methodology but it really depends on why you are using it and if it fits with what you are trying to achieve. For example, daily management helps to figure out the problems but Kaizen solves them so you can't just apply one methodology of Lean. It is the full set of tools and the backing of the company that are required for success.

Q

What characteristics or values do you have that makes you a good leader?

A

My number one attribute is that I am process-orientated, so I am focused on the 'how' we do things. It is never the person who fails or forgot to do something, it is the process that allowed that to happen. It is the process that is not mistake-proven enough to avoid that human beings make mistakes. If you take the example of an airplane pilot, we all hope that this person doesn't make any human mistakes but this is the reason that pilots always go over checklists. It is critical and the is process there so that i leaves no room for errors. First of all, everyone has good and bad days and secondly, we want to make sure that processes are not people dependant which is often an issue. If someone is on holiday and they are out tomorrow and the company struggles because they were the one and only person who can do this part of the business – that isn't efficient. The focus is to support the employees and that is what allows me to be uncritical towards people and that is also what I coach the leaders in the organisation – never ask 'who?' always ask 'why?'. It isn't about blaming people it's about understanding the root causes. I also think I am a good leader because of my passion and my belief in Lean itself and I am not afraid to get my hands dirty – I don't mind where in the organisation I am, I will hold Kaizen events and clean machines myself alongside the team. Leading by example is really important because people need to understand that the employees are all one big machine and everyone plays their part.

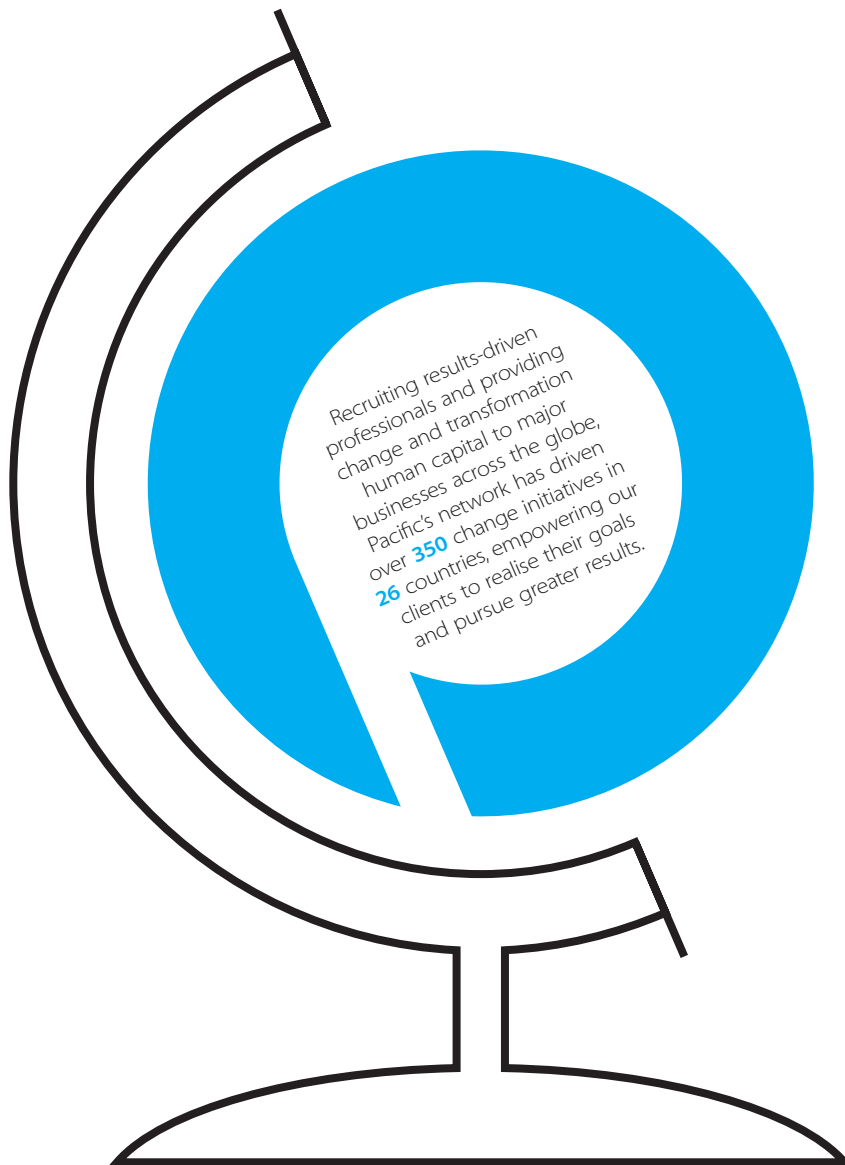
Q

What are the biggest challenges faced by women in the manufacturing industry?

A

First of all, I would like to say that I am not very critical. I have never felt as if I didn't have the same opportunities as men, but I recognise that I am one of the few. The personal interest of women vs men is different and I think it is taking time as women don't really grow up thinking that they will be in Manufacturing. It is one of the biggest challenges, especially in my role, where men in engineering jobs would question why I feel as though I could help as I don't have an engineering background. But its an easy answer for me – I don't need to know how it functions. I don't need to know all of the engineering details. I stay open minded, I ask basic questions about the process and ask the questions that engineers wouldn't ask because they think they understand the process and why they do it, however it is better to be able to think outside of the box and question everything, no matter how small. I gained a leadership position when I was 26 and I have always just made sure people understand my role because then they understand me and why I am there. I also think that it helps that my role is critical and I have to explain my role and why I am there, so then with this I can explain about myself too. However, I do wonder if my life would be different if I had been 26 and a male. But my job is more about building trust and once that is done, I don't feel like I am restricted in any way. I don't think that it is about me in anyway, but it is about my position and my attitude and style.





If you are interested in taking part in the Women in Leadership series, please contact isobel.wright@pacific-international.com

If you are looking for a new opportunity, find our current jobs [here](#).

Email info@pacific-international.com
Direct [+44 \(0\)207 478 7737](tel:+442074787737)
Twitter <https://twitter.com/PacificIntRec>
LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/pacific-international-recruitment>

pacific-international.com