



# Problems are Uncovered

**The growth of a successful manufacturing business was being severely hampered and the owner and Managing Director needed specialist help to identify and resolve the problems.**

**“As a result of the project, the company is now more profitable and capacity has increased by more than 50%”**

**D**ebbie Knowlson founded Selective Covers Limited in Thirsk, North Yorkshire, in 1999, having identified a market opportunity. They manufacture and sell customised, high grade, waterproof covers for a vast range of applications, including covers for swimming pools, hot tubs, vehicles and trailers, garden furniture, banners and, on a larger scale, farm equipment, sports equipment, boats and other leisure industry applications.

The growing popularity of the product range

created problems in both the manufacturing and administrative processes – only 25% of deliveries were made on time – so Selective Covers called in Business Link in York to identify the issues and diagnose the problems. The experienced Business Link advisor was quick to identify the need to involve productivity improvement specialists Scott-Grant Limited to address the situation. Using this authorised consultant enabled the Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS) for Yorkshire and The Humber to fund 50% of the costs – an important consideration for smaller companies.

Scott-Grant implemented a much leaner way of manufacturing, significantly altering flow and layout, streamlining communications and enabling the customised

product to keep moving through the process. Now each operator takes responsibility for an individual customer order, cutting their own material for their job and continuing with all activities of manufacturing through to completion.

### **Enthusiastic and motivated staff**

For each operator, there is job ownership, accountability and enthusiasm. “It’s a million times better because we have far more understanding of the job; there’s no stress now, no waiting for materials. Communications have improved in every aspect,” – the unanimous opinion from the shop floor.

The admin staff agreed with the team leader on the shop floor: “We’ve seen huge improvements. All the staff are happier and we all really

enjoy working as a team in a successful environment.”

Different from the fragmented approach in use before Scott-Grant’s involvement, the new method has more flexibility and makes manpower planning easier and more predictable. Significant improvements to the layout and systems were introduced which had further positive effect. The system now allows the profitability of each job to be known at the despatch point, and a KPI has been introduced to automatically track the year-to-date position for each of the product categories produced.

A new structured approach to job costing and generating quotations was introduced, so that a historic record of each quotation is made on its journey through manufacture to despatch to the customer,

with all labour and materials used being recorded against that job.

As a result of the project, the company is now more profitable and capacity has increased by more than 50%.

**Finance Manager was wrong!**

The company’s Financial Manager was sceptical and didn’t believe the layout and method could be improved. She was delighted to concede however: “Expanding the operators’ jobs to include all aspects of the process has improved product flow, reduced manufacturing time and enhanced the variety of work for the operators.”

Managing Director Debbie Knowlson has been particularly impressed with Scott-Grant’s intervention. “Using lean techniques to overhaul the manufacturing system and



improve product flow has meant that, even in the early part of the year, our customer deliveries were on time or even ahead of time for over 80% of our orders – and we continue to improve.

“Our last three months show we have delivered 100% on time – or even early! The manufacturing throughput time has dramatically reduced from

about three days to around one to two hours. Work is properly scheduled and there’s a much better understanding and control of the whole process.”

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# The very best professional help



We are always keen to help members and any enquirers of the Institute in their quest for knowledge or assistance when it comes to productivity issues. We’d like to draw readers’ attention to the following solutions for help with Performance Rating, which is still an internationally used technique.

**New rating films for professional analysts**

We have explored the possibility of creating new rating films but found the costs quite prohibitive. We were advised by Scott-Grant Ltd, one of our accredited training providers, that they had recently produced a new and comprehensive series of 12 rating films on DVD and we have fortunately managed to secure access to them. The rating films show examples of real jobs

being undertaken in the workplace and the industries include

- manufacturing
- electronics
- engineering
- distribution
- timber
- needle trade
- retail
- manual work
- warehousing
- high volume distribution

All the films are intended to develop the application skills of analysts. They are an invaluable means of professional development for re-calibrating and maintaining the rating accuracy of every professional analyst, to ensure that the high standards of the Institute are maintained.

**Performance Rating explained**  
Scott-Grant have also produced “How do you rate?” – a practical, 35 minute DVD to explain clearly

how to use Performance Rating when measuring work. We would encourage every industry to use this film if they want to improve productivity in their workplace. Although the subject matter is very serious, “How do you rate?” delivers its message in a relaxed and entertaining way. Above all it is designed to be informative, practical and memorable.

Within 20 minutes viewers will have the opportunity to assess performance in carrying out a simple task, using the criteria explained in the film.

Please contact Lynette at the Institute head office  
Tel 00 44 (0)1543 266909 for more details.

