



TBM™

An Interview with Bill Remy, Chairman and CEO, TBM Consulting Group



SPEED WINS EVERY TIME

TBM specializes in operations and supply chain consulting for manufacturers and distributors. We push the pedal down in your operations to make you more agile and help you accelerate business performance 3-5x faster than your peers.

Bill Remy

Chairman and CEO

TBM Consulting Group

Bill Remy is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer at TBM Consulting and a member of the Board of Directors. He has 30-plus years of leadership experience in general management and manufacturing operations. Bill's areas of expertise include operational performance improvement through LeanSigma deployment in manufacturing operations, supply chain, product development and project management. He has experience in broad array of business leadership positions across various industries including aerospace and defense, railway, industrial and agricultural equipment, technology and process automation.

Bill returned to TBM in the summer of 2011 after working at Invensys as Vice President, Continuous Improvement. Prior to Invensys, Bill led the initiative to develop and launch TBM's lean supply chain practice.



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What are some of the ways that new technology is changing manufacturing and supply chain management today?

People were first talking about automation, artificial intelligence and predictive analytics 20 years ago.

What's happened is that computing technology, the Internet, software applications and so on, have all gotten so much faster, more reliable and cheaper. Just a few years ago, the computing technology and networks weren't nearly as good. You couldn't move as much data or crunch it as quickly as you can today.

As for specific technologies, 3D printing is still evolving; but it seems like exciting, new applications are emerging every week. In the robotics arena, "cobotics" where you have robots and humans working very closely together, is a very interesting area of development.

Not too long ago virtual reality systems were viewed mostly for gaming applications. Now, they're being used for training and simulating work environments. I've seen a virtual reality system for training refinery operators, for example, that could simulate work processes and emergencies, allowing people to work through an event outside of a real emergency.

How are lean manufacturing and other business improvement efforts being supported by technology?

Technology is a force multiplier. It allows manufacturers to get more done, faster, either in terms of planning or solving problems.

It's important, however, never to lose sight of the fundamentals. It's said often but bears repeating. You shouldn't automate or add any new technology without first getting the process right. After you get the process right, then you can see how technology could be used to improve productivity, quality, safety or throughput.

Too many managers become enamored of the flashing lights and new technology, or they try to reap the benefits too quickly, and don't do the heavy lifting. You can't skip the hard work. That's like a baseball player skipping preseason training and jumping right into a regular season game. It just doesn't work.

Beyond specific processes, how can new technology be used to improve problem solving and achieve wider organizational goals?

Management dashboards can provide a single view of current performance versus expectations, but they're only a start. To have the most impact, these dashboards need to be linked to action plans and countermeasures. This goes way beyond the financial aspect.

One of TBM's board members uses the term "small data." Manufacturers have a ton of internal data about how their business is performing: capacity utilization, uptime, scrap rates, on-time deliveries and so on. All of this operational data is completely underutilized. When it's analyzed you can find trends and ways to perform better.

People tell me they don't have the bandwidth, or skills, to leverage such data. But it doesn't take much time or effort. You just have to take a look at it and see what you can learn.

What ROI should companies target for new technology investments?

Every company is a little different in terms of ROI expectations.

It depends on whether it's a long term, leading edge type of investment, or if it's a mature, off-the-shelf technology where you expect to see the payback right away. Some things take a little more work to understand where the value is going to come from.

Take the Internet of Things, for example. Business leaders have to first develop a roadmap and vision of what's possible in the near- and long-term. Even with that, there will be some areas where the technology has to evolve, where it isn't really quite ready for prime time, or where the potential return depends on how it's implemented.

I like to pick on Bluetooth because it's so frustrating for everyone. It's been around forever, and the core protocol is fairly sound. But when companies have embedded the Bluetooth protocol inside their software and applications, they've made it less reliable and less robust, so it performs poorly.

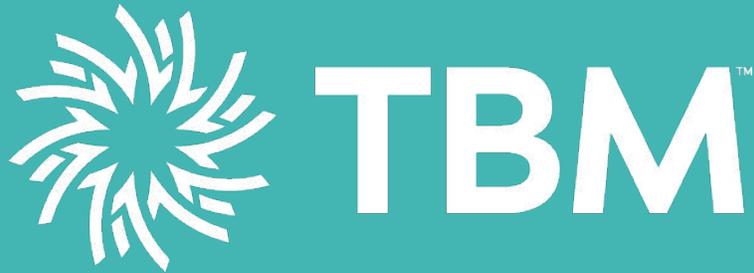
That's the type of issue that has to be figured out up front. When you start using any such technology inside of a factory, whether it's Bluetooth or some other communications protocol, it has to be reliable and robust. If not, it won't perform well and won't deliver the targeted ROI.

What are some of the best practices that manufacturing managers should follow when implementing new technology?

Like I said, you have to work on the process first. Make the process repeatable. Standardize it so you get predictable outcomes. Then start looking at places where automation or other technology can improve productivity.

There will be places where a given technology can provide a benefit, and places where it won't. Make sure the solution fits the process or problem. When solutions go looking for problems, it never ends well.

I'd conclude by saying that managers at all levels consistently underestimate the effort it takes to implement both new processes and new technology. They underestimate the change management necessary to get people to use or follow it and to become more productive. You have to be conservative around how long it's going to take for new technology to work and be adopted.



TBM Consulting Group

The faster your organization can execute against its goals, solve challenges, respond to opportunities, and meet customer needs, the quicker it will realize its growth potential. And the faster we can put you in a position to do that, the more successful your improvement initiatives will become.

TBM Consulting Group attended our American Manufacturing Summit on March 28-29th, 2017 in Chicago, IL where Bill Remy spoke on *The Technology Freight Train Get On Board: Use Technology As A Force Multiplier For Operational Excellence And Value Creation.*

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