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UMMARY

This case discusses the process and challenges of identifying and adopting an ERP system at Braebill Company. The desire to investigate ERP solutions was brought about by their recent adoption of Lean Manufacturing and its associated kaizen events, which allowed them to change their business processes very quickly. However, their homegrown IT systems are difficult to change, and cannot always accommodate the rapid changes in the business processes. IT management wants to adopt a new ERP system to replace many of their existing homegrown systems. This process is complicated by the need for significant flexibility in the adopted system, by a desire to standardize platforms across all companies held by Braebill, and by a previous effort by a sister company to adopt an ERP system. The Braebill IT organization will have to navigate a complex political and organizational environment to successfully adopt an adequate ERP system. [Article copies are available for purchase from InfoSci-on-Demand.com]

Keywords: Enterprise Resource Planning; IT Platform Consolidation; Organizational Dynamics

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Francis Braebill started the family business in the US Midwest in the late 1800s with Midwest Tool, a small hand tool business. Francis’ oldest son, Gordon, took over the company in 1929, but due to trouble in the “Great Depression,” the company declared bankruptcy in 1932. During the next two decades, the Braebill family created various products that contained gasoline and diesel engines, such as lawn mowers, tractors, and small farm equipment, but eventually found a profitable niche in the engine dynamo market where they created several innovative products.
using small engines to generate electricity in portable products. By the mid-1950s the Braebill Company was exclusively focused on its electrical generator business. In 1982, Braebill acquired Grassl Company, an East coast manufacturer of portable generators, and in 1995, Braebill acquired Westlin Corporation, a Midwest after-market parts distributor. Two acquisitions in 2006, Kitchwell, an overseas after-market parts company, and Kensit Company, a southern based manufacturer of alternative power generation equipment, complete the company’s holdings at the time of this case. George Braebill, great-grandson of Francis, is now president of Braebill Company, and his cousin, Fred, is president of Westlin. Table 1 shows the relative size in terms of employees for each of the five companies in Braebill Company. Because most of the products are seasonal, the organization has a significant number of seasonal workers.

The Braebill Company has a simple but powerful vision: Passion, Innovation, and Customer Amazement! The organization takes pride in its core values: Be Honest, Be Fair; Keep Our Commitments, Respect the Individual, and Encourage Intellectual Curiosity. The management system used to achieve that vision is based upon 15 principles that are built upon these core values (Figure 1).

The management structure at Braebill is organized around value streams. A value stream encompasses all the activities, from engineering through manufacturing and customer support, for a set of products. Each value stream has a director and a set of leaders for engineering, materials, manufacturing, and customer support. Accounting, Purchasing, Sales, Human Resources, Marketing, Administration, and MIS all support the value streams (Appendix A has a more detailed description of the value streams at Braebill).

Braebill adopted Lean Manufacturing in response to their primary business: “to stay alive and be competitive.” The management structure was developed as part of the move to Lean. As with most manufacturing businesses in the United States, Braebill was faced with intense pressure from cheap overseas labor, increased demand for quality products, and environmental concerns about energy prices and emissions. These challenges were so great that in 1998, when George Braebill took over as president, Braebill was in crisis. Something had to change!

**SETTING THE STAGE**

To address their financial and production problems, Braebill actively embraced Lean Manufacturing. Lean is a continuous improvement philosophy that focuses on being customer—and knowledge—driven to provide value to the customer by eliminating waste, simplifying operations, and aligning the value chain. It is based on five basic principles: define value, identify value streams, make value flow, pull systems based on customer demand, and pursue perfection (Womack & Jones, 2003).

At the center of Braebill’s lean effort are their kaizen events. They have had, and continue to have, kaizen events frequently (averaging 174 per year in 2002-2006) throughout the organization.

| Table 1. Number of employees in each of the Braebill companies |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
|                 | Braebill| Kensit  | Westlin | Kitchwell| Total  |
| Full Time Employees | 750     | 16      | 166     | 30      | 987    |
| Seasonal / Contract Employees | 250     | 4       | 84      | 10      | 383    |
| **Total Employees** | **1000** | **20**  | **250** | **40**  | **1370** |

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