



The Center to Advance Manufacturing Monthly News

February 2026

Change is a constant in manufacturing, whether driven by new technologies, workforce shifts, supply chain pressures, or evolving customer demands. While innovation often moves quickly, how organizations navigate and manage change can be just as critical as the changes themselves.

This month, we're highlighting change management through a few connected features in this issue. In March, we'll host a webinar focused on how intentional pauses during periods of change can help manufacturing leaders reduce missteps, improve alignment, and build momentum that lasts (*see registration details below*). As a preview of that conversation, our featured Knowledge Hub article introduces practical frameworks for navigating change in fast-paced manufacturing environments.

Alongside these insights, this issue continues to spotlight student experiences, workforce initiatives, and regional partnerships supporting manufacturing across Northwest Ohio. As organizations adapt to ongoing challenges and opportunities, we hope this newsletter offers useful perspectives and ideas you can apply within your own teams and operations.

Lunch & Learn Webinar

THE SPACE IN BETWEEN: MASTERING CHANGE IN FAST-PACED MANUFACTURING

Discover how manufacturing teams can harness strategic pauses to move from reacting under pressure to responding with confident clarity, turning chaotic change into deliberate action that delivers stronger results.

Thursday, March 19
12:00 PM

[REGISTER HERE](#)



Steven H. Cady, Ph.D.

Professor & Founding Director
of the Organization Development &
Change Program in the
Schmidhorst College of Business,
Bowling Green State University

Equipment Purchase Supports Safety Training at the University of Findlay



Over the past year, the Center to Advance Manufacturing supported an equipment investment at the University of Findlay to enhance hands-on safety training for manufacturing employers and workers.

The equipment is utilized by the University’s All Hazards Training Center (AHTC), which delivers industry-focused instruction in confined space entry and rescue, hazardous materials response, emergency preparedness, and more. While industry partners are the primary audience, the equipment also supports University of Findlay students enrolled in for-credit safety coursework through the Environment, Health, Safety & Sustainability program.

Supporting Real-World Confined Space & Hazmat Training



During a recent confined space entrant, attendant, and supervisor training, instructors Brian Herbert and Jason Distel guided participants through realistic scenarios using the new equipment. The eight-hour sessions place trainees in simulated high-risk environments, addressing scenarios such as unresponsive workers, vertical and horizontal rescues, and proper use of fall protection systems.

The equipment includes harnesses, tripods, winches, ropes, hard hats, gloves, and rescue systems designed for raising and lowering, fall protection, and responder comfort. These tools allow participants to practice procedures in real time, an essential component of effective safety training in manufacturing and industrial settings.



Photos at left capture moments from a recent confined space training, including equipment used during instruction, rescue simulations, and hands-on demonstrations led by AHTC instructors.

Expanding Capacity and Meeting Industry Demand

With this equipment in place, the AHTC has expanded its ability to host more training sessions, with equipment divided between two mobile units, with additional assets housed at the University of Findlay. Since deployment, it has been used at 12 professional training locations, supporting safety instruction for approximately 214 trainees.

“The new equipment improves both the quality and frequency of our safety training, helping us meet growing demand from industry,” said Brian Herbert, Confined Space Instructor.



This investment reflects needs consistently raised by manufacturers through the Center’s ongoing engagement with industry partners, particularly as facilities adapt to new technologies and increasingly complex safety requirements. By strengthening the University of Findlay’s training capacity, the Center is helping ensure manufacturers have access to practical, industry-aligned safety education that supports workforce readiness and safer workplaces.



Northwest Ohio Language Resource Guide

Northwest Ohio's workforce continues to grow more diverse, with employers, educators, and community organizations across all 17 counties serving individuals whose primary language is not English. This diversity is a strength for our region, but it can also present real challenges when access to English language learning opportunities is unclear or difficult to navigate.

Through ongoing conversations with manufacturers, workforce partners, educators, and economic development organizations, a consistent need has emerged. Language barriers can affect workplace communication, training participation, safety, and long-term retention, yet many employers and individuals are unsure where to turn for English language classes or support. In many cases, available resources exist but are scattered across the region and not easy to find.

In response, the Center to Advance Manufacturing developed the Northwest Ohio Language Resource Guide to provide a clearer, more accessible starting point. Organized by county, the guide highlights English language learning classes and programs available throughout the region, helping individuals, employers, and partners more easily connect with local opportunities that support communication, skill development, and workforce success.



At its core, this guide reflects a shared understanding that language access is more than a communication challenge, it is a workforce, safety, and inclusion issue. By bringing these resources together in one place, we aim to support stronger participation and clearer pathways to opportunity across Northwest Ohio.

[Access the Northwest Ohio Language Resource Guide here](#)

Partner Updates



Individual Microcredential Assistance Program Training Opportunities at Bowling Green State University

Bowling Green State University (BGSU) is an approved provider for Ohio's Individual Microcredential Assistance Program (IMAP), offering industry-recognized training at no cost to eligible Ohio residents through state funding. As an IMAP provider, BGSU covers all training costs, each valued at approximately \$2,500, to help learners build in-demand skills that support career growth or entry into manufacturing and related industries.



The Spring 2026 IMAP trainings are delivered fully online and self-paced across four-week sessions, with optional live trainer office hours and interactive support. Courses available include topics such as Quality Production, Supply Chain Management and Design, Quality Practices and Measurement, Warehouse and Distribution Center Layout, and Manufacturing Process Control.

Explore eligibility requirements and see a full list of active Spring 2026 IMAP trainings [here](#).

The Space In Between: Strategic Pauses That Improve Manufacturing Performance

Modern manufacturing often associates speed with excellence. Production targets demand relentless motion, supply chains run on tight tolerances, and leaders pride themselves on maintaining momentum. The culture prioritizes constant performance and speed, viewing reflection, learning, and continuous improvement efforts as a luxury or even a weakness. Yet in the rush to produce, ship, and scale, many organizations overlook the most powerful accelerator of all: the intentional pause.

Across high-performing operations, from automotive to aerospace to pharmaceuticals, leaders are rediscovering something countercultural, which is that the most consequential improvements do not happen while people are rushing and in constant motion. They occur in the small, deliberate spaces between activities. These “in-between” moments, known as liminal spaces, are the brief but critical periods where teams can reflect, adjust, and realign before the next cycle of action. When used intentionally, these pauses help organizations reduce defects, strengthen coordination, accelerate change, and build long-term resilience.

A recent framework I have developed identifies seven strategic pauses that appear across every change effort, whether it involves a new production line, an ERP upgrade, a lean transformation, or a supplier transition. These moments: *planning*, *centering*, *adapting*, *responding*, *discovering*, *retrospecting*, and *stabilizing*, offer manufacturing leaders a powerful playbook for navigating complexity with clarity.

Below are the seven spaces, each illustrated with real-world manufacturing examples.

1. Planning: Slow Down Early to Go Fast Later

Planning spaces are intentional pauses taken before a project, shift, or improvement effort begins. Too often, production environments push to “just get going,” which creates rework, downtime, and safety risks later.

Manufacturing example: A Tier 1 automotive supplier was preparing to introduce a new robotic welding cell. Rather than jumping straight into installation, the engineering team paused to engage operators, maintenance technicians, and safety leaders in a structured planning sprint. They performed early risk assessments, clarified job changes, and ran multiple simulation tests. The result? The equipment was launched ahead of schedule, requiring minimal rework, and its first-pass yield exceeded historical averages by 12%. This illustrates a core principle: time invested up front dramatically reduces the cost and pain of midstream corrections.

2. Centering: Preparing People Before the Work Begins

Centering is the moment immediately before action when people ground themselves and focus. In high-stakes manufacturing environments, where pressure, performance, and precision intersect, these micro-pauses matter.

Manufacturing example: Before a pharmaceutical aseptic filling line begins its first batch of the day, the team engages in a 90-second ritual: controlled breathing, a quick check-in, and a stated commitment to sterile discipline. This small centering practice reduces anxiety, improves attention to detail, and reduces human error that could otherwise result in costly batch loss. Centering is not about meditation; it is about readiness. A focused team performs differently from a rushed team.

3. Adapting: Adjusting in Real Time Without Losing Control

Adapting spaces occur during operations, when something unexpected happens, and teams must pivot. These moments require awareness rather than panic, an ability to make targeted adjustments without abandoning stability.

Manufacturing example: During a packaging run, a consumer goods plant began noticing minor misalignments appearing on cartons. Rather than pushing through to meet the shift quota, the line lead paused the operation for a structured “micro-adjustment huddle.” Within minutes, the team traced the issue to a misfed label roll, corrected the alignment, and resumed production with no scrap loss. In many plants, teams rush past early signs of trouble, leading to large-scale defects. Adapting spaces allows organizations to catch issues when they are small and inexpensive.

4. Responding: Managing the Space Between Trigger and Action

Responding refers to the pause between an emotionally triggering event and the reaction that follows, especially when anger, fear, or stress spikes. This is where leaders and frontline teams safeguard safety, communication, and quality.

Manufacturing example: A supervisor on a machining line receives word that an urgent order will require rescheduling the day’s sequence. Rather than reacting with frustration, she takes a brief moment, 10 seconds of mindful breathing, before communicating the change. Because she regulates her response, the team stays calm, collaborates quickly, and completes the order without mistakes. In manufacturing, the difference between a reactive outburst and a grounded response can determine whether a team spirals into confusion or mobilizes effectively.

5. Discovering: Recognizing Valuable Insights When They Surface

Discovery spaces are the moments where new ideas or unexpected insights appear, often during downtime, conversation, or routine tasks. Manufacturing environments are filled with potential breakthroughs, but people must pause long enough to notice them.

Manufacturing example: During a routine equipment cleaning, an operator realized the design of a removable guard created unnecessary hand strain. She paused to jot down the observation and later shared it during the shift exchange. Engineering reviewed the suggestion, redesigned the guard, and ultimately reduced repetitive-motion injuries by 40%. If she had pushed through, the insight would have evaporated. Discovery depends on recognizing small signals that lead to big improvements.

6. Retrospecting: Learning From the Work Before Moving On

Retrospecting is intentional reflection after an event, when a project ends, a shift concludes, or a new line goes live. In manufacturing, after-action reviews are often rushed or skipped, causing organizations to repeat preventable mistakes.

Manufacturing example: After completing a plant-wide Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) rollout, a food processing company conducted a structured retrospective involving operators, maintenance, procurement, and quality. They explored what worked, what failed, and what needed refinement. This single conversation surfaced several insights, such as overly complex checklists and inconsistent spare-parts availability, that were quickly corrected, making the next rollout twice as efficient. Without retrospection, improvement stagnates. With it, teams evolve faster.

7. Stabilizing: Securing the Gains Before Declaring Victory

Stabilizing spaces occur after a change effort when the organization ensures new behaviors, processes, or systems stay in place. Manufacturing leaders often rush to the next priority and assume new practices will “stick” on their own, yet without stabilization, regression is nearly guaranteed.

Manufacturing example: After introducing digital work instructions for a complex assembly process, an electronics manufacturer conducted a stabilization audit. They reviewed whether supervisors were reinforcing the new standard, whether metrics aligned, and whether old instructions were still circulating on the floor. The audit caught drift early, allowing leaders to re-anchor the change before old habits returned. Stabilizing is the difference between temporary improvement and lasting transformation.

Why Pauses Create Competitive Advantage in Manufacturing

Manufacturing thrives on efficiency, but efficiency is not the same as speed. Strategic pauses reduce error rates, improve safety, strengthen communication, and increase adaptability. They help teams think better, not just work faster. In an industry facing labor shortages, supply chain disruptions, digital transformation, and constant pressure for throughput, these capabilities are essential and not optional.

When manufacturing leaders master the space in between, change becomes less chaotic and more intentional. Teams move from firefighting to foresight. Organizations move from reactive to resilient. And the culture shifts from “keep moving at all costs” to “move with purpose.”

These seven pauses are not delays; they are accelerators. They turn manufacturing change from a source of strain into a source of strategic advantage.

Want to learn more?

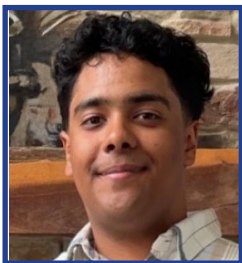
Join us on March 19 for a webinar featuring Dr. Steven Cady on Mastering Change in Fast-Paced Manufacturing. Register [here](#).



Dr. Steven H. Cady is a scholar-practitioner specializing in large-scale transformation and the design of human-centered, high-performance systems. As Professor of Management and Founding Director of the Doctoral Program in Organization Development & Change at Bowling Green State University, he bridges research and practice to help organizations navigate complex change. He founded NEXUS4change, a global consultancy network advancing collaborative change and enterprise innovation. A prolific thought leader, Dr. Cady is the author of over fifty articles and several books, including *The Change Handbook* and *The Collaborative Change Library*. His current work focuses on human capabilities in the age of AI and building resilient, people-centered organizations.

We're continuing our monthly Student Spotlight to celebrate interns, co-ops, and apprentices working with manufacturers and logistics companies across our partner schools. Real-world experience is where education and industry intersect, and each month we'll highlight a student's experience, what they learned, and their advice for peers.

If you'd like to learn about internship, co-op, and apprenticeship opportunities with students from Bowling Green State University, the University of Findlay, and Owens Community College, please reach out and we'll connect you. Together, we can create more pathways for students to build skills.



Felix Tajeda-Salgado
Bowling Green State University
Mechanical & Manufacturing Engineering Technologies
JE Dunn Construction
Campus Field Intern



Felix Tajeda-Salgado has spent nearly a year in a co-op with JE Dunn Construction, gaining hands-on experience in applied, real-world work environments.

Throughout the co-op, Felix has worked in both field and management-focused roles. He applied skills such as CAD, solid modeling, technical writing, and materials analysis to support surveying and site layout, while also developing practical experience with shop drawings, framing, and concrete work. In a second role, he focused on scheduling, workflow planning, and visual management to improve coordination between field teams and project leadership.

Felix says the most rewarding part of the co-op has been contributing meaningful work that directly impacts project progress, whether through hands-on tasks in the field or planning tools that help sequence and track critical activities. Being trusted with real responsibility helped him build confidence and refine his problem-solving skills.

Felix points to coursework in areas such as CAD, technical writing, and lean, along with support from BGSU's Kuhlin Hub for Career Design and Connections, as helpful in preparing for his co-op and navigating the hiring process. Those foundations continue to support his work in both field and project-based settings, where clear communication and organized processes are essential.

The co-op has also helped Felix clarify his early career direction and reinforced the value of hands-on learning in complex, systems-oriented industries. He plans to continue building on this experience as he develops skills that apply across construction, manufacturing, and other operational environments.

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