

HWK # 6a Manufacturing systems

The history of manufacturing systems, Ref: Hounshell

1. How did the Ford Motor Company differ from the Singer sewing machine company in how they competed in the market? What were their core competencies?

The products from the two companies competed very differently in the market. While Ford produced a low price automobile for the mass market, Singer offered a high price sewing machine on the top end of the market. Ford competed by his production methods to bring the cost down; Singer competed by its marketing techniques, which included extensively advertising, and by offering customer services and a purchasing plan. The evidence is that Singer's production methods used extensive fitting and handwork during this period and as described by Hounshell (p. 5 & 6) they were not able to achieve interchangeable. Hence the core competencies of the two companies were very differently, Ford relied principally on manufacturing, while Singer relied principally on marketing and service.

2. How did Hounshell describe the changeover from the Model T to the Model A at Ford? Where did this changeover take place? How long did the changeover take? Did Ford want the same people who built the model T to also build the model A?

Hounshell spend the entire Chapter 7 talking about this issue, and on page 12 he says the changeover to the Model A... "was one of the most wrenching nightmares in American industrial history". The Model A change over took place principally at the River Rouge plant. The changeover caused a six-month shutdown at the plant. According to Hounshell, the nature of this changeover ("vengeance, ruthlessness, and seeming chaos") gets clearly captured in the colorful invective of Charles Sorensen, "get rid of the Model T sons-of-bitches." (p 266)

3. How did Ford use change or improvement as a selling point?

He didn't. According to Hounshell, "by 1920, the model T was expected to be constant". Therefore, change created a particular marketing problem for the Ford Motor Company. The company could not use change or improvement as a selling point.