

Three Of The Four Elements of a Continuous Improvement Management System

Leader Standard Work, Daily Accountability, Discipline.

BRIEF

MANAGEMENT of continuous improvement is not something that is normally deeply considered, yet it is critical. (David Mann, "Creating a Lean Culture".)

Lean (a term "westernised" for continuous improvement) implementations invariably fail long term because management (all levels) fail to recognise that they too must change their ways in the way they manage. A previous article provided a brief description of the 4 Essential Elements of a successful Continuous Improvement System. This article expands on 3 of the elements - Leader Standard Work, Daily Accountability and Discipline.

INTRODUCTION

If we don't have the right accurate information easily accessible to those that can improve the process or operation then sustained improvement will be unlikely no matter management's intent ...

Then, if we don't have disciplined routine actions focussed around the "right accurate information" sustained improvement will still be unlikely no matter management's intent ...

Leader Standard Work, Daily Accountability and Discipline build on the above second opening remark.

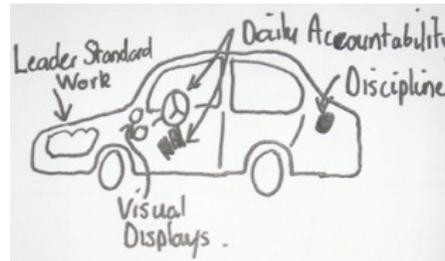
RECAP – FOUR ELEMENTS

There are four essential parts of a Continuous Improvement Management System. They are not complex or complicated. They are all dependent on each other. All four must be present and working well in order to drive your improvement work.

These four elements are:

- Visual Displays.
- Leader Standard Work.
- Daily Accountability.
- Leadership Discipline.

The analogy of a car was used to describe the four elements. The car and four parts are drawn below.



Leader Standard Work is the engine, the driving force. Daily Accountability is the controls, the system for generating actions. Discipline is the fuel that powers the engine.

Visual Displays is covered in a separate article, we will now expand on each of the above 3.

LEADER STANDARD WORK

Leader Standard Work is like the engine of a car. If the engine performs well, there is a very good likelihood the car will get you to where you need to be, when you need to be there. If the engine stops, the car slows quickly. There is no force to keep the car moving forward.

Let us firstly be very clear on what “standard work” is in any business. Standard work is the clear and defined method that is followed every time in the work area in order to achieve predictable outcomes, the expected results. For example, there will be standard work in a factory for starting and running a machine. There is standard work in a finance department for how an invoice is paid. There is standard work in an IT Department for how help requests are assigned. This information is often contained in SOP’s.

Leader Standard Work is similar, with a slightly different focus. Leader Standard Work is the *set of clear and defined “leadership tasks”* that occur in the work area in order to *support the achievement of expected results, and improve them*. For example, every 4 hours, how is our production chart tracking, in front or behind?

Leader Standard Work tasks focus more on what is done when, rather than how.

Leader Standard Work ensures you focus on the process as it is running, not on the results at the end of the week. Why is this focus important? Because focusing on the process as it is running, allows you to work in the “now” and correct issues as they arise, while fresh in people minds, before they become a big problem. If you address them at the weeks end, it is way too late to do anything about the “now”.

There are 4 other reasons why Leader Standard Work is important in any operation, manufacturing or service.

- A solid Leader Standard Work program makes it much easier for people to step into and out of the Management System. The actions expected of the leader are clear and defined.
- Leader Standard Work is like a recipe for leaders. Follow it and you will be much more likely to achieve the expected results.
- Leader Standard Work allows it to be very clear when a new leader, or a leader being asked to change into an Improvement Management System, just doesn’t fit.

In a company establishing a Continuous Improvement program, perhaps the most important thing, the 4th thing, that Leader Standard Work does is drive a change in culture. Why? Because ...

- Leader Standard Work requires a *change of behaviour of leaders, a change of habits*. Changed leader habits will quickly change workplace culture.

Lastly, Leader Standard Work is “layered”. That is the different levels of leaders do different things, each related to the other, and they spend different amounts of their time doing Leader Standard Work. For the purpose of this article we will consider 3 layers of leadership in the “average” work environment – Team Leader, Supervisor and Manager.

The Team Leader should spend about 80% of their time on Leader Standard Work. This assumes they are not involved at all in production itself which is often not reality. (Companies vary on how they define the role of a Team Leader.) The Supervisor should spend about 50% of their time on Leader Standard Work. The Manager should spend about 10-20% of their time on Leader Standard Work.

DAILY ACCOUNTABILITY

In the model of the car, Daily Accountability is the controls - the steering wheel, brakes and accelerator together. Daily Accountability is assigning actions to people based on what the Visual Displays are communicating. If targets are not being met, *action must be taken*.

The steering wheel represents “What will be done by who?” In a car the steering wheel determines the direction of the car. It is the same here with Daily Accountability. “What will be done by who?” sets the direction – what will we do now as a result of what we are seeing (in our Visual Displays).

The brake and accelerator pedal represents “by when”. In other words, how quickly must we achieve the “what”? Again, the same as a car. Our use of the brake and accelerator in a car determines how quickly we get somewhere.

Thus all together, the steering wheel, brake and accelerator represent Daily Accountability which is “what will be done by who by when”.

This in many ways seems like a simple follow up system. However, it is more than that because of when you assign “what will be done by who by when”. You do this during Leader Standard Work actions based on Visual Display information. This ensures you are *focusing on the process as it is happening*, not the results at the end of the week. You are asking the question “What caused the problem that interrupted the process and who will do what to resolve it?”

DISCIPLINE

Leader Standard Work and Daily Accountability can be learnt and systemised. People can develop their capabilities in both. However, neither will happen without the 4th element of the car model – *discipline*.

Discipline is the fuel that powers the engine of Leader Standard Work. Discipline comes from *within each leader*. Without it the engine stops and so does the whole Continuous Improvement Management System. It is not usually something that is learnt. It can be developed but the will to do so must come from each leader.

Discipline means developing new habits. By developing new habits based on Leader Standard Work, the culture will change, you will start heading toward a continuous improvement culture.

This 4th part of discipline is of course the hardest. Required is commitment of each person to Leader Standard Work, *in particular the most senior leader*. If the fuel runs out, the engine won't go, displays will show nothing or if they do, they will be ignored. Actions may then be misdirected, or non-existent.

Discipline will bring rewards to the leader. If the leader practices and thus establishes Leader Standard Work and Daily Accountability around Visual Displays, their work becomes easier. Why, because the leader will become increasingly free of “firefighting time”, troubleshooting, responding to “fire alarms” all day long.

SUMMARY

Sustained change via a sound Continuous Improvement Management System requires *disciplined routine actions* focussed around the “right accurate information”.

The “right accurate information” comes from Visual Displays, then ...

Leader Standard Work is a set of leader actions that drives you forward. Daily Accountability assigns *what will be done by who by when* based on what is happening in the process. Discipline is the fuel that powers the engine. Leader Standard Work and Daily accountability can be learnt and heavily systemised. The discipline to apply the system comes from within each leader, in particular the most senior.

Source for information: *Creating a Lean Culture, David Mann.*

<http://www.amazon.com/Creating-Lean-Culture-Sustain-Conversions/dp/1439811415>

ARTICLE