

Target Conditions

“Keeping the Learner in the game”

BRIEF

“If I have learned nothing else in the last couple of years, it has been the balance between dogma and keeping the learner “in the game.” The latter is FAR more important.” – Mark Rosenthal, TheLeanThinker.com.

Following is a series of emails, an “email conversation”, between Marcus Johansson of Chris Marine Sweden and Oscar Roche of the TWI Institute Australia & New Zealand that is pertinent to Mark’s quote above. There are 4.5 pages of text. We were tempted to edit and shorten it but was going to be very hard to do that and not change the context and personal feel of the main points.

FROM MARCUS JOHANSSON, AUGUST 2017

You guys probably have loads to do but I'll take a chance here to throw out a question about a sort of realization that I had while speaking to one of my colleagues.

(Well this E-mail became much longer than I expected so I just hope you have the time and interest to have a read through!)

It all started with Oscars black mat! (See footnote, page 5.)

There was something about this target condition gnawing in my head. It was so simple and so right but how can we use those sorts of target conditions.

All of our target conditions have had figures of lowering cycle time with x minutes, reducing production area x m2 etcetera. I could not see how we could take those target conditions away and replace them with these simpler and more straight forward and not least making more sense to the operator.

I have been thinking about this while I have been on parental. And when I came back, in the beginning of this week, the person that had my position during my leave had given me an article about inner motivation (attached) although it is in Danish so you might need some google translate Oscar, maybe you as well Joakim, if you want to read it). Well in a short summary the article is about how we have built a world and an expectation of other people from the research of Fredric Taylor, Taylorism or behaviorism, and how demotivating this is. The author uses terms like homos economics and that we look at people as lazy beings that will only do things either by giving them a carrot or a whip (is this a used expression in the English speaking world?).

But newer research proves that inner motivation is a more forceful driving force in doing a good job. Very interesting.

Well to make a long story a bit shorter this article gave words and research back up to thoughts I have had at home. I also think it evolved my thoughts about the black mat although I could not put my finger on it at that moment.

So then when I came in to work today I had a short talk with my colleague, mentioned in the beginning of this e-mail. I am not sure how we came across to talk about it but we spoke of production cycle times and how the operators were unwilling to lower the preset cycle time even though they had done the job faster 10 times in a row (we show the cycle time for each operation at our daily meeting and the lists that show the planned operations for the day and week).

Then it hit me, why do we show our operators the cycle time? Do they have any use for this at all?

All of the focus of the operators is to maintain the cycle time. Most complaints are about not meeting the cycle time and I can see now that most shortcuts taken are because of meeting the cycle time.

But is it really the operators' responsibility to meet the set cycle time (the whip)? Shouldn't the operator concentrate on doing things the set way (the process or work instructions)?

I do believe this (presenting the cycle time) to be the obstacle both in my mind and our production leaders.

I see now that when presenting the cycle time to the operator we put all of the responsibility on our operators to maintain that cycle time. This will result in us giving them target conditions to reduce that cycle time. Since they are "responsible" for it, the TC should make sense to them.

The problem is, I think, that the operators don't really give a flying f**k about the cycle time, they think it is the planners that are responsible for this (which I do now agree on).

So by seeing these things I played a scenario in my head of trying to set a target condition from these new "rules".

The result was that by not showing the cycle time the operator could focus on doing their operations in the sequence decided and spend less time worrying about the time spent on the operation. In my mind this resulted them being more willing to lift up things that disturbed them in their operations (wrong material, no material etc.) instead of trying to do a quick fix to reach the set cycle time.

This would also trigger the planners and production leaders to go out and see for themselves how the process works and to set TCs from their observations instead of the set cycle time.

In my mind this would make it much easier to find the TC's like the black mat.

Am I on the right track here and have I stumbled onto something fundamental here or am I barking up the wrong tree and should shift my focus somewhere else?

If you have come this far I thank you for the time spent and hope you have some insightful answer ☺.

P.S I had my daughter learning how to drill a hole by using some sort of JI.

OSCAR'S REPLY

Yes, the interest you generated created the time ... simple really!

I love your frankness. You are right, largely operators DO NOT care less about cycle times. Worse still, if they do, it is "negative care" - when you set a target of decreasing a cycle time, I'm sure 99% of them first think "what, you asshole, you are going to make me work harder??"

I've never seen an improvement sustained where someone's work has become harder, never. So we must communicate the message of the "black mat" – Alan's job was easier when that was achieved (and the cycle time went down!)

I couldn't agree more with Frederick Taylor based on your summary. Yes, we get the carrot and the whip, well put.

You say "Shouldn't the operator concentrate on doing things the set way (the process or work instructions)?" That is what Mike Rother talks about – we must set a condition, describe what we NEED the process to look and be like. Not necessarily what "number" it will provide us when it does look like that ...!

Yes, I think you are on the right track, but I'm not sure. Your 4th last paragraph is very insightful and I believe you are on the right path. What I am sure about is that if you keep thinking like this, you'll find the best answer, whatever that may be. (What I do know from my own experience is that "black mat type Target Conditions" engage the right people much more than numbers.)

A month ago I delivered the first Kata 10-Hour (5x2, like TWI) in the USA. It was very well received. (We already have a full class for Train the Trainer.) We spoke a lot about Target Conditions in that.

Most of all, thanks for taking the time to send this email. In the February (2018) US TWI / Kata Summit I have been asked to do a short keynote for the Kata side. Guess what it is titled? "In Step 3 of the Improvement Kata, the Key Word Is "Condition" ... Guess what is the feature story? The black mat ... Any chance you can come? I'd love you to "chime in" because I know it is from the heart.

MARCUS'S RESPONSE

Thanks for those words and still thank you for taking your time to read and reply - your insights are highly appreciated.

Well frankness is the only way to, although sometimes you must wrap it in some softer words.

Great that you think I am on the right track it only took almost a year since you told me the black mat story and 8 months of distance to work, one article and one random talk to a colleague to figure it out. Writing the E-mail was some self therapy to straighten out the new found thoughts in my head.

Congratulations! I think it is brilliant of you to make Kata education in the form of a TWI training. Well the TCs are the key I believe so good that you focus on that!

I would love to go, I will have a chat with my boss to see if there is a possibility to join you at the Summit! Well it is a great and simple story.

What is the meaning of "chime in" I have never heard that expression before (just trying to learn new things).

When we spoke in Germany we spoke about that it could be difficult to introduce Kata at home due to women in general being more emotional driven. After findings these new insights I have thought about that during today.

Wouldn't it be easier to set TC on an emotional basis than a rational basis? The rational side (or at least with me) is always looking for measurable goals which tends to be time reduction etc. But if you look at the black mat is that not more an emotional target or at least it plays with the operators emotions more (a sense of simplicity).

Or was it the Kata routine you spoke about. Maybe I explain better in an example.

Couldn't a TC at home be ...

"Everyone in the family should feel welcome when walking into our home"

I bet you would get a lot of obstacles, at least in my house right now. There are shoes all over the place as one example. It could be that the daily meetings would meet some resistance and might be hard to have time to set up.

OSCAR'S REPLY

I get the bit about self-therapy. I find writing helps me sort things out in my mind. If I see my thoughts (i.e. the words of my thoughts), then I can make better sense of my thoughts, and adjust them often!

In the Kata 10-Hour we focus heavily on coaching practise. (We believe the biggest thing needed "out there" is sufficient coaching confidence. We are finding the Kata 10-Hour delivers that.)

"Chime in" (slang) means contribute to something, usually in small way, but can be in a big way. (A clock with bells "chimes in" every hour.)

Your 4th last paragraph is gold, you have touched on something I think is brilliant, I've never thought of it this way – emotional TCs. Let me provide some background.

We got involved in Kata because I knew there was a link/overlap between Kata skills and the TWI skills. I thought I knew where and how but, on reflection, had no idea, and perhaps still don't.

How familiar are you with TWI Job Relations (JR)? JR is about the Leader getting their results through the people who work for them – about the people doing the correct thing when the Leader is not there. About a year ago I started to see a relationship between JR and Kata. As time has gone on I'm pretty sure of possibly a 100% overlap between JR principles and Step 4 of the Improvement Kata.

Step 4 of the Improvement Kata is a "people process", nothing more, nothing less. (Perhaps it is a "scientific people process"?) If one accepts this, then the emotional aspect of us human beings MUST come in. Hence what type of "driver" (Target Condition) is most effective? One with "emotional content". (The Target Condition is the "pull driver" of Step 4, experiment toward the Target Condition.) But, it does need to be measurable, as we must be able to ask "have we achieved it or not?" (So, re your home one, there needs to be consideration given as to how this can be measured.)

So if JR is "results through people", is Kata "results improved through people"? If yes, then you're thinking and the direction it is taking you is perfect.

(The summit in Feb is Mon/Tue TWI, Wed workshops day, Thur/Fri Kata.)

MARCUS'S RESPONSE

Using more senses than one is always better both for sorting the thought as well as remembering, or that is at least the case for me.

I do agree that the coaching is a really important puzzle piece but I do also believe that coaching will be so much more easier once you set the "right" TC. I can just imagine coaching a "black mat" condition instead of a "decreasing lead time" condition.

One thing that I have learned about coaching and team leading is the difficulty of handling questions and suggestions that is not in the direction of the TC. Especially when you introduce this way of working in an organization where spontaneous improvements have been done for a long time and where the one that screams the loudest gets wins. It is hard to tell them that "that is a good suggestion but not in the direction we are striving".

Those are some really interesting thoughts I will absolutely reflect on them!

But isn't and emotion something measurable, if not always by visualization. Do you feel tired today...yes. Let's try to go to bed earlier etc.

It might be that it will be harder to get the obstacles out?

When I think about it, isn't Kata something a psychologist uses when trying to cure a patient? Trying to figure out the obstacles in ones' life in order to remove them and feel better (I have no experience in psychologists though).

I am working on being able to attend at least the later part (w-shop + Kata) of the conference in February.

OSCAR'S REPLY

Further good thoughts ...

Do we have a chicken and egg situation?

I imagine the "parking of spontaneous suggestions" would be easier if the person who made the suggestion had a Target Condition they really believed in and were engaged in (as opposed to "decreasing lead time") In fact, if there was such a Target Condition in place, my money would be on the fact that there would be less such "spontaneous suggestions", if any at all. Why? Because the persons mind would be driven by the Target Condition *they believed in* thus wouldn't drift to "other ideas".

Yes, emotion probably is measurable. But perhaps not quantitatively? I'm not sure what I really mean by that ... thinking out aloud.

Probably your right re physiologists. Why? Because really the Kata pattern is in many professions.

MARCUS'S RESPONSE

Yes I do believe you are right about the chicken and egg situation.

So if the TC is clear and purposeful for the persons in the process the coaching gets a lot easier because the focus is on the TC instead of all other improvements. Yes the setting of TC must be the critical part in the Kata.

I brought our discussion up with my boss and he thought it was some interesting thoughts, it just has to land in his mind as well. The discussion also changed my position to a more process orientated role, something I have been missing (but not realized what is was until now).

I think it would be quantified if you measured the brainwaves of a person. Does it need to be quantified? Isn't it better to have a feeling of improvement, then quantify the goal?

For example the home situation. If you feel more welcome at home you have a better temper and then there might be 50% (just a figure) less arguments (if that is the goal)?

Yes I start to see that. I think that if you have this missing link (at least for me) you can apply it more frequently and more wide spread.

This discussion has given me more insights of TC's than 2 years practicing them. Although the experiences from those 2 years have come in handy while philosophizing.

Thanks for this!

OSCAR'S REPLY

This has been a terrific conversation for me.

I had an epiphany (perhaps) while swimming my laps yesterday in the local pool. But I need more time to think about that. What I want you to do please is after you've attended JRT 10-Hour, come back to me and ask me what that epiphany was.

I think perhaps you are right about that above highlighted in yellow. But, like all this stuff, try it and see what you learn!

Your last sentence is the key to all this thinking. You could not and would not have had this conversation (and nor would I) if you hadn't practiced for 2 years (and if I hadn't either). So the last 2 years is not wrong if it was better than the previous 2, and has given you insights into the next 2 that you will validate or throw out through experimentation!

Thank you so much and I hope you do come to the Kata summit in Feb. Let me know please.

The "black mat" is a 2mx1m mat that the operators stand on when operating the bag sealer and box closer at Tatura Milk's cream cheese bulk packing line in Victoria Australia. It was only when the black mat was integrated into a Target Condition that Alan, one of the operators, became engaged. It (the Target Condition) was then meaningful to Alan.

