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The Need for Training Within Industry

Jamie Flinchbaugh | Tue, 2015-06-02 02:00

Standard work is one of the most challenging aspects of a lean transformation. It is both foundational and frustrating. It is hard to observe work without a common method for work. It is hard to experiment without a standard. It is, in some ways, the backbone of continuous improvement.

Standard work manifests itself through many different tools and methods. One method that is underutilized is TWI, or Training Within Industry. I recently attended the TWI Summit, and was impressed by how committed many organizations have been to the effective utilization of TWI. There were many examples of success, from LEGO to hospitals. I won't make this column about the basics of TWI, as you can easily research that on the internet, buy a book or take a course from one of the many organizations that teach it. I want to instead focus on some of the challenges that remain with making TWI as effective as we all need it to be.

TWI is primarily rolled out through three mechanisms:
• **Job Instruction**, or JI, is a method to provide training on how to perform a job.
• **Job Methods**, or JM, is a simplified way to break down a job and improve it through eliminating, combining, rearranging or simplifying the elements of the job.
• **Job Relations**, or JR, helps supervisors systematically work with people and develop teamwork.

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The first big challenge organizations face in the systematic adoption of TWI is finding the resources to engage in the development and deployment of such training mechanisms. Most organizations have decimated their training functions, mostly because they didn't have a productive way to make them useful. Maybe that has changed with the reintroduction of TWI, but the resources aren't there to make the case.

An even larger problem to overcome is the reliance on front-line supervision. While I've met droves of capable front-line supervisors, on the whole this is one of the most underinvested-in and underappreciated workforce groups we have. Front-line supervisors are essential to making Training

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While this has been a trend underway for a couple decades, there are new challenges faced in increasing levels: languages and geography.

Whether in one location or a global organization, having to train in multiple languages is a legitimate challenge. Most translation services either do not understand the content required for contextual or technical training, or you spend a small fortune gaining that context. And even if you have the materials, it's not terribly unusual to have a supervisor who speaks one language and a front-line employee who speaks another language, creating another barrier for engagement.

Geography makes that even more difficult. Many resources are spread across the globe, and not always in nicely replicated organizational structures. I know many managers with direct reports, even at the front-line level, spread across three continents. I've even seen that due to legal travel restrictions, a manager is unable to visit the country of a direct report, requiring that they meet in a neutral country. These problems used to only exist at top management levels but they exist more and more at every level of the organization.

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Some TWI gurus would probably suggest that technology doesn't belong in TWI. After all, it was successful in the past without any technology. But, we are facing new and difficult challenges, and have access to technology that didn't exist before. Similar to lean, I believe that there are many opportunities to develop and utilize technology to help solve these challenges.

Another way to improve the value of TWI is begin its development earlier in the process, ideally during product and process development. When you develop job instructions earlier, you start thinking earlier about whether a process will work, and is robust to the challenges of the workforce. You may learn a few things which will affect your product and process development, and you can act on them before it is too late.

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