Standardization

Standard Work

Standard work is an important topic that applies to any industry or process. Standard work is also one of the principles within the lean management body of knowledge that can cause the most confusion. In this course we'll cover standard work in general, as well as specific applications.

So let’s begin with a discussion on standardization. Standardization means setting a standard as well as bringing a condition into conformance with that standard.

Now there are three steps to the standardization cycle.

1. First we must determine or identify a standard.
2. Next, once we know what the standard is we must ensure everyone in the organization understands what the standard is while also committing to following the standard.
3. Third, we must check to see that the standard is reasonable, fair and can be followed while also finding ways to improve the standard.

An often misunderstood idea is that standards are absolute and unchanging. This isn’t the case at all. In fact, standards must be continuously updated and improved.

In fact, most of us live with and benefit from standardization in our daily lives. A good example of standardization is the red stop sign. Its shape and color are familiar to people all over the world making it possible for anyone to know what to do when they see the sign.

Standards of this type are set by traffic laws to serve the higher purpose of keeping people safe. These types of standards are adjusted or improved when people realize that the location or position of the sign needs to be moved in order to become more visible.

Additionally, in some cases the stop sign can be eliminated and replaced with a roundabout as is very common throughout the world such as the UK and throughout Europe.
Benefits of Standardization

Next, there are many benefits to standardization no matter if you work in an office, hospital, or factory. For example, practicing standardization improves safety, maintains stable quality while also enabling us to visualize what’s normal vs. abnormal.

Additionally, practicing standardization reduces cost, increases productivity, stabilizes delivery times, eliminates waste, simplifies processes, improves morale with fair and objective standards, and creates the basis for continuous improvement.

Additionally, standardization develops people through problem solving. In fact, Taiichi Ohno, the chief architect of the Toyota Production System, once said that without standards there can be no kaizen. In other words, if you’re always doing things differently, without agreeing to a standard, it’ll be nearly impossible for anyone to be able to improve a process in a sustainable manner.

Standards are Meant to Be Improved

Along these lines, another important aspect of standardization is that standards are meant to be improved.

In other words, standards are not handcuffs like some mistake them to be. Instead, standards are the starting point for continuous improvement.

Now, to wrap this first lesson up I’d like to leave you with some thoughts and questions to ponder.

• First, I’d like you to think of examples of everyday standardization.
• Next, I’d like you to brainstorm examples of how a lack of standards has potentially jeopardized safety, quality, delivery, cost or the morale of associates at your company.
• And finally, I’d like you to ponder how the work you personally do could benefit from standardization? Alright, this wraps up this first module.