

The White Board in Identifying Opportunities for Change (2017 June)

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Conclusion: The simple white board functions for all levels of work engagement to prompt improvement and fosters visual management.

The primary role of team members working in a culture of continuous improvement is to actually see their system of work for what it is and what it could be. Employee engagement in a Lean culture expects workers to reveal in real-time, to each other, and to their managers what is not working as expected. That is, to identify in-process mistakes, defects and waste, blamelessly. This is the intended use of a simple white board.

A white board can be used in the workplace in a number of ways- as a team focus for posted communications, a metrics display board, a value stream mapping board, a daily management board. But without a specified purpose and structure the white board may devolve to a whining board. The intent here is to use a white board as a structured work communication tool for the team members and managers to proactively address issues so that "no problem" doesn't become a "problem."

This is the essence of Lean- a continual improvement loop with a 'shop floor' focus by employees who know the nature of their work best. Why write it down publicly? Simply, to collect factual information about less than optimal work closest in time to its detection so that root cause considerations can be captured.

To this end, we place white boards in the workplace at each laboratory workstation so that defects can be made visible, blamelessly, by the workers themselves. For those of you in patient care areas, consider placing your white boards in break rooms, secretarial areas or manager offices away from patient scrutiny. Perfecting the work is a work in continual progress but that doesn't mean that your "customer" needs to see your improvement efforts. Aligned along the path of workflow, WB is a simple tool to help the individual worker and the team communicate within and between work stations,

connect work stations horizontally across the path of work flow (or value stream). The white board makes the workplace visual for both those doing the work and those managing the reliability, consistency and stability of the work.

Should you walk into a workplace and see white boards describing defects encountered, you will understand this tool to be a visual reminder that in a true Lean culture employees are empowered to work differently, invested in and accountable for the quality of the work they receive or produce. White boards are only fully functional as visual workplace tools when leaders have created the enlightened culture that encourages blameless identification of mistakes and provides an organizational structure and reporting relationships that incentivizes empowered workers to contribute to daily defect resolution.

Standardized White Board

Structure provides consistency in data capture. Important information elements are captured on white boards to clarify the defects that arise in the workstation and facilitate the team's subsequent resolution. The following structured list of data elements were observed on a white board to capture issues in a manufacturing plant that we visited but are just as pertinent to our work in healthcare.

- Date identified
- Problem encountered (what happened, give it a brief name or description)
- Who identified it
- Root cause, if known (How and why did it happen to your best guess)
- Action- short term (rapid countermeasure employed to fix the problem immediately)
- Action- long term (data driven A3 based PDCA improvements to change the process in order to eliminate the problem)
- Responder/Comments (may include communications for and between shifts)
- Estimate % resolution complete (visual using a circle with quadrants filled in)

So, should you as the manager on a "gemba walk" through the workplace see a blank white board, you now have a visual message that you have either encountered a perfect workday (doubtful) or you have a

workforce disengaged from their responsibility to contribute to continuous improvement. As a manager, you now have work to do in re-engaging the team.

Structured White Board

Date	Problem	Who Identified	Root Cause	Short Term Fix	Long Term Fix	Comments	% Resolved
							⊕
							⊕
							⊕
							⊕
							⊕
							⊕

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