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Most World Class Manufacturing principles have been developed in Japan and to date we continue to try and utilize them in Zimbabwe. It thus is sad to note that most of the implementers lift them as they are and put them to local use with little or no adjustment to fit the local environment. It’s like they “copy and paste”. Failure is likely to happen since the environment in which these principles were developed is different from the in which it is being applied. I will explain the 5S principle as it is and show how it impacts on Productivity. Variations to this principle may be necessary on a company by company basis.

5S terminology relates to a principle that originated in the Japanese Manufacturing setup and it is about good housekeeping in the workplace. Having realized “waste” emanating from manufacturing activities due to untidiness and dirty in the workplace, 5S housekeeping was coined. It is thought to have been utilized by the Toyota Company in Japan way back in the 1970’s and it found much usage in support of Lean Manufacturing methodologies. Looking at the time gap between inception and effective utilization in the Zimbabwean industry raises many questions than answers.

The 5S principle is one of the simplest lean tools which strive to create a culture of cleanliness at the workplace. Discipline to create and maintain an orderly workplace is critical. The principle provides for a systematic way of implementation using words and all the words contained therein begin with the letter S, hence 5S. The words are however in Japanese and some innovative authors have coined the English equivalents of the 5 Japanese words all of them starting with the letter S also. The five are as outlined below.

- **Seiri (Sort)**: Discard unnecessary items (Clear the workplace)
- **Seiso (Shine)**: Clean the workplace (Cleanliness)
- **Seiton (Straighten)**: A place for everything and everything in its place (Organization)
- **Seiketsu (Standardize)**: Set standards (Standardization)
- **Shitsuke (Sustain)**: Maintain standards (discipline)

Explaining these 5S requires a small shift to one’s daily life and comparison of the principle with what happens in their lives. It can be at home or at work but it has found much application in the manufacturing workplace. It also needs a deliberate link to show how 5S Housekeeping impacts on Productivity. Productivity explained is basically the ratio of output to input. It has several measures that relate to how well we utilize our resources. As such I will show shortly how good 5S Housekeeping can help improve productivity.

Seiri means Sorting and it requires that you discard unnecessary items at the workplace. There may be a reason why you keep unnecessary items but they are not necessary, so discard them. If they remain in the workplace, they will consume space and may reduce the rate of working. They may also create a pile that one may need to spend time going through in search for useful materials. All this is time consuming and may not be
necessary. This reduces productivity since the time that you will be searching through a pile of useless materials, is time lost without adding value to the product.

Seiso requires cleanliness in the workplace. There is need to keep things clean and tidy. In order to achieve this, it must be given to someone as a responsibility. In this lean principle, cleanliness is everyone’s responsibility and this may create sustainability. A clean environment has a positive psychological effect on human beings. People will be happy to work in a clean environment and their motivation may be raised. If this happens, productivity will increase as a result. This is not withstanding that fact that some products may require clean environments in order to uphold product quality. If contamination happens due to uncleanliness in the workplace, any such products will be rejected or reworked and the effect on productivity is obvious.

Seiton means that you should straighten up the workplace and “create a place for everything and everything should be in its place”. Simple as this may sound, it has the potential to improve productivity if practiced. If you have a place for your tools, you will not spend much time looking for the tools. You will go straight to where the tools are and take them. This will happen in the shortest possible time. This is in sharp contrast with someone who does not have such a setup. They will spend more time looking for the tools and by the time they come to be productive, valuable time has elapsed. When you straighten the workplace, things will stay in their rightful places and they can be easily located. Again they prevent causing obstructions during, movement within the workplace.

Seiketsu is to standardize. When everything has reached the desired state, create a standard that others will strive to attain and even surpass. This means that all the time people will know what they aspire to achieve and that will be to maintain cleanliness and order. This requires that the first three S’s be implemented and given a known standard. This standard will then be communicated to all employees in a visual way, only then will all employees be in a position to know what standard to achieve and surpass. Your customers walking into a clean workplace all the time will want to come back all the time. If there is no standard, there may be fluctuations between clean and dirty workplace.

Shitsuke calls for sustainability. This is the discipline to ensure that all the other 4S’s are maintained and even improved. There is need to create a commitment among employees to uphold the set standards. Pride of workmanship and workplace ownership will improve if high standards of workplace cleanliness are maintained. This disciple also ensures that the implementation of the 5S principles has been accepted by all levels of the organisation. The impact on productivity will be seen in the long term though some short term results may appear.

Described above is the original 5S concept that has been in use but other scholars have gone on to develop this principle by adding the 6th and even the 7th S. It however remains important to note that you can impact positively on your productivity measures by implementing a 5S Housekeeping program in your organization. It also is the basics for
other improvement initiatives. In order for the initiative to be a successful one, let these principles also apply home and away. This means that 5S Housekeeping should be a way of life. Encourage people around you including your children to practice 5S Housekeeping. A simple application is that school shoes should be at a particular place and when it’s time to prepare for school, no one should be seen looking for shoes all over the house. You know when they should be, that is exactly where they are, go and take the shoes. 5S Housekeeping has been used to improve productivity in other organizations, so you can also benefit from its systematic implementation.

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