

Creating Alignment with the Leadership Team Part 11

By Harold Chapman

Last month was the first half of a series on Learning Organization. We discussed how important it is to include the entire team in problem solving while transitioning the managers into coaches and the workers into learners. This month we will discuss the importance of using Scientific Thinking within the Learning Organization.

SCIENTIFIC THINKING

The Scientific Method has been around for centuries. However, many organizations still fail to utilize this simple process to improve their business. The scientific method was established in the 1200's by Roger Bacon and was later called the PDCA cycle when Deming and his team popularized it within the manufacturing circles in the 1950's. At Drive, Inc. we follow the PTRS cycle which is a derivation of the PDCA cycle. The PTRS process is used to test hypotheses.

PLAN: Create a plan to test the hypothesis. The plan should be proportional to cost and risk. If there is a large cost and high risk to safety and/or quality, then the plan should be significant. If the cost and risk of the "try" is low, then one should simply do it and see what is learned. We have noticed many western companies spend too much time planning and not enough time trying.

George Patton: "A good plan violently executed today is far better than a perfect plan executed next week."

TRY: The key in this step is to DO something. We like to call this step "Try-storming." It involves running small tests/experiments to see if our hypothesis was correct. After each test, we **CHECK** the result. If the result didn't meet our expectations, we **ADJUST** and try again. We continue this cycle until we achieve what we set out to achieve in the plan (target condition). Sometimes leaders are stubborn when it comes to adjusting, so we must be relentless to ensure adjustments are made when needed. Although scrapping a project may seem extreme, sometimes it may be necessary.

Mark Twain: "Continuous Improvement is better than delayed perfection."

REFLECT: In this step, we reflect on what went well, what we learned, and what didn't go so well, or what we should do differently the next time. Of all the steps, reflection seems to be the



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one most overlooked although it is one of the most important steps in the learning process. If executed properly, the learning is captured, and the process is improved during the next cycle. The key to effective reflection is to take the time necessary to proficiently complete the project. However, do act quickly to obtain RESULTS.

STANDARIZE: Once we have learned something new about our process, we must standardize it to ensure the learning is retained within the organization. This is also the step in which we would read-across any learning to like processes in the organization.

The key to PDCA or PTRS is to ensure timeliness in following the method. Organizations must change their paradigms about how long it should take to complete a project. While we do encourage the use of the PTRS cycle, we highly discourage the use of the PTAR cycle. The PTAR cycle is Plan-Try-Abandon-Revert. We see, in some cases, the team doesn't get the result they want initially, and they abandon the effort instead of adjusting the plan and trying again. This mindset will ensure no continuous improvement success.

THE MOST COVETED BUSINESS SYSTEM IN THE WORLD

If one studies the origins of the most coveted business system in the world, The Toyota Business System, they will find that the genius behind that system can be traced back to an engineer by the name of Taichi Ohno. In the beginning, Ohno was doing three things in his area:

- Finding a Problem
- Fixing that Problem
- Ensuring It Never Happened Again

From that approach, many tools were developed that now have universal applications.

A3 Problem Solving: A result of standardizing how teams solve problems to ensure they are getting to root cause.

Single Minute Exchange of Die: A result of standardizing the process of reducing changeovers on machines.

Workplace Organization (5S): A result of standardizing the process to improve the work area to support flow of product by having materials and tools at the point of use.



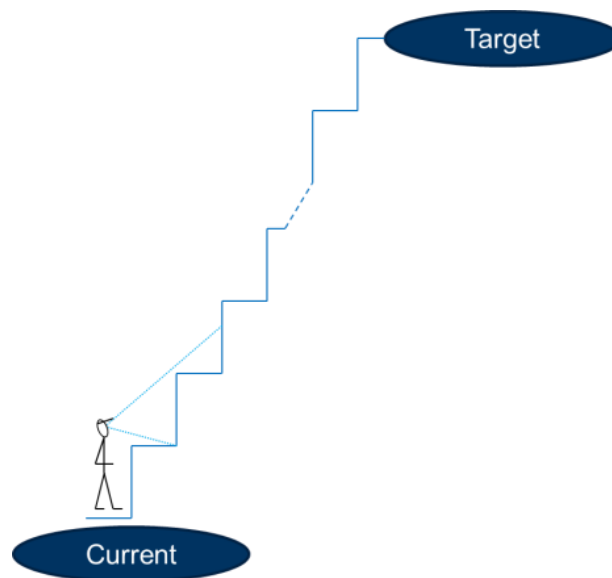
Autonomous Maintenance: A result of standardizing the process of involving operators in the maintenance of their equipment.

Every Lean Manufacturing / Operational Excellence / Continuous Improvement Methodology has the purpose of exposing problems so that the problems can be solved. This leads to continuous improvement in the business. To do this effectively, we must ensure the following are occurring:

- Problem Exposure
- Root Cause Identification
- Problem Solving
- Continuous Improvement

If any one of these steps is skipped, the business will not be propelled toward the ideal state (True North). Every day, we must ensure we have every person on every process following this Find-Fix-Prevent cycle. To encourage the teams to keep striving toward the ideal state, we like to continually reinforce the following:

- Every day little up
- Some days big up
- Until you take the first step, it will not be possible to see the next step.
- “Please try.”
- “Do your best.”



One may find it hard to believe, but we have actually met with business people who stated their businesses were running fine, and they didn't have any problems. In 100% of the cases in which we were allowed to visit the business, we found many excesses that were covering up the problems. Those excesses were in the form of excess inventory, capacity, labor, and floor space. Not only were business leaders paying for the excesses, they were also paying for the problems the excesses were hiding. We have a saying, "No Problem is a Problem." Seeing no problems usually means no one has challenged the business enough to expose the problem. This breeds complacency and lazy processes which will result in workers who are unable to perform at peak when the demand increases.

NEXT STEPS

Does your team embrace the Plan-Try-Reflect-Standardize cycle? Does your team have a habit of applying the Plan-Try-Abandon-Revert cycle? How do you ensure your organizational knowledge doesn't leave when people leave? If you don't know the answers to these questions, Drive, Inc. can help. We have experienced professionals who can coach your team through the process of gaining alignment around this principle and the other principles covered in this series. For a no-obligation introduction meeting, please contact Paul Eakle at paul.eakle@driveinc.com or 865-323-3491. Stay tuned for next month's newsletter when we will discuss the final principle in this series to ensure your leadership team is aligned.

