

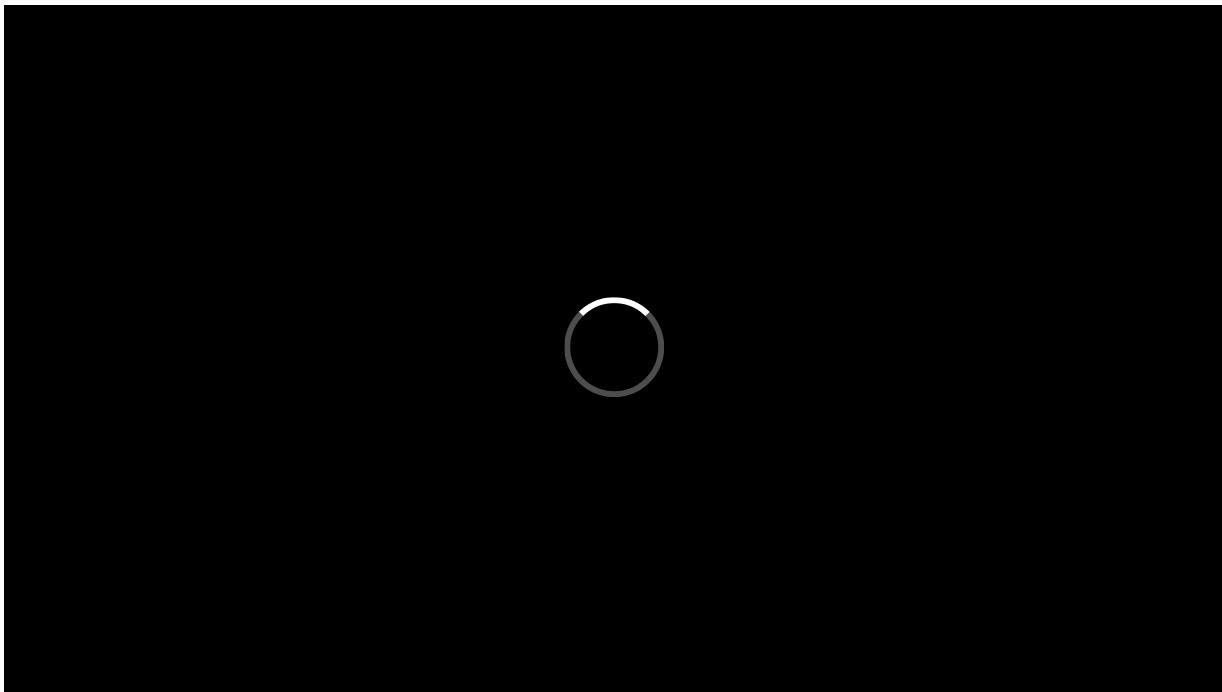
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How 5S Can Improve Workplace Safety, Quality, and Processes

Updated: May 9, 2023 by [Lori Kinney](#).





5S is often thought of as the foundation for continuous improvement. While traditionally considered only applicable to a manufacturing environment, it's highly relevant for non-manufacturing operations as well. In this article, we will define 5S, discuss its benefits, and consider its importance to an organization.

Overview: What is 5S?

There is some debate as to the original developer, with some saying it was Hiroyuki Hirano who took the known correlation of good housekeeping with optimized production and developed a structure and sequence. Others say it was Takashi Osada, and some say it was Sakichi Toyoda and son Kiichiro as well as Toyota engineer Taiichi Ohno, who developed the Toyota Production System and the 5S methodology as we know it today.

In any case, it was developed in Japan. The original Japanese terms for 5S are:

1. Seiri
2. Seiton
3. Seiso
4. Seiketsu
5. Shitsuke

These were subsequently translated into English:

1. Sort
2. Set in Order (Straighten)
3. Shine
4. Standardize

5. Sustain

A sixth S was later added, Safety, thus creating the 6S structure.

Here is a description of the terms:

- **Sort:** The goal of Sort is to separate the necessary and unnecessary items in the workplace. The items not currently needed and not being used should be removed from the work area. Some may be discarded totally or some put nearby for easy retrieval, and some might be Red Tagged and put in a disposition area for further evaluation.
- **Set in Order:** Set in order means to arrange the items that are needed in the area and identify them so that *anyone* can find them or put them away. The key phrase is “a place for everything and everything in its place.” Create borders or boundaries to keep items from creeping out of place with tape or painted lines. Create a home address for items so people will know where they go, and you can tell if something is missing at a glance. Labeling, signage, and item descriptions are important.
- **Shine:** Shine emphasizes the ongoing removal of dirt, grime, and dust from the work area daily. This is an ongoing program of keeping the work area swept and clean of debris. It is often said that cleaning is inspection; inspection is detection; detection is correction.
- **Standardize:** Standardize means to develop and implement a procedure for doing the 5S, particularly the first three — Sort, Set in order, and Shine.
- **Sustain:** Sustain means developing a mindset whereby the 5S program has a discipline that ensures its continued success and is ingrained in everyday work life and procedures.

3 benefits of 5S

It would seem intuitive that a clean and organized workplace would be beneficial for any organization. Here are three benefits that should encourage any organization to implement a 5S program.

1. Safety improvements

An organized workplace and established procedures will reduce accidents and damage.

2. Quality improvements

By having an organized workplace, there will be fewer lost items, fewer damaged items, and less of an opportunity for delays of customer deliveries.

3. Process improvements

If you are spending time looking for something that is not in its place, you are wasting time. If something is put in an inconvenient location, or is difficult to retrieve, that slows down the process. If you inadvertently misplace something and have to purchase another one, only to find that you already have two that were hiding, you are losing money.

Why is 5S important to understand?

It is important to not only understand what 5S is but also how to put it into place in your organization.

Having a disorganized workplace will cost you time, money, employee satisfaction

It is also likely to create customer dissatisfaction. Implementing 5S is the easiest and most cost-efficient way of overcoming these barriers.

5S is a foundation for continuous improvement

If you are disorganized, you don't really know what your baseline condition is. Without that knowledge, it makes no sense to try improving your processes. Why buy new clothes if you don't know what you already have because your closet is in disarray? You may already have two shirts of the same color and design.

You may be in violation of OSHA or other health and safety rules

You may incur serious and costly fines for violation of national, state, or local ordinances. If you have blocked fire exits because you have no place to put a pallet, you may be fined for creating a fire hazard — or worse.

An industry example of 5S

A small manufacturer finally decided to implement a 5S program after a number of negative occurrences. Customer parts were misplaced, causing significant delivery delays. Machines were broken down for months because of missing parts. Employees suffered eye injuries because they weren't using eye protection when cutting steel parts.

Multiple items were purchased because they couldn't find the ones already on the shelves. Cash was tied up in inventory without knowing what exactly they had and whether there would be any future opportunity to use the material. Bins were not labeled or mislabeled, so employees wasted time looking for parts. There were trip hazards because of electrical wires on the ground. Forklifts were parked in random locations at the end of the day, blocking access to materials and exit doors.

The owner finally decided to seriously implement a 5S program. After training his people on 5S, they did an initial 5S audit of the plant. It became obvious to everyone that there were lots of opportunities for improvement. The owner is now engaging everyone to help implement 5S in their own areas, which has been met with great enthusiasm.

3 best practices when thinking about 5S

There is no real technological challenge or capital expense to implementing a good 5S program. Here are a few tips and best practices.

1. Make sure everyone understands the 5S and how it benefits them

Some basic training as to the definition of 5S is the first step. Establish the benefits and WIFM (what's in it for me) so employees can appreciate the potential impact on their workplace.

2. Engage everyone in the deployment effort for 5S

Get everyone involved in coming up with ideas on how to 5S their personal area. Get their ideas and make them accountable for making the changes.

3. Be sure there is a plan for sustaining the changes

Sustaining the changes is important since it is human nature to revert back to old behaviors if there isn't a defined plan to continue the changes. Having your employees conduct ongoing 5S audits is a good way to keep everyone accountable and engaged.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about 5S

What are the elements of 5S?

Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, and Sustain.

Is 5S applicable to non-manufacturing operations?

Yes. In any organization, there are many opportunities to organize the workplace, whether it be the finance department, maintenance, or manufacturing.

What is the difference between 5S and 6S?

"Safety" was added to the original 5S because of the importance of safety as part of the overall organization of the workplace. The other 5S also have an impact on the ability of an organization to provide a safe environment for its employees.

A summary of 5S

5S is the structured activity of creating a safe and organized work environment. It is the foundation of any continuous improvement deployment.

Getting buy-in and engagement from your employees is critical to establishing the mindset and accountability for implementing and sustaining any 5S deployment. Don't attempt to do everything at one time. Logically lay out a planned and sequenced deployment across the organization. And don't forget the non-manufacturing functions since there are also significant opportunities for deploying 5S in various other functional areas.

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