

Business Improvement Projects

IN ACTION

Application of the “Lean Philosophy” in a medium-sized engineering company

Case Study

Berto's

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April 15th, 2022

Berto's S.p.A. is an Italian medium-sized company specializing in the production of professional cooking equipment, with over 100 employees. It introduced the “Lean Philosophy” both in production and administrative activities about eight years ago.

The purpose was to eliminate the critical issues of an organization based on mass production such as a warehouse full of stationary or unusable supplies, production queues, delivery delays, etc.

In this case study, we will briefly describe what the company has done, with the help of a consultant, for the implementation of 5S in its organization.

Summary

The desire for change, the propensity to innovation, and the search for greater efficiency have been the drivers that have pushed the ownership and the managers of the company to propose to their employees a new way of conceiving the business organization. An external advisor has guided Berto in the first steps of the implementation of the Lean Methodology.

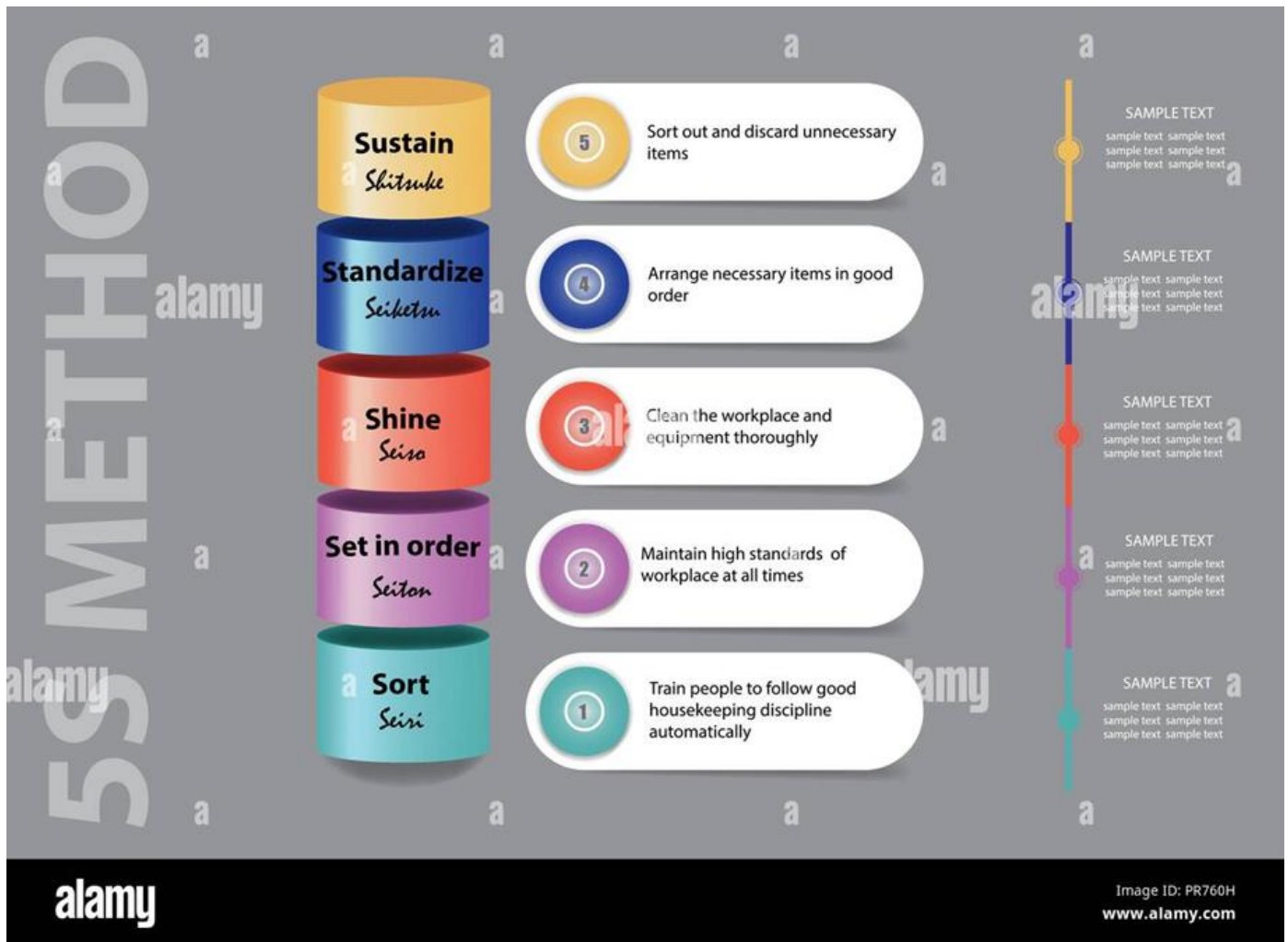
Why

The starting point to introduce Lean Methodology is an intensive action of 5S to organize the workstations in a more tidy and clean way, to make the working performance easier inside each production unit (or "cell"). The working environment must be optimized to avoid long "treasure hunts", that is, searches for work tools or pieces to be assembled, that may cause time and concentration losses and, as a consequence, delays in the delivery of the product to the customer. In the second picture, you can find the workbenches' most orderly and rational arrangement of equipment.



“The working environment must be optimized to avoid long "treasure hunts".

The 5S in a nutshell:



After seeing a visual and operational improvement in the workplace, the management decided on a constant training policy at all levels (workers, employees, middle management, providers, etc.) about the new philosophy that was being introduced.

What

The logistic reorganization has served to introduce the so-called "cell design". It is the split of the department into smaller work units (cells) producing standardized semi-finished products and carrying out fairly repetitive operations, to increase productivity and reduce lead time. The goal is to slide the pieces one at a time inside the cells in order to focus their attention on a single piece at a given time of the process, speeding up the execution.

Finally, a "visible planning" (see the picture) was placed in each office; it is a billboard divided into weekly columns that add up the period of about two months. The so-called visual programming is nothing more than a set of objective post-its in which each member of the staff describes the activities that he/she will have to carry out in that specific week. This tool is essential when, on a predetermined day of each week, a meeting is held within each office directed by the workers themselves. On this occasion, each employee takes the floor and explains to colleagues the current situation of their work. When an activity is completed, the post-it is cancelled.



Final considerations

Berto's case study shows how much, for the implementation of the Lean Methodology, active and participatory involvement of workers is necessary. The company has had the foresight to create an optimal working climate and conditions such that each employee, new or historic, feels an active part of a defined project and directs their physical and mental energies to the Berto's cause. Forming

a compact team in which all the departments are in constant dialogue with each other, identifying shared values creating a strong sense of belonging etc. are some of the most complicated aspects of a company, but at the same time, these are the solid foundations on which to build a long-term development path.

It also demonstrates how, unlike the Anglo-Saxon organizational theories, which focus on rigid procedures that have had a "transfer" in countless more or less complex computer systems of dubious effectiveness and applicability, Asian business practices continue to emphasize people more than management software. It is indicative, from this point of view, of the use of "visible planning", written and updated by hand: you could use one of the many software available on the market, but the use of post-it instead of clicks on the keyboard, physical and not virtual sharing of the billboard, etc. make it a far more effective and less expensive tool!

“Asian business practices emphasize people more than management software”

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