

5 Signs It's Time For Standardized Work

Key Implementation Steps & Tips For Success



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EBOOK

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An Introduction to Standardized Work

“

Without standard work,
there is no kaizen.”

–Taiichi Ohno, Founder of the Toyota Production System

Standardized Work is a methodology that seeks to build consistency into all work processes.

When an organization adopts a Standardized Work (SW) approach to employee training, it establishes **work standards** that create stability, improve safety, cut down on waste, increase uptime and efficiency and promote job satisfaction among workers and supervisors. Most importantly, SW ensures the highest quality end product.

SW can be applied to nearly any aspect of work — from operating procedures, to safety measures, to worker-supervisor communications and even customer service interactions. It is also iterative, meaning that steps in a **standard work** process can be tested and changed as needed to improve efficiency.

Once SW is implemented, it becomes the foundation for all continuous improvement efforts. Since SW defines the “one best way” to accomplish any given process, the goal of the work is clearly defined, so that all participants in the process can agree on the same fundamental standard and desired result.

In other words, it shouldn't be the individual worker whose performance determines the result of the work — if all workers follow one process, everyone should get the same result every time.

The [Standardized Work program](#) from the TWI Institute was developed under the leadership of Isao Kato, who spent 35 years with the Toyota Motor Corporation developing and iterating on SW and kaizen (continuous improvement) courses for employees.



Key Benefits of Standardized Work

- ✓ Establishes a baseline and mindset for improvement
- ✓ Provides direction and measurement materials for management and supervisors
- ✓ Establishes guidance and standards for worker performance and supervision — person to person, team to team, facility to facility
- ✓ Teaches observation skills and their impact on improvement solutions
- ✓ Synchronizes work procedures and improvement activities
- ✓ Clarifies criteria for building quality and safety into each process
- ✓ Explains the optimal way to proceed under current working conditions
- ✓ Provides tools for supervisors to apply standards and manage work comprehensively
- ✓ Builds tenets for judging normality or abnormality in the way of work
- ✓ Establishes foundation for consistent training of employees

SW is common in the manufacturing and healthcare fields, though its holistic, adaptable methodology can be applied to almost any industry. All sectors can benefit from a framework for organizing, training and thinking about work, within which all team members have a common understanding of their contribution to organizational success.

Key Terms

Work Standards

Concrete statements about various work conditions, work methods, work management methods and precautions.

Generally organized into three main categories: Process Conditions, Control Conditions and Operation/Working Conditions.

Standard Work

Refers to a specific task or job for which the content, sequence, timing and outcome have been identified.

Standard Work is the description of a worker's interactions with equipment and materials.

Standardized Work

A process by which standards are identified, then followed.

The end result of Standard Work and Work Standards being identified, taught, followed and enforced.

Now, armed with this understanding of Standardized Work and its objectives, read on to determine whether any of the following statements resonate with your organization.

PROBLEM ONE

“We can’t keep up with our current customer demand.”

If someone has recently said this at your organization, you may have inefficiencies in your processes. The problem is not necessarily surplus demand or a lack of available resources. Somewhere along the production path there is probably a task that’s taking much longer than it needs to, or a job that’s utilizing a few too many employees.

In order to trim the waste and identify ways to standardize your processes, you first need to understand and assess your **takt time** and **cycle time**.

Takt Time

- ✓ The amount of time in which an item or service needs to be completed to meet customer demand
- ✓ Refers only to the time during which a team is actively working on creating value for the customer
- ✓ Used to plan production and communicate lead time to the customer

Calculated using a simple equation:

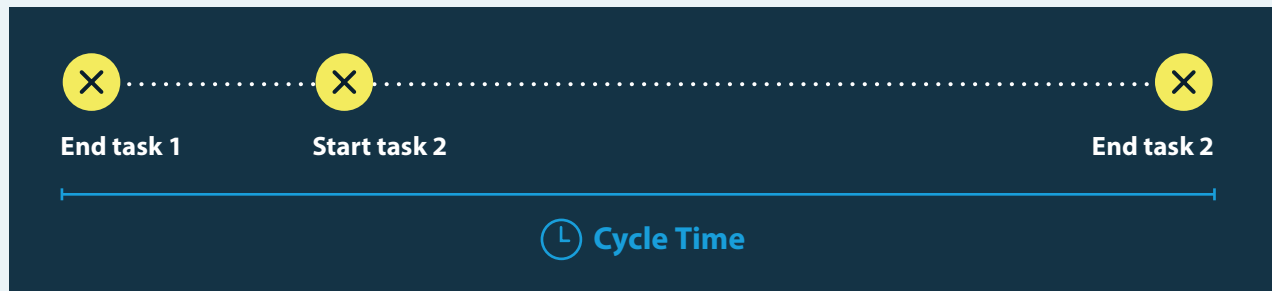
$$\frac{\text{Total Available Production Time}}{\text{Average Customer Demand}} = \text{Takt Time}$$

[Learn more about Takt Time](#)

Cycle Time

- ✓ The amount of time required to produce one part, finish one product or complete one standard process
- ✓ A calculable measurement that conveys the fastest repeatable time in which an operator performs all steps of a standardized work process before they start over again
- ✓ Refers to both the average actual time it takes to complete a process and the repeatable target time one hopes to achieve

You can calculate cycle time by measuring the **amount of time between the completion of one part or process and the completion of the following same part or process.**



[Learn more about Cycle Time](#)

To maintain the desired pace of production:

- ✓ The amount of time between one product or part being completed and the next must be less than the takt time
- ✓ The cycle time needs to be less than or equal to takt time to ensure the order complies with the projected lead time

$$\text{Cycle Time} \leq \text{Takt Time} > \text{Transition between cycles} \\ = \text{Projected Lead Time}$$

For example, if a manufacturer receives a new product order every 3 hours, the team needs to finish making the product in 3 hours (the takt time) or less to meet demand.

Once an organization knows its takt time and cycle time for any given product, it can:

- ✓ Provide customers accurate lead times
- ✓ Optimize employee shift schedules
- ✓ Place workers accordingly
- ✓ Keep only as much raw material or inventory on hand as needed at one time

It's important to remember that takt time does not need to be set in stone. Just as with any process, it should be regularly evaluated based on customer demand and updated as needed. In fact, Toyota regularly reviews and makes adjustments to their takt time, approximately every 10 days.

How can Standardized Work help?

Standardized Work training establishes the “one best way” to accomplish each task, eradicating waste in favor of optimal efficiency.

Efforts to reduce cycle time and takt time can naturally lead to process standardization.

SW tools like a [Time Observation Sheet](#) and a [Standard Work Chart](#) help frontline managers analyze current conditions and identify variability, which SW then helps to level out.

SW also helps to reveal specific issues that may be resolved with a Training Within Industry (TWI) training methodology. For example, [Job Methods \(JM\)](#) can help with streamlining and rebuilding lean processes, while [Job Instruction \(JI\)](#) can ensure every team member understands exactly what their contribution to the process should be. If, for whatever reason, workers are not motivated to follow standards or improve them, [Job Relations \(JR\)](#) can help teams identify workplace frustrations and improve worker-supervisor communication.

PROBLEM TWO

“Our current output quality is inconsistent.”

Your process hasn't changed. Your production team hasn't deviated from the standard operating procedure. There hasn't been a major personnel change. So why has your product quality been so unreliable?

Poor product quality hurts more than just the customer's satisfaction. It can lead to:

- ✓ Losses in customer loyalty
- ✓ Lower industry reputation or lost market value
- ✓ Employees who maintain lower quality standards
- ✓ Higher production costs from replacing customers' purchases, processing returns or duplicating production

How can Standardized Work help?

Standardizing your processes ensures that the work is done in the most effective way possible with little to no deviation between workers or work cycles. SW establishes control standards that automatically generate results within an acceptable range.

Think of these standards like blood pressure or body temperature measurements — our bodies require these numbers to be within a specific range to ensure optimal health. Any variation from the acceptable range is cause for concern, since it can lead to dangerous results.

Likewise, you want your team's work to meet your control standards every time, and for every member to know exactly what “good quality” and “poor quality” look like in order to maintain those standards. Just as we know our bodies should maintain an internal temperature of 98.6°F, workers should know what an acceptable output is.

Ultimately, if customer demand is not met with quality products, it is not worth the work expended. SW ensures that production teams can stay within a “healthy” range to generate the best results and maintain customer loyalty.

PROBLEM THREE

“Everyone has their own way of doing it.”

This is a common phrase to hear as a new hire, often uttered with nonchalance and the implication that “you’ll figure it out.” However, since every team member may show a trainee a different process or technique, and every new team member will “figure it out” in a different way, it perpetuates a pattern of inconsistency and a lax attitude toward work.

This is also a symptom of a “tribal knowledge” culture, in which a small handful of workers hold all the knowledge and do not maintain a written record or standard manual. When these team members leave, their knowledge goes with them.

In this work environment, there is no easy way to troubleshoot issues or trace errors to the root cause, since there is no standard process to trace. If everyone learns how to do something a different way, variation is inevitable.



How can Standardized Work help?

Standardized Work eradicates variation by establishing one way to carry out a process. This makes root cause analysis much more straightforward, as there is only one path to follow back up the chain.

Learn more about root cause analysis

Once a process is standardized, TWI [Job Instruction](#) training can coach entire teams in the “one best way” to accomplish any given task. As they practice a new process, workers will be able to identify areas for potential improvement. When someone proposes a change, [Job Methods](#) training can help managers and supervisors to

listen to workers’ ideas, have them participate in the implementation and experimentation phase, then (if successful) take ownership of “locking it in” as the new standard. This is kaizen at work — a true people-centered approach to continuous improvement.

Workers should not feel as though they have to follow a new protocol just because management says so — [Job Relations](#) training can help managers ask for their teams’ input, listen to their opinions and feelings, set agreed-upon expectations and praise workers for their innovation. This way, workers come to want to follow the standard, instead of feeling obligated to do so.

PROBLEM FOUR

“We don’t have enough resources to fully train new hires.”

It’s a struggle in any industry — training new employees is expensive and time consuming. But without proper training, organizations experience a whole host of issues, from poor product quality to safety hazards to lower employee engagement.

Learn more about employee engagement

Organizations that are already experiencing talent shortages may believe they lack the time or money to manage comprehensive employee onboarding that is discrete from the actual work, let alone test and implement a brand-new training program. But standardizing your training program carries similar benefits to standardizing your work processes.

How can Standardized Work help?

On-the-job training like TWI [Job Instruction](#) mitigates this conundrum by not slowing work down significantly; new hires learn and contribute to production at the same time. If entire teams need retraining or upskilling, it’s possible to make small, incremental changes (kata) over time that are less intimidating or disruptive to the work being done.

Learn more about kata

Having a clear set of expectations and well-defined training processes can:

- ✓ Speed up the process for the trainer
- ✓ Cut down on the time it takes for a new employee to become productive
- ✓ Help streamline processes and test them until they’re airtight (with [Job Methods](#))

With work standards in place, all trainers can train to the standard. This way, new hires learn the same processes no matter who trains them, and management knows exactly how long it will take to onboard them so they can plan accordingly.

PROBLEM FIVE

“Because that’s how we’ve always done it.”

This is a veiled way of saying, essentially, that you can’t or don’t want to devote time and resources to changing, learning or implementing a new process. But what if “the way we’ve always done it” lacks efficiency and turns out lower quality products? What if this mindset has created a culture vacuum in which your teams can’t even tell that there might be a better way?

New hires are often met with this answer when they propose a better way. Their objectivity is a threat to the status quo, because they are suggesting that tradition or baked-in habits are not the “one best way.” Maintaining “the way we’ve always done it” does not create or reinforce a culture of improvement, and may in fact be contributing to:

- ✓ Lower product quality
- ✓ Frustrated new hires
- ✓ Waste in processes
- ✓ Higher production costs

If you’re heard (or spoken) these words in your workplace, ask yourself: does this mindset support a lean operation, one that is free of waste?



Learn more about lean operations

How can Standardized Work help?

A cornerstone of Standardized Work is continuous improvement, which means that, essentially, there is no end point — it eradicates the limit imposed by “the way we’ve always done it.”

Kaizen proposes changes with a holistic approach involving the worker, the workplace and how the work gets done. Part of this process is working with teams to accept new changes, let go of old habits and embrace new ones. Practicing patterns of small, gradual changes through Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) can help ease the transition while leaving room for team members to have a say in the changes.

Learn more about PDCA

Through a combination of [Job Relations](#) and [Job Methods](#) training, workers learn to understand the reasons for change and their own feelings of resistance; they are also energized to consider a better way. It helps to remind hesitant workers of the ultimate goals: to build efficiency, reduce waste, improve product quality and make their jobs easier, safer and more fulfilling.

By letting team members participate in how they do their own work, it naturally increases engagement and shifts the workplace culture to one of agile, iterative improvement.

Learn more about kaizen

What's the **Next Step?**

If you recognize your team or workplace in any of these scenarios, then it's time to seriously consider Standardized Work. If the thought of leading your teams through process updates is intimidating, remember — if they come to want and understand the need for change, they'll be motivated to follow the standard every time.

Engaging your workers authentically makes implementing SW that much easier. If you're not sure where or how to start, we invite you to connect with our team at the [TWI Institute](#). With roots stretching back to the 1940s and thousands of successful use cases, we approach workplace training from a place of mutual respect, helping all team members realize their potential in a way that achieves sustainable results.



TWI Institute's P.E.O.P.L.E. Values

The people-centered values of the TWI Institute follow the principles of lean operations outlined throughout this eBook.

Potential

We believe in what is possible for people. That first with respect, followed by guidance and trust, every individual has the potential to create and contribute in all of their surroundings.

Originality

We believe in authenticity. Thus, we will be faithful to the original tenets and principles of TWI (Training Within Industry). We will deliver coaching and training programs in TWI, Kata and Standardized Work, in the most effective and conscientious ways, to organizations and their people the world over.

Leadership

Leadership shouldn't be about size or position. Leadership should be what drives inspiration. We believe in building a "leadership workforce." Individually and collectively we listen, learn, solve problems and achieve the smaller goals that contribute to realizing larger ones.

Engagement

We believe that engaged people improve workplaces in big ways. When people feel freed to think, when they feel involved and appreciated, their emotional commitment takes performance and improvement to new heights.

Principled

We believe in integrity, honesty, loyalty and mutual respect. These are the qualities that guide our relationships with people, partners, businesses – all those who entrust their success to us.

Empowerment

We believe in people who believe in themselves. We don't just train people. We impart the knowledge that builds skills and self-confidence in a way that helps them achieve success in life and at work.

We look forward to **connecting with you.**

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Postscript

As you explore Standardized Work methods, you'll ask more specific questions to further define the current condition of your work. The questions below come from the article “**What is Our Standard? 6 Starter Questions**,” written for the Baptist Management System, a lean management methodology developed specifically for Baptist Memorial Health Care.

If you can answer a question with a clear “YES” for a given process, you may proceed to the next question. If you are not able to answer with a clear “YES,” then you'll know that a more in-depth examination of the process is needed.

- ☐ **Question 1:** Is there a clear standard for the outcome?
- ☐ **Question 2:** Is there a clear standard for the method that will achieve the standard outcome?
- ☐ **Question 3:** Are the conditions required for success present?
- ☐ **Question 4:** Can you execute to the standard without meaningful variation?
- ☐ **Question 5:** Was a standard method followed and were the results (outcomes) as expected?
- ☐ **Question 6:** Does everything work OK, but you want or need to do better?

[Find the complete article here](#)