



Leadership Barometer 198 Learning to See Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPTD



Part of my "Quality Black Belt" training 30 years ago introduced me to the concept of "learning to see." There are many interpretations and uses of learning to see.

The one I will focus on in this article is from the "Toyota Production System." It is a system for eliminating waste in a manufacturing system.

I will broaden the concept to include learning to see in management processes. I am fascinated by the concept and think we can all benefit from learning to see better.

Learning to see waste

In the Toyota Production System, "learning to see" refers to identifying and eliminating waste in a production process. The TPS is a manufacturing philosophy developed by Toyota that emphasizes continuous improvement, waste reduction, and respect for people.

"Learning to see" includes training oneself to observe and interpret the world around us more accurately and perceptively. It involves developing the ability to notice the details, patterns, and nuances in our environment. These are things that we might otherwise miss or take for granted.

One of the key concepts of TPS is the identification and elimination of waste. Waste is defined as any activity or process that does not add value to the customer. In order to do this, employees are trained to "see" waste in their work environment. They develop the skills to identify and eliminate waste.

The process of "learning to see" in the context of TPS involves several steps. First, employees are taught to identify the eight types of waste in a production process. These types include overproduction, waiting, transportation, processing, motion, inventory, defects, and unused employee creativity. Once they can

identify these types of waste, they are encouraged to take creative steps to eliminate it.

Next, employees are trained to use a variety of problem-solving tools and techniques to eliminate waste. These tools may include root cause analysis, value stream mapping, and continuous flow manufacturing. By developing these problem-solving skills, employees are better equipped to identify and eliminate waste. They are urged to continuously improve their work processes.

Value Stream Mapping

A major component of TPS is a special kind of diagram that maps all parts of the enterprise. Quantities of raw materials are recorded along with the subassembly processes and inventories that make the final product. By studying the value stream map, employees can easily identify areas of high waste. That process allows them to focus efforts to reduce the waste.

Learning to see for management processes

It is possible to envision a kind of value stream map for management processes. In this case, the raw materials are ideas. They flow into a process of evaluation and decision points. Sometimes ideas are held up due to employee pushback. That becomes a kind of waste to eliminate through better communication.

Possible system

I believe it is possible to envision any management system as part of a process that can be optimized. The trick is to have the ingenuity that allows us to visualize processes in a different way. We need to learn to see what is going on.

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