

Visual Management: Seeing Clearly

WHAT IS VISUAL MANAGEMENT?

Visual management is one of the lean techniques designed so that anyone entering a work place, even those who are unfamiliar with the detail of the processes, can very rapidly see what is going on, understand it and see what is under control and what isn't. Essentially, the current status of the operation can be assessed, at a glance.

Which of these is easiest to understand?

APAGOREUETAI TO KAPNISMA or VIETATO FUMARE or  ?

They all mean the same thing, but unless you speak Greek or Italian, the first two instructions may not have been clear. Pictures, diagrams and visual representations of processes are the easiest way of getting messages across. If we want someone to understand how files should be organized on shelves, the easiest way is to take a photo of the right way with a big ✓, and a photo of the wrong way with a big x.

Visual management evolved in factories, but its principles apply equally in any setting, from offices to call centres. Ask yourself this, with a basic idea of what your organisation does, could someone walk into your building/office and understand what the process is? Would they be able to see how work passes through the process, or people pass through the service? Do we make it easier for staff to perform by creating a visual workplace? If the answer to any of these questions is 'no', read on...

WHAT DOES VISUAL MANAGEMENT HELP YOU TO DO?

Visual management helps you:

- Understand and indicate work priorities
- See whether performance (usually daily) was met
- Identify the flow of work and what is being done
- Identify when something is going wrong or not happening
- Show what standards of work should be
- Communicate to everyone what performance measures are in place
- Demonstrate all the elements required for safe and effective work
- Provide real time feedback to everyone involved in the whole process
- Cut down on meetings to discuss work issues.

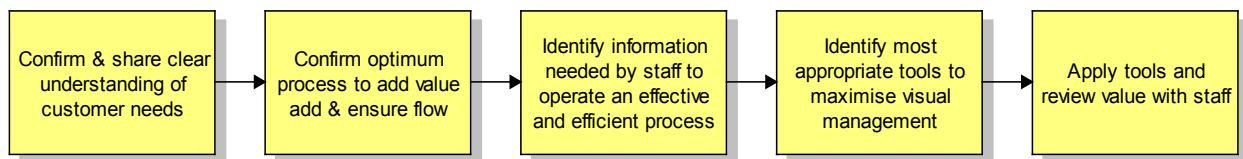


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HOW TO DEVELOP A VISUALLY MANAGED WORKPLACE

Most of us have some visual clues in our workplaces. They may include notices with instructions, signs pointing to other places, or pictures of products or services. They sometimes help, but often notices literally become part of the wallpaper, lack relevance, and are soon ignored. How do we ensure then, that we have a relevant and effective approach to visual management?

There are numerous techniques involved in visual management and we describe these below. It is important though that when establishing a visually managed workplace, that we sequentially work through a simple process, rather than merely throwing in a few tools.



TECHNIQUES USED IN VISUAL MANAGEMENT

The techniques used to create a visually managed workplace fall into a number of categories:

The workplace itself:

- Signs
- Marked floor areas/hatching
- Direction of process flow shown on floor or wall
- Shadow boards to visibly store items frequently needed
- Identified equipment & locations – including files, processing status, etc

Visual information

- Process documentation
- Procedures - can be in the form of a one-point-lesson (all you need to know on one page) or exemplars e.g. a form filled in showing the likely problem areas
- Skill & training boards to indicate competence development needs across the team

Visual production control

- Visual process indicators (Jobs in progress, productivity, output, lead time, etc)
- Maximum work-in-progress levels show to prevent over-production
- Production status boards
- Kanban visual signals

Autonomation

- The machinery automatically stops when there is a problem and attracts attention

Visual performance measurement

- Quality charts
- Performance charts (dashboard metrics based on KPI's)
- Status of the organisation

Visual safety management

- Safety warnings
- Precaution information

VISUAL MANAGEMENT IN MANUFACTURING SETTINGS

Many factories operate some form of visual management, and such settings do lend themselves readily to this technique, with it being easy to see the overall value being added in the process. The full range of visual management tools apply, making it simpler to engage staff in the manufacturing process, and making it easy to meet legislative requirements as well as being productive and efficient.

Markings, colours, pictures and visual controls all abound in the visual manufacturing environment. In most factories all floor areas are painted and marked to indicate what can and cannot be put there. The golden rule is a place for everything and everything in its place.

Visual management is a way of error proofing manufacturing processes, for example, by painting all the tools and jigs required to make one particular part number the same colour, we make it much less likely that they will be confused with the tools required for another part number.

The labelling of shelves, and putting a photo on the shelf of the things to be stored on a shelf, makes it easier to find things and to put them back in the right place. All procedures are clearly identified, and the key operating instructions for a machine are located on the machine, with as many photos as possible to show the right and wrong ways to do each activity.

VISUAL MANAGEMENT IN SERVICE SETTINGS

In service settings, visual management can seem much more challenging since tools such as automation don't really apply automatically. However, all aspects of visual management are relevant, so long as we can persuade people to follow the processes necessary to make them work.

Automation can be redefined as 'no error forward'. E.g. we stop the process when we find an error and stop any more errors going forwards to the next stage. The question is then how to make this stoppage evident and how to get support to the person with the problem as soon as possible. We may not appreciate a klaxon or a flashing light in our office, but a red flag or sending a distress email to a central address is an equivalent. The key question is, 'do we carry on making mistakes until we find a way to prevent them, or do we stop making them until we find a way to prevent them?' Service and public sector processes are much more likely to continue working, even it is known that there are problems with the process output. A visual 'no errors forward' system makes this much less likely.

An example of recent client work took place in a small call centre of a manufacturing organisation, serving large corporate and small independent customers. Service levels were low, and complaints high, as the call centre struggled to deal with orders, queries and increasing demand. First glance showed a chaotic and poorly managed process, with little understanding of priorities or how each individual was contributing.

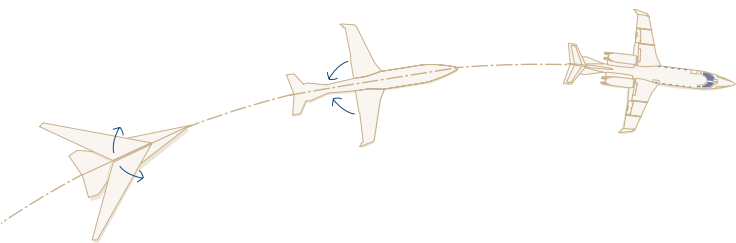
With the client, we established clarity in the process, delineated individual and team roles and set about sorting out the physical workplace and the visual management of process. Together we mapped processes and made them available to all operators. The management of customer files became ordered and standardised for effectiveness, and a visual means of call waiting/abandonment rate was put in place, along with a visual display of number of operators logged into the system to take calls as a preventative measure. Better measurement systems led to better management of the process in real time. Unsurprisingly, calls answered within 15 seconds improved, customer complaints dropped, and productivity increased.

THE BENEFITS OF VISUAL MANAGEMENT

Apart from the overall outcomes of improving customer satisfaction, the introduction of visual management tends to have a number of benefits, which include greater employee involvement and motivation, as they feel more in control of what they are doing; better communication; raised quality and productivity of work; faster decision making processes; and less waste in processes.

HOW AD ESSE CAN HELP YOU

We have worked in many different environments where we have helped managers and teams get to grips with creating a better visual workplace. We start with a very brief diagnosis to help you understand the scope of opportunities available to you and the benefits this will deliver. If you would like to know more about this, please call, Philippe Lacey on 07843309165.



FURTHER INFORMATION

To receive regular case studies and articles like this one, you can subscribe to our newsletter 'Actuality'. Contact us at Ad Esse Consulting Ltd.

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