



Introduction

The technologies of the visual workplace represent a comprehensive strategy for installing vital information as close to the point of use as possible. Through this elegant and powerful chain of methods, we eradicate motion—caused by chronic information deficits in the workplace—even as we generate new levels of employee inventiveness and contribution, even as we align the enterprise.

As you will discover by the time you complete this book, workplace visibility creates a set of outcomes that work in parallel with lean outcomes.

Visual builds the details of work into the physical environment and thereby improves adherence, enabling people to work precisely with increasing self-regulation. Lean defines, extends, accelerates, and controls the flow of work that visual spells out, dramatically reducing lead-time and flow distance. Visual imbeds lean gains into the physical workplace and creates self-leadership and alignment on every level of the organization. Visual and lean work hand-in-hand, as do the wings

of a bird. Neither is more important; they are of equal importance.

There is understandable confusion on this point because nearly every early training session on lean has a built-in module under the “5S” rubric that teaches the importance of borders and home addresses, two elements of workplace visuality. This leads people to mistakenly assume that the lean approach incorporates visual. It does not.

In fact, as you move through the chapters of this book, you will see that applying 5S solely within the context of lean not only gives implementers a false belief that they are implementing workplace visuality, it also vastly reduces the impact that 5S can contribute to the company’s journey to excellence.

In nearly twenty-five years of research and implementation, I have never found an approach more powerful than workplace visuality in liberating, empowering, and aligning the workforce—not just value-add employees but all employees, including managers and executives. And this is only one aspect of its power. From its foundation (5S+1) to visual guarantees (*poka-yoke* systems), the visual workplace is so much more.

Because organizations have an incomplete understanding of the visual approach, they under-implement and therefore under-use the remarkable set of principles, concepts, methods, tools, and practices that constitute the technologies of the visual workplace.

A New Understanding

This book invites you to consider a wholesale upgrade of your vision and understanding of visuality—one that populates the operational landscape with hundreds, even thousands, of visual devices and mini-systems that would redefine entirely, even revolutionize, the way work gets done, waste is reduced, employees are involved, customers are served, and profit is made in your organization.

Imbedded in this invitation is the promise of a new enterprise, one that reaches for and gains excellence as a way of doing business, as part of daily work. That excellence is founded upon the emergence of a new core competency in the corporation, one that I call *visual thinking*.

Visual thinking is the ability of each employee to recognize motion and the information deficits that cause it—and then to eliminate both through solutions that are visual.

Visual thinking, which fits hand-in-glove with lean principles and outcomes, is the doorway to the tomorrow you have been seeking, whatever the industry, whatever the venue.

How to Use this Book

The first in a new series of books on visuality in the workplace, *Visual Workplace—Visual Thinking* focuses on what workplace visuality is, why it is important, and how its fundamental values and premises lead to visual outcomes that are effective, expansive, renewable, and, above all, sustainable.

Ultimately, this is a book about visual thinking and how to create a workforce of visual thinkers. It is written for executives, managers, supervisors, team leaders, and union leadership in its entirety—in short, for anyone and everyone who must work through others to achieve their own objectives.

The second and third books in this new series, *Work That Makes Sense* and *Visuality In Action*, focus on the visual contribution of operators and line employees—the value-add level of the enterprise. Other conceptual and how-to books will follow, addressing such key visual outcomes as visual displays, visual standards, visual metrics and visual problem-solving, visual controls and visual pull systems, and the leadership conversion that the journey to enterprise excellence requires.

My purpose in telling you this is not to take an opportunity to market our other wares but to help you stretch your thinking further about what the visual workplace is and why it is important.

This book is most emphatically *not* an implementation manual, even though it provides many details on the previously misunderstood field of workplace visuality. While it explains what each visual workplace technology is, implementation requires much more detail. What is required is a known sequence of steps that yields early success (the easy part) and ensures long-term sustainability—that elusive holy grail of all improvement activity. The improvement workscape is already littered with too many failed implementations—failed because either the initiative caused more harm than good and/or because improvements did not last.

Primarily, then, this is a book about knowledge, not know-how. It has four sections. Section One focuses on basic concepts and principles, with Chapter 1 discussing enterprise excellence and the pure power of visual information sharing. Chapter 2 presents the eight building blocks of visual thinking and is as close to a

methods primer as you will find in this volume.

The second section of the book focuses on the culture of work, beginning with the discussion in Chapter 3 of the role of executives in discovering and developing new facets of leadership—including initiating the empowerment conversion that results in a deeply engaged, spirited, inventive, and aligned workforce. Chapter 4 discusses the evolution of individual employees into visual thinkers, capable of creating a genuinely visual work environment.

The three chapters in the book's third section detail the technologies of the visual workplace, what they are, why they are important, and who takes the lead in implementing them—visual order, visual standards, visual displays, visual metrics, visual problem-solving, visual controls, visual pull systems, and visual guarantees.

The book concludes with a discussion of the visual and lean paradigms, how they support each other, and where the most common mistakes are made in bringing them into alignment—for aligned they must be if excellence in the enterprise is to be achieved and sustained.

Graphics and charts along with over 25 photo albums of actual examples anchor your understanding. Other photographs of visual solutions populate the text. I hope many of these will knock your socks off, much as they knocked off mine when I first saw them.

As you turn the last page, it is my sincere wish that you will have gained a much deeper and more complete understanding of why workplace visibility is crucial to your company's journey to excellence and your own. If all goes well, by book's end, you may also be well on your own way to becoming a visual thinker. I would be so very pleased if you were.