

6S tool

***Did you know?** Commonly this tool is known as 5S but we have added an additional 'S' for 'safety' so you may find it called by either 5S or 6S!*

What is it?

6S is a visual system for improvement that helps create and maintain an organised, clean, high-performance workspace. It forms the basis for *Standard work*, which enables you to measure improvement and it aligns with the *Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle*.

Benefits at a glance....

- enhances the workspace environment by streamlining tasks and reducing waste in a simple and effective way
- removes frustration by leaving you with only the items that you need to carry out the task
- results in frequently used tools and resources being arranged in standard locations for consistent and easy access, whether desk items or shared electronic files
- gives everyone a chance to provide creative input on how their workspace is organised
- improves communication and increases the ability to work well as a team which can boost morale



Figure 1: 6S tool – Sift, Sort, Sweep, Standardise, Sustain and Safety

There are six steps:

1. **Sift**: discard unnecessary items and identify everything else ready for sorting (red tag)
2. **Sort**: put things in their designated places for ease of retrieval processes
3. **Sweep**: develop a regular routine to organise and clean to the Standards
4. **Standardise**: formalise the new practices
5. **Sustain**: track and monitor adherence to the other 5S
6. **Safety**: stay safe from risk and ensure that all locations, and practices are safe and secure

When to use it?

1. Physical workspace organisation

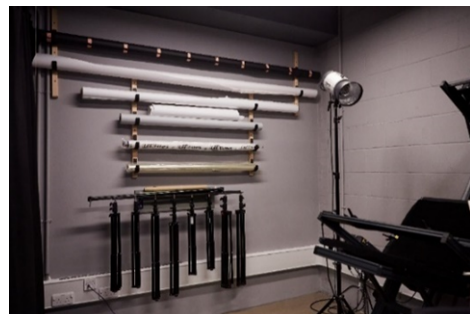
6S is not a new concept. Historically, nowhere has it been more important to conserve space and promote tidiness than on-board a ship. This very apt quote from 1841 is by ship's captain and author

Frederick Marryat 'In a well-conducted man-of-war everything is in its place, and there is a place for everything'.

Involving the whole team, **6S** activity can be planned to tackle untidy workspaces, cluttered desks and communal areas. By removing, amongst other things, legacy paperwork and redundant or broken equipment and putting things in designated places, it becomes easier to spot problems when it is immediately obvious that things are out of place.

Case study: Working in an underground photography studio, full of technical equipment, the Bodleian Library's Imaging Services team believe that being tidy is essential due to the nature of their work.

Previously 20 ft of racking was full of equipment and materials that are no longer used. This was difficult to identify anything that was useful, many collected dust and looked disorganised.



Additionally, there were materials, lighting stands and camera tripods propped up in any available gap creating trips hazards and allowing potential damage to the items if knocked into with a trolley. To create a more accessible and efficient space, they disposed of anything that was obsolete, including the racking, and ensured everything else has a place, including the material and stands which are now organised on racks and hooks on a spare wall in one of the bays. This has had a positive impact on the whole team. The Team Manager reflects on the impact of the improvements:

'Just looking at this area now makes us feel good. Our efficiency and effectiveness have improved through working in a tidy and organised environment. It helps us to plan our work in a structured way and stops time being wasted finding things. I personally think that it helps to set a standard and can be very calming when there is pressure to get work completed.'



Figure 1: Lab in Experimental Psychology 'before' and 'after' 6S is applied



2. Storing and retrieving electronic information

Whilst we are faced with an abundance of systems for storing and retrieving electronic information, we often struggle to find either what we're looking for or where to store the documents we are working on and we end up implementing our own interim solutions which can hinder us in working effectively.

Using the **6S** tool to manage electronic files can additionally benefit teams and individuals in terms of saving time, duplication of effort and re-working or correcting information.

Using a team-based approach, **6S** has recently been applied to University SharePoint sites, a shared Outlook email Inbox and a shared g: drive. **6S** can also be applied by individuals to personal drives, virtual desktops, email accounts and cloud storage accounts.

How to use it?

The approach is broadly similar for physical workspaces as it is for virtual ones.

Capture the situation as it is now

- Start by collecting data on performance issues and visual evidence as it is important to be able to capture the baseline so that continuous improvement can be measured
- Document the scale of the task. This is especially important for electronic files where this may not be immediately obvious visually

Top Tip: Ensure that a 'team-based approach' is used to apply **6S** to both physical and virtual workspaces otherwise there may be unintended consequences where items colleagues require are inadvertently moved/removed/deleted, and to help ensure everyone buys into the standard.

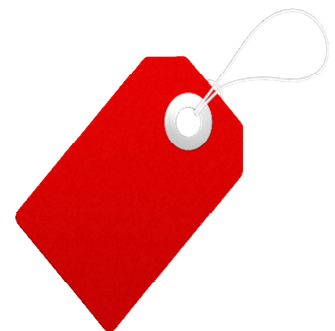
Phase 1

Get rid of the junk and stop working around it!

- **Sift** - use 'Red Tags' (real or virtual) to identify unnecessary items and arrange for their relocation/disposal

The tag should include:

- Description of the item
- Date tagged
- Reason for tagging
- Name of the person tagging
- Action required and by when e.g., relocation, disposal or donation



Phase 2

Explore the rest of **6S** to create an action plan and agreement for a system that ensures a place for everything and everything stays in its place.

- **Sort** - put items in their agreed designated places for ease of reach whenever they are required
- **Sweep** - clean up and tidy/scan items at regular intervals



- **Standardise** - involve the whole team in agreeing a *Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)* and document it and make it visible
- **Sustain** - agree on a regular audit cycle and review the results and SOP, looking to continuously improve the process and to make sure everything is staying in its place!
- **Safety** - check for any Health & Safety requirements or GDPR and data breaches for electronic files

'A place for everything and everything in its place'

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