

Standard Work and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

What is it?

Standard Work is about achieving a consistent, best way of doing things. We use the **Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle** to make the improvements, and **Standard Work** stops it rolling back to the previous state.

Benefits at a glance....

- the agreed best way of doing something created by those who have hands-on experience
- creates repeatable operations using step-by-step instructions that are easy to follow
- helps new starters quickly learn 'one best way' and everyone to get it right first time
- empowers employees to be creative in problem solving
- leads to consistent quality outcomes and results for all concerned



Figure 1: Standard Work stops new implementations rolling back to the previous state

To achieve **Standard Work** you need to be consistent:


- in the process
- the pace at which work is done
- the layout of our workspace, documents and so on

Once you have agreed how and what to standardise as a team, you document to ensure that you understand how to follow the process in the future. This document is known as your **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)**.

We cannot improve until we know what we are improving against.

When to use it?

A **Standard** should only be developed for a process or task that is frequently repeatable. It should contain the key steps that must be done correctly otherwise the process will fail. Over-standardisation can be problematic as generally people don't like to feel like they are working in a factory.



Where **standards** are created for critical steps, there can be big gains through avoidance of duplication, outputs presented how the customer actually wants to see them, more efficient screen presentations, efficient sequencing and in the office layout.

Standards are local and they determine how we do things around here. They might not transplant exactly to a very similar set of circumstances nearby, but can be a useful starter. For example if, as the result of a **6S** workspace organisation activity, you create a **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)** to maintain an organised, clean, high performance workspace it won't be exactly the same as the **SOP** of any other University team undergoing the same activity. But is likely to be very similar.

Case study: Drawing up a **SOP** for carrying out a stock count in the Ashmolean shop has helped ensure that everyone involved is doing things the same way, and next time they do a stock count the guidance is already documented. Additionally other museums who use the same stock management system have been able to use the document for their own stock counts.

How to use it?

For optimal implementation of **Standard Work**, construct your **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** with those who have hands-on experience of the process or task.

Ask those who are doing the same job to compare their methods. As one may be better at one activity and another at another activity then they can share good practice. **Go See**, timing the activity or discussion about the different ways of doing the can help you to facilitate this.

A documented 'procedure' which will go into the **SOP** answers the WHAT-type questions, for example, what happens? In what order? Who does what to whom?

'Work instructions' are HOW the individual carries out the procedures and it is important that colleagues are allowed some autonomy and flexibility in how they carry out these procedural steps.

Warning: Ensure robust version control in a central repository, for example, a team SharePoint site

When you have your **SOP** in place, use **Process Confirmation** to check that the process is implemented as documented and that when adjustments are needed a **Plan-Do-Check Act (PDCA) cycle** is scheduled.

Additional resources

1. Bicheno J (2012). The Service Systems Toolbox: Integrating Lean Thinking, Systems Thinking and Design Thinking. PICSIE Books
2. Pink, DH (2011). Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us. Riverhead Books.