

Grabbing Lunch and a Bite of Standards

By Preston Ingalls

It's lunch time, you're hungry, and you see a McDonald's and quickly turn in to grab a fast bite. A long drive-through line convinces you to go inside to the counter and despite never visiting this Mickey D's, it appears to be like all the others at first glance. However, as you walk inside, workers are wearing street clothes and something seems a little off. The line advances and you are in front of an employee who is leaning on one arm against the counter, almost too casually.

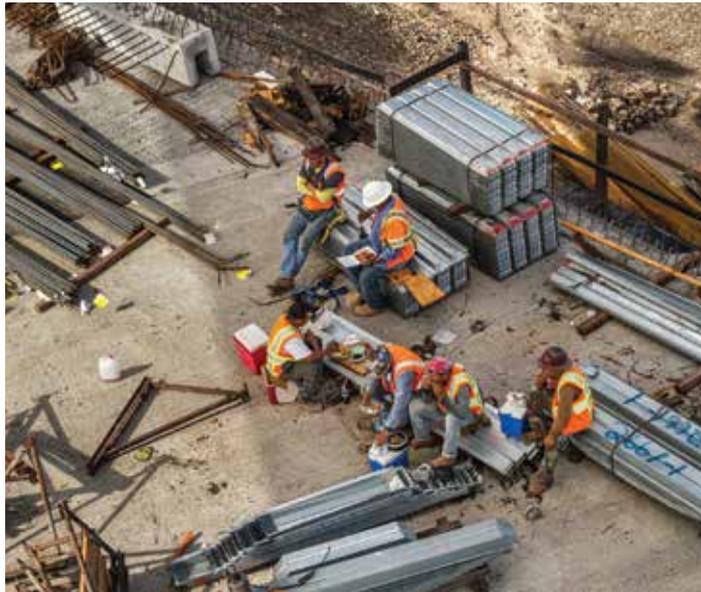
You order a Big Mac combo, pay, and take your change from the employee who doesn't say a word as he roughly throws the burger on the tray, loosening the wrapper exposing the burger patty, which looks square—so you inspect it further.

"Woah. What the heck is this? This looks like a Wendys' Double—not a Big Mac. What gives?"

"Look mister. That is how we make 'em here. But Charlie there puts extra pickles on but not me—I load on a layer of extra cheese. I'm a cheese person—that's why. Now Sarah at the window likes to toast the buns when she makes the Big Mac, but that takes too much time for me. Look—that's our Big Mac. Now do you want it or not?"

McDonald's is a successful franchise business that refined standardization of burger making. But this location is doing everything different. Can you run a successful business with this much variation?

Yes, you can. *We do it all the time.*



LACK OF STANDARDIZATION

My McDonald's story, which is a fabrication to make a point, is meant to show the absurdity of non-standardization in a multinational corporation. We all know that McDonald's was founded on the principles of process standardization and methodologies that can be learned and practiced by anyone anywhere. While Henry Ford didn't invent the automobile, he did, however, develop a repeatable process to produce consistency in automobile production by controlling excessive variation.

According to the *Lean Enterprise Institute*, Standardized Work is one of the most powerful but least-used lean tools. That explains why even in today's business environment, companies are generally unaware of the strategic implications of standardization.

The all-too-real examples of Charlie doing something different from Sarah

may be because he truly believes his way is the best way, and can't understand why others don't follow his tried-and-true way. On the other hand, Sarah is mystified why Charlie is allowed to perform his process different than the way she was shown.

The fact is that inherent variation and inconsistency prevents predictable and reliable output, but while there is always some level of variation, the real problem is excessive variation. One of the key questions is whether the variation is normal for the process (common) or is unexpected (special).

With respect to variation, we can, to a great extent, control that variability through standardization of tasks. This means acquiring consensus on the sequence of activities and tasks and repeating those each time they are performed. Rather than Charlie's way or Sarah's way—it becomes the company's way. While numerous business and thought leaders have said it in their own way, I am partial to Qentinel Group CEO Esko Hannula's way of explaining it:

"Any decent company works on or at least talks about, processes, templates, standard reports, and other forms of harmonization. Quite often the discussion is sparked by an individual observation of a problem: confusion, error proneness, or inefficiency somewhere in the operations of the company."

"Most likely, the conclusion of the discussion is that it would be a good idea to standardize something, such as

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the format of the monthly status report or the process of handling a customer complaint. Everybody will nod their heads to signal that yes, the problem could have been avoided if we had a standard form of monthly reporting. If enough people are serious about the issue, they may even decide to do something about it: define a process, create a work instruction and standard operating procedure, or create a new document template."

Standardization allows us to exercise control over the variation by minimizing special and common causes through repeatability and reliable application of work practices. In the case of McDonald's, a new hire goes through a standardized training and induction process that enables them to work at any Franchise because they are grounded in "standardized practices." That facilitates repeatability of the process that encompasses everything from the uniform they wear to the method they use to empty and clean the fryer.

Now the argument is "our operation is not a burger joint." True, but the success of McDonald's wasn't making burgers,

as many restaurants can do that, it was delivering repeatability, no matter where you went in the world.

STANDARDIZATION METHODOLOGIES

Rolls Royce was a very unique automobile because much of it was handcrafted. However, it was very expensive because the lack of automation of repeatable manufacturing processes made it difficult to mass produce efficiently and cost-effectively.

Luxury cars these days are mass produced by working on the consistency of how it was made. Robust standardization methodologies can be adapted to any process.

ISO 9000 was a process to improve quality and outputs by getting companies to "document what they do and do what they documented." It was meant to reduce variation through documentation. Find the right process, list the steps and get people to repeat it.

THE BENEFITS ADD UP

A standardized process can be a

blessing as it helps to standardize results, minimize deviations, achieve scale, and accelerate learning. By taking steps to identify and document best practices, reach consensus as to the standard way, and to communicate these to all our workers, standardized practices have become a vital and influential part of improving an organization's effectiveness and costs.

The best process standards or documentation not only spell out steps in clear and easy to understand language, they are also highly visual with images, photos, charts, drawings and any other helpful illustrations. In Total Process Reliability, we use Job Aids, Single Point Lesson Plans, Checklists, and Standards to improve this skill transfer and task repeatability. This training resource provides a continuous reference to minimize reliance on recall or memory.

The next time you are staring at that burger lying on the tray, think about all the study to determine the optimal way to produce it and then get employees to make it many times over—consistently. Even if you do the right thing and grab a salad, the process is no less exacting. ■



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