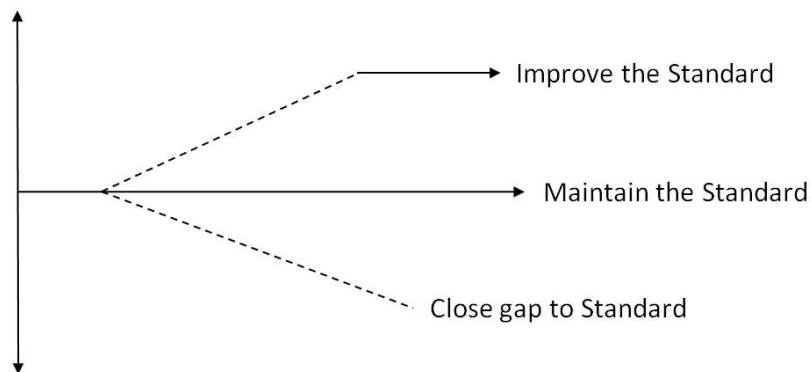




## ***Developing your Production Frontline Leaders***

Production Frontline Leaders (Team Leaders and Supervisors) have a critical role to play in the workplace. When their roles are unclear there can often be frustration in the workplace. When they are ineffective in their roles, you get the impact of everyone in the Leadership Chain (from Site Manager down) working down a level, doing part of the role of their subordinate, to cover for their ineffectiveness. The result of this can be debilitating for the site and holding it back from its full potential.

Consider a manufacturing operation with separate roles of Operator, Team Leader and Supervisor. Everyone in this group is performing a combination of three basic roles. They are either trying to maintain a workplace standard, trying to close the gap to the standard (troubleshoot problems) or trying to improve the standard.



The Operator is maintaining the workplace standard of the process he is responsible for. The Team Leader is ensuring the Operator can perform his work safely and effectively. When the Operator is unable to properly perform his role the Team Leader provides support by applying troubleshooting skills to address the problem. If the problem cannot be successfully tackled at this level the Supervisor would then become involved.

For example, where recurrent quality issues coming from upstream processes affect the ability of the Operator to perform their task, it would become necessary for the Supervisor to step in to ensure the process can be completed. The Team Leader can intervene and provide support if it is a one-off problem but when this is a recurrent issue the Team Leader would inform the Supervisor who would then investigate the problem and ensure measures are put in place to eliminate the problem.

This describes a neat 'closed loop' situation where the personnel involved either tackle the problem at their own level or, where necessary, escalate the problem and seek support from their superior.

Now ask yourself the question:

**“As a Manager or a Supervisor how often do you have to help solve problems that you believe should be tackled successfully at the level below you?”**

If you are doing this daily or even multiple times a week, this is having a huge impact on your time and, importantly, it is detracting from the time you are spending on your key role → “Improving the standard”.

Improving the way your business creates and delivers value to your customer is what keeps you ahead of your competitors.



**“If your Team Leaders aren’t effective, everyone else in the Leadership chain tends to manage down a level”**

*(Developing Competent and Engaged Team Leaders’, R. Kennedy, 2011)*

So why are you having to ‘manage down a level’? Why are you spending time tackling problems that should be dealt with at the level below you?

A key question is whether the capability of your Frontline Leaders is meeting your expectation. Are they performing their work to the level you want? Are they solving problems at their own level and only having to escalate issues beyond the scope of their role? If the answer to these questions is “no” then consider another question; “Is the expectation for the role of your Frontline Leaders clear?”

**So what is a “Frontline Leader”?**

*“The person directly in charge of operational activities with assigned responsibility, authority and accountability, who reports to a more senior manager and whose tasks are usually a mix of fixed and discretionary elements” (Prentice & Rabey, The Frontline Leader 2009)*

With this definition in mind, the Frontline Leader can describe either the Team Leader or the Supervisor. Consider their roles in relation to the operator (or the Frontline worker) and how they support this person to do their job.

	Operator / Frontline Worker	Team Leader	Supervisor
Standardised work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performs to standard</li> <li>• Escalates any deviations from standard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaches the standard</li> <li>• Troubleshoots any deviations from standard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures the system is maintained via the Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle</li> </ul>
Improvement activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies improvements in own process</li> <li>• Participates in improvement activity</li> <li>• Performs prevention at source to required standard</li> <li>• Escalates any deviations from standard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies improvements in own area</li> <li>• Leads / participates in improvement activity</li> <li>• Teaches prevention at source activity</li> <li>• Troubleshoots any deviations from standard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies improvements in own section</li> <li>• Ensures improvement system is sustained</li> <li>• Ensures the prevention at source is maintained via the Check, Act, Plan, Do cycle</li> </ul>
Leadership & Resourcing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides leadership and on job development for personnel within own span of control (Team)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides leadership and on job development for personnel within own span of control</li> <li>• Sets goals for area</li> <li>• Ensures adequate resources (physical / equipment / material are available)</li> </ul>



Having clear roles within your workplace helps ensure production can function effectively. They understand what needs to be done to maintain the standard, close the gap to the standard (troubleshoot) or improve the standard.

In your own workplace consider how well roles are defined and understood.

The high level roles described above are clearly about the 'task' to be performed. Since the early 2000's many workplaces have focussed not only on task but also on the application of competency within the workplace. An example of this is where your Team Leader may be excellent at getting their Team Members to accomplish their individual tasks but they do this by being directive and forceful. Whilst this style of leadership may sometimes be appropriate, to consistently lead this way would eventually cause a revolt. The ideal situation is where tasks can be achieved sustainably over time. Achieving results sustainably is about getting the job done but also about being able to maintain relationships by demonstrating appropriate behaviours for differing workplace situations.

Some examples of behavioural competencies are communicating effectively, conflict resolution and demonstrating teamwork. There may already be an existing competency framework within your business.

How well are these competencies used within your company? Are they utilised only in performance reviews once or twice a year? Or are they discussed regularly so that the required behaviours are reinforced?

To develop your Frontline Leaders consider both the task and behavioural components of their role, define the standards by level and ensure that these role standards support each other (by level). Once this standard is clear you can then establish a plan to develop your Frontline Leaders to the required level. The development plan will involve some classroom learning (off-job training) and some workplace learning (on-job training or coaching). Most development plans are traditionally heavy on the classroom element and light on workplace coaching. Adult learning principles tell us that adults need contextual learning. If we can't absorb the knowledge and apply it within a certain timeframe the knowledge will usually be lost. On-job training can be performed by a specialist trainer or workplace coach however the person best placed to perform the on-job development of the Frontline Leader is their direct Supervisor or Manager.

*By Paul Furtado Senior Navigator, CTPM Victoria*

**For more information about developing your Production Frontline Leaders please contact your CTPM Navigator or CTPM Head Office on +61 4226 6184 or email [ctpm@ctpm.org.au](mailto:ctpm@ctpm.org.au).**

#### References:

- Ivancevich, J. Olekalns, M. and Matteson, M. 2002 'Organisational Behaviour and Management', McGraw-Hill
- Kennedy, R. 2011, 'Developing Competent and Engaged Team Leaders', CTPM Australasia
- Kennedy, R. Mazza, LN, et al 2011, "Preparation for Area Based Teams and Work Area Management"(Ed 17), CTPM Australasia
- Prentice, E. and Rabey, G. 2009 'The Frontline Leader', Developing Effective Leadership Skills', Tilde University Press,
- Spear, S. 2009 'The High Velocity Edge', McGraw-Hill.
- Toyota Institute 2007, 'On-Job Development', Toyota Institute, Toyota Motor Corporation