

The Power of Observations!

When teams start Cross-functional Improvement Team activity, one of their first tasks is to understand the losses that occur in the production area that is being examined.

While the team can usually get a lot of information from documentation such as downtime logs and production records, this information rarely provides any insight into the small stoppages that occur on a production line. After all, *"why should we write it all down – no one reads it anyway!!!"*

Small stoppages are very important – they not only reduce output but also cause a lot of frustration to the production crews as they work hard to maintain productivity.

This was the situation that team "Super Seven" found themselves in at **Dominion Salt in Tauranga, New Zealand**, as they were working to understand the losses in their Salt Vacuum Refinery. The team started by gathering data from the production logs which wasn't helping them to identify the small stoppages that were occurring and were frustrating the operators. So they decided to organise an observation to document all of the small issues that occurred over a four hour period.

The observation team included a "Super Seven" team representative from the Finance Department, one from the Purchasing Department, and two others from Operations.

One of the small stoppages the team identified was pallets of product jamming on an outfeed conveyor. Every time the pallet jammed, the forklift driver had to leave his regular duties, get off his forklift and come over and fix the problem, meanwhile stopping production on the Packaging Line.

How much of a problem was this?

*It typically occurred three times every hour, taking 1-2 minutes to fix each time – that is about **8% of OEE!***

Figure 1: Pallet of product approaching the jamming point on the conveyor (in red)



While there was a known problem here, its magnitude wasn't understood until the observation had occurred. A plan was being developed by the site to spend \$5,000 of capital to fix the problem.

The maintenance team representative on the "Super Seven" team, Jim Donaldson, went to investigate the jamming issue further. After some careful observation and a few trials, Jim implemented some permanent modifications to the transition between the two conveyors, eliminating the cause of the jamming pallets. The forklift drivers didn't have to get off their forklift to clear the jammed pallet and there was no need to spend \$5,000 of capital to replace the transition area. The line was able to keep operating!

...oh, and the "Super Seven" team identified a further 19 improvements!!!

For further information please contact:



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