

A few months ago I did a sales manager minute where I explained “setup time reduction” by using the example that if my kids would spend a couple of extra seconds each night fixing their clothes, the person doing laundry wouldn’t have to spend an extra 5 to 10 minutes turning the clothes right side out when loading the washing machine. Today, I am going to expand on that example to describe our **Process Analysis Service**.

Laundry is a mundane task that we do all the time without much thought. Everyone has a routine that they follow and most likely don’t see that there might be a more efficient way to get it done. This is the same with many of the processes found in manufacturing companies.

The first thing we need to do is establish a goal. My wife and I both work full time so the laundry doesn’t get done until Sunday which is family time. It would be difficult to put a value on family time or leisure time but what ever it is I want to maximize it and reduce the time spent doing the laundry. Lets say the goal is to reduce the time spent doing laundry each week by 25%.

So the next thing I would do is watch the process from start to finish. The laundry process starts when we put dirty laundry into the laundry basket and ends when we put away the clean folded clothes. In our house the bedrooms are on the second floor and the washing machine and dryer are on the first floor so the second step in the process is to gather all of the dirty laundry and bring it downstairs.

Next the laundry is separated into darks, lights, and whites. I have improved this step by separating as I load the washing machine. As mentioned before, I make sure all of the clothes are right side out and the pockets of the pants are empty. After the clothes are washed and dried they are put in a laundry basket and taken back upstairs. Since I do not like folding, the deal my wife and I have is that I do the laundry and she folds it. My wife folds and separates the laundry by family member in our bedroom usually while watching Desperate Housewives. Since the kids are sleeping at that time, their folded laundry is put back into a laundry basket until it can be put away in the morning.

As I look at each step in the process I ask why is it done this way, is there waste either time or materials that could be eliminated, and what could be automated.

The first observation that I noted in the laundry process is that I need to take the laundry downstairs to wash and dry it and then back upstairs when it is clean. If the machines were upstairs that time and effort could be eliminated. Or I could install a laundry chute that would go from the second floor to the washing machine and reduce the wasted time. In manufacturing any time spent moving material from one department to another is considered waste because it doesn't add any value to the end product.

Next when I load the washing machine besides the time I waste turning the clothes right side out, I also spend time separating darks and lights and checking pockets. If everyone spent a little extra time checking their pockets and turning their clothes right side out it would save me a lot of time loading the washing machine. I could take it a step further and have 3 laundry baskets for dirty clothes 1 for darks, 1 for lights, and 1 for whites and then have everyone separate their clothes each night. In manufacturing this is known as "over the wall mentality" meaning department 1 only cares about getting work out to department 2; they don't see that a couple extra seconds of their time would save a lot of time for the second department.

The time the washing machine and dryer takes is basically fixed as long I am able to switch over the loads as soon as one finishes and because I do the laundry at the end of the week the loads are mostly full or maximized.

The fold and put away step that my wife does has some wasted time and effort but since my wife performs this step, and I would like to keep it that way, I will leave it alone. I will say that the arrangement my wife and I have where I wash and she folds is not very efficient. Again a little extra time spent folding the laundry as it comes out of the dryer would eliminate a step in the process. This would also produce a better product since the clothes would have less chance of wrinkling because they are folded while they are hot instead of being folded while they are cold after sitting in a pile for a couple of hours. The clothes could be

then brought upstairs and put away. But like many manufacturing employees I encounter, I am stuck in my ways and folding is not my job which is again another example of “over the wall mentality”.

Companies tend to think that “bigger and faster” would be better so in the laundry process I know there is bigger and faster equipment available but because of the amount of laundry my family does it wouldn't be worthwhile to invest in new machines. Also if I don't eliminate the waste I have identified before and after washing and drying, my time savings with new equipment probably won't amount to very much.

With this process, I am too close to it since I am the one that does it. After I did my original sales manager minutes many people told me they have the same problem with clothes being inside out. When I was talking to Frank about it he said that he also does the laundry but he separates the loads by person rather than colors. This is an example of the value of an outside perspective, I never thought of separating the clothes that way.

Automation options in this case could be a robot that transfers the laundry from the washing to the dryer automatically when the wash cycle is done but it would not be practical. Another option would be if I installed the laundry chute that I mentioned, when the machine was full I could have the proper amount of soap go into the machine, have the lid close, and start the cycle automatically. Believe it or not I could do that for under \$1,000 and it would be fun and convenient but it wouldn't cut that much time out of the overall process.

Another option would be to outsource most of the process. When I say outsource I don't mean send it to China, I mean send it to a local company that specializes in the process. In this case, I could take the laundry to a wash, dry and fold place. The goal of this project is to maximize my free time so this option would achieve that goal. Of course, I would have to do a cost-benefit analysis to see if it was worthwhile. Many companies have the problem of running out of space but don't have the capital to invest in new real estate. Outsourcing locally is an easy way to expand capacity.

Now I don't expect all of you to hire me to evaluate the way you do laundry but think about how many processes that a manufacturing company has that they do day in and day out that could be improved. It isn't that these companies don't want to be more efficient and save money, it is that small companies don't have the time or staff to evaluate their operation to see if there is a different way. Also like when you do laundry, you probably don't give a thought about how it could be easier or better because it is the routine that you always follow. My services end up being free for my clients because of the money they save everyday after the improvements have been implemented. I even guarantee that if I can't make improvements that payback within 6 months, there is no cost to them.

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