

Learning to Lead at Toyota

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Article Study Guide

This guide is designed to help focus you on the key points of the article, and prepare you for a meaningful discussion. The headers align with the major sections of the article. The questions refer to specific paragraphs that make key points.

Pre-Reading Work

Before you begin, consider this process in a product packaging operation:

Every 15-20 minutes a pallet of boxed product is delivered from the packaging line. The Team Member pulls individual boxes of product from a pallet, one by one. He runs them over a scanner that verifies he has the correct product for that job, then places them in a carton.

Overall, the Team Member's work pace is fast enough to meet the current production requirements. Two or three times a minute, however, the scanner's computer faults and he must stop and interact with the keyboard to clear the error and restart the program. The Team Member is clearly irritated when this happens.¹

1. In your organization, as it operates right now, if you were a Manager, or above, what would be your role in addressing this problem?

2. If you were running a “kaizen event” in this area, what would be your role in addressing this problem?

This guide closely follows the sequence of the article.

The questions are to draw out key points.

There are hints on where to look in the article to find answers to the questions.

You are encouraged to highlight passages in the article, make notes in it, and cross-reference to this study guide.

This should be study, not cursory reading.

Write down your answers.

¹ This was an actual problem from a packaging line in a real company.

Introduction

The first three paragraphs of the article cover background about previous research on Toyota's culture. (*Decoding the DNA of the Toyota Production System*)

3. What does Spear say is Toyota's purpose for "standardization?"

[Look in paragraph 3 which begins "*As we explained in the article...*"

the sentence which begins "*Rather, standardization – or more precisely...*"]

4. Why do you think Spear prefers the word "explicit specification" over "standardization?"

5. What does "standardization" mean in your organization today? How might "specification" be different?

The Program

The main character, Bob Dallis has several advanced degrees, and a successful history of increasing responsibility in a U.S. auto manufacturer, including managing an engine plant. He has learned TPS by applying it in his jobs.

Mike Takahashi is a very senior member of the Toyota Supplier Support Center. He has been assigned to help Bob Dallis learn his role as a Toyota senior manager.

Before you continue reading:

6. Based on his background, Bob Dallis obviously knows what he is doing. What do you believe are the learning objectives of this training?

Back to Basics

Takahashi starts Dallis off on the shop floor of a Toyota engine plant, working with a 19 member team. For the first six weeks Dallis was to help the team improve ergonomics, productivity and operational availability.

7. How was Dallis directed to go about this? List the steps:

[“...For the first six weeks...”]

8. What did Takahashi have Dallis do on Mondays?

[Starting with “Dallis was not left to his own devices...”]

9. What did they do on Fridays?

As they studied the process after 5 weeks of changes, they found improvements in ergonomics and a significant improvement in productivity. *They also found that operational availability has dropped from 90% to 80%.*

[In the paragraph beginning “Dallis and Takahashi spent Dallis’s sixth week...”]

The sentence that begins “Unfortunately, the changes had also reduced...”

10. Why?

11. As things are today: If operational availability of a machine dropped after a kaizen event, how would your plant's leaders respond? What would be done to fix it?

12. What problems did Dallis discover as he observed the process?

[The paragraph beginning "...But as Dallis observed the machines..."]

13. Do you think traditional OEE data collection would have picked up these problems? Why or why not?

The Master Class

14. What has Takahashi concluded after observing Dallis work for 12 weeks in the engine plant?

15. What was different about Takahashi's expectations for Dallis in Japan (vs. his expectations in the U.S. plant)?

16. How did Dallis accelerate his rate of improvements?


17. What about Takahashi's approach was *the same* in Japan as it had been in the U.S. engine plant?

18. What did Dallis learn about the culture around improvement?

Lessons Learned

19. How do they go about understanding a problem?

Contrast your answer to question 19 with:

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- More traditional "data collection" [*"...This a very different approach from..."*]
 - Your reply to questions 1 and 2.

20. What does Spear mean by "Proposed changes should always be structured as experiments" ?

Paragraph 2 of "Lesson 2" which begins:

[*"Of course, many people trying to improve..."*]

21. How do “small incremental changes” drive deeper understanding than big system changes? “Lesson 3”

22. What did Dallis’ past experience teach him about the leader’s role in continuous improvement? “Lesson 4”

23. How does Toyota’s expectation of leaders differ? Contrast your answer here with how you answered Question 6.

24. Describe Takahashi’s role in teaching Dallis. Paragraph 2 of “Lesson 4”

25. Compare this leadership expectation with your answers in the packaging case. (Questions 1 and 2) What is different:

- About the role of leaders in your organization?

- About the role of kaizen event leaders in your organization?

Back to America

26. If Dallis had demonstrated his learning in Japan, why did Takahashi return him to the original operation in the USA?

27. What was the task?

28. Why did Dallis succeed this time, where previously he had fallen short of the goal?

Overall Review

29. What were the learning objectives for Dallis?

30. Compare your answer above with your answer to question 6. Is there a difference? Why?

31. What gaps exist between the “ideal leader” described in this article and the way leaders are expected to act in your organization?