



Understanding Work As Performed And Asking Better Questions

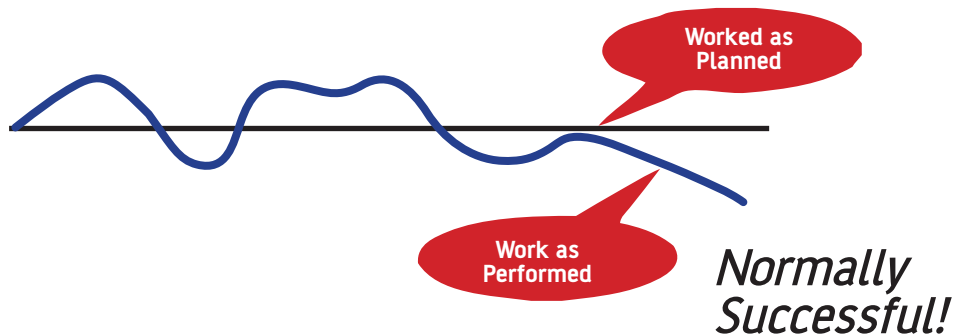
Let's think about how work is planned and how the steps are documented in a procedure manual, standardized work sheet or JSA. On the graphic below the way work is planned or imagined is represented as the straight black line. But is this the way work is performed? When asked, workers normally shake their heads and respond "no".

Why is there a difference between work as planned and work as performed?

Remember, frontline workers are always trying to adapt work and balance a number of often conflicting goals such as productivity, efficiency, quality and safety in an ever-changing workplace frequently burdened by resource constraints. They inherit the output of many organizational processes. Some of the processes are outstanding while others may be deficient for a variety of reasons. *Frontline workers make the system work despite process shortcomings.* This adaptive behavior is an essential resource for safety as well as successful work.

Understanding the blue line – how work is actually performed – is critical to operational and organizational learning, successful work and workplace safety. Organizations accomplish this by implementing learning teams, no-fault incident and near miss reporting systems, pre-task planning, post-task debriefs and discussions with workers. The list of questions below is intended to engage workers and take advantage of their knowledge of the system.

Worked as Planned vs. Work as Performed



Frontline workers make the system work despite process shortcomings.



Asking Better Questions

1. What procedures are out of date or no longer reflect the way work is actually performed?
2. How is work actually performed? (This question is an attempt to understand the context of work including goal conflicts, production pressures, staffing, etc.)
3. Are there safety procedures that make the job more difficult but not safer?
4. Have there been injuries, illnesses, close calls or near misses?
5. Which tasks put you near moving parts, hot surfaces, hazardous materials or other hazards?
6. What do you need to do your job successfully?
7. What are the hazards on your job?
8. Are the hazards effectively controlled?
9. What is frustrating on your job?
10. Have you been surprised by anything on your job lately?
11. What pisses you off when doing your job?
12. What is physically challenging?
13. What are the roadblocks on your job?
14. What innovations have workers made to improve the job?
15. What ideas do you have about how we can make your job easier or more productive?
16. How can the process or your job be improved?
17. What's the most stupid thing that you must do at work?
18. If you were given \$50,000 to improve work in your area what would you do with the money?
19. How has work changed that makes it more difficult and/or dangerous?
20. If someone were to be hurt here today in your work area, where would it be – on what job?
21. If your mother, father, sister, brother, son or daughter were to perform your job, what would you change?



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