

Home Base

Are you ready to harness the potential of your team leaders?

Reach your goals together with others – that is what shopfloor management basically is about. To create a balance between organizational efficiency (business) and a humane workplace (leadership) a leader has to influence the behavior of employees and peers. For this, the most important tool is his own behavior. That is, the leader can influence through communication.

by István Kosztolányi and Zoltán Márton

Front line

The level of team/group leaders is the company's first management level. They are the ones who are in close contact with the employees, who talk to them daily, so it is crucial that they understand and represent the company goals. It is an important distinction whether they regard themselves as »union representatives« or »leaders for organizational goals«. Often they become leaders directly from the production or service line. Usually the best worker is appointed for this job and leadership is a new situation for them, because:

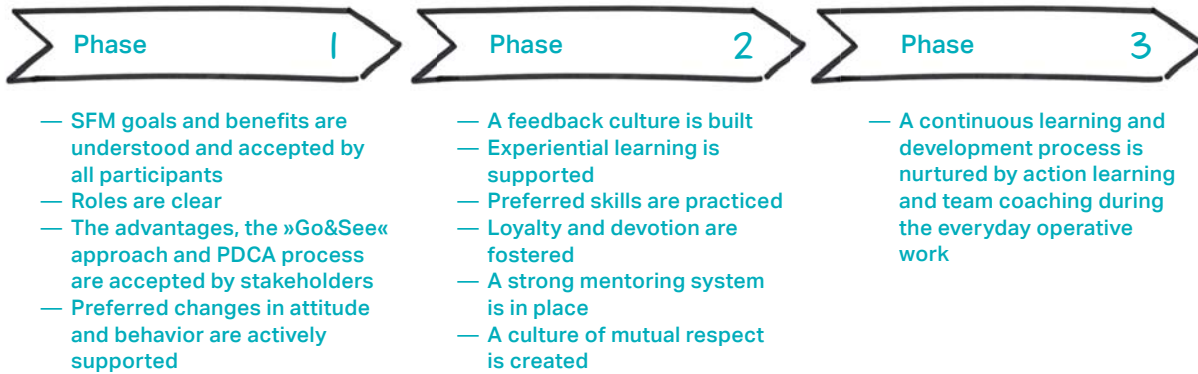
- they do not have managerial experience,
- they do not want to or do not know how to confront their former colleagues,
- they have to drop and effectively delegate tasks, which were inseparable from them and they were successful in,
- they may have to represent the company interests against the appeals.

In addition to this, experience shows that particularly this management level does not have a clarified role definition.

Between daily tasks

If a company plans to reach sustainable success by implementing a SFM (shop floor management) program, attitudes and behaviors need to be changed actively.

General SFM process



Therefore, training the team leaders is essential as by failing to develop them, a good worker is lost and a bad manager gained. Improvements and changes are also much slower without their support and can only be executed at higher expenses. The general process is presented in the illustration above.

Due to the daily workload, it is hard to dedicate time and resources to the development of this management level. Even if it is done, in many companies team leaders get the reduced version of programs optimized for top management – »this will be enough for them ...«. Trainings are more general, model-oriented and exercises are mostly separated from the practice. The span of the two-to-three-day focused training is too short to evoke sustainable changes in behavior. The remaining experience is rather »we had a good time there – we enjoyed it, at least«. As a consequence, the training does not have a direct result in business indicators, however, »it certainly had some useful effects ...«. According to our experience, an investment of five to six days per an eight-to-ten-week period makes a substantial difference – this duration is necessary to evoke real changes in the behaviors of team leaders.

Real changes will appear in the team leaders' managerial approach and tools, their attitude towards leading people, their working culture – as they set an example for other employees. Leaders learn to be more flexible about expected changes on the shop floor and deliver better results through the selected business indicators.

Through various development areas

We have developed a learning framework and experimental environment, which supports all participants by providing space for exercising and ensuring achievement of company goals, as well as individual success. The content of each process needs to be tailored for team leaders, developed in the preparation phase and based on both, the daily program and the role profile. The most critical development areas are:

- Confrontation with broken rules and promises.
- Delegation of tasks.
- Problem solving in the everyday workshop environment.
- Continuous improvement of processes.
- Team work in the area with the team leader's responsibility.

As a first step, a team leader profile has to be compiled. Although most of the companies have a job description for this role, it is usually rather general and written with the focus to comply to all legal requirements. There is a real need for a practical guide program for team leaders:

1. A daily program: Consisting of timed and non-timed tasks, starting from the beginning until the end of the workday. This includes the expected outcomes of the tasks, as well.
2. A competence profile: An exact and explicit list of behavior patterns preferred and needed to sup- ▶



port a successful, high performance team leader role.

3. Scoring sheet: Built on the daily program and the competence profile, a handy evaluation sheet is drafted to be used for (potentially) 360 feedback at the beginning of the SFM and also after, in order to measure the results.

Above and Beyond

The effectiveness of this program depends on finding the balance between applying the necessary skills and organizational development. In other words, the development of team leaders needs to be supported both, inside the skin (attitude, skills, behaviors) and outside the skin (processes, regulations, rules).

In recent years, we have compiled a framework and concept for a ten-week training period which starts with setting goals and the participant's commitment to achieving these goals. After the basic training, where the development areas are clarified and short practice sessions are held, the team leader has to do some homework and peer learning. In the following weeks, there are sessions of individual coaching, progress evaluation, difficulty handling, fieldwork etc. Finally, the results are evaluated in a management workshop.

Participants' and their managers' feedback shows that – apart from fully tailor-made content – the main strengths of this process are as follows:

- Clear role definition »in the language« of the team leaders.
- The action learning approach: Instead of using lots of models, participants work on their own cases and process new knowledge and skills through these.
- Support from management, including the possibilities to openly ask questions and direct participants as resource in the program (feedback, mentoring).
- In peer learning people learn from and with one another.
- Between the sessions, participants work on individual homework directly related to their everyday work – the tasks are chosen according to individual development goals.
- A »pull« effect is created by the final mini-workshop, where participants present the results of their homework and learnings in the presence of members of the company management.

This SFM development process leads to higher quality team leadership and is thus, a very successful investment for companies. ●