Messy thinking is killing your business

In manufacturing, 5S is a way of ensuring order in the workplace. This is both a set of activities and a way of thinking. Although some of the activities may apply only to manufacturing, the ***thinking processes*** are applicable much more broadly.

The term comes from 5 Japanese words that are often translated as:
Sort – Get rid of clutter by identifying what's needed and what is not
Set in order – provide a place for everything and put everything in its place
Shine – clean the workplace
Standardize – set up visual cues that tell when something is out of place
Sustain – develop procedures and audits to maintain and improve the systems.

The short descriptions above don't do justice to the 5S methods. For example, **Shine** might involve not just mopping the floors, but things like repainting or changing lighting. **Standardize** may extend that to using special colours to indicate locations of fire extinguishers or special equipment. Overall, 5S is a very thoughtful process.

But what if I don't have a manufacturing operation? What good is 5S to me? While some of the typical activities may not have analogies in service industries, the thought processes behind them often do. For example, both use procedures and methods of work. Are yours published and stored in convenient locations? If on-line, are they easily accessible? Is there the minimum number to accomplish the tasks, or did our procedures become bloated? ***Sort*** is about reducing this kind of clutter.

Another area that can often benefit from 5S thinking is shared network drives or the cloud. Is there a way of consistently cleaning out files that are no longer needed? Is there a file structure that is easily understood, so that new material can be stored in a logical place? Do file titles and keywords reflect the contents so that someone searching for information is likely to find what they are after?

Once, while checking into a hotel, there were a couple of people ahead of me and it took about 10 minutes to get to the head of the line and get checked in. I was at the same hotel a month later, and had pretty much the same experience. While not a huge inconvenience, it dawned on me that it was taking far longer than I would have expected for such a simple transaction. So when I got to the head of the line, I tried to see what the clerk was doing. I couldn't see his screen, so I counted his keystrokes. Now keep in mind that he already had my name, address, phone number, credit card information, and I'd stayed there before. There was no conceivable piece of information he could be putting into the system that it didn't already have. Yet it took over 200 keystrokes to check me in. I don't know what he was doing, but whatever it was most of it had to be wasted activity. 5S is the kind of thinking that could have helped.

Are you feeling like your business is strangled by clutter and confusion? **SigmaDoneSimply** can help.