

# Techniques

## Japanese 5-S – where TQM begins

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### Keywords

TQM, Management styles, Quality cultures, Japanese management styles

### Abstract

It has been recognised that Japanese firms are clean and orderly. The same is true for high quality western firms. Over the last two decades, the Japanese have formalised the technique and name it as 5-S practice. The author has developed the world's first 5-S audit worksheet and used it for training in Hong Kong, Malaysia and the UK since 1994. As the name is new to most western societies, the objective of this paper is to explain the intricacy of the 5-S so that it can be understood easily and adopted readily by those who may find the tool useful. 5-S is also an important tool for action learning and the corner stone of a new paradigm for quality culture. In 1994, the Hong Kong Government Industry Department started promoting the 5-S practice in Hong Kong. Many seminars and workshops have been conducted and they were all very popular and well-received by the business community. As a result of the success, the Department commissioned a "5-S practice workbook" with ten successful case studies from the manufacturing, services and public sectors. Further, a grant has been given to the authors to train up 2,500 5-S lead auditors, the first of its kind in the world. The experience will also be shared in this article.

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## Introduction

The 5-S practice is a technique used to establish and maintain quality environment in an organisation. The name stands for five Japanese words: *Seiri, Seiton, Seiso, Seiketsu and Shitsuke* (Osada, 1991). The English equivalents, their meanings and typical examples are shown in Table I.

The technique has been practised in Japan for a long time. Most Japanese 5-S practitioners consider the 5-S useful not just for improving their physical environment but for improving their thinking processes as well. Apparently the 5-S can help in all walks of life. Many of the everyday problems could be solved through adoption of this practice.

## Is 5-S practice applicable to the western world?

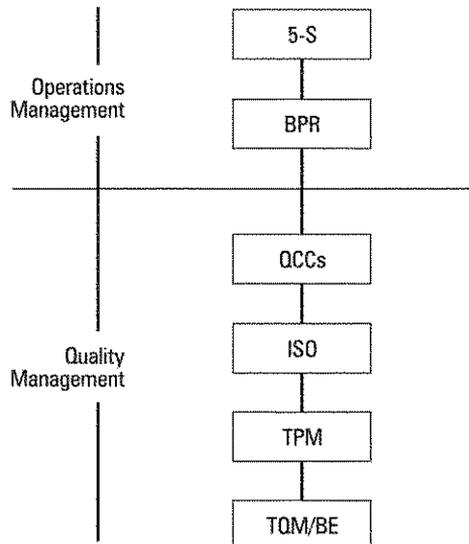
Research by Ho (1995) has shown that the western world seldom recognises the significance of the 5-S practice, although there are indications that some companies have included some aspects of the 5-S in their routines without being aware of its existence as a formalised technique. There are many examples of successful implementation of some principles of the 5-S, especially in the service sector organisations, such as fast-food restaurants, supermarkets, hotels, libraries, and leisure centres. The difference between the Japanese and western approach lies mostly in the degree of employee involvement. By formalising the technique, the Japanese established the framework which enabled them to successfully convey the message across the organisation, achieve total participation and systematically implement the practice. The 5-S has become the way of doing business, not only to impress the customers but to establish effective quality processes as prerequisites for good products and services. Through in-depth research in Hong Kong, Japan and the UK, the author has identified the 5-S practice as the step number one (see Figure 1) for a TQM programme (Ho and Fung, 1994; 1995).

## The 5-S practice in detail

In order to be able to comment whether 5-S practice is useful, a sample of constituents of the 5-S practice and the benefits of its implementation are highlighted below. While contemplating each of the 5-S aspects a reference can be made to the proprietary 5-S audit worksheet (Appendix 1) developed by Ho (1995).

**Table 1** The English equivalent of Japanese words, their meanings and typical examples

Japanese	English	Meaning	Typical example
Seiri	Structurise	Organisation	Throw away rubbish
Seiton	Systematise	Neatness	30-second retrieval of document
Seiso	Sanitise	Cleaning	Individual cleaning responsibility
Seiketsu	Standardise	Standardisation	Transparency of storage
Shitsuke	Self-discipline	Discipline	Do 5-S daily

**Figure 1** The TQMEX model

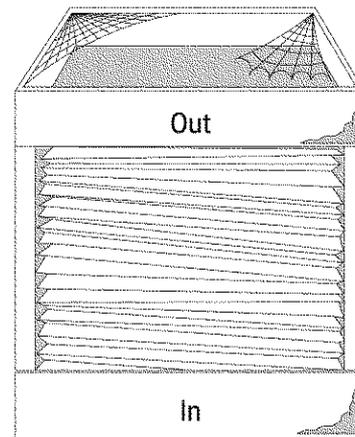
- 5-S = Seiri, Seiton, Seiso, Seiketsu, Shitsuke  
 BPR = Business Process Re-engineering  
 QCCs = Quality Control Circles  
 ISO = ISO 9001/2 Quality Management System  
 TPM = Total Productive Maintenance  
 TQM = Total Quality Management  
 BE = Business Excellence

### Organisation (*Seiri*)

Apart from throwing away rubbish, other aspects of organisation are shown in the 5-S audit worksheet (1.1 to 1.10). It is worthwhile to emphasise the importance of a principle of organisation called “one-is-best”. Examples of application include: one set of tools/stationery, one page form/memo, one day processing (Figure 2), one stop service for customer and one location file (including local area network server for file sharing). In particular for “one day processing”, there is an ancient Chinese saying “Let today’s work belong to today”. There is a lot of virtue in this saying and it requires a combined effort of organisation and self-discipline.

### Neatness (*Seiton*)

Neatness is a study of efficiency. It is a question of how quickly you can get the things you need and how quickly you can put them

**Figure 2** A bad example of one-is-best – not complying with “one-day processing”

away. Just making an arbitrary decision on where things go is not going to make you any faster. Instead, you have to analyse why getting things out and putting them away takes so long. You have to study this for both the people using the things frequently and those who seldom use them. You have to devise a system that everyone can understand.

### Cleaning (*Seiso*)

“Everyone is a janitor” – cleaning should be done by everyone in the organisation, from the managing director to the cleaner. This is why in Japan, they do not need street cleaners in residential areas. Every family is responsible for cleaning the pavement in front of their houses. Therefore, what they need are rubbish collectors. The Japanese believe that while they are doing cleaning, they are cleaning their minds, too. If you have done your annual cleaning at home before the New Year, you would probably have this feeling of freshness.

In an office or a factory, you might start by graphing out the individual areas of responsibility. In doing this, it is important that all assignments be absolutely clear and that there is no undefined, unallocated, or grey areas. Unless each and every person takes these admonitions to heart and accepts personal responsibility, you are not going to get anywhere.

### Standardisation (*Seiketsu*)

Standardisation means continually and repeatedly maintaining your organisation, neatness and cleaning. As such, it embraces both personal cleanliness and the cleanliness of the environment. The emphasis here is on visual management and 5-S standardisation. Innovation and total visual management are used to attain and maintain standardised conditions so that you can always act quickly.

### Discipline (*Shitsuke*)

Discipline means instilling the ability of doing things the way they are supposed to be done. The emphasis here is on creating a workplace with good habits. By teaching everyone what needs to be done and having everyone practising it bad habits are broken and good ones are formed. This process helps people form habits of making and following the rules.

The word *shitsuke* originally comes from the tacking (guiding stitches) that are done before a garment is properly sewn. If accepted that way, discipline is an underlying tool in making life go smoother. It is recognised by the Japanese as the minimum the society needs in order to function properly.

Discipline is a process of repetition and practice. Think of discipline as an integral part of industrial safety. How many people have had accidents because they forgot to wear their safety helmet, their safety shoes, or their goggles? Far too many. How many have had accidents because they stuck their hands into the machinery without shutting it off first? Again, too many. It is important that everyone has the habit of obeying simple safety rules. An example of bad discipline is illustrated in Figure 3.

McGregor (1960) identified two human attitudes towards work. In his Theory X, he observed that humans dislike work and would like to get away from work if possible. On the contrary, in his Theory Y, he observed that humans actually like working and they work as hard as they can to achieve results. This is the case when people are motivated to do their work. Ouchi (1981) observed many successful Japanese and American firms and found out that people actually consider the organisation as part of their family. The staff in these companies devote so much energy and time to their work that one might think as if it is their own business. This type of devotion to work represents the scope of Ouchi's Theory Z. His research shows that it applies not only to the Japanese but also to American workers.

In order to make a successful and painless transition from Theory X to Theory Y and then to Theory Z organisations should install some degree of discipline in the form of

Figure 3 A bad example of discipline – no self discipline



procedures and work instructions. Consequently, self-discipline should be encouraged. Finally, the employees will develop their own self-discipline framework.

### The 5-S implementation plan

The 5-S implementation requires commitment from both the top management and everyone in the organisation. It is also important to have a 5-S champion to lead the whole organisation towards the 5-S implementation step-by-step. The steps of 5-S implementation can best be summarised in the self-explanatory activity-time chart shown in Appendix 2.

### Author's encounter with the 5-S practice

The author was recognised as the one transplanting this useful quality technique to the western world. There are many examples of successful implementation of some principles of the 5-S, especially in the service sector organisations, such as fast-food restaurants, supermarkets, hotels, libraries, and leisure centres. In most Asian countries, including Hong Kong, 5-S has been promoted by their productivity organisations under the umbrella of the Asian Productivity Organisation in the early 1980s but they all died down very quickly. With the benefits of hindsight, the author thinks the main reason for failure was the lack of systematic approach to its implementation.

The author's first encounter with the 5-S was when he was doing a research project for the Asian Productivity Organisation in Japan in 1987. Most of the 24 firms visited had implemented some sort of 5-S activities. It remained an idea till 1993 when he was invited by the Asian Development Bank as the quality expert to the Malaysian Government. At the Standards and Industrial Research

Institute of Malaysia (SIRIM), he was asked to develop a five-year national quality plan for the country. After spending a month to analyse the industrial development of Malaysia, he came to the conclusion that the first step to their quality programmes should be the 5-S. Then the director general asked the author to be their 5-S champion. Being an ISO 9000 lead auditor, he firmly believes that the best way to acquire a quality technique is to do auditing according to the technique. So, it came to his mind that he should develop a 5-S audit checklist, which he now finds the most powerful tool for learning the 5-S. Moreover, since Osada's book was too long (250 pages) and sometimes difficult to comprehend, the author decided to summarise the main ideas, and cover the essential elements together with the additional 5-S audit checklist, implementation plan and a 5-S poster, using 30 pages of A4 size paper.

On the 5-S day, the director general of SIRIM took the lead by wearing his track suit in order to do cleaning in his office after the author's brief introduction. He gave a 40-minute 5-S seminar to some 80 senior staff, including the 20-minute 5-S audit video which he took beforehand. At the same time, all remaining 900 staff were given a one page guideline to "throw away the rubbish and do cleaning all together". At 1 p.m., when the 5-S day was over, three lorry-loads of rubbish were thrown out of the 30 blocks of buildings. More interesting was that a week after the 5-S Day more rubbish came out of the buildings including steel file cabinets which were not suitable for the "transparency" requirement of the 5-S. With that experience, the author started training their consultants and delivering open workshops throughout the country.

The Mobile Oil Company survey tells us that more than 200,000 accredited ISO 9000-family certificates have been issued in September 1997. This means that certified quality management is no more a matter solely for production companies, but is nowadays practised in almost any industry around the world. For those firms preparing for ISO 9000, they should do 5-S first. The reason is that if the obsolete documents and procedures are discarded, there is no need to document them! From the author's experience as ISO 9000 lead auditor, companies that registered for ISO 9000 have already done a significant part of the 5-S, i.e. 5-S applied to document control. Moreover, they can apply the 5-S to improve their work environment and make it more conducive to work. Likewise, the 5-S can also be a good basis for implementing the environmental management standard ISO 14000.

For those firms promoting quality circles, they should look for improvement opportunities from the 5-S angle. From the author's observation and experience, many quality circles die away because they are running out of agenda. There is always a limit as to what to improve from one's own perspective. However, with the use of the 5-S audit worksheet, there are 50 potential areas for improvement, and they can be applied to various work areas by different people. The author has not yet come across a firm doing 5-S but running out of agenda. Thus, 5-S can be used to expand and extend the life cycle of a quality circle which, in return, provides a very good teamworking environment for the 5-S implementation.

### The Hong Kong 5-S campaign

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government Industry Department was charged with the responsibility of transplanting new and useful quality management ideas into Hong Kong. In May 94, its Quality Assurance Unit started organising the 5-S seminars and workshops, and the response was overwhelming. Every time, the seminar and workshops were fully booked and they had to be repeated several times. From the feedback questionnaires, most participants are finding the sessions interesting and the live-audit useful.

After three years, it came to a point that the Department decided not to continue, in order not to be accused of becoming a training organisation. In December 1996, the Department appointed Sam Ho to commission the 5-S workbook (Ho, 1997), based on the teaching materials and ten local case studies. The feedback from the senior executives of the ten sampled companies are quoted as follows.

At C&K, we are always concerned about the quality of our products and the quality of the working life of our employees. Over the last few years, we have found that the 5-S can and has delivered to us what we want. Not only are our products now considered by our customers as world-class, but also our employees enjoy working in the pleasant and cheerful environment. Moreover, we have much less than average staff turn-over rate in our China plant (C&K Systems Ltd (security systems manufacturer)).

Many people would think that textile is textile, we can never be as clean as the electronic industries. However, through our determination and concerted effort, we have been trying to make the impossible possible. Today, cleaning and tidying up things are done round-the-clock at Central textile. We have found 5-S useful for

our continuous improvement and strive for excellence in quality (Central Textiles Ltd). The Hong Kong construction industry mostly operates under very low profit margins due to the competitive nature of the prevailing tendering systems. The hair-split difference between profit and loss are largely determined by how good our firm can organise, standardise and discipline our daily activities. We have found the 5-S useful in helping us to meet the quality and delivery requirements of our clients (CKFC Construction Ltd).

With the objective of productivity improvement at the workshop, including quality, cost, delivery, safety and morale, Computer Products Asia-Pacific Ltd, also trading as Power Conversion Asia-Pacific (PCAP) has introduced the 5-S practice to the shopfloor. The 5-S has built up foundation for the just-in-time manufacturing and TQM later on. We have implemented our 5-S programme thoroughly, vigorously, critically, continuously and successfully (Computer Products Asia Ltd (manufacturer of computer power supplies)).

With the deregulation of the personal communication systems in Hong Kong, we have to improve our service continuously in order to compete with the best players in the field. We have found that the 5-S has helped us a lot in providing a powerful tool to organise our service activities, and projecting an up-market image for our products and services to our customers (Communication Services Ltd (subsidiary of the Hong Kong Telecom Ltd)).

A direct benefit of implementing the 5-S programme is that we have greatly improved the working environment for our staff. More importantly, practising 5-S enhances the communication among Elec & Eltek employees and our spirit of accountability (Elec & Eltek Ltd (printed circuit board manufacturer)).

5-S is a simple but effective tool to improve productivity through a better management of the working environment. In view of the vast volume of work as well as data handled by the Maintenance Division, there is a need to adopt a systematic approach to organise information and manage our operations in order to provide a better service to public housing residents. The use of 5-S techniques provides a solid foundation for the implementation of the Quality Management System in the Maintenance Division (Hong Kong Housing Authority – Maintenance Division).

The 5-S lays a foundation for our quality programmes and enables us to continuously improve our services to the customers. Staff can easily understand the simple and effective tools under the 5-S and apply them in their daily work with improved results. In addition, implementation of the 5-S provides a pleasant working environment conducive to staff morale and productivity (Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation – East Rail Rolling Stock Department). We aim at the operating the best department store in Hong Kong and other territories. In order to achieve this, we are totally committed to

provide quality product and services to our customers. Our experience in Japan has confirmed that the 5-S practice is a very useful tool for us to provide a pleasant and customer-centred shopping environment, making shopping at Sogo a completely new and exciting experience (Sogo Ltd (Japanese department store)).

Neatness and tidiness have always been our principles for creating a comfortable and safe working environment for our staff. The 5-S has provided us with a framework for implementing our principles effectively and systematically (Sunnyside Ltd (toy manufacturer)).

Unlike their previous “manuals”, the workbook was the first one to provide working details of a quality improvement methodology. The workbook has 50 colour photos of good examples of the 5-S implementation, one set each from the ten case companies. A photo is better than a thousand words and they do speak for themselves. As “seeing is believing”, they also contribute to a very powerful and convincing media to the readers on the effectiveness of the 5-S practice. It is the first English book outside Japan on the 5-S, putting aside the Chinese translation. The workbook was published in May 1997 and by September 1997, all 5,000 copies were requested within the shortest time that they have ever experienced, despite the rule of one copy per person. As Francis Ho, the Director-General of Industry, has said on the Foreword of the 5-S workbook:

I therefore recommend this useful workbook to those who wish to excel in pursuing quality improvement in their operations, including the implementation of ISO 9000 and TQM.

In order to successfully promote the 5-S practice in Hong Kong, it is important that a massive promotional campaign be launched together with a readily available training programme. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has given a significant grant to the author for training up 2,500 people in two years as 5-S lead auditors, the first of its kind in the world. Each delegate will be given a copy of the 5-S workbook and attend two sessions in consecutive weekends. In between the two Saturdays, the delegates will do the 5-S audit at their own organisation. Ten photos have to be taken, one each for the good and bad examples of 5-S. There is a written test on the second day, and each delegate will be awarded the 5-S lead auditor certificate if they pass both the live audit and the written test. Since the launch in April 1998, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Over 1,000 lead auditors have been trained within the first six months, including a number through in-company training for the manufacturing, service and education sectors.

## The new 5-S paradigm

Let us take a step back to look at the traditional strategic change process which can broadly be summarised by five key steps:

- (1) vision;
- (2) mission;
- (3) behaviour;
- (4) action;
- (5) culture.

A new paradigm is:

- (1) action;
- (2) behaviour;
- (3) mission
- (4) vision;
- (5) culture.

In fact, the first step is nothing new. Peters and Waterman (1982) have already found out from over 46 successful firms that most of them choose “action” as step number one in their pursuit towards excellence. The new idea here is that action leads to behaviour change of the employees. This arises from the learning process, and as Revans (1983) said: “There is no learning without action and no action without learning”. If learning has been taken successfully, the organisational behaviour will be lifted to a dynamic and challenge-seeking level. This will influence the top management in defining their mission. By then they are confident that the mission, spin off from the better organisation behaviour, will take off once it is announced. The chief executive will then be in a position to develop the corporate vision which will take the organisation through to world class against competition. Being built on firm foundations, the new vision will establish a new culture within the organisation.

5-S provides possibly the best example of this new culture. From the numerous case examples and experience of thousands of people who have gone through the 5-S lead auditor training and implementation, the message comes up again and again that 5-S is an effective and powerful change agent. The front line people are excited about the changes that can be derived from 5-S. They can now be in control of their own work environment and methods of working which can guarantee quality output. This will in turn provide them with positive behavioral changes. The management can then develop the mission statements and the chief executive write down the vision, when the cultural change is already in place. As a result, success is almost guaranteed.

## Conclusions

The 5-S practice is a well-recognised methodology used by the Japanese for improving the work environment. It consists of five steps: organisation, neatness, cleaning, standardisation and discipline and is found to be key to quality and productivity. This paper details the proprietary 5-S audit methodology and reports on how it has been adopted and adapted to the Hong Kong business environment through the training programme and case studies conducted by the Industry Department. The 5-S practice is useful because it helps everyone in the organisation to live a better life. It is the starting point of a TQM programme. In fact, many successful organisations, east or west, have already included some aspects of the 5-S in their routines without being aware of its existence as a formalised technique. The Hong Kong Government is fully committed to promoting the 5-S practice in order to help industries to improve their competitiveness. Last but not the least is that 5-S can act as an effective change agent for promoting quality culture within organisations through action learning. It is therefore hoped that this paper will serve as a seed and a working manual to promote such effective and important quality techniques world-wide.

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**Appendix 1: 5-S audit worksheet****Firm Audited :** \_\_\_\_\_**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_**Phone No. :** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date :** \_\_\_\_\_**Auditor :** \_\_\_\_\_ **Audit No. :** \_\_\_\_\_

*NOTE: Some of the 'Typical Activities' are not applicable to the office environment and therefore need not be audited for offices. You should spend at least an hour to do a thorough audit on all elements of the 5-S, i.e., all 50 points have to be audited. If the finding is good, say how good it is and cross out the last column. If the checkpoint is not applicable, write down N/A.*

**1. ORGANISATION (Seiri):** Stratification management and dealing with the causes.

NO.	TYPICAL ACTIVITIES	LOCATION	AUDIT FINDING	Action by (& Date)
1.1	Throw away the things which are not needed.			
1.2	Deal with the causes of dirt leaks and noise.			
1.3	Organise cleaning the floors and housecleaning.			
1.4	Treat defects, leakage and breakage.			
1.5	Organise the storage of parts and files.			
1.6	One-is-best #1: one set of tools/stationery			
1.7	One-is-best #2: one page form/memo			
1.8	One-is-best #3: one day processing			
1.9	One-is-best #4: one stop service for customer			
1.10	One-is-best #5: one location file (e.g. LAN server for file sharing)			
<i>No. of non-conformances</i>				<b>/10</b>

**2. NEATNESS (Seiton): Functional storage and eliminating the need to look for things.**

NO.	TYPICAL ACTIVITIES	LOCATION	AUDIT FINDING	Action by (& Date)
2.1	Everything has a clearly designated name & place			
2.2	30-second retrieval of tools, documents & parts			
2.3	Filing standards and control			
2.4	Zoning and placement marks			
2.5	Eliminate covers and locks			
2.6	First in, first out arrangement			
2.7	Neat notice boards (also remove obsolete notices)			
2.8	Easy-to-read notices (including zoning)			
2.9	Straight-line and right-angle layout			
2.10	Functional placement for materials, parts, tools, etc			
<i>No. of non-conformances</i>				<b>/10</b>

**3. CLEANING (Seiso): Cleaning as inspection and degree of cleanliness.**

NO.	TYPICAL ACTIVITIES	LOCATION	AUDIT FINDING	Action by (& Date)
3.1	Individual cleaning responsibility assigned			
3.2	Make cleaning and inspection easier			
3.3	Regular sparkling cleaning campaigns			
3.4	Cleaning inspections and correct minor problems			
3.5	Clean even the places most people do not notice			
<i>No. of non-conformances</i>				<b>/5</b>

**4. STANDARDISATION (Seiketsu):** Visual management and 5-S standardisation.

NO.	TYPICAL ACTIVITIES	LOCATION	AUDIT FINDING	Action by (& Date)
4.1	Transparency (e.g. glass covers for see-through)			
4.2	Inspection OK marks or labels			
4.3	Danger zones marked on meters and switches			
4.4	'Danger' warning signs and marks			
4.5	Fire extinguisher and 'Exit' signs			
4.6	Directional markings on pipes, gangways, etc.			
4.7	Open-and-shut directional labels on switches, etc.			
4.8	Colour-coded pipes			
4.9	Foolproofing (Poka-yoke) practices			
4.10	Responsibility labels			
4.11	Electrical/telephone wire management			
4.12	Colour coding -- paper, files, containers, etc.			
4.13	Prevent noise and vibration			
4.14	Department/office labels and name plates			
4.15	Park-like environment (garden office/factory)			
<i>No. of non-conformances</i>				/15

**5. DISCIPLINE (Shitsuke):** Habit formation and a disciplined workplace.

NO.	TYPICAL ACTIVITIES	LOCATION	AUDIT FINDING	Action by (& Date)
5.1	All-together cleaning			
5.2	Do daily physical exercise all together			
5.3	Practise pick-up components and rubbish			
5.4	Wear your safety helmet/gloves/shoes/etc.			
5.5	Public-space 5-S management			
5.6	Practise dealing with emergencies			

5.7	Execute individual responsibility			
5.8	Good telephone and communication practices			
5.9	Design and follow the 5-S manual			
5.10	Seeing-is-believing: check for 5-S environment			
<i>No. of non-conformances</i>				<b>/10</b>

**Overall Evaluation:** \_\_\_\_\_ / 50

<u>Total No. of Non-conformances</u>	<u>Rating</u>
0 - 5	Excellent
6-10	Good
11-15	Average
16-20	Marginal
> 20	Fail

## Appendix 2: The 5-S implementation plan

**Company:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Dept./Section:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Issue No.:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Issued By:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Issue Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Step	5-S ACTIVITY	Person (s) Responsible	<==== MONTH =====>					
			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
1	Get top-management commitment, establish status quo and implementation plan.	CEO & 5-S Champion (5-SC)						
2	5-S Workshop for 5-S Facilitators	5-SC						
3	1st 5-S Day -- Organisation (e.g., Throw away things you do not need.) *	5-SC, Facilitators & CEO						
4	Daily 5-S activities by everyone	Facilitators						
5	2nd 5-S Day -- Neatness (e.g., Name everything and assign locations.) *	5-SC, Facilitators & CEO						
6	3rd 5-S Day -- Cleaning (e.g., All-together housecleaning) *	5-SC, Facilitators & CEO						
7	4th 5-S Day -- Standardisation (Visual management & transparency for things) *	5-SC, Facilitators & CEO						
8	5th 5-S Day -- Discipline (e.g., Seeing-is-believing) *	5-SC, Facilitators & CEO						
9	Grand Prize Presentation for best 5-S department/section	CEO & 5-SC						
10	Review and plan for next 5-S Campaign	5-SC & Facilitators						

\* Individual prizes (gold, silver and bronze) should be given to the top three 5-S winners for the Day. They should be presented by the CEO.

## Commentary

*Cleanliness is next to total quality?*