

The underestimated efficiency reserve: rethinking workstation organisation.

How clear structures, short routes and workstations organised for easy reach save noticeable time every day – and make more of every movement.

The kaiserkraft white paper.



Executive summary

Workstation optimisation does not start with new furniture, but with a close look at daily use. Wherever people search, reach, transport, inspect, pack or document, many small delays arise that add up over weeks and months to noticeable losses in efficiency.

The kaiserkraft Efficiency Compass helps to make these losses visible in a structured way. It examines four key areas: access, travel, orientation and process. A general wish for more order thus becomes a concrete basis for decisions about the workstation, warehouse, workplace equipment and material flow.

Solutions are particularly effective when they consider frequency of use, reach zones, clear labelling and defined processes together. Frequently needed equipment belongs within direct reach, information must be clear at a glance, and material, waste disposal and replenishment need unambiguous locations.

The white paper shows how companies can get started quickly with simple observations, a self-check and a 30-60-90-day plan. The aim is workstations that operate more safely, ergonomically and productively, noticeably easing employees' daily workload.

In brief: This is how to deliver the greatest benefit.

Find faster: Clearly defined locations, visible labelling and storage in an easy reach zone reduce searching and queries.

Work more efficiently: Ergonomic reach zones, clear routes and structured storage reduce strain and improvisation.

Make better decisions: Observations are translated into concrete actions and linked to suitable kaiserkraft solutions.

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01. Introduction

More speed, better organisation and less effort directly at the workstation.

Many companies invest considerable time in process optimisation, digitalisation and space planning. That is the right approach – but one crucial area is often underestimated: the individual workstation.

Wherever people reach, search, transport, inspect, pack, assemble or document every day, numerous small delays arise. A missing container. A tool in the wrong place. A material trolley blocking the way. Unclear labelling. A storage surface known only to the most experienced person on the team. Taken individually, each issue seems harmless. Over weeks, months and multiple sites, however, they add up to noticeable time losses, unnecessary travel, greater strain, more queries and avoidable errors.

This white paper shows how companies can organise their workstations so that people can work better: with greater clarity, safety, ergonomics and productivity. At its heart is the kaiserkraft Efficiency Compass – a practical model for quickly identifying, classifying and improving typical workstation weaknesses.

Practical tip: Make small delays visible.

Check search and travel times: Well-structured workstations can reduce search and travel time by up to 60 per cent. Use this figure as a guide to make the potential of an area tangible.

Take frequent access seriously: At the workstation, people reach several hundred times a day for tools or materials. Even brief searches are therefore repeated so often that they noticeably consume time and concentration.

Start with specific observations: Pay particular attention to search time, reach distances and labelling, waste at the workbench and the absence of fixed locations. This turns a general tidiness issue into a clear route for improvement.

02. Why the greatest efficiency reserve is often found directly at the workstation.

In many companies, efficiency work begins with the big issues: process landscapes, IT systems, machine running times, logistics chains or space concepts. That is understandable, as changes in these areas can be planned effectively and supported by KPIs.

By contrast, the individual workstation often appears unremarkable. It has 'always been set up this way', experienced employees use it with great familiarity, and at first glance it works well enough. That is precisely why it is often overlooked.

Yet it is at the workstation that the true day-to-day performance of a process is determined. This is where material is supplied, tools are used, and goods are inspected, picked, packed, assembled, cleaned or documented. It is also where many small time drains arise that are barely noticed in everyday operations: searching, regripping, asking questions, rearranging, waiting, working around obstacles and rework.

A closer look quickly reveals that workstation organisation is not about tidiness. It is about productivity. And it is about safety. A clearly structured workstation helps employees complete their tasks faster and more safely, with less physical and mental strain.



Tip: Do not treat search time as an isolated problem.

First check whether search time is caused by a lack of visibility. It often results from unclear locations, inconsistent labelling or poorly accessible work equipment. Assess the workstation using simple checkpoints: 12 to 15 points met indicate a clear structure, 8 to 11 show a good foundation with potential, and 0 to 7 suggest likely time losses through searching, queries and interruptions.

Good workstation optimisation therefore does not simply mean adding more shelving or relabelling everything. It means thinking systematically about the workstation from the point of use: What is needed, and how often? What routes are created? What information must be visible immediately? Which actions are repeated every day? Where does uncertainty arise? Where does the team improvise? Only once these questions have been answered can solutions be created that genuinely work in practice.

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ Make everyday obstacles visible: For one week, record three typical disruptions at a selected workstation: searching, unnecessary travel and queries. A simple sheet at the workstation is enough.
- ▶ Estimate the time roughly: Work with the team to estimate how many minutes per shift are lost to these issues. Even an order-of-magnitude estimate helps to set priorities.
- ▶ Start a workstation conversation: Ask employees directly: 'What slows you down most here in your day-to-day work?' and 'What would need to change to make the work easier?'

How to implement it.

Start with a manageable area, such as a packing station, workbench, inspection station or material issue point. It should be used regularly, and the team should know its day-to-day operation well.

Use a simple observation checklist:

Observation	Example	Possible kaiserkraft solution
Searching	Tools are kept in different places	Tool cabinet, perforated panel with tool holders, drawer cabinet with divider sets, workbench with drawers, shadow marking
Travel	Material has to be fetched several times per order	Supply trolley, shelf trolley, shelving directly at the workstation
Queries	It is unclear which material belongs where	Labelling, labels, coloured containers, open-front storage bins
Rearranging	The work surface is used as temporary storage	Additional storage levels, shelving system, material-flow trolley
Physical strain	Frequent bending, reaching or lifting	Lift table, height-adjustable workbench, anti-fatigue mat

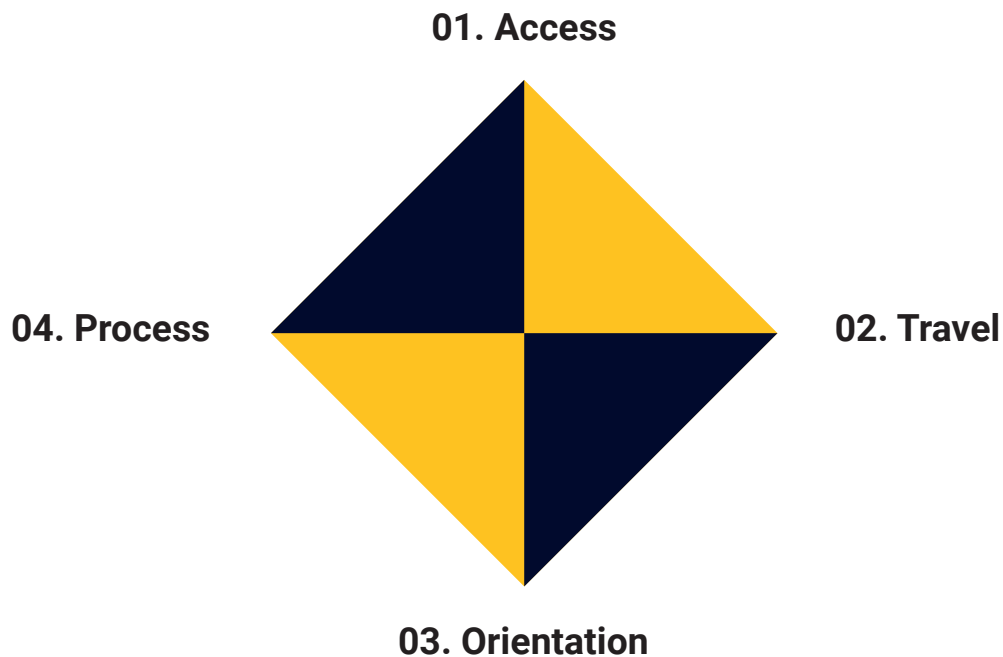
The key point: understand first, then select. Only then can you decide whether a new workbench, cabinet, shelving unit, trolley or labelling system will deliver the greatest benefit.

**Practical example.**

A production area finds that employees spend around 20 minutes per shift searching for tools and materials. Rather than rebuilding the entire area, tool locations are marked first, frequently used parts are placed in open-front storage bins directly at the workbench, and rarely used materials are moved to shelving at the rear. The result: less searching, more free work surface and a workstation that new employees can understand more quickly too.

03. The kaiserkraft Efficiency Compass: four zones that improve every workstation.

Many discussions about workstation optimisation remain vague. “It is confusing.” “The travel distances are too long.” “A lot of time is lost here.” Such statements may be correct, but they rarely lead directly to good solutions. The kaiserkraft Efficiency Compass turns vague impressions into a clear picture. It looks at every workstation from four perspectives:



These four zones help to classify problems accurately. Instead of talking vaguely about “more order”, they reveal exactly where the workstation needs to be improved.



Tip: Organise storage by frequency of access.

Keep like with like: group material by function, application or process step, rather than wherever space happens to be available.

Give every item one place: avoid duplicate storage locations and the “there is some somewhere else” approach. Both lead to time spent searching in the long term.

Prioritise visibility over depth: open fronts, pull-outs and transparent or labelled containers make stock easier to identify.

Prioritise access over density: maximum storage density is not automatically efficient. Frequently used items need deliberate free space.

Create systems rather than standalone solutions: cabinets, bins, shelving, labelling and rules only work reliably when they fit together.

The four zones of the Efficiency Compass.

01

Access: Is everything where it is needed?

Access problems arise when work equipment, tools or materials cannot be reached quickly. Frequently needed parts may be stored too far away, drawers may be overfilled, or employees may have to open several containers before finding the right part.

Typical solutions include:

- ▶ Workbenches with suitable drawer equipment
- ▶ Open-front storage bins and small-parts cabinets
- ▶ Perforated panels and tool holders
- ▶ Material supplied within easy reach
- ▶ Shelving organised by frequency of use

02

Travel: How much movement is really necessary?

Not all movement is bad. But travel caused solely by poorly positioned materials, equipment or information costs time and concentration. Additional metres quickly add up, especially in warehouses, workshops, dispatch, assembly and maintenance.

Typical solutions include:

- ▶ Shelf trolleys and transport trolleys
- ▶ Mobile workbenches
- ▶ Material supply trolleys
- ▶ Shelving systems close to the workstation
- ▶ Clearly defined handover points

03

Orientation: Can everyone see immediately what belongs where?

Orientation problems arise when order depends on experience. Long-standing employees may know where everything is. New employees, stand-ins or the next shift do not.

Typical solutions include:

- ▶ Colour-coded container systems
- ▶ Floor markings
- ▶ Shelving labels
- ▶ Labels and signs
- ▶ Shadow marking for tools
- ▶ Visual standards at the workstation

04

Process: Does the workstation support the next process step?

A workstation can look tidy in isolation and still disrupt the overall process. This happens when material does not arrive in the right condition, handover areas are missing, or information is not passed on clearly.

Typical solutions include:

- ▶ Defined supply and collection zones
- ▶ Kanban shelving
- ▶ Flow racks
- ▶ Picking trolleys
- ▶ Labelling for status and priority
- ▶ Workstation systems with clear inbound and outbound logic

Why the Efficiency Compass is particularly useful.

The compass prevents companies from jumping too quickly to standard solutions. Not every untidy workstation needs new shelving. Not every long route can be solved with more space. Not every query is a training issue.

Sometimes there is no clearly defined location. Sometimes the reach zone is used poorly. Sometimes a mobile solution is needed instead of fixed equipment. And sometimes the cause is not at the workstation at all, but in the preceding handover.

The compass provides a common language. Managers, procurement, occupational safety, Lean specialists and employees can discuss the same observations – and derive concrete actions from them. The tools later in this white paper are also based on this way of thinking.

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ **Run a compass check:** Review a workstation using the four categories of access, travel, orientation and process, and note the most striking points in each category.
- ▶ **Match the appropriate product range:** Check whether the problem is best solved through storage, transport, labelling, ergonomics or material supply.
- ▶ **Select one problem per zone:** Define no more than one action per zone so that the start remains manageable and results are visible.

How to implement it.

Print the Efficiency Compass as a simple worksheet and use it in a team workshop. The key questions:

Zone	Key question	Typical kaiserkraft products
Access	What is needed frequently but is not directly within reach?	Workbenches, drawer cabinets, open-front storage bins, perforated panels + tool holders
Travel	Which routes are repeated without adding value?	Transport trolleys, shelf trolleys, roll containers, pallet trucks
Orientation	Where is it not immediately clear what belongs where?	Labels, floor markings, colour systems, shelving labels
Process	Where do handover, supply or onward transfer stall?	Supply shelving, Kanban shelving, picking trolleys, flow racks

**Practical example.**

In a dispatch area, “not enough space” is initially named as the main problem. The Efficiency Compass reveals, however, that the real issue lies in orientation and process. Packaging materials are not clearly labelled, completed shipments stand next to unfinished orders, and the need for replenishment is noticed too late. Clearly defined areas, colour-coded zones and replenishment shelving improve the process without renting additional space.

04. First observe, then equip: making hidden time drains visible.

Many workstation projects begin with a solution: new shelving, additional containers, larger tables or more cupboards. That is understandable, because visible order quickly creates a sense of progress. But equipping too early risks merely organising existing problems more neatly. An additional cupboard is of little use if it is unclear which parts are actually needed at the workstation. New shelving adds little if frequently used material remains outside the reach zone. And more space can even lead to yet more temporary storage areas.

A different sequence is better: observe first, then assess, then design.

The good news is that this does not require a complex analysis. Simple methods already provide valuable insights. Walking routes can be drawn on a floor plan. Searches can be counted. Disruptions can be recorded in a list. And in short conversations, employees can explain what slows them down each day.

These observations provide a basis for decision-making that is useful to both managers and procurement. Suddenly, 'we may need new shelving' becomes the finding: 'We lose time every day because material A is too far away and tool B has no fixed location.'



Tip: Identify waste directly at the workbench.

Look for typical sources of waste such as waiting, transport, material supply, stock, unnecessary movement, errors, rework, unused improvement potential and missing 5S routines. Pay particular attention to repeated waits for material, manual or duplicate transport, tools outside the optimum reach zone, blocked work surfaces and unclear work instructions.

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ **Sketch the routes:** For a typical activity, draw the routes between the workstation, material storage, tools, waste disposal and the handover point.
- ▶ **Count access events:** For one day, record which materials or tools are needed particularly frequently.
- ▶ **Record disruptions:** Note every interruption caused by searching, asking questions, rearranging, missing parts or unclear storage locations.

How to implement it.

Use a simple three-step check:

01 Observe.

Choose an activity that is carried out regularly, for example:

- Pick an order
- Pack a parcel
- Assemble a component
- Issue tools
- Set up a machine
- Provide spare parts

Observe the activity several times and note where travel, searching or interruptions occur.

02 Identify patterns.

Ask:

- Which parts are needed particularly often?
- Which routes are repeated?
- Where do waiting times arise?
- Which areas are used for other purposes?
- Which aids are missing or poorly positioned?

03 Derive the equipment needed.

Only now should you decide which equipment makes sense:

Observation	Possible solution
Frequently used small parts are scattered	What is needed frequently but is not directly within reach?
Tools have to be searched for	Which routes are repeated without adding value?
Material has to be fetched constantly	Where is it not immediately clear what belongs where?
Heavy parts are lifted	Where do handover, supply or onward transfer stall?
Packaging material blocks work surfaces	Packing-table system, under-table shelving, wall holders



Practical example.

A maintenance team records for one week which tools are searched for several times a day. The entire tool area is not then rebuilt. Instead, a clearly divided drawer cabinet is first set up for the most frequently used tools. Rarely used specialist tools are also stored separately. The result: less searching, a better overview and much easier return after use.

5. Access beats space: organise workstations by use.

When a workstation does not work, an obvious explanation is often: 'We do not have enough space.' In some cases, that is true. Very often, however, the real problem lies in how the space is used.

The best locations at a workstation are limited: the direct reach area, the work surface, the area at eye level and the immediate surroundings accessible without taking extra steps. Frequently used items should be placed there. In practice, the opposite is often true. Rarely used materials occupy the best storage surfaces, old documents remain on the work surface, and spare parts accumulate within reach 'just in case', while frequently used items disappear into drawers, boxes or distant shelving.

Good workstation organisation therefore asks a simple question: How often is something actually used?

This creates clear access zones:

- ▶ **Zone A:** Needed constantly or several times per shift
- ▶ **Zone B:** Needed regularly, but not continuously
- ▶ **Zone C:** Needed rarely or only for certain orders

This logic fundamentally changes the layout. Frequently used items are placed within direct reach. Regularly used items remain close to the workstation. Rarely used items are moved out, stored higher up or transferred to central areas.



Tip: Use reach zones consistently.

Prioritise the comfort zone: Place frequently used tools and materials between hip and shoulder height. Access is fastest, movement most efficient and processes most stable there.

Use the movement zone deliberately: Use areas below hip height or above shoulder height for larger or moderately used materials. Allow for bending, stretching and regripping in these areas.

Relieve the outer zones: Floor-level areas and high shelves increase access times, searching and the risk of errors. Reserve them mainly for rarely used parts.

This does not create a merely cosmetic "tidy" workstation. It creates a workstation that makes work noticeably easier.

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ **Introduce ABC zones:** Sort tools, materials and aids by frequency of use and assign them to zones A, B and C.
- ▶ **Clear the reach area:** Remove everything from the immediate work area that is not needed daily or several times per order.
- ▶ **Choose storage deliberately:** Use drawer cabinets, open-front storage bins, wall holders, shelving or mobile trolleys to match frequency of access.

How to implement it.

A practical approach:

Frequency of access	Positioning	Suitable equipment
Very frequently	Directly at the workstation, reachable without taking a step	Workbench superstructure, tool holder, open-front storage bins, pick bins
Regularly	Close to the workstation, no more than a few steps away	Workstation shelving, drawer cabinet, tool trolley, shelf trolley
Rarely	Centrally or outside the immediate work area	Warehouse shelving, material cabinet, marked reserve area

Combining vertical and mobile organisation is particularly effective. Walls, superstructures and shelving free up the work surface. Transport trolleys and roll containers bring material to where it is needed without permanently blocking fixed areas.



Practical example.

At an assembly workstation, spare parts, inspection equipment and packaging material are kept together on the workbench. After ABC sorting, only the parts needed daily remain within direct reach. Inspection equipment goes into a clearly divided drawer cabinet, packaging material into side shelving, and rarely needed spare parts into central storage. The workbench becomes clearer, movements are shorter and new employees find their way around more quickly.

6. The workstation as part of the process: consider material, information and movement together.

A workstation never operates in isolation. It is always part of a wider process. Something happens before it and something happens after it; in between, material, information and movement must all align.

This is where many problems arise that, at first glance, look like workstation issues. A packing station appears disorganised because orders arrive incomplete. A workbench is overcrowded because there is no clearly defined collection area for finished parts. An inspection station becomes a bottleneck because information is missing. A picking zone appears to need more space, even though the main issue is an unclear replenishment logic.

It is therefore worth looking beyond the table, shelving or cupboard. What matters is the entire flow around the workstation.

Three questions are crucial:

Material: What arrives, when, in what quantity and in what condition?

Information: What details does the person at the workstation need in order to start without asking questions?

Movement: What routes are created for employees, material and equipment?

If these three levels do not align, people improvise. Employees create buffer stores, label items by hand, put material down 'just for a moment', ask questions, wait or sort. This often works for a surprisingly long time – but it ties up time, space and attention.



Tip: Plan waste disposal at the same time.

Think the workstation process through to the end. Waste, empties and cleaning products also need defined locations.

Plan separate, clearly labelled waste disposal directly at the workstation. This keeps areas clean, reduces temporary storage and makes sustainable processes practical in everyday work.

A well-organised workstation makes handovers unambiguous. It has clear inbound and outbound areas, defined locations, visible status information and suitable transport equipment. The workstation thus becomes a stable link in the process.

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ **Make material flow visible:** Map where material comes from, how it is supplied at the workstation and where it goes next.
- ▶ **Clarify information needs:** Check which information is missing at the workstation or is regularly asked for.
- ▶ **Define handover points:** Set up clearly defined areas, containers, trolleys or shelving for "open", "in progress", "finished" and "for inspection".

How to implement it.

A simple process check begins with a sketch. Draw the workstation in the centre and add:

- **Material input**
- **Staging**
- **Work surface**
- **Equipment**
- **Information source**
- **Inspection point**
- **Buffer storage**
- **Output or handover**
- **Disposal or empties**

Then mark every point where something is unclear.

Process question	Typical problem	Suitable kaiserkraft solution
Where does material arrive?	Material is left in different places	Defined supply area, floor markings, supply trolley
How is the need for replenishment identified?	Parts are only found to be missing when they are needed	Kanban shelving, open-front storage bins, minimum-stock marker
Where is order information kept?	Queries, incorrect sequence, outdated documents	Document holders, information board, order wallets
Where do finished parts go?	Finished and unfinished parts get mixed up	Marked outbound area, roll trolley, status containers
How are empty containers handled?	Empty containers block the workstation	Empty-container trolley, collection container, return zone

The important point is that handovers need physical clarity. A sign alone is rarely enough. The location, container, labelling and rule must fit together.



Practical example.

An inspection workstation receives parts from three assembly areas. Previously, these were left on any available surface, causing queries, searching and the wrong sequence. The solution: three labelled supply trolleys, clear priority marking and a defined outbound area for inspected parts. The inspection workstation remains clearer, and the assembly areas can immediately see where their parts are.

7. Visibility in day-to-day operations: status, replenishment and deviations at a glance.

Not every delay is caused by poor reach zones or long routes. Uncertainty also costs time in daily work: Has this order been released? Is material missing? Is replenishment needed? Is this scrap, rework or finished goods?

This is exactly where visual management differs from general tidiness. It is no longer about fixed locations for tools – the Efficiency Compass already addresses that. The focus is on conditions, priorities and deviations that everyone must recognise immediately.

Well-designed visual standards make the workflow readable. They show at a glance what is being processed, what is waiting, what is missing and what should happen next. This reduces queries, makes shift changes easier and stabilises the process.

Visibility is genuinely helpful when it simplifies decisions rather than creating more information. Fewer labels, but clear signals.

- **which status applies,**
- **where replenishment is missing,**
- **which priority applies,**
- **where deviations have occurred,**
- **what the next safe step is.**

Labelling thus becomes an everyday management tool, not merely an element of tidiness.



Tip: Design labelling to help immediately.

Label every storage location unambiguously and use consistent logic throughout the operation. Ensure that signs are readable from a distance and use colours purposefully, not decoratively. Link each item clearly to its storage location. Supplement digital systems with visible labelling and check regularly that everything remains permanently legible.

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ **Mark status areas:** Clearly and consistently identify areas as 'open', 'in progress', 'complete', 'blocked', empty containers or replenishment required.
- ▶ **Limit the colour logic:** Use colours for status, urgency or areas – but only to the extent that they can be understood quickly and unambiguously in day-to-day work.
- ▶ **Make deviations visible:** Use target-state photos, minimum stock levels, inspection notes or brief standard cards exactly where decisions are made.

How to implement it.

Start with three visual standards:

Standard	Benefit	Examples
Location marking	Missing or incorrectly parked items are immediately obvious	Floor markings for trolleys, tool outlines, shelf-location labels
Status marking	Orders and materials are unambiguous	colour-coded containers for open/complete/blocked, job wallets, information boards
Target state	Order can be verified	Photo of the set-up workstation, end-of-shift checklist

kaiserkraft product ranges particularly suited here:

- **Marking systems**
- **Labels and labelling materials**
- **Open-fronted storage bins**
- **Shelving with label strips**
- **Tool walls and perforated panels**
- **Information boards and document holders**
- **Floor markings**
- **Material and status containers**



Practical example.

At a packing station, staff often have to ask which packaging material should be used for each type of order. Once colour-coded shelf compartments, brief pictorial instructions and clear replenishment marks are introduced, the number of queries falls. New employees can be trained more quickly and material supply becomes easier to plan.

8. Organisation that empowers people: ergonomics, safety and 5S in everyday work.

A workstation may look efficient on paper yet still cause strain in day-to-day use. If employees constantly have to bend, reach too far, move heavy parts by hand, step over materials or work in awkward positions, health risks arise. The likelihood of errors, fatigue and accidents also increases.

Good workstation optimisation therefore always considers three dimensions:

- **which status applies,**
- **where replenishment is missing,**
- **which priority applies,**
- **where deviations have occurred,**
- **what the next safe step is.**

The 5S method provides a useful framework. It comes from Lean practice and helps keep workstations clear and functional over the long term. Importantly, 5S is not a one-off tidy-up day. It only works when standards are created that are easy to follow in everyday work.

5S for the workstation.

5S step	Meaning	Workstation benefit
Sort	Remove unnecessary items	more free space, fewer distractions
Set in order	Arrange required items logically	shorter routes, faster access
Shine	Keep the workstation clean	Faults and damage become visible sooner
Standardise	Make order unambiguous	consistent quality, easier onboarding
Sustain	Review standards regularly	lasting impact instead of regression

In practice, this means first deciding what genuinely belongs at the workstation. Everything is then assigned a suitable place. Finally, cleaning, inspection and return are made as simple as possible.

Ergonomics and 5S belong together. A tool may be stored neatly but still hang too high. A container may be clearly labelled but be too heavy to lift. Shelving may be well organised but restrict a traffic route. Every 5S measure should therefore also check physical strain and safety.


Tip: always combine 5S with ergonomics.

Sorting and setting in order only work properly when frequently used items are both tidy and within easy reach. Do not arrange items by size or weight alone. Frequency of use is at least as important for efficient workstations.

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ **Carry out a 5S check at the workstation:** Remove unnecessary materials and position frequently used aids within easy reach and mark their fixed locations.
- ▶ **Check ergonomics too:** For shelving, workbenches, containers and cupboards, consider reach heights, posture, load weight and freedom of movement.
- ▶ **Choose safe equipment:** Use anti-slip workstation mats, stable steps, lifting tables, height-adjustable workbenches, drawer cabinets and safe transport trolleys rather than improvised solutions.
- ▶ **Keep standards visible:** Use target-state photos, end-of-shift checklists, cleaning plans and clear location markings.
- ▶ **Involve the team:** Ask employees to assess which arrangement is genuinely practical in day-to-day work. Acceptance rarely begins at a desk; it develops at the workstation itself.

How to implement it.

Start with three visual standards:

Check question	What to look for	Possible kaiserkraft solution
Is frequent bending required?	lower shelves, heavy parts, floor storage	lifting table, supply trolley, shelving with ergonomic access height
Is long reaching required?	tools or parts outside the reach zone	workbench superstructure, swivel arm, perforated panel, open-fronted storage bins
Are heavy loads carried manually?	manual material transport	transport trolley, material lift, pallet truck, roll container
Are there trip hazards?	cables, cartons, empty containers, bottlenecks	cable protectors, collection containers, defined parking areas
Is the workstation tiring?	prolonged standing, hard floors	workstation mat, standing aid, ergonomic work chair


Practical example.

In a workshop, frequently used tools are stored neatly but poorly: some hang too high, heavy parts sit on the bottom shelf and employees spend long periods standing on a hard floor. A new arrangement based on reach height, a drawer cabinet for heavy tools, a workstation mat and clearly defined return locations noticeably improve both order and

9. What works immediately – and what delivers lasting value.

Not every improvement needs a major project. Some measures deliver results within days: clear labelling, a repositioned container, a marked parking area, an additional shelf trolley or a clear work surface.

Other issues need more preparation. These include consistent workstation standards, new material-flow concepts, cross-functional handovers and investment in larger equipment solutions.

Both matter. Immediate actions create visible wins and show the team that change is happening. Structural measures ensure improvements do not disappear again after a few weeks.

The most common mistake is to mix the two. Small improvements are then discussed endlessly while larger issues begin without a clear plan. A simple distinction works better:

- **Improve immediately:** What can be changed directly without risk or major effort?
- **Plan deliberately:** What needs budget, coordination, procurement or new standards?

This creates momentum without rash action.

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ **Sort the measures:** Divide ideas into 'immediately feasible', 'short-term planning' and 'structural' categories.
- ▶ **Launch three visible improvements:** Choose measures the team will feel within 30 days, such as labelling, container logic or transport equipment.
- ▶ **Prepare lasting standards:** Document successful solutions so that they can be transferred to similar workstations.

How to implement it.

Start with three visual standards:

Impact	Effort	Recommendation
high	low	implement immediately
high	higher	plan as a project
low	low	only implement if it supports order and safety
low	high	review critically

Typical immediate measures:

- label open-fronted storage bins
- mark trolley parking areas
- assign fixed locations to tools
- relocate rarely used materials
- clear the work surface
- introduce empty-container bins
- fit document holders

Typical structural measures:

- new workstation systems
- standardised workbenches
- Kanban supply
- new shelving layout
- ergonomic redesign
- consistent marking logic
- cross-functional material flow



Practical example.

A warehouse team collects 25 improvement ideas. Rather than tackling everything at once, it selects five immediate measures: floor markings for transport trolleys, shelf-location labels, a separate empty-container area, open-fronted bins for small parts and a target-state photo. In parallel, a larger project to reorganise the picking areas is planned.

10. Workstation profiles: turn good individual solutions into robust standards.

The Efficiency Compass shows where a workstation has problems. Workstation profiles answer the next question: which standard solution will suit similar stations?

Profiles are therefore not a second guiding model alongside the compass. They translate it into standardisation and rollout. They help turn one good solution into reusable building blocks for assembly, inspection, shipping or maintenance.

The work logic is decisive: frequent access, extensive movement, large volumes of information or regular changes of user. Only then can suitable standards be derived for workbenches, storage, trolleys, marking, supply and ergonomics.

This creates solutions that work in one place and can also be transferred cleanly to similar areas.

Typical workstation profiles.

Profile	Characteristics	Key requirements
Reach-focused workstation	many repetitive manual actions	short reach distances, clear tool locations, materials within reach
Movement-focused workstation	frequent movement and transport	mobile equipment, clear routes, suitable trolleys
Information-focused workstation	many orders, documents and checks	visible information, document holders, status marking
Shared workstation	several people or shifts use the same station	standards, target state, easy return
Project workstation	changing tasks and materials	flexible furniture, mobile shelving, modular storage
Heavy-load workstation	heavy parts, lifting, repositioning	lifting tables, transport aids, ergonomic reach heights

The benefit: companies do not standardise blindly. They define recurring components for each profile – such as workbench type, storage, trolley, labelling, supply and disposal – and roll them out in a targeted way.

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ **Profile workstations:** Classify pilot stations by their dominant work logic, not simply by department or area.
- ▶ **Define standard components for each profile:** For each profile, define which combination of workbench, storage, marking, supply and ergonomics will be specified.
- ▶ **Prepare the rollout:** Use these components for similar workstations instead of planning every area from scratch.

How to implement it.

Example allocation:

Workstation profile	Typical standard solution for rollout and procurement
Reach-focused workstation	Workbenches, tool walls, open-fronted storage bins, swivel arms, drawer cabinets; reach zone, fixed tool locations, replenishment logic
Movement-focused workstation	Shelf trolleys, transport trolleys, roll containers, pallet trucks; routes, parking areas, handover points, empty-container flow
Information-focused workstation	Information boards, document holders, marking, workstation lights; order information, status logic, approvals
Shared workstation	Standardised cupboards, labelled storage surfaces, target-state photos; identical basic layout, shift handover, onboarding
Project workstation	Mobile shelving, roll containers, flexible tables; modular storage, mobile supply, temporary zones
Heavy-load workstation	Lifting tables, heavy-duty shelving, ergonomic transport aids; reach heights, fewer lifting operations, clear movement areas



Practical example.

A company wants to equip all workshop stations consistently. The profile check shows that some are classic assembly stations, others serve maintenance and others inspection. Instead of a one-size-fits-all solution, three workstation standards are created with different workbench superstructures, cupboards, marking logic and material supply. This avoids unsuitable purchases, simplifies later rollouts and improves usability at every station.

11. The business case: what good workstation organisation measurably improves.

Workstation optimisation is most compelling when it becomes visible and measurable. This does not always require extensive data collection. Samples, observations and transparent assumptions are often enough to calculate a robust order of magnitude.

Key metrics include:

- **search time**
- **travel time**
- **waiting time**
- **errors or rework**
- **space occupancy**
- **accidents and near misses**
- **onboarding time**
- **stock visibility**
- **on-time delivery**

Even small figures can have a major impact. If one person loses 10 minutes a day through searching or unnecessary movement, that amounts to around 36 hours a year over 220 working days. For ten people, the total is about 360 hours – almost nine working weeks.



Tip: make the impact tangible with simple figures.

Use this as a guide: well-structured workstations can reduce search and travel time by up to 60 per cent.

Always present such figures as potential, not a guarantee. The actual impact depends on the starting point, the area and implementation.

The calculation is simple:

Annual time saving = minutes per day × working days × number of employees / 60

Example:

$10 \times 220 \times 10 / 60 = 366.7$ hours per year

Valuing this time at an internal hourly rate quickly produces a clear economic benefit. Qualitative effects also contribute: less stress, better safety, faster onboarding and greater process stability.

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ **Measure the pilot area:** Record search time, movement or queries over one week at a selected workstation.
- ▶ **Calculate the savings potential:** Extrapolate the observed minutes to a year, team size and hourly rate.
- ▶ **Document additional benefits:** Add qualitative effects such as less rework, better safety, greater visibility and faster onboarding.

How to implement it.

Use a simple business-case table:

Metric	Today	Target	Benefit
Search time per person/day	10 min	4 min	6 min saved
Journeys per order	8 journeys	5 journeys	less walking
Queries per shift	15	6	fewer interruptions
occupied work area	100%	70%	more usable space
onboarding time	5 days	3 days	productive sooner

This makes typical investments easier to justify:

- new workbench with storage
- workstation shelving system
- transport trolley for material supply
- drawer cabinet for tools
- lifting table to reduce strain
- marking system
- packing-table system
- workstation mats



Practical example.

A packing area measures that employees spend around 12 minutes each day searching for or replenishing packaging material. Labelled shelf compartments, minimum-stock markers and a clear replenishment process reduce this effort considerably. Investment in shelving, containers and marking can be justified through time savings, fewer packing errors and more stable processes.

12. From hotspot to rollout: the 30-60-90-day roadmap.

Many improvement projects begin with energy and end in the pressures of day-to-day business. The idea is usually not the problem. The route is often too broad, too unclear or insufficiently embedded.

A good starting point begins with a hotspot: a workstation where problems are visible, employees are affected and improvements can show results quickly.

The 30-60-90-day roadmap helps turn this starting point into a robust model.

Days 1 to 30: understand and implement initial improvements.

The first 30 days focus on observing the workstation, applying the Efficiency Compass and testing initial measures.

Typical activities:

- select a pilot workstation
- define objectives
- involve employees
- record search time, movement and disruptions
- apply the Efficiency Compass
- implement initial immediate measures
- test suitable products and equipment

Days 31 to 60: stabilise and develop standards.

Now assess what works and what needs adjustment. Successful solutions are documented.

Typical activities:

- gather feedback from the team
- refine locations and standards
- photograph the target state
- supplement work instructions
- finalise the equipment
- clarify responsibilities
- measure the metrics again

Days 61 to 90: transfer and scale.

In the final step, the solution is transferred to similar workstations. This is not about copying at any cost. Sensible adaptation is what matters.

Typical activities:

- define the workstation profile
- specify standard components
- select further areas

- consolidate procurement
- provide training or instruction
- establish a review cycle

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ **Define the pilot clearly:** Choose a workstation with a visible need and manageable scope.
- ▶ **Set up a 30-60-90 plan:** Define specific objectives, owners and dates for each phase.
- ▶ **Secure the standard components:** Document successful solutions so that other areas can adopt them.

How to implement it.

A concise roadmap:

Period	Target	Outcome
0–30 days	analyse and test initial improvements	visible relief at the pilot workstation
31–60 days	stabilise and document	clear workstation standard
61–90 days	transfer and roll out	scalable model for similar areas

Typical kaiserkraft components for rollout:

- defined workbench types
- standardised drawer cabinets
- consistent open-fronted storage bins
- transport trolleys by workstation profile
- Marking systems
- workstation mats and ergonomic components
- shelving systems for material supply
- packing-table and shipping solutions



Practical example.

A company starts with a single packing station. After 30 days, materials, tools and documents are arranged more clearly. After 60 days, the new standard is documented. After 90 days, three further packing stations use the same basic logic – adapted to volume, product types and order structure.

13. Practical toolkit: Putting the Efficiency Compass into practice.

A white paper is only valuable if it leads to concrete steps. That is exactly where the practical toolkit comes in.

It builds on the Efficiency Compass. The compass remains the central thinking model of this white paper: it assigns workstation problems to four zones – access, movement, orientation and process. Three complementary tools then help structure observations, select measures and implement them in operations:



Tip: evaluate the self-check simply.

Add check points covering workstation and order, marking and visibility, and day-to-day processes to the self-check.

Use a simple evaluation: 12 to 15 ticks indicate a clear structure, 8 to 11 ticks a good foundation with potential, and 0 to 7 ticks likely time losses through searching and queries.

- Self-check
- Prioritisation matrix
- Action plan

Together, these tools turn the Efficiency Compass into an approach that teams can discuss, prioritise and implement step by step.

The foundation: the Efficiency Compass.

Assign observations to one of the four zones:

Zone	Observation	Measure
Access	What cannot be reached quickly?	visible relief at the pilot workstation
Travel	Which journeys occur unnecessarily often?	clear workstation standard
Orientation	What is not clear at a glance?	scalable model for similar areas
Process	Where do handovers or onward transfers stall?	Orientation

Tool 1: workstation organisation self-check.

Rate each point from 1 to 5:

Together, these tools turn the Efficiency Compass into an approach that teams can discuss, prioritise and implement step by step.

Tool 1: workstation organisation self-check.

Rate each point from 1 to 5:

1 = does not apply at all**5 = applies fully**

Question	Rating
Frequently needed work equipment is directly accessible.	1 2 3 4 5
Tools and materials have fixed locations.	1 2 3 4 5
Walking routes are short and logical.	1 2 3 4 5
The workstation is clearly marked.	1 2 3 4 5
Handovers are clearly defined.	1 2 3 4 5
Shift changes work without lengthy explanations.	1 2 3 4 5
The workstation is ergonomically equipped.	1 2 3 4 5
Trip hazards and improvised storage areas are avoided.	1 2 3 4 5
Replenishment needs are visible in good time.	1 2 3 4 5
New employees find their way around quickly.	1 2 3 4 5

Tool 2: prioritisation matrix.

Measure	Impact	Effort	Priority
	high / medium / low	high / medium / low	A / B / C
	high / medium / low	high / medium / low	A / B / C
	high / medium / low	high / medium / low	A / B / C

Recommendation:

- A measures: high impact, manageable effort
- B measures: high impact, greater effort
- C measures: low impact or unclear benefit

Tool 3: action plan.

What will be implemented?	Owner	By when?	Equipment required	Status
				open / in progress / complete
				open / in progress / complete
				open / in progress / complete

Put this into practice now.

- ▶ **Start the team check:** Use the self-check in a 30-minute team session and collect the most important weaknesses.
- ▶ **Apply the Efficiency Compass:** First assign all observations to the four zones – access, movement, orientation and process.
- ▶ **Link measures to products:** Then check whether the improvement can be achieved with a workbench, shelving, a cupboard, trolley, container, marking, ergonomic product or a combination of these.

**Practical example.**

A team first uses the Efficiency Compass and finds that orientation and access are the main issues – not movement. The self-check sharpens these observations. The prioritisation matrix and action plan are then used to implement fixed tool locations, labelled open-fronted storage bins, a drawer cabinet and marked parking areas. This turns the analysis into a more stable workstation that can later be transferred to similar areas.

14. Conclusion: Workstation optimisation begins with understanding everyday work.

Good workstation organisation is more than tidiness. It combines productivity, safety, ergonomics and everyday practicality. It helps employees spend less time searching and improvising, work more safely and recognise more quickly what needs to be done.

The kaiserkraft Efficiency Compass remains the central thinking model. It shows whether a workstation primarily needs improvement in access, movement, orientation or process. The self-check, prioritisation matrix and action plan then help implement the right solution systematically.

The result is workstations that look better and work better day to day: clearer, safer, more robust and closer to what teams genuinely need every day.

Talk to kaiserkraft.

At kaiserkraft, we help you find the right products and solutions for industrial, warehouse and office equipment as well as packaging. Together, we assess which equipment genuinely supports your workstations day to day: from workbenches, cupboards, shelving and trolleys to containers, marking and ergonomic products, plus packaging and disposal solutions.

This turns a workstation observation into a solution suited to your processes, teams and spatial requirements.

15. Glossary.

Term	Explanation
5S	Method for structured workstation organisation: sort, set in order, shine, standardise and sustain.
Process	Part of the Efficiency Compass. Describes how tasks, handovers, replenishment and information interlock in the work process.
Workstation optimisation	Targeted improvement of access, movement, orientation, ergonomics, safety and process directly at the workstation.
Efficiency Compass	A practical kaiserkraft model that assigns weaknesses to four zones: access, movement, orientation and process.
Reach zone	The area in which tools or materials can be reached. Frequently used items should be placed in the ergonomically favourable comfort zone.
Marking	Visible, unambiguous labelling of storage locations, containers, materials or parking areas so employees can find and assign items more quickly and safely.
Comfort zone	The ergonomically favourable area roughly between hip and shoulder. Frequently needed work equipment should be placed here.
Orientation	Part of the Efficiency Compass. Describes whether employees can immediately see where something is, where it belongs and what needs to happen next.
Open-fronted storage bin	An open or clearly visible container for small parts that makes access, overview and replenishment control easier.
Search time	Time lost through poor visibility, unclear locations, inadequate marking or illogical processes.
Waste	All activities or conditions that create no direct value, such as waiting, unnecessary movement, rework, duplicate transport or searching.
Access	Part of the Efficiency Compass. Describes how quickly and easily employees can reach the tools, materials and information they need.

16. Sources.

Selected internal and publicly available kaiserkraft materials used in this white paper. Status: May 2026.

Source	Used for
kaiserkraft: 'Workstation – more from every movement.'	Title context, benefit rationale, search-time/reach-zone/disposal logic, product references
Checklist: 'The search-time check for workshop, warehouse and production'	Self-check, assessment logic, guidance on fixed locations and search time
Guide: 'The order code for clear access'	Chapter on access, order logic, fixed locations, visibility before depth and frequency of use
Guide: 'Rethinking reach zones'	Chapter on reach zones, comfort zone, movement zone and ergonomic arrangement
Mini guide: 'Why no one can find anything – even though it is all there'	Chapter on search time, fixed locations, visible order and a simple system
Checklist: 'Warehouse marking: the 7 rules'	Chapter on visibility, status marking, legibility and marking logic
Practical analysis: 'Identifying waste at the workbench'	Chapter on observation, process flow, 5S, workbench analysis and practical examples

Note on the use of AI support.

This white paper was created using AI-assisted tools and was editorially reviewed, revised and finalised by kaiserkraft. kaiserkraft is responsible for the content, statements and technical assessments.

