

Industry Outlook: Cultivating Valued Assets

Written by Poul Jeppesen, President, SKF North America
Friday, 19 August 2011 14:00



Manufacturers today are under tremendous pressure to provide the highest possible quality at the lowest possible cost and to manage and maintain assets efficiently, productively and profitably. In striving to meet these critical objectives, however, operations face strong headwinds, especially with a growing shortage of experienced-based workers who possess the necessary technical skills and knowledge.

The exit of U.S. manufacturing jobs, for example, has exerted a huge impact for reasons well beyond the basic economics. The next generation of engineers and maintenance professionals likely wonders where and when opportunities—*if any*—will present themselves. This is occurring at a time when the effects of attrition in the workforce and resulting lost expertise have imposed even greater burdens on operations.

One positive way to address—*and help fill*—existing and anticipated vacancies in the areas of engineering and reliability is for the manufacturing sector to pursue sustained educational partnerships with colleges and universities. Such partnerships can open a wider window into career opportunities for the future workforce and, in the process, impart real-world knowledge, generate interest in particular fields and motivate qualified candidates to become part of the solution. SKF has engaged in educational-partnership endeavors for years and has benefited in kind.

Within our organization, we place significant emphasis on training and energizing our own people. Internally focused SKF “colleges” around the world have been established to educate our workforce about leadership qualities and the skills that can help move associates to higher levels. In addition, our people are encouraged to gain new perspectives and new experiences by serving in a variety of successive working opportunities during the course of their careers—*including opportunities that sometimes involve totally different technologies and venues than what they may have been used to*

. Along the way, individuals have been equipped to enhance and broaden their skill sets.

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Many operations, of course, will continue to struggle with an evolving marketplace and a changing workforce. Where can they turn for help? For many, the “SKF Reliability Maintenance Institute” (RMI) plays a substantive and ongoing role in cultivating asset knowledge and efficiency through training on scores of topics.

The RMI conducts more than 100 training programs annually and addresses needs from shop floor to top management. Experienced instructors offer comprehensive tailored courses covering all aspects of machine reliability and competence development. As a result, higher levels of efficiency can be achieved both for personnel and machinery, plant safety can improve and an organization can underscore its commitment to its people.

Technology, too, has become an important factor in supporting today’s manufacturing operations, in general, and the needs of maintenance professionals, in particular. Technology to perform various—and often historically complex—tasks has evolved steadily with the development of highly sophisticated and increasingly user-friendly tools. The continuous rollout of advanced technology intends to equip operators with as much knowledge as possible delivered in clear and understandable ways, while accommodating differing experience levels.

Many challenges will persist for manufacturers on the road to reaching their particular operational, maintenance and reliability objectives. But with support from willing and experienced industry partners, every challenge can present opportunities to optimize asset efficiency and cultivate the people who represent an organization’s most valuable asset of all. **M
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