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A Reliability Improvement Policy, as described in the January 2008 installment of this column, along with a Plan developed, supported and administered by company leadership at all levels is essential for fueling positive changes in the maintenance and reliability process. Sustaining improvements in maintenance and reliability should be the next concern of your leadership team as it develops and deploys your Reliability Policy.

Since there is a compelling case that our business success or growth depends on the results of change efforts, sustaining positive change is fairly easy if: 1) it is not an option; and/or 2) it is a condition of employment. Why, then, do so many maintenance and reliability improvement initiatives stop or go dormant in such a short time?

Could it be that there is no honestly “compelling” reason to change? Could it be that everyone who should be leading the change process has NOT bought into it? Could it be that some are afraid of change (i.e. afraid of the unknown)? Or could it be they simply don’t want to change at all? Truth is, it could be all of these reasons and more!

So, how do we sustain positive changes and innovations in maintenance and reliability in our organizations?

Sustainability of innovative work processes, be they maintenance- or operations-related, have been promoted by many purveyors and “innovators” for decades. Sometimes it is “sales hype” and other times it is wishful (or hopeful) thinking. Sustaining positive change in equipment, plant and process reliability is a must in today’s highly competitive and rapidly changing global economy. Sustaining positive change depends on people—you and me, senior leaders and

plant floor people, mechanics and operators, all of us—buying into the new methods, adopting them and sometimes changing our beliefs and behaviors in the workplace.

Reliability-Centered Maintenance (RCM), Preventive Maintenance (PM), Total Productive Maintenance (TPM), Operator-Performed Maintenance, Condition-Based Maintenance (CMB), Life-Cycle Costing (LCC), Lean Manufacturing, Computerized Maintenance Management Systems (CMMS), ALL represent some of the numerous changes in the ways companies, and people, take care of their equipment and facilities today. Have you seen some of your maintenance and reliability improvement programs come and go? Have you started on an improvement journey only to have it stall, go stagnant and (perhaps) even stop all together? It happens all the time in many businesses large and small all over the world.

Let's explore how individual attitudes throughout the organization, from senior leadership through plant floor employees, can affect the development and sustainability of maintenance and reliability changes in the workplace.

Individual innovativeness

Some people are more innovative, more adventurous than others. Studies over the years have shown that people embrace change or new ideas at different rates. Take for example studies done by Everett Rogers dating from the early 1960s up through the early 2000s. Rogers identified five groups of "adopters" of innovation:

1. Innovators represent the first wave of adopters (2.5%). They are adventuresome, well educated, have multiple sources of information and are willing to tolerate initial problems that may occur, as well as willing to seek solutions.
2. Early Adopters represent the next wave of adopters (13.5%). They tend to be the social leaders, popular, educated, visionary, and are looking to adopt new ideas that will lead to breakthroughs even though a high-risk, high-reward project may be the only way.
3. Early Majority represents the next wave of adopters (34%). They are motivated by evolutionary changes, rather than revolutionary changes, where their larger group adopts the changes together and is willing to move along quickly.
4. Late Majority represent the next wave of adopters (34%). They tend to be more skeptical, traditional, looking for price-sensitive, ready-to-go, bullet-proof solutions for staying competitive. They don't want to fall too far behind.
5. Laggards represent the last wave to adopt (16%). They are the skeptics who cherish the status quo and do not believe that the innovation is any good at all. They are likely to block movements toward changes in their areas.

When an entire organization, a company, a department or even a plant-floor crew is expected to quickly adopt innovative maintenance and reliability methods, the degree of individual innovativeness can greatly influence success and sustainability of the maintenance and reliability gains.

“Individual innovativeness” should be carefully considered when striving for sustainable breakthroughs in maintenance and reliability performance using any innovative change process or work methods. Identifying the Innovators and Early Adopters in your organization to lead maintenance and reliability innovations will be essential to your success. Seek them out. Engage them as both formal and informal leaders.

Advocates of change

In many cases transforming an organization from highly reactive or repair-based maintenance to highly planned, preventive and proactive maintenance represents a significant work culture change. John Kotter, in his book Leading Change, estimates that 85% of corporate and company CULTURE change efforts fail. In Kotter’s analysis of successful and unsuccessful company change, he identified his own four categories of people:

1. Advocates strongly support the change process and push its implementation.
2. Incubators understand the innovation and the need to change, but they are waiting to see if it will stick.
3. Apathetics don’t know much about the innovation or the change process and don’t believe it has anything to do with them or their jobs.
4. Resisters will actively block the change efforts.

What would happen if senior leadership chose a mix of Incubators, Apathetics and even Resisters to lead the change efforts? There wouldn’t be a “snowball’s chance…” of succeeding. Conversely, what if senior leadership made sure that those leading the innovations were all Advocates willing to walk the talk? There likely would be no limit to what they could accomplish.

You can see how “leadership” of any change effort easily can be influenced by the mindsets, attitudes and paradigms of those charged with heading up such an initiative in an organization. Maintenance and reliability innovation leaders also must be aware of other personal change dynamics at work in their workplace and consciously approach change accordingly.

Leading sustainable change

Creating major change can be a challenge for any size organization. But, what would happen if the change were not successful—if the desired results were not achieved and sustained? In many cases sustainability of maintenance and reliability is “a must” for business success. After years studying hundreds of businesses change efforts, successes and failures, Kotter identified the following “Eight-Stage Process for Creating Major Change.” Two of the most important aspects of these eight stages are: 1) that change starts with a compelling reason to change from the status quo; and 2) that change builds on this compelling foundation, one proven stage at a time, to create lasting change.

1. Establishing a sense of urgency: A real compelling business case for change, not a threat.
2. Creating the guiding coalition: A true team with enough formal and informal power to lead the change.
3. Developing a vision and strategy: Where are we going and how will we get there.
4. Communicating the change vision: Face-toface vision-sharing and walking the talk.
5. Empowering broad-based action: Getting rid of obstacles, taking educated risks.
6. Generating short-term wins: Very visible, very fast, rewarded, recognized and celebrated.
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change: Leveraging the “wins” for more paradigm-shifting change.
8. Anchoring the new approaches in the organization: Showing results and successes due to changes in behaviors at all levels, and ensuring leaderships’ ability to sustain the behaviors.

Be cautious, however, when looking at this list of Eight. Each stage is sequential, meaning that it builds on the one(s) before it. Thus, an individual stage will not be successful if the preceding step is flawed, or incomplete.

Keep in mind, as well, that Kotter’s “Guiding Coalition” is of utmost importance: The maintenance organization alone can rarely lead and deliver sustainable gains in reliability. This “Coalition” must include all of the leadership stakeholders in the business (operations, finance, maintenance, engineering, quality, safety, environmental, labor union, et al).

The bottom line for sustaining gains

Gaining senior leadership buy-in is a prerequisite to sustainable change if you believe breakthrough changes in maintenance and reliability methods are essential to ensure your business success. Sustainable gains must be led from a business perspective by senior leadership with clear expectations and accountabilities through all levels of leadership down to

the individual work groups and employees.

Let's make sure that improvements in maintenance and reliability are: 1) not an option; and 2) are a condition of employment. Our business success or growth depends on it! **MT**

References

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