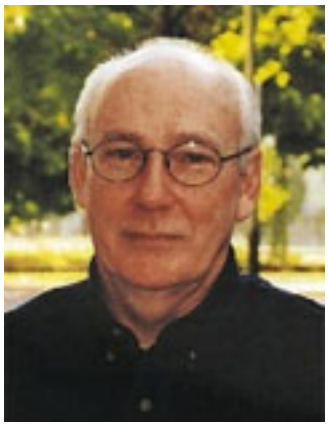

Christer Idhammar, President IDCON, INC.

Many years ago, one of my uncles asked me, "Christer, do you know what a three-man rowing boat is?" As I could not figure out the answer, he continued. "It is a boat with a crew of three. One rows, one is assigned to bail out the boat and one is crying for help."

During my plant visits, I often hear the following comment from Maintenance employees: "Why do you talk to us about best maintenance practices? We know this stuff and we want to do all of it; the problem is within the Operations organization. They cannot count to more than one when setting priorities. They want everything 'done now,' so we don't have time to plan work here."

I, in turn, ask the questioners why they don't just tell Operations that it will have to wait to get some work done. "Around here," they typically answer, "we are told that Operations is our internal customer and Maintenance is a service to them. That makes it difficult to argue."

"So who is responsible for the cost of maintenance?" I wonder. "I guess we are," they say, "because if we spend more than what's budgeted, we're in the hot seat, and we ended there because we did what the customer requested." In other words, these Maintenance staffs are in a very reactive state, which means they are trying desperately to keep their boats afloat.

From Operations, on the other hand, I frequently hear: "We do not understand what the Maintenance people do. We have many breakdowns and we often have to wait to get work done. They even work a lot of overtime. We agree with you, they should implement all of the best maintenance practices you talk about." These Operations people clearly see themselves rowing their boats as fast as they can.

Then, from Plant Management, I've heard: "We agree wholeheartedly with you. Can you tell us how we can convince Operations and Maintenance? Sometimes we feel like we're calling out for help from a sinking boat."

The point is that Maintenance, Operations and Plant Management tend to agree that manufacturing organizations must change the old habits of departmental protectionism, differing objectives and blame. For your site (or company) to be successful, all parties must work together in a true partnership.

It is not enough to agree on this and then just hug each other. You must change the way you do business. You need to set one common goal to improve and that goal is manufacturing reliability. Improve manufacturing reliability and you will have faster throughput and lower costs for maintenance and manufacturing. Remember that you must agree to the partnership principle up front, then scrutinize the way you do business today and—more importantly—how you will do it working within the future partnership. **MT**

Christer Idhammar, president of IDCON, is a world-renowned expert and award-winning consultant on reliability and maintenance management best practices. He founded the Idhammar group of companies, in Sweden, in 1972, and IDCON, INC., in the U.S., in 1985. For more information on the strategies reflected in this article, e-mail: info@ idcon.com Better yet, come learn from Christer Idhammar and other noted industry experts in person this April at MARTS 2009. For complete details, visit www.MARTSconference.com

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