

Viewpoint: Are Most Maintenance Organizations Overstaffed?

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I'll answer my question: Yes, I think most maintenance organizations are overstaffed—*but not necessarily with their own personnel*

. Many of these organizations just seem to use more total maintenance hours than necessary. (Total maintenance hours include the organization's internal hours, overtime hours and contractor hours.)

Consider this example from the pulp and paper industry: A newsprint mill or a linerboard mill making 600,000 tons of recycled paper per year on two machines is very good, at less than 0.3 total maintenance hours per ton. Most operations where our company has been working are using about 0.5 total maintenance hours per ton.

The reasons why most maintenance organizations are using more total maintenance hours than necessary is that they allow too much time for doing the wrong things. From a systems perspective, these organizations aren't set up to let personnel be as efficient as they can be.

Correcting a dysfunctional system is the responsibility of leadership. In fact, to my way of thinking, this is the most important thing a leader can do. (I use the term "leader" because too many managers are doing just that: managing status quo.)

Examples of doing the wrong things

Allowing maintenance to be driven by cost instead of actions that drive cost...

Maintenance managers become more focused on budget constraints than on delivering reliability. Their focus must be to improve total reliability which, in turn, will improve quality and production throughput, as well as reduce costs.

Reacting to equipment breakdowns... Our studies show that between 50% and 70% of all maintenance work is avoidable. The reason for this is that adhering to the basics of

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maintenance prevention, inspections and the right operating practices concurrently with planning, scheduling and executing is not done well.

Reacting on emotional priorities... Even today, most maintenance organizations are viewed as service providers, not as providers of equipment reliability in equal partnership with operations. Those on the operations side are still viewed as customers of maintenance. This can nurture a mindset that focuses primarily on pleasing the “customer” versus delivering what’s best for the business.

The managerial oxymoron

While members of upper management may agree to all of the above, they often respond, “Reliability is top priority but we must cut costs first.” This is an oxymoron. The fact is that better reliability drives down costs while a focus on lower costs drives down reliability. Unfortunately, this is a difficult predicament to solve. The solution to achieve consistent and sustainable lower costs is long-term in nature, but managers often work within systems that force them to make short-term decisions.

The goal of “cutting costs” is—*in most organizations*—achieved by deferring maintenance work. Remember, however, that a valid maintenance job can never be eliminated: It can only be postponed for a while. Moreover, if it is postponed, you’ll frequently pay much more for the work than it would have cost had it been done on time.

Simply eliminating personnel without improving people’s productivity will result in increased maintenance hours. Although you might, in fact, have fewer employees, you’ll require more overtime and contractor hours to get the work done. Translation: Short-term savings and long-term loss.

If you shift your focus to improving total reliability, you could see some higher short-term costs—*but they’ll be coupled with long-term continuously improved production throughput and lower costs.*

The question you need to answer is “What’s that worth to our operations?”

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