



Get real about this: Make-work is simply not a good way to increase operator engagement. That said, just how can you optimize your operator-care program and data-collection activities? Consider the following:

1. What's the best operator-care/data-collection method for your site: electronic or paper?

The electronic approach has many advantages over paper, including efficiency in both collection and analysis. If you need to enforce the collection of data, the electronic method is more workable, but if you have to enforce participation, you may be missing the boat. Whether your operators take a paper or data-logger approach, it is ultimately the effectiveness of the data utilization that matters. Before you put a system in place, answer the next three questions:

2. What will you use the data for?

If you don't have a clear plan for turning the data into action, why do it? Organizations tend to gather data like squirrels gathering nuts in the fall: because they can. Some look on it as a way to keep their operators moving around. Both rationales are weak.

Collected data either needs to be something required to manage the process or to improve equipment reliability. This implies that every piece of data is added to some type of database (manual tank inventories in refineries or WIP cycle counts in discrete manufacturing come to mind) or that some analysis and action will be required of the person capturing the data (such as adjusting a coolant flow to maintain a bearing temperature within limits).

The Fundamentals: Improving Operator Care - Checklist Fundamentals

Written by Sam McNair, P.E., CMRP, Life Cycle Engineering (LCE)
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It doesn't matter if data is being collected for further processing or as something to be acted upon immediately: Your collection system must be able to set clear limits beyond which some action is required. Let's say you're looking at a bearing temperature. Whether it is recorded electronically or on paper, it should express the normal limits and the point at which action must occur. (Actions could be anything from adjusting the coolant to writing a work request.)

3. Who's doing the analysis, when and why?

If data analysis is not being carried out by the individual(s) collecting the data, you need to ensure that someone is, in fact, conducting appropriate, timely analyses—*and that he/she is initiating action(s) based on any discovered deviations*

. Remember: If there is no clear plan to turn data into action, you're wasting time and alienating your workforce by collecting it. People know when you're wasting *their*

time and resent it. As the author Stephen Covey wrote, "Start with the end in mind."

4. Why are you really collecting all that data?

To recap: If data is not firmly associated with some requirement(s) pertaining to process efficiency or equipment reliability, don't bother collecting it. Many organizations go to great lengths in creating tasks that are "easy" or "simple" enough to give to operators without considering whether such tasks are really necessary. No matter how well-intentioned your efforts may be, trying to improve operator involvement by creating tasks for them to do is not an effective strategy.

One way to disengage a workforce is to add to its workload and require it to gather information that has no value for the business (or disappears into a black hole from which nothing emerges). This sends a clear message to personnel that you don't value their time or trust their judgment—*you just want to see them look busy!*

Check here for success

If you want to increase the level of operator engagement at your site, implement your operator-care program with these actions in mind:

- Ensure that the data you collect or the tasks you ask your operators to perform add true value to your business. Make sure personnel understand why they're collecting such data. Is that inspection task you put on the list needed for some reliability analysis— *such as an FMEA* —or is it just make-work/busy-work?

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- Provide feedback systems so personnel know the work they are performing means something. How many significant “finds” or “saves” resulted from the added inspection tasks? What happened to a work request the operator submitted for that leak last week?
- Set up clear responsibility and accountability. If you had assigned a task to a maintenance craftsperson, you would have expected him/her to complete it accurately and in a timely manner. His/her supervisor would have been aware of the activity and accountable for the individual’s completion of the assigned work. Expect no less from operators and their supervisors.
- Train people to do inspections and gather data properly. You typically wouldn’t send a craftsperson to inspect a piece of complex machinery without first training him/her on the specifics of the job. Don’t send out unprepared/untrained operators. Furthermore, don’t “dumb down” the task so that just anyone can do it without training. This type of approach creates a non-value-added task that is likely to cause disengagement.

In the end, keep in mind that it’s the psychology—*not the technology*—that will define the success or failure of an operator-care program. Good luck with yours.

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Sam McNair is a senior consultant with Life Cycle Engineering (LCE), where he specializes in reliability engineering with a focus on the integration of maintenance and manufacturing functions. E-mail: smcnair@LCE.com

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