Written by Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor
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Many maintenance and reliability professionals will remember the old song "the thigh bone's connected to the knee bone, the knee bone's connected to the…" It was all about being connected with one's self. Within today's streamlined maintenance department, being connected and communicating valuable information between departmental peers has never been more important for task accomplishment.

In reality, maintenance connects on many different levels, influencing the decisional outcomes of the entire department—and organization—on a daily basis through both action and non-action. On any given day, many thousands of decisions are made throughout the corporation. Leading up to any decision is a series of connective events, linked via pre-established business processes determining at which point a decision is required to make the next connection.

For example, in a simple PM event in which a piece of equipment must receive a basic oil and filter change, events and connections required to set up and execute the PM are broken down into three stages. They are as follows:

Stage 1 – Set-Up

Setting up an oil change event requires the maintenance planner to develop a work plan. To do so, he/she must first connect with the engineering department, connect with the machine manufacturer and connect with the lubricant supplier to determine the required lubricant, filter, recommended change-out procedure and initial change-out interval.

With the work plan established, all materials must be purchased and added to the storeroom. Depending on the business process, this will require the maintenance planner to now connect

with the maintenance inventory control person, who in turn connects with the purchasing agent, who in turn connects with the material supplier. Of course, if this is a new supplier, the purchasing agent also must connect with accounting department personnel to set invoicing and payment schedules.

Once materials are shipped and received, the receiver connects with the inventory control person, who in turn reconnects with the maintenance planner to advise that the oil change materials are now in stock, allowing the department to move to Stage 2, in which the event can finally take place.

Stage 2 – The Event

At this point, the maintenance planner now connects with the maintenance scheduler, who in turn connects with the applicable trades foreman, who then connects with the trades person or lubrication specialist to pass on the work order to perform the oil and filter change.

The lubrication specialist proceeds to the inventory crib and connects with the inventory control person to pick up the oil and filter materials, along with any special tools that may require a connection with a tool crib person. The lubrication specialist then travels to the jobsite where he/she may or may not need to connect with the production foreman and/or equipment operator to receive control of the equipment and commence work.

Once the oil change is completed, the lubrication specialist reconnects once again with the production supervisor and/or operator to give back control of the equipment, after which he/she may reconnect with his/her direct supervisor to deliver the complete work order and to report for the next assignment.

Stage 3 – The Paperwork

With the event completed, recording of the event is required. The trades supervisor may choose to connect with the production foreman and/or equipment operator to perform a work quality check. Satisfied the work is completed, the trades supervisor connects with the CMMS administrator to have the work order closed and filed.

While performing the oil change, were the lubrication specialist to find a problem requiring further maintenance attention, he/she would need to connect with the trades supervisor to

discuss the new findings or write down the requirements on the work order. The trades supervisor would then connect with the planner to hand over a work request, after which the planner would repeat the entire connection cycle by commencing with the new work requirement at Stage 1.

Mapping the thread

In this typical oil change scenario, a series of purposeful connective events have taken place involving both maintenance and non-maintenance departments. Setting up and executing a simple oil change can require up to 20 connective events in which information is passed from one individual to another.

The connection path will change according to availability of repair parts, tools, trained resources, equipment, communication tools, etc. How smoothly these connections occur will depend greatly on the systems and business processes in place—*both at the department and the organizational level* .

Mapping of the connective thread throughout your organization can be an especially effective way to help make things run smoothly, and is well worth the time required to do so.

Mapping the thread will show the efficiency—*or inefficiency*—of the current process, exposing actions that are taken, as well as where no action is taken. Don't overlook the connective map. It is a valuable tool in building successful maintenance partnerships.
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Ken Bannister is lead partner and principal consultant for Engtech Industries, Inc. Telephone: (519) 469-9173; e-mail: kbannister@engtechindustries.com