

Make Maintenance a Strategic function in Your Organization

Written by Gino Palarchio, Society for Maintenance & Reliability Professionals
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Why is maintenance often viewed as being at the bottom of the totem pole in an organization, when in fact it is the most critical function as pertains to product output, quality, safety, and environmental integrity?

Is it because many maintenance managers, supervisors, and technical staff fail to recognize the important role they play in the strategic goals of the organization?

Having been involved with hundreds of maintenance organizations and their respective employees over the years, I have come to recognize a fundamental difference among them.

There are Leaders, Fast Followers, Slow Followers, and Laggards.

The Leaders are very open minded and willing to take risks. They are entrepreneurial in making things happen. They recognize that their role as a maintenance manager or supervisor is to constantly challenge the status quo and look for ways to improve their contributions to the balanced strategic objectives of their company.

The Fast Followers are the ones that do not want to take a lot of risk on their own, but look to those they regard as Leaders and follow them. This reduces their risk because they can learn from the mistakes the Leaders made, but there is still risk involved because they often do this before all the results are in.

The Slow Followers will wait until the Leaders and Fast Followers have adopted something and proven that following suit will give them a competitive advantage. They are risk adverse and want to have lots of information about how to accomplish a project successfully and the results they can expect. Often, by the time they are ready to adopt it there are many companies able to help them, unlike the Leaders who probably had to figure it out on their own.

The Laggards are the ones that do not accept change very well and, even if they do finally decide to follow suit, are bound to not be highly successful in implementing it. This is because

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they often follow suit reluctantly and therefore do not give the project the resources required to make it a success.

I have found that 5 percent of maintenance organizations are Leaders, 20 percent are Fast Followers, 50 percent are Slow Followers, and 25 percent are Laggards.

It is time to change this; it is time for maintenance to stand up and get bold on how it is very important to the strategic objectives of the organization.

Start by identifying an area of improvement. It could be a new technology that will allow you to enhance your current computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) without replacing it. Management may find it more palatable to add a new system that will provide additional value rather than replacing an existing system with a similar system that does basically the same thing.

Perhaps implementing a new advanced maintenance methodology such as RCM will help insure your company meets objectives. Maybe you can identify a recent, high-profile issue in the organization. For instance, maybe you have experienced poor quality during production recently so your yield rate has dropped. Determine how maintenance may be able to impact this problem.

Once you have identified the project you want to implement you need to create a clear business case and a maintenance strategy to achieve it. This requires research. Talk to your peers. See who else had a similar problem and find out what they did to resolve it. Talk to suppliers who may have products or services that can help you because they can put you in contact with customers who have solved this problem and give you an idea of the effort required and the results you can expect.

Remember, this is a business case that is going to require approval potentially from several levels above you. You need to speak their language. You need to show them that by doing this they will gain something that they want (such as increased revenue, more production output, or higher quality) or they will avoid something that they don't want (such as safety problems or environmental issues). You also need to show them that you have a clear strategy to ensure the success of the project.

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It is time for maintenance management to recognize that we are business people, too. We need to take an active role in helping shape our organization and improving it. We need to show by example how we can make a difference. Senior management will never take maintenance seriously until we ourselves do. **MT**