Written by Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor
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Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor Once the maintenance department realizes it cannot function autonomously, it immediately begins to establish itself as an integral part of the manufacturing, service and corporate process. As partnership interaction grows, so do mutual understanding, value and respect for each partner's role in the process.

Establishing a partnership requires the maintenance department to proactively solicit each potential partner and deliver an investment statement that details the roles of the individual partners and outlines the mutual benefits of each partnership (inputs and outputs). In order for the potential partner to "buy in" to the concept, maintenance must, from the onset, establish its ability to consistently provide the necessary outputs to its partner, and more importantly, show that it has the mechanisms and capability to process inputs and turn them into equipment availability, reliability and increased throughput.

Continued success ultimately is borne out of each partner always feeling valued in the relationship. Therefore, if maintenance is to be the soliciting partner in the relationship, it must prepare for partnership by understanding its current strengths and improvement opportunities and by ensuring that intra-departmental communication processes are successfully in place.

Such behavior is the hallmark of successful, responsible maintenance departments that recognize they must be collaborative with and responsible toward the needs and requirements of other corporate departments–and at the same time, be cognizant of maintenance department needs and requirements and be responsible to itself. This level of behavior and partnership preparation can be achieved in a five-step process.

Step 1. Know Thyself: Perform a Maintenance Operation Effectiveness Review (MOER).

Forging a winning maintenance team is the simple result of understanding and communication. Many maintenance departments struggle with the concept of system management, job planning and open information sharing, often thinking it is much easier to revert to the "path of least resistance" found in a reactive environment based on personal agendas and limited responsibility. In this type of environment, we find low morale and complaints of lack of respect from both peers and inter-departmental workers.

The first step to breaking free from such a regime is to engage a reputable third-party maintenance expert to audit your current state of maintenance operations. The resulting MOER must recognize staffing strengths and current best practices that can be capitalized upon to bridge the disconnected management areas that present them selves as improvement opportunities. The MOER must address the following areas:

- Planning and scheduling
- Work flow management
- Lubrication management
- Inventory control
- Failure prevention and analysis
- Performance indicators
- Management reporting

Recognizing–and taking on responsibility for– both strengths and weaknesses is the first step in building an understanding of how the maintenance department and its partners impact each another.

Step 2. Know Thy Future: Build an Engineered Maintenance Improvement Management Action Plan.

A management action plan is a detailed project plan that plots a timelined series of maintenance improvement initiatives determined by studying the corporate and department vision, short-term and long-term goals and objectives and budgets and investment returns, and by preparing a phased implementation of projects that can capitalize on strengths, add measurable value to the maintenance function and be implemented within a specific timeframe.

Building a management action plan requires maintenance to work in partnership with other departments and management to determine the validity of the project. This is the first showcase for maintenance–*and it will set the stage for partnership interaction later.*

STEP	ACTION
1	Know Thyself: Perform a Maintenance Operation Effectiveness Review (MOER)
2	Know Thy Future: Build an Engineered Maintenance Improvement Management Action Plan
3	Develop Intra-Departmental Communication Tools
4	Develop the Partnership Input/Output Matrix
5	Meet Your Pilot Partners!

Step 3. Develop Intra-Departmental Communication Tools. The commencement of any major maintenance management initiative can act as a change catalyst to develop crucial intra-departmental communication tools. This also presents the perfect opportunity to forge the maintenance group into a unified team of peers by involving them in the communication development process. Typical communication tools should include the following:

- Minimum information requirements to raise a work order
- Work order flow for differing work order types
- Taking out and restocking MRO inventory parts
- Work order design
- Work order fault codes
- Cross shift information transfer notes and status
- Key performance indicators (KPIs)
- Condition-based response actions

- Basic CMMS or EAM failure reports

There are many communication tools that could be added to the list; by allowing maintainers to be involved in the process assures the immediate communication shortcomings are addressed. The ability to communicate effectively intradepartmentally will show your partners you have the ability to consistently provide outputs to help them–and the ability to act on the input information provided by them.

Step 4. Develop the Partnership Input /Output Matrix.

The maintenance improvement initiatives set out in the management action plan will require the collaboration of multiple partners to achieve success. For example, any one project could involve management to endorse the project, accounting to release funds, purchasing to buy in product and/or services on time, production to release pilot machinery for testing, engineering to prepare/ change specifications, vendors and contractors to provide delivery of goods and services, etc.

The first Input/Output model can be built to assist in the first improvement project–*and can be approached and presented as a pilot for future partnership dealings.*

Step 5. Meet Your Pilot Partners!

This step is about preparing your case for partnership assistance; it will capitalize on the work performed in the first four steps to instill partner confidence. Be prepared to defend the merits of your new approach–*and to explain why this approach is better than any previous initiative because you now understand yourself and how you fit in the corporation.*

What's next? The next installment of this column will examine the input/output relationship between the maintenance department and the operations or production department. **MT**

Ken Bannister is the principal consultant for Engtech Industries Inc., a maintenance management consulting group. Telephone: (519) 469-9173; e-mail: kbannister@engtechindustries.com

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