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DOES MAINTENANCE PLANNING PAY?

Unfortunately, the answer in many cases is “no”. Most plants and mills have staffed their maintenance organizations with Planners who have the responsibility to produce job plans and assist with the scheduling process. The question is: Do these job plans produce savings that justify the cost of a staff of maintenance Planners?

Many of you know that your planning function is not paying off. At the same time, you know that planning is something that you should be doing. So, what should you do to improve the situation? You may be surprised at the reasons that maintenance planning is not effective. There are two primary reasons why the maintenance planning function and the associated job plans do not produce benefits in terms of labor productivity, cost reductions and equipment uptime.

One reason is that **the job plans are not good**. They often do not contain the needed information, and the job plan implementation actions are not performed so that craftsmen have the opportunity to reduce delays while working on the job. Fixing this problem is relatively straightforward and can be done with good planner training and readily-available information.

The second reason that maintenance planning is not effective relates to the **weak expectations of management, supervision and the craftspeople that perform the work**. Even if the job plans and implementation actions are excellent, you may still not achieve the benefits that are available. We have seen situations where excellent job plans have been produced with little improvement in productivity and cost reduction. In one case, we’ve seen craftsmen take the job plans and throw them in the trashcan without even reviewing the planning work. I asked why he threw it away and was told, “I have been doing maintenance for 25 years and don’t need a planner or anybody else to tell me how to do it”. In another plant, I worked with a group of craftsmen to identify all of the activities that they perform during a day, in addition to the hands-on work at the job site. After they came up with a list of 15 activities not associated with actual hands-on work, I asked them which activities could be eliminated by planning the job before it was assigned to them. Their reply caught me by surprise. They said that none of the activities should be planned away because they were all part of their (the craftsmen’s) job. Yet another example to illustrate the point involved a craftsman who actually appreciated the contribution of the planning function. He said that the job plans were good and they provided him with information that he would otherwise have to look for himself. I asked him if he was getting more work done each day because he had fewer delays to handle. His negative reply also surprised me. He said that the supervisor still assigned the same amount of work each day even though the job plans would allow him to get more done. He simply didn’t have to work as hard and could spend the same amount of time on each job.

Making the planning function pay off at your plant depends on all of the following being in place:

1. Accurate information must be readily available to the planner. If not, the job plan is incomplete or it takes that planner an excessive amount of time to pull the plan together. One particularly useful planning tool is for all planners to share standard job plans that have been perfected over time. Other obvious information involves accurate equipment parts lists, drawings, repair history, etc.

2. The job planning packages have to be good. Information must be included that will allow the craftsmen to perform the required work with a minimum of delays.

3. Labor estimates must be adjusted to reflect the planning contribution. For example, if a job traditionally takes 4 hours without planning, it should take less than 4 hours if a good job plan is provided. This estimate needs to be revised and used accordingly in the scheduling process to ensure that the craftsmen are provided a full day of work. On the other hand, preparing a good job plan may result in the need to adjust the labor estimate upward from the original estimate on an unfamiliar job. Accurate labor estimates are the key to gaining productivity via the scheduling process.

4. Job plan implementation actions must in many cases be performed before the main work effort begins on the job. Not all jobs justify these preparation actions, but many do especially if equipment downtime is an issue. A job plan should be thought of as both information and actions prior to the start of the job.

5. The expectations of the craftsmen, supervisor and planner must be aligned toward the estimated duration of the job. Obviously many jobs contain unknowns that extend the scope of the work and require more time. That is not the point and all people should understand that is part of maintenance. On the other hand, if the job plan is good and does provide the opportunity to reduce delays, the craftsmen should be expected to take advantage of those opportunities, get the job done in the appropriate amount of time and go on to the next job. All in all, more work should get done if jobs are planned.

6. Feedback must be provided to improve the planning and equipment reliability efforts. We tell planners in our training that in order to be successful they need two things: information and friends. The friends are the craftsmen and supervisors who must provide feedback so that job plans can be improved and reused.

7. Planners must be allowed the time to focus on future work. They can't accomplish what they need to do if they are constantly interrupted to find parts for break-in and emergency work. In general, Planners should focus 90% of their effort on work that will be done in the future. Supervisors, on the other hand focus 90% of their effort on work that is going on in the present. The remaining 10% of the time is needed for overlap.

So, just because you have a planning organization does not mean that you are achieving the benefits that are available. Good job plans only provide the opportunity for benefits. Making planning pay requires that you clearly define and repeatedly emphasize your expectations. The resulting rewards of increased productivity and equipment reliability are well worth your effort.