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# Work Process Transformation: 4 Steps to Evolutionary and Revolutionary Results

Over the past two decades, manufacturing companies in a broad range of industries have come to understand that improving maintenance efficiency and effectiveness is critical to minimizing downtime and reaching higher levels of profitability. An estimated one-third of plant maintenance costs are wasted because of unnecessary or improper practices according to a report from DuPont. The report states that, “the largest single controllable expenditure in a plant today is maintenance.” This is a frightening fact for most companies when coupled with the fact that maintenance mistakes can result in unplanned outages that decrease revenue. Despite an understanding that effective maintenance processes are critical, many companies struggled to implement them.

One way the manufacturing industry has attempted to meet this challenge is through the use of partnerships and alliances. To truly improve maintenance efficiency, there must be a deep level of integration between internal engineering, operations and maintenance functions as well as outside partners. Reaching this level of integration requires companies to transform into process-centered organizations.

The concept of a process-centered organization was first coined by MIT professor Michael Hammer in his 1996 book *Beyond Reengineering*. In short, Hammer suggested that for most of industrial history, companies measured the performance and execution of tasks rather than the performance and execution of their end-to-end processes. By focusing on individual functions rather than big picture practices, companies missed opportunities to eliminate unnecessary steps in their overall process and to streamline performance.

More than 16 years after Hammer first proposed that the process-centered revolution was underway, many companies still have not determined how to make the full transition. Day & Zimmermann has identified four steps we use to help companies achieve this transformation and improve maintenance performance.

## 1. Map Your Maintenance Processes

A company must first understand what its maintenance processes are. It sounds simple enough, but many companies have never broken down their maintenance processes to understand how goals are achieved. Even companies that believe they have a firm grasp on their maintenance processes can benefit from revisiting them and mapping them out in specific detail. Knowing the process “in your head” isn’t good enough. A visual representation of the process will make clear where problems might exist. Whether it’s a communications bottleneck or a non-value added activity, they will show up more clearly once the process has been mapped out. It’s easier to eliminate these issues once they are clearly identified.

## 2. Embrace Change – From the Top

For a work process transformation to be completed, every member of the organization must buy into change. This includes leaders at the executive level all the way down to the front lines. This can be a challenge because a process-centered approach to maintenance challenges the role of management at every level. Existing paradigms intended to clearly define responsibilities give way to a structure that is more fluid. Managers can no longer focus on managing tasks; they must focus on evaluating the overall health of processes. This is often a drastic change for those that have become accustomed to doing things “their way.” If a company is serious about becoming a process-centered maintenance organization, the buy-in must come from the top first.

## 3. Empower Your People

Once buy-in has been secured by those at the top level, it is much easier to empower those on the frontlines. More so than managers, field personnel have spent most of their careers focusing on the task at hand. They finish one job and then move to the next. In a process-centered organization, these skilled workers come to understand that they are part of something larger. No longer identified merely by their title, these workers are now identified by their ability to move the process forward. With elevated responsibility, workers are empowered to make independent decisions with the best interest of the process in mind.

## 4. No Excuses

One of the biggest obstacles to completing the transition to a process-centered organization is company and employee perceptions about the value of existing roles and practices. These are artificial barriers. If the focus is on the efficiency of the process, then companies should find the best people to do the job and put them in position to do so. Traditional excuses are no longer acceptable. A familiar refrain is, “We don’t trust our partner with this kind of information.” If your partner is best suited to do the job, have them sign a non-disclosure agreement. Similarly a company might say, “This job can’t be done by hourly workers it can only be done by staff workers.” If the staff workers are adding an unnecessary step to the process then the job should be transitioned to the hourly workers. Once companies realize that the efficient management of maintenance processes is the ultimate goal, these excuses quickly fade away.

The transformation to a process-centered organization will not happen overnight. It takes time for a company to grow and evolve. Once achieved, the benefits are obvious. For companies striving to improve, a process-centered approach will ensure greater efficiency while decreasing the chances of an unexpected outage. When the focus is put on the larger maintenance process, skilled workers have the latitude to make decisions that will ultimately benefit the overall health of the organization.

In a tight economy, plant owners can no longer afford to waste one-third of their maintenance costs. If you are ready to take the next step in the evolutionary process and become a process-centered organization, Day & Zimmermann can help you achieve revolutionary results.