Aligning Perception and Perspective to Improve Asset Management

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Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "People only see what they are prepared to see." That holds trues in the RAM arena. To be specific, when a problem is reported to the Maintenance department, it's the job of the Planner to interpret the maintenance request and determine the validity, consequence, and urgency of the situation described in the request.

Action is then taken based on facts, specialized knowledge, and a pre-determined decision process designed to provide an accurate and appropriate level of response to the request and the requestor(s). Unfortunately, in the absence of clarity and process, the requestor's perception is frequently allowed to overrule perspective, which, in turn can, and will, lead to poor maintenance-decision-making and inefficient work scheduling.

Perception is often described as a person's interpretation of a particular situation based on his/her ability to see, hear (listen), feel, and comprehend (bias) the situation. This is based on primary senses, attitudes (which can be political and entitlement), and values that are personal. These factors are not necessarily aligned with what's best for the asset or the maintenance-management approach.

It's the job of the Maintenance department to deliver perspective to stakeholders and/or maintenance requestors by providing a set of guidelines and processes that help them logically evaluate and perceive situations through an asset-maintenance lens.

Reliability-centered maintenance (RCM) teaches us to change our perspective of asset failure, basing it not only on the failure itself, but also on the consequence of the failure as it pertains to health/safety/security, the environment, product delivery (quality/quantity), and economic loss. From this understanding, a measured level of response and action can be pre-determined. Consider this hypothetical example of the same make and model of a pump being employed in three different parts of a plant:

- **Pump #1** is used in a critical process that feeds an essential slurry mix into the production process line. (Pump failure would shut the entire production line down.)

- **Pump #2** is used to pump water into a large holding tank from which water is occasionally drawn by gravity when needed, preventing a continual cycling of the pump. (Pump failure in this situation is not critical, as the tank level is never allowed to go below half-full before a level switch activates and cycles the pump to refill the tank. Pump failure at the half-full level gives the maintenance department three days before the tank empties completely.)

- **Pump #3** is used in the main fire protection water line and is protected with a backup pump should the main pump fail.

As we can see, those pumps have different jobs to do, with different consequences should any of the three fail during operation. In short, they're reflective of three different perspectives, requiring three different levels of maintenance response that need to be understood not only by Maintenance, but also by the client, operator(s), and stakeholders. Once understood, and should a failure occur, everyone involved can exercise the same perspective, understand the maintenance approach, and, accordingly, set expectations for the agreed-upon maintenance response and repair.

The Final Word

It is the responsibility of the Maintenance department to teach and inform clients, operators, and stakeholders to “see through a maintenance lens” when alerting/communicating on a potential or actual asset failure. Doing that can be as simple as using request forms tailored to individual assets, based on various symptoms that a maintainer would look for when troubleshooting to determine the equipment problem, e.g., noises or lack of noise, temperature, smoke, and vibration, among other things.

In addition, Maintenance may choose to classify the line, equipment, or component(s) with a clearly marked number code. This number code would designate a specific maintenance response based on the consequence of failure. By using a response-numbering system designed to align with the Work Order Priority Code system, the requestor and Planner will be sharing the same perspective and expectation for managing the request.

About the Author

Ken Bannister has 40+ years of experience in the RAM industry. For the past 30, he’s been a Managing Partner and Principal Asset Management Consultant with Engtech industries Inc., where he has specialized in helping clients implement best-practice asset-management programs worldwide. A founding member and past director of the Plant Engineering and Maintenance Association of Canada, he is the author of several books, including three on lubrication, one on predictive maintenance, and one on energy reduction strategies, and is currently writing one on planning and scheduling. Contact him directly at 519-469-9173 or kbannister@theramreview.com.