

What Gets Measured Gets Done

Are you measuring what really matters?

Data, metric, measures, assessments, evaluations, scorecards, progress reports... Many of us have been faced with a whole host of measurement opportunities. Seems like some of the performance measurements are moving targets that we seldom hit. Some measurement processes come and go like fog. I recall hearing this maxim years ago: ***“What gets measured gets done.”*** It has been attributed to Peter Drucker, Tom Peters, Edwards Deming, Lord Kelvin and others. Why is it that so often we get hung up on metrics and measuring things to the point that we sometimes lose track of *measuring what really matters?*

Many discussions about improving maintenance and reliability tend to center around what to measure, how to measure it, and how to calculate the metric. We discuss MTBF (mean time between failures) and MTTR (mean time to repair). We analyze OEE (overall equipment effectiveness) and availability. We monitor wrench time, and we examine schedule compliance. It turns out that there is an ever-increasing number of maintenance and reliability metrics fueling the discussion: what gets measured gets done. But we should be very careful about what gets measured. Albert Einstein reportedly had a sign on his office wall that stated: ***“Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.”*** When it’s all said and done, we must make improvements—actual, tangible improvement—in our equipment and facility reliability and life cycle operating costs. Measurements and metrics will not do that alone.

So, where should we start our use of metrics and measures? The first step is to determine the important business priorities. As one plant manager put it, ***“On-time, lead time, and cost are our top priorities”***—simply stated. Everyone from the executives down to the plant floor knew what those improvement priorities were. Their organization’s task was to make rapid and sustainable gains in three areas: on-time delivery, lead time from receipt of order to shipment, and lower total cost to produce. What gets measured gets done. They communicated their priorities like a mantra. They identified contributing factors. They set meaningful goals to achieve. They steadily improved their performance one machine, one cell, one area at a time until they reached the performance standards they set. They adopted new work standards. They measured their progress and posted the results for all to see. They learned from their failures... and from their successes. They designed and implemented focused improvement projects. They avoided “analysis paralysis” by monitoring performance, progress, and the effects of their improvement efforts on their top business priorities. Sustainable gains and continuous improvement processes were the results of their efforts.

“Without a standard, there is no logical basis for making a decision or taking action,” according to Joseph Juran. As we consider what to measure, we must have a standard or a goal to attain. We must measure current performance as compared to that standard and take intelligent, consistent actions (standardized work) to eliminate problems. But what we measure must be important to both the business and those who directly and indirectly impact what is being measured. Keep in mind ***when something is measured but it isn’t important, it probably won’t get done.*** This speaks to sustainability. With so many business and maintenance and reliability-related metrics out there, it is easy to measure things that are not really that important to the organizations success.

Measure the wrong things and you will likely get the wrong behaviors. Improving performance, in most cases, means changing the behaviors of those who operate and maintain, those who budget and control, those who design and install our equipment and facilities. When we look at changing behaviors, we must always consider the people who must do things differently. Do they have the skills and ability to change? Do the rewards and recognition processes encourage and reinforce the desired behavior changes?

Noted leadership trainer John E. Jones said: ***“What gets measured gets done. What gets measured and fed back gets done well. What gets rewarded gets repeated.”*** Again that speaks to sustainable gains in performance improvement through behavior change. We should remember that “measuring things” is not about the numbers but rather about guiding and monitoring improvement toward a measurable, observable goal. It is about understanding the cause and effects of problematic performance as well as successes and then leading human performance improvement in our organizations. It’s a known fact: Our equipment and facilities will deteriorate without proper, timely and intelligent, human intervention.

Lastly, most businesses have been under a cost cutting, cost reduction, cost control mission as a path to improving competitiveness. But some of the costs are not in our direct control. “The non-wage manufacturing costs as a percentage of total costs are continuing to rise in the U.S.” according to the *Herman Trend Alert* (www.hermangroup.com). These increasing non-wage costs include corporate taxes, higher energy, pollution abatement, and insurance benefits. And we must all be reminded of the skills shortages in maintenance and manufacturing. A looming cost that is expected to rise significantly is the cost of training—or up-skilling—the workforce to handle advanced manufacturing practices, which includes improvements in maintenance and reliability. The Herman Group warns that these costs “will continue to rise across the developed world.” What gets measured gets done: cost reduction. Be careful because what gets measured (cost cutting) gets done. And what gets done could defeat the purpose of what gets measured.

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