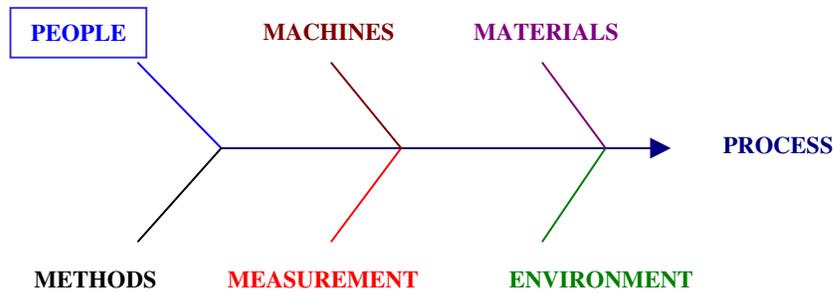


Efficiency – People

This month people is the theme:



There is no doubt that the most important part of a good process is the people that run it – they can make or break an operation. I have never found a magic ingredient, but one thing for sure, most are guilty of not looking after this main asset properly – by this I do not mean conditions of employment, I mean ordinary things like communicating, interest in the individual, and being consistent.

Management of people is one of the most written about subjects and many have made a great deal of money out of it. Management of people has changed from ‘control, direction, compliance, discipline, measurement, feedback loops and union meetings’ to ‘empowerment, self management, involvement, co-ordinating, facilitating, enabling and team meetings’ and the structures are now flatter.

I have been through management change that moved from one extreme to the other, and there is no doubt that there are problems at both ends of this spectrum. The latter, however, has to be the healthier environment to work in. The difficulty is that some of the people who worked under the old regime often do not fit in to the new one. This leads to some hard decisions about the people who clearly no longer fit in the organisation.

Empowerment and self-managed teams may be good things, but it also needs first class production management - even better than before. However, there is so often a lack of it, production managers run themselves into the ground chasing resources and seeking emergency fixes for problems; instead of giving themselves time to understand, observe, listen and then to improve the manufacturing process.

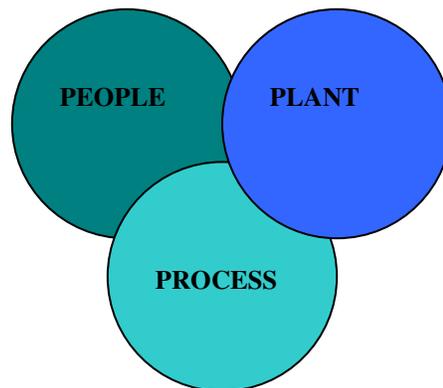
So why is this? I would suggest it is because manufacturing has become so tight that resources have been stretched to the limit. There is always two streams of activity, firstly, the real job of manufacturing – producing good quality product as required - and secondly the constant change programmes that enshroud manufacturing today. It is difficult to do both well! Fifteen years ago it was ‘Unions’, today it is ‘Change’.

Resources are geared to cope with production, ignoring change, but for change programmes, people in the manufacturing teams are needed. As most change programmes have such a significant future impact on the plant the best people need to be involved – therefore manufacturing suffers. This cycle will continue, and so change needs to be part of a team activity not something that is divorced from it. Often there are so called ‘change management teams’ but they are not always helpful to manufacturing. They tend to build up resistance to change; then they need internal help, so you end up with the same problem.

Coupled with this, manufacturing teams have become 'flexible'. Apart from the obvious advantages, this has other connotations. With the dedicated operators of the past, machines were owned and cared for by specific individuals, now with flexibility the same dedication is not there, and as a result machines are not receiving the same level of attention. I was talking to a manufacturer of board a short while ago about flexibility and ownership, and he identified immediately with this problem. Two issues arise from this:

- The consistency of operation
- The aptitude of the individual.

To overcome this, training has to be good. Individual operators need to be trained and properly assessed. With bigger operations that run a number of shifts this is really key. The only way out is to have professional training – perhaps with the help of NVQs - and having done this, individuals operating the machinery need to be constantly assessed. I also favour the nomination of key operators for individual machines, and linking them to a technician, in order to bring some ownership back – they can still be flexible but will have a special interest – they will also be the trainers for their specific machine. In the next issue we will talk about maintenance and how initiatives like TPM (Total Productive Maintenance) also have an impact on people. At the end of the day people are a part of plant and process with which they are inextricably linked:



For this article I have chosen to talk about the issues that directly affect output. There are two excellent chapters on the subject of people in a new book called 'Excellence in Packaging of Beverages' produced by myself and Eric Candy and recently published by the Binsted Group. Tel 01256 764180.