

## Maintenance & Reliability

# 70/30 Phenomenon

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70%

When you ask front-line supervisors or team leaders if all people in their teams are performing to the same standards or if some are doing more work and achieving more results than others, you will often get the same answer. All over the world, the most common answer, after some analysis, verifies that about 30 percent of the people do 70 percent of the work. This is not only true for front-line people like mechanics and electricians, but also for planners, engineers, and other salaried employees. However, our focus in this column is on the front line of maintenance.

When I am involved in assessing maintenance performance for a customer, I always make an effort to talk one-on-one with individuals, but I also talk with a group of three to eight individuals. When you talk with people one-on-one, they are in most

cases very open and honest about what they say. When you talk with a group of more than three, there will often be a change in attitudes.

In a good work system with a homogenous group of strong performers, there is not much difference in talking with people in a group or on an individual basis. However, in a typical work situation, it is common to see a big difference.

What I call “the griping level” is very high in a typical group. For example, in a group of nine, it is likely that three people will talk and complain about all the bad aspects of working in their mill, three people will show signs of support for the gripers, and three will say very little and remain passive.

I have discovered that the silent few are often very good craftspeople that belong to the group of good performers, the ones doing 70 percent of the work. They are also sick and tired of hearing the gripers’ constant complaints about everything that is wrong, especially when these gripers never do anything to improve the situation. As a manager, you should remember to listen to the good performers and to downplay comments from the gripers. You should give much more time and attention to the best performers; otherwise, you risk losing them.

When presenting observations and recommendations to a large, mixed group of people, I have often brought up the griping level as an improvement opportunity. After addressing this problem, I have had numerous craftspeople thank me for bringing it up. “If we could just get the 70 percent you talked about—and I believe you are correct with that figure in our organization—to pull their weight, we would do very well

30%

## What Is a “Root Cause”?

Reliability and Maintenance Management Consultant IDCON is convinced that the process of analyzing the root cause of failures and acting to eliminate these causes is one of the most powerful tools in improving plant reliability and performance. But what is a “root cause?” One definition is “The cause of a problem which, if adequately addressed, will prevent a recurrence of that problem.” Let’s look at an example.

Imagine that a bearing has failed, and that an investigation shows that it had not been lubricated. Asking the question “why had it not been lubricated?” may lead to the discovery that the grease point for the bearing had been missed during a lubrication survey and it was not on the lubrication mechanic’s route sheet.

Using the above definition of “root cause,” this problem can be prevented from happening again by simply adding this grease point to the lubrication route sheet. But if the definition of “root cause” is changed slightly to “The cause of a problem which, if adequately addressed, will prevent recurrence of that problem *or similar problems*,” This raises the bar to a higher level. The next question then is “Why had the grease point been missed from the lubrication route?” The answer may be that lubrication routes were set up by a single person, with no checks or confirmation that the routes were complete. This may lead to an action to change the procedure for the development of lubrication routes, which will ensure that there are no other missed lubrication points in the plant, nor will there be in the future.

By asking the question “why” a few more times, the root cause of a problem is often identified as a procedural, or management, shortcoming. Addressing these root causes often requires a change of thinking and some pain and effort, but the results will be much longer-lasting and higher-value than correcting individual failures.

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here,” is a comment I have heard many times from individual crafts people.

I have also had human resource, production, and maintenance managers thank me for addressing the griping level. The fact is that people’s attitudes change quickly after such an open discussion, especially after talking about the group they belong to. It is not positive to be branded as a griper, so the griping decreases and people start talking about more productive and positive issues. Then, when they hear others say that they do not have enough resources for a task, their reaction becomes “we must each do our own part of the work before we complain about not having enough people.”

To really change the situation, supervisors or teams must start assigning work in such a way that all employees will have a chance to improve their performances. In a team environment, especially if teams are supposed to be self-directed, this can be difficult. In the pile of work orders that must be done, there are always jobs at the bottom of the stack that nobody wants.

As a supervisor, it is understandably tempting to hand work to your best performers, because you know it will get done and you won’t need to worry about it anymore. However, to bring the whole team up to a high-performance level, you must make the effort to match the best performers with others when you assign work. It might take a little longer, but it pays off in the long run.

The same principle is vital when a proposed flexible work system transfers from the negotiated contract to reality. Unfortunately, it is common to see that after long negotiations, strikes, and increased pay, the flexibility agreement is not

implemented. Remember that you only get the flexibility you have trained people for through their work assignments.

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## Reliability Week

IDCON, Inc. will be hosting its fifth annual Reliability Week training seminars April 7–11 at the Sheraton Raleigh Hotel in Raleigh, North Carolina. The training week equips attendees with the tools, knowledge, and shared understanding to immediately impact the bottom line in an operation.

Reliability Week is a training week of carefully selected, one-day seminars presented by IDCON, Inc. combined with presentations from practitioners throughout the industry; it is designed to provide anyone who works in plant operations, maintenance, and engineering with new knowledge and tools to improve equipment and process reliability in any process or manufacturing plant.

For information, visit [www.reliability-week.com](http://www.reliability-week.com).

