

Why Plant Managers Fail:

Causes and Consequences

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Executive Summary

The authors describe 15 reasons why plant managers fail and show how those failures affect all plant personnel. They also make the case that managers cannot succeed without adequate support from their organization. Included is a self-assessment tool to help managers and front-line supervisors determine whether their organization's practices are setting them up for failure.

"I know this, that keeping a plant operating in an optimal fashion is definitely a juggling act between your systems and people and environment and goals. . . . It takes a lot of hard work, skill, patience, drive, good people, and even a little luck to succeed in this line of work."

A plant manager's observation

The 1990s witnessed a renaissance in U.S. manufacturing for a wide variety of reasons. A robust U.S. economy, many technological breakthroughs, a rush of capital investments, the growth of markets in the world economy, and a strong domestic demand for high-value-added products are just a few of the plausible explanations for this phenomenon. Although manufacturing has performed well as a whole, manufacturers are still under extreme pressure to improve their overall performance as they brace for the next wave of international competition. This competitive pressure has created a greater need than ever before for highly effective plant management.

Manufacturers in the 1990s experienced a host of technological and systems enhancements such as large-scale process re-engineering and cellular manufacturing. They also saw more use of automation, integrated information technology, and computer-aided design methods. At the same time, manufacturers developed more effective and enlightened approaches to enhancing workforce productivity. Open-book management, work teams, labor-management co-ops, worker empowerment programs, improved training and development, improved supervision, and more effective incentive systems are but a few of these methods.



U.S. organizations such as Motorola, Chrysler, Ford, Cummins Engine, Boeing, and Steel Case, among others, have been benchmarks for manufacturing success on a worldwide stage. These companies have integrated both cutting-edge technology and systems with effective “productivity through people” initiatives.

Although technology and “people” factors are critical to success in manufacturing, managers are responsible for using these resources wisely to achieve lofty and growing-loftier organizational goals. Plant managers are being asked to lower costs, increase efficiency, improve quality, reduce cycle time, enhance innovation, reduce turnover and absenteeism, improve safety, and enhance workforce morale. At the same time, they are expected to increase return-on-investment and shareholder value. This is a tall order for any mere mortal, and the likelihood of failure increases proportionately with the degree of aggressiveness and breadth of goals that a plant manager is asked to achieve.

There is a solid body of literature on why managers fail, but only a limited amount of information addresses the specific issue of why *plant* managers fail to achieve the success they so earnestly desire. However, we believe that all managers need three types of skills to be successful: interpersonal, conceptual, and technical skills. *Interpersonal skills* include the ability to communicate, develop solid working relationships, resolve conflicts, create teamwork, motivate people, and delegate tasks effectively. *Conceptual skills* focus on a manager’s ability to process information, plan, make effective decisions, demonstrate sound judgment, and solve problems. Finally, *technical skills* include having sufficient knowledge in one’s discipline, keeping current in that discipline, having experience to draw on, and understanding the technical aspects of the job, as they relate to producing value-added goods or services. Without these skills, it is very difficult to get results in any management position, particularly in manufacturing. Managers must be able to work with people, information, and technology, so when they are deficient in any of the three skills we have described, the likelihood of achieving and sustaining high levels of performance diminishes significantly.

But is possessing critical skills enough to be successful as a plant manager? The answer is probably *yes* in the short run but *no* in the long run. In our research we have identified a

host of variables affecting managerial performance that lie outside a manager’s control. These factors fall under the category of “support needed for success.” They include having the following: a clearly defined mission from superiors, achievable goals, adequate resources and technology, company policies that do

not hamper performance, access to critical information, and empowerment to make decisions that affect performance, just to mention a few. So even though having the appropriate skill set is vital to a plant manager’s success, it is also crucial that managers receive adequate support from superiors and their organizations as they pursue manufacturing excellence. All of the management talent in the world cannot make up for a lack of ongoing support—a fact easily lost in the heat of battle.

Why plant managers fail

We would like to draw on our experience and our research in more than 100 manufacturing plants across the United States and share what we have learned about why plant managers fail in their quest to get superior results. We will describe the most common causes of failure, based on our observations and interviews with hundreds of managers in the following industries: automotive, steel, furniture, appliances, electronics, plastics, textiles, aerospace, and glass. We will list the causes of failure in logical order and follow with the consequences for plant operations — consequences that occur when plant managers fail to demonstrate key leadership actions and do not solicit or receive the support they need to get the job done.

✓ **Cause 1: Lack of a clear sense of direction.** Plant managers are destined to fail when they do not set a clear and unambiguous direction for their operation. What superordinate goal is the facility pursuing? Growth, quality, volume, and profit margin goals must all be *prioritized* and then translated into specific metrics that the operation can target and develop plans to achieve. Without specific goals, everything is a priority; if everything is a priority, nothing is truly a priority. It is amazing how often manufacturing operations find themselves pursuing goals that are either out of step with the actual needs of the organization or that conflict with each other.

Consequence 1: Operational activity that drifts and lacks purpose

✓ **Cause 2: Failure to develop an effective and appropriate plan for action.** When a plant manager has clearly defined goals, it is incumbent on that manager to work with the staff to develop a clear strategy or plan for action. It is surprising how many manufacturing organizations fail to develop a real, comprehensive plan to achieve operational goals. In the rush to achieve goals, managers can struggle when they fail to start and finish a serious discussion about how to achieve critical goals and how performance will be measured. Organizations often find themselves using outdated plans or strategies that no longer support their current needs. Each organization in this study has gone through periods of maintenance and periods of change, each requiring different strategies. The plant manager must be steadfast in holding to a maintenance strategy and reactive to a change strategy when appropriate.

Consequence 2: Activity without meaningful action

✓ **Cause 3: All talk and no action.** When managers do create a clear direction and develop plans for action *but then fail to implement the plans*, their efforts fall short. For example, a manager may talk a lot about improving quality but make no change in the facility's modus operandi toward achieving that goal. Many plant managers may want to make changes but are unsure of how to drive change forward except to issue a mandate, write a memo, or send an e-mail. But real change requires altering attitudes, behavior, processes, procedures, and systems. It also requires a great deal of two-way communication and accountability for action; both are critical to successful implementation. A plant manager must balance teamwork with accountability in order to achieve production goals, improve targets, and make required system changes.

Consequence 3: Frustration in the plant and erosion of a manager's credibility with plant personnel

✓ **Cause 4: Failure to delegate and empower.** Plant managers struggle when they fail to delegate appropriately to their staff and to ensure that the change process cascades downward through the organization in an effective fashion. When managers fail to assign duties to key personnel properly and provide them with the requisite authority, they are failing to use the most rudimentary of all management practices. Responsibilities must be clarified, parameters of authority must be established, and methods to ensure accountability must be put into place if a plant manager's staff is to be fully utilized. *Empowerment* refers to the amount and level of authority the manager is willing to grant to staff. Problems of delegation and empowerment can occur when plant managers delegate very little, ensuring that they will be overextended, or when they delegate virtually everything, ensuring that their people will be overworked. More problems arise when managers fail to communicate their expectations effec-

tively, grant adequate levels of authority, or fail to hold people accountable for performance. Yet another difficulty occurs when plant managers themselves are not adequately empowered by their superiors and therefore cannot make decisions and control resources that affect their operation.

Consequence 4: Unclear performance expectations, frustration, and lack of control over factors affecting performance

✓ **Cause 5: Communication meltdown.** These days, plant managers have more diverse communication tools than at any other time in our industrial history. Pagers, cell phones, conference calls, e-mail, and voice mail have emerged to augment traditional meetings, bulletin boards, and telephones. Plant managers frequently fail when they do not effectively develop two-way channels of communication with key stakeholders: their superiors, customers, staff, workforce, and suppliers. When communications with these key groups are not effective, problems are on the horizon. Communication meltdown can easily occur in a manufacturing facility when ineffective communication becomes the norm; plant managers are often accused of being out of touch for this very reason. Out-of-touch managers operate with less information than they need to make effective operation decisions, and one or more of the key stakeholder groups may be doing the same. Ineffective plant managers either don't share critical information with stakeholders or they fail to listen to them — or both. When a plant manager communicates with any of these key groups, it can be a problem-solving transaction, a problem-avoiding transaction, or a problem-creating transaction. The behavior and communication skill of the plant manager will, to a great extent, determine the outcome of those transactions.

Consequence 5: Personnel operating and making decisions with incomplete information

✓ **Cause 6: Treating people like a commodity.** When a plant manager does not place a high priority on people and effective human resources management, bad things happen. In the current marketplace, it is getting harder and harder to find talented and motivated people in nearly all operating functions. When a plant manager does not place a high priority on the "people component," the organization's culture will reflect this attitude. Superior performance cannot be created with substandard employees and managers. Thus, the organization's HR practices must create and sustain effective systems for selection and orientation, training and development, performance appraisals, compensation, benefits, and labor relations if the organization is to be successful and considered a good place to work. When the top manager in a facility does not place a high priority on these functions, they will not receive the attention and or budgets they need to be effective. This damages the operation's ability to achieve goals.

Consequence 6: An underachieving workforce

✓ **Cause 7: Ego problems and poor working relationships.** When a plant manager is perceived as unapproachable, egocentric, unreasonable, and quick to speak and slow to hear, or when the manager treats people disrespectfully or is seen as a know-it-all, then his or her effectiveness is compromised. Plant managers with perceived ego problems have a very difficult time developing and nurturing effective working relationships with those around them. This trust factor — key in any relationship — affects labor relations, teamwork, coaching, performance appraisals, problem-solving activities, and performance-reporting functions. The issues of ego and trust are central to a plant manager's ability to create an environment of open communications and strong working relationships. When people are not confident in a manager's motives or approach to people, they naturally pull back, which can keep a manager from being in the know and thus hamper his or her efforts to bring out the best in others.

Consequence 7: Mistrust, resentment, and communication breakdowns among plant personnel

✓ **Cause 8: An inability to foster an effective leadership team.** If a plant manager and his or her operation is to be successful, cooperation, coordination, and integration are para-

mount. These organizational qualities are difficult if not impossible to develop without effective leadership from key personnel. When a plant manager fails to select effective leaders, delegate properly, coach subordinate managers, and define goals clearly, or does not articulate a preferred management style, then the words *management team* will quite possibly become an oxymoron. If the top management group cannot work together effectively, the rest of the organization will suffer. One of a plant manager's key missions must be to practice effective supervision with the staff and help forge goal structures, operating practices, and working relationships that keep top managers on the same page in their pursuit of high performance. When managers work together and cooperate, the rest of the organization will usually follow their lead.

Consequence 8: Lack of support and cooperation needed to achieve goals

✓ **Cause 9: Lack of adequate resources.** When plant managers do not receive the resources they need to support their current mission, frustration and less-than-desired results can be anticipated. "Lack of resources" refers to lack of money, which can be translated into a lack of technology, staff, materials, and infrastructure. This lack of critical resources can be created by any number of conditions, which ultimately fall into three categories: (1) the organization is unwilling or unable to fund a

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Key issues of plant management failure

Key issues	Technical skills	Conceptual skills	Interpersonal skills	Support
1. Lack of a clear sense of direction	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Failure to develop an appropriate plan for action	✓	✓		✓
3. All talk and no action		✓	✓	
4. Failure to delegate and empower		✓	✓	
5. Communication meltdowns			✓	✓
6. Treating people like a commodity	✓		✓	✓
7. Ego problems and poor working relationships			✓	
8. Inability to foster an effective leadership team		✓	✓	
9. Lack of adequate resources				✓
10. Technology holes, gaps, and mismatches	✓	✓		✓
11. Operating with bad systems, processes, and SOPs	✓			✓
12. Ineffective control and corrective action systems	✓	✓	✓	✓
13. Poor operational planning		✓		
14. Inability to integrate functions, resolve conflicts, and deal with political fighting		✓	✓	✓
15. Losing sight of ultimate goal		✓	✓	✓
Total =	6	10	10	10

Figure

manufacturing facility adequately; (2) the plant manager is unable to convince the powers that be of the need for resources; and (3) the allocation and budgeting systems designed to distribute resources fail to operate effectively. In the end, plant managers will struggle to get desired results when their organization underfunds their operation, when they themselves fail to be an effective advocate for their operation's needs, or when existing allocation processes are ineffective.

Consequence 9: Lost opportunities and operational stress

✓ **Cause 10: Technology holes, gaps, and mismatches.** Given the manufacturing technology breakthroughs of the past decade, it would appear that the success of a plant manager's operation would be driven by the level of technology deployment; that is to say, if you put enough technology into an operation, results will follow. From a plant manager's perspective, however, the problem is more complex. A technology hole exists when an organization does not have enough technology to be competitive. This problem is frequently linked to lack of resources, but that is incomplete as an explanation of technology failure. An operation can just as easily struggle with a technology application gap, which means having the right kind of technology and in sufficient quantities but, for whatever reason, failing to adequately leverage the technology to achieve desired results. A major technology hole identified in many companies is not having adequate technology support. This could mean not having appropriate engineering

support, maintenance, training, or customer approval. In addition, plant managers can and will fail when their operations have technology that does not meet their operation's current needs. These technology mismatches are linked to the plant manager's struggle to keep goals, game plans, and resource requirements in tune with technology, and vice-versa. If a plant manager cannot bring these factors together in concert, results are destined to be less than desirable.

Consequence 10: Performance problems

✓ **Cause 11: Operating with bad systems, processes, and SOPs.** When a plant manager strives for success, systems thinking is a necessity. When an operation is attempting to achieve aggressive and multifaceted goals, it is imperative that the operating system, processes, and standard operating procedures function in an optimal fashion. This is considered one of the basics of effective plant operations and is often overshadowed by current fads associated with world-class manufacturing. Plant managers can frequently fail when they attempt to implement new products, goals, and plans without ensuring that their current operating practices support such changes. Without effective, integrated systems and processes, goal achievement becomes infinitely more complex and can lead to frustration when personnel at all levels find "systems barriers" that prevent optimal performance. When a plant manager does not ensure that an operation's systems, processes, and SOPs are constantly aligned with the opera-

tion's current needs, that manager's leadership will be called into question by both the staff and the workforce.

Consequence 11: Development of inefficiencies and performance barriers, with resulting frustration

✓ **Cause 12: Ineffective control and corrective-action systems.** Although the benefits of control systems are frequently overstated, it is our experience that few things wreak more havoc in an operation than the inability to constantly measure meaningful metrics and make ongoing adjustments as needed. It is here that plant managers face a significant test of their technical and conceptual skills and their organization's existing operating systems. First, plant managers must ensure that meaningful performance measurements are in place for all levels and functions of the operation. Ideally, these metrics collectively support the operation's overarching goals and do not conflict or compete with each other. Second, control systems must be in place to provide performance data that are viewed as both meaningful and accurate by personnel operating the system. Third, and perhaps most critically, corrective-action procedures must be in place to trigger appropriate action when performance is less than desired. It is critically important that plant managers take a leadership role in creating such a cybernetic system—one that is designed to adjust performance on an ongoing basis. Without proper goals and standards, effective measurement devices, and prompt and effective corrective action, minor operational problems can easily mushroom into large-scale organizational nightmares, with unpredictable outcomes.

Consequence 12: The conversion of little problems into big problems

✓ **Cause 13: Poor operational planning.** When a manufacturing operation has ineffective leadership, it can easily develop a culture in which planning, organization, and orderly action become the exception rather than the norm. We have witnessed many operations that were in a constant state of crisis. They had problems in receiving, shipping, and staffing, as well as maintenance breakdowns, production shortages, chronic changeover delays, and on and on. The culture of these operations was, in effect, crisis-driven and reactive in nature. In such facilities, "operational planning" tends to be a play on words, and people become immune to the term *crisis*, which can actually come to mean simply "the way we do things here." These environments fail to develop the rhythm — the systematic beat — that is needed for disciplined operating. When a plant manager does not place a high priority on day-to-day operational planning activities such as production scheduling, staffing, maintenance, shift changeovers, daily performance measures, and the like, that manager is unintentionally allowing a crisis mentality to evolve. This crisis mind-set is extremely difficult to de-program once it has developed.

Consequence 13: Unnecessary crises and a resulting loss of momentum and morale

✓ **Cause 14: Inability to integrate functions, resolve conflicts, and deal with political infighting.** One of the most critical functions of modern-day plant management has to do with breaking down functional walls and "political freedoms." In this role, the manager must serve as a facilitator to integrate an operation's various functions into cohesive actions that are pointed, ultimately, at serving the customer (whether internal or external). This requires that a plant manager exercise leadership skills in getting engineering and production to function as a unit, in getting production and shipping to operate in unison, in getting salespeople aligned with the internal realities of the operation, in getting staff departments like personnel and information technology aligned with the needs of the line operation, and so on. This ability to foster teamwork and cooperation requires excellent technical and conceptual skills to understand how and why these functions must operate in concert. But great listening and selling skills, as well as political savvy, are needed, too. Plant managers must help resolve the conflicts that lead to political gamesmanship and infighting. In many operations, departments and work groups have a tradition of working at cross-purposes, competing against each other, and generally doing their own thing. This tradition creates an inertia that is difficult to overcome yet must be dealt with if an organization is to achieve its ultimate goals.

Consequence 14: Distraction from real work

✓ **Cause 15: Losing sight of ultimate goals.** It is a common phenomenon that plant managers can be so awash in a myriad of metrics that measure nearly every facet of an operation's output that they lose sight of overarching goals. These goals must include customer satisfaction, company profitability, and workforce development — goals that can easily be cast aside in efforts to increase yield, reduce cycle time, grow the business, improve quality, and implement new corporate programs. At this point, common sense becomes a critical survival skill because, in the end, satisfying customers, making money, and creating and maintaining an excellent workforce will determine a plant manager's success more than simply hitting short-term production goals and the like. With the pressures of the modern marketplace, it is easy for a plant manager to struggle to separate the urgent from the important. But not doing that is a huge mistake.

Consequence 15: Focusing too heavily on short-term metrics and losing sight of the big picture



Figure 1 provides a summary of the key issues of plant managerial failure and the corresponding technical, conceptual

Key issues	Plant manager focus	Front-line manager focus
1. Proper focus Clear direction for operation Clear definition of metrics Delegate and empower	Overall operation Strategic To managers/supervisors	Work group Operational To all workers
2. Effective planning Strategic planning Operational planning	Comprehensive Systems-oriented	Improvement-based Situation-oriented
3. Adequate resources Adequate Financial Resources Effective Technology Effective Human Resources	Securing/allocating funds Applying technology effectively Using HR systems	Using funds wisely Using funds properly Using effective HR practices
4. Effective processes Sound operating systems Integrated operating activities/teamwork Effective control and corrective action plan	Creating effective systems Coordinating among depts. Monitoring overall performance	Using the system properly Coordinating within departments Monitoring work group performance
5. People practices Effective working relationships Effective communications/feedback Ability to lead change Ability to resolve conflicts	With/among leaders Between leaders/functions At the operational level Where improvement is affected	With/among workers Within functions/work groups At the department level Where performance is affected

Figure 2.

and interpersonal skills that are involved in each issue. At the same time, this table includes the support category that addresses the degree to which the plant manager receives adequate support from superiors and the organization as a whole. A careful review of this table reveals that a variety of skills and support mechanisms are necessary to prevent failure and create a climate for success. For plant managers to succeed, they need a breadth and depth of skills in all three areas. Technical skills are, without question, important. But conceptual and interpersonal skills, as well as ongoing support, are all critical to long-term success, as is illustrated by the column totals of Figure 1.

Effective plant management in action

A review of the issues and the reasons plant managers fail to get desired results demonstrates the complexity of a manager's job. A variety of key management factors must be in place to help a manufacturing operation function in an optimal fashion. These key factors generally fall under one of five highly integrated issues that have a profound effect on performance and should be carefully understood by not only those who run manufacturing facilities but also by their superiors. In Figure 2 we identify each of the key variables that can damage a plant manager's performance. The very same issues can be applied to nearly all front-line management personnel in a manufacturing facility, but with a somewhat different focus. These issues include providing proper focus; using effective

planning; having adequate *resources*; using effective *processes*; and having sound *people practices*.

Throughout this discussion, our focus has been on the role of plant management. Each plant manager interviewed described front-line managers as "mini-plant managers" who deal with the same strategic and operational issues for their areas of responsibilities. A failure within a front-line area can ultimately result in a failure for the organization; it is also a symptom of an underlying deficiency on the part of the plant manager. For these reasons, the key issues associated with plant managers' failures are applicable to front-line managers, and organizational success can be enhanced at each of these levels of responsibility by the same issues. In Figure 3, we depict the interdependent relationships among these key variables and the desired operation outcomes.

- **Focus:** It is critical for the plant manager and front-line managers to focus their energies and talents in a meaningful fashion. The plant manager must ensure that the overall operation has a clear sense of direction, while the front-line supervisor does the same for his or her work group. The plant manager must create a metric system that provides strategic focus, while the front-line manager must articulate clear and unambiguous operating goals and measurements for his or her people. Once the direction has been established for the operation as a whole, the plant manager must properly delegate work to the management team and empower them according to their abilities. The front-line supervisor must do

the same for his or her work group by clarifying performance expectation and duties, granting authority, and creating a system of individual and group accountability for key results.

- **Planning:** The plant manager's job is to help create a plan for the overall operation's activity that is clear and comprehensive and that reflects the best possible input from the people who must implement the plan. The plant manager must ensure that both strategic and operational planning take place in an effective fashion. Strategic planning for the plant manager must have a comprehensive focus, whereas operational planning must be system-oriented to ensure that future action includes all facets of the operation. For the front-line supervisor, strategic planning must focus on improvement plans that support operational improvement, whereas operational planning must be situation-oriented to include such activities as production and work schedules, maintenance activities, training initiatives, and so on. With the constant pressure for short-term results and operating lean and mean, effective planning can easily be cast aside by managers at all levels — at their own peril.

- **Resources:** Even though almost every manufacturing facility would like more resources, it is becoming increasingly important that resource management become a high-priority organizational proficiency. First, plant managers must be responsible for securing needed financial resources from those who control such decisions, which requires not only good planning but strong selling skills. Second, plant managers must ensure that technology is secured and properly applied to operational needs. Third, plant managers must take proactive steps to create and maintain an adequate and effective workforce. This requires an effective HR management system for orientation, training, performance appraisal, compensation, benefits, and safety systems. At the same time, front-line managers must ensure that financial resources are wisely used, that technology is properly employed, and that HR systems are actually put into practice as they were designed. Thus, having adequate financial, technological, and human resources requires that the plant manager secure and create resources and that front-line supervisors put them to good use.

- **Processes:** Without effective processes to support the effort to focus, planning and resources themselves will not lead to superior performance. The plant manager must create a sound operating system that integrates critical operating activities and that monitors performance on an ongoing basis. When an operation's overall performance is less than desired, corrective action must be taken to improve it. From the perspective of the front-line supervisor, the operating system must, again, be used as designed, integration activities must be aimed at improving teamwork within work groups, and work-group performance must be monitored on an ongoing basis. When work-group performance is less than expected, corrective action should be initiated at the work-group level to fix the deficiency. Without good

systems and without integration, teamwork, and effective control and corrective-action systems, both plantwide and at the work-group level, performance will suffer.

- **People.** It is becoming exceedingly difficult to compete without an effective and motivated people component. The plant manager must help forge effective working relationships with and among the leaders of the operation. And front-line supervisors must work hard at developing effective working relationships with and among members of their work groups. This is not possible without effective two-way communications being practiced by all levels of management. When communications are effective in an operation, all other activities become less problematic. Sharing information, listening, and coaching are three of the most important people skills that manufacturing managers possess. They also must have the ability to lead change at the overall operational level and resolve organizational conflicts that hinder improvement. Front-line supervisors must then be able to implement change at the work-group level and resolve the conflicts that affect work-group performance.

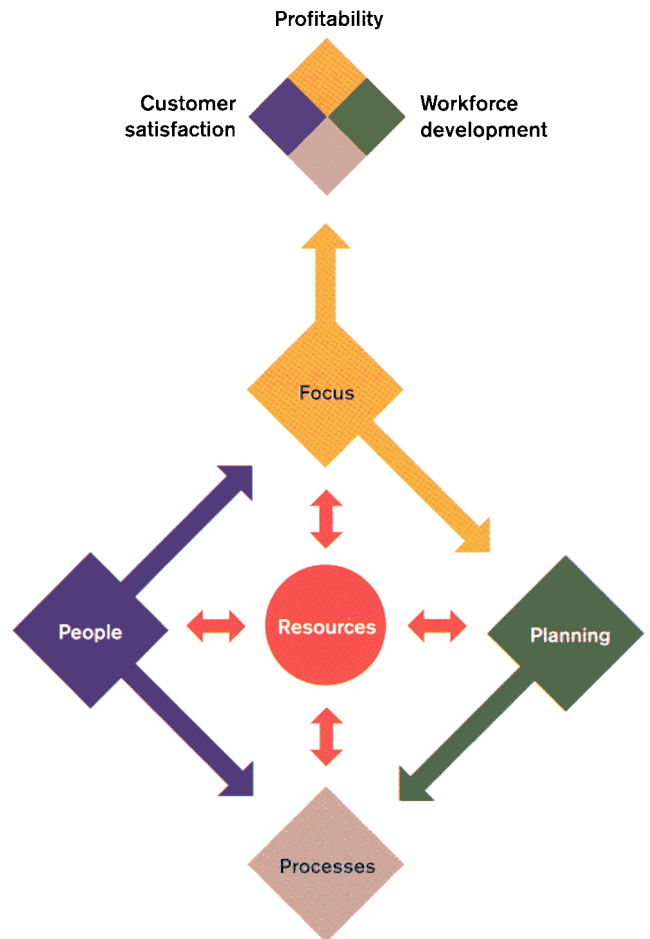


Figure 3. The components of effective plant management.

Plant management self-assessment

Instructions: Carefully review this list of critical management practices and assess the extent to which these factors are presently part of your current operating culture. Please be candid!

To what extent...	Not at all	To some extent	To a great extent
1. Does this operation have a clear sense of direction and well-defined goals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Does this operation have an effective plan of action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Does the leadership of this operation create real change?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Do managers practice effective delegation and empowerment with their people?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Is effective two-way communication practiced in this operation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Is creating and maintaining a high-performance workforce a priority?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Do managers have effective working relationships with employees and each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Are managers/supervisors effective leaders?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Is this operation adequately funded?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Is technology being properly applied and leveraged?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Are current operating systems, processes and SOPs effective?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Is performance being monitored and corrective action taken when performance is less than desired?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Is proactive operational planning practiced in this facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Are organizational members and departments operating in unison with each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Is this operation focused on the over-riding goals of customer satisfaction, profitability, and workforce morale?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 4.

In closing

We have identified some factors that cause plant management failure — factors that influence not only the performance of the plant manager but of all plant management personnel. The issues identified here make it clear that when plant managers and their staff do not have the requisite technical, conceptual, and interpersonal skills, problems can and will occur. At the same time, when managers at all levels do not receive the support they need from their superiors and their organization, the likelihood of failure increases. Support can come in the form of critical resources, technology, information, clear goals, empowerment, feedback and coaching, and a sound corrective-action system, among other sources.

Figure 4 provides a useful self-assessment tool for those who manage plant managers, for plant managers themselves, and for front-line supervisors to assess the extent to which an operation may be planting the seeds of operational failure.

The factors shown in the table make it clear that the selection, training, performance appraisal, coaching, development, and support of plant manufacturing management personnel must be given extreme attention and care in order to groom people for this rewarding yet arduous profession. These factors will determine an operation's long-term performance and the degree to which a plant manager's career will be a successful one. When gaps are identified, prudent action is nec-

essary for both the sake of the manager and the organization. Without continuous improvement on a personal level, plant managers and their management personnel will not realize their full potential, which is simply the mandate needed for future success. ■

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