

## Engaging your Workforce to assist Innovation

Whilst implementing Operations Excellence, engaging your workforce is crucial for success. However, this can also be one of the more difficult steps. In order to take the mystery out of this process, Peter Mastalir, the **Managing Director at Rambor** explained how to effectively engage your workforce to assist innovation at the 2012 TPM & Lean Annual Forum.



Based in South Nowra NSW, Rambor design and manufacture the installation of roof and rib (wall) retention chemical anchor bolts for the underground coal mining industry. Their products are used worldwide and recognised to be a leader in its field. Rambor also provide further support to their clients through equipment servicing and rental services.

At Rambor, 25% of profits are redirected into Research and Development (R&D). According to Peter, such funds are dedicated to R&D as they recognise it as an integral part of their business model and the future of the organisation.

Over the years, Rambor have focused on Risk Management Systems including Work Area Management (WAM), independent hazard chemical storage audits and the integration of OH&S within manufacturing.

To begin the presentation, Peter explained the crucial nature of an engaged workforce when aiming for innovation.

“(There are) no empirical equations, it’s all about people and at the end of the day, your people are your assets.”

Figure 1 – Peter presenting at the Forum



Peter dedicated the duration of the presentation explaining the **Stages of the Innovation Process** and how to engage your workforce along the way. The first stage of Rambor’s Innovation Process involved **identifying risks**. Such risks include technical, commercial, reputational and customer issues.

The next stage in the Innovation process concerned the **design**. According to Peter, the site needs to prioritise specifications and clarify unknowns. In order to do this, the plan should include clear steps so the teams can go back and reflect upon previous actions if necessary. In order to engage the workforce in the design, several options should be created for peer review so employees from all levels can have the opportunity to contribute.

The third stage involves the **project management plan**.

“Gantt chart, Gantt chart, Gantt chart,” repeated Peter, “that’s so important, you’ve got to invest the time to plan.”

According to Peter, the three key elements of the project management plan include defining

realistic goals, resources and milestones. The project management plan can function as a guide for employees and provide them with a greater idea of the project objectives. However, the Project Manager is still crucial to provide leadership and ensure the Improvement Activities run smoothly.

Peter also emphasised the importance of implementing any Improvement projects into normal manufacturing procedures during the Innovation Process. Although this may appear difficult, planning ahead with the Project Manager and allocating resources appropriately can lessen the chance of disruption to day to day production. In order to engage the workforce in this process, employees need to have a clear understanding of the values and potential of the project.

“Five years ago, if I turned up and said ‘OK guys, we’re going to do some R&D’ everyone would have just cringed,” explained Peter.

Now that employees understand the worth of Improvement activities, it is the complete opposite. Everyone at Rambor is more enthusiastic and interested in becoming involved in future projects.

Despite the importance of documentation within the Innovation Process, Peter acknowledged that this aspect is often neglected. Should you wish to receive successful results, Peter encouraged that it is best to complete documentation in parallel with the project. In order to engage the workforce in the documentation process, Peter argued that communication with all parties involved is necessary.

The final stage of the Innovation Process discussed was **commissioning and testing**. In order to engage the workforce, there must be confidence in the solution, each employee should understand the risks involved and all parties should observe the offsite testing to gauge a greater understanding.

“It is good for the staff to see the fruits of what they have done,” added Peter.

For example, when Rambor first implemented Work Area Management (WAM), Peter had to use the above steps to ensure that the site was sufficiently engaged in the project. Initially, the employees were sceptical towards WAM, believing it was a waste of time. However, the project allowed teams to bond and the employees had greater ownership over their site.

**Figure 2 – WAM Teams at Rambor**



Peter noted that WAM acted as a consistent and repeatable practice that enabled their staff to explore talents they were unaware they had. Subsequently, the employees had a greater sense of pride for their site and were able to maintain their WAM results.

To wrap things up, Peter condensed his Innovation Process stages by stating that inspiration, pride, ownership, praise and humour are all necessary when engaging your workforce in Innovation.

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