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## BELOW THE RADAR

Factors that Steal Tons, Increase Costs and Prevent Change

### Project End Dates – An Invisible Barrier to Sustainable Change

Jeff Smith, an early TV chef, once said “Everything has an end, except a sausage which has two.” Ends imply that we can stop doing one thing and begin doing another. We can find “endless” (no pun intended) examples of this in our personal and professional lives. Ending an old habit means that we have adopted a new one. The end of college life marks the beginning of a new career. Moving means the end of life at one address and the beginning of life at another.

In the mining industry, many activities have end times or dates – production shifts, weekly PM schedules, finishing a longwall panel or a longwall move, and equipment installations. End dates are also factors in continuous improvement. A project end date sets the expectation for achieving measurable bottom line improvements AND shifting resources to other work, something that resource-constrained organizations anxiously anticipate. If commitment to a new process is low, managers and employees may eagerly anticipate this date so that they can “go back to the old way of doing things”. A project end date drives behavior. If not carefully managed, a project end date implies that the improvement process is finished, a **misconception that steals the opportunity to sustain improvements** to productivity, costs and organizational effectiveness.

Every improvement project goes through a series of basic steps. One acronym for these steps is DMAIC: Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control. During the Control step, a project is monitored (after a change was made) to determine if we are getting the expected result. Successful projects show that an improvement was sustained over the period monitored. If the activity in the Control step is adequate to sustain improvement, why are gains often lost months later? Was it because the wrong consultants were chosen or because training was inadequate? Often the reason stems from a failure to tie the process change to the management system.

You may be wondering why improvements should be tied to the management system. After years of helping companies improve performance, it has become apparent that this step is required for sustainability but is usually missed or underemphasized during every implementation. To support this theory, we only need to examine the impact of the management system on an organization.

Management system processes:

- Set expectations for the organization.
- Determine the decision criteria used by management.
- Establish communication policies and practices.
- Direct the interaction of departments.
- Channel energy, enthusiasm and cooperation.
- Demand or reject feedback.

We could make a much longer list of how a management system touches managers and employees. At its most basic level, the management system connects top-down driven goals and strategies with the energy, enthusiasm and commitment of the workforce to get the job done. The result can be outstanding earnings or disappointing results. The management system becomes the link to success or failure and to sustained improvements or shortfalls. When management processes are overlooked as essential change elements, chances for long-term benefits from improvement work are sabotaged.

So how does all of this relate to a project end date? Historically, the role of managers in improvement work was limited to reviewing project reports. When projects “ended”, their work ended. The links to the management system were never established, which disconnected the gains from the source that could sustain them. This is a main reason for project failures, the cause of lost credibility of the management team, and explains why some companies start searching for a new improvement initiative. Managers are the only people that can establish and execute the links, which is why sustainability depends on management and not on the workforce. Ironically, most of this work occurs AFTER the end date on the project report.

Mine managers know that their processes are “never-ending” and understand the importance of effective management practices at their operations. Connecting projects to the management system sustains the benefits and helps managers “manage change like they manage operations”. It is truly the “last step” in the improvement process.

Here’s the thought for March:

Managers become great improvement leaders when the management system is intentionally connected to improvement work. Sustainable change is always the result.

Kay Sever implements improvement programs for mining and downstream processing facilities. Her approach balances commonly used tools and methods with a focus on value creation and the "people side of improvement". Kay works with every organizational level and department to find the highest dollar opportunities and remove barriers that prevent sustainable change. She helps management teams lead improvement and better execute the budget, capital approvals, incentive plans, communications, etc. See **MiningOpportunity.com** for details on her services and contact information. Look for the mining edition of her first book "Building An Opportunity Culture – Addressing the Barriers That Steal Profits and Prevent Sustainable Change", available on her website under Products/Books.