

THE ENEMY WITHIN

DOUGLAS A. HALL

IN AN AGE OF TEAMWORK, MANAGEMENT AND THE WORK FORCE MAY HAVE DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES BELONG TO WHICH GROUP.

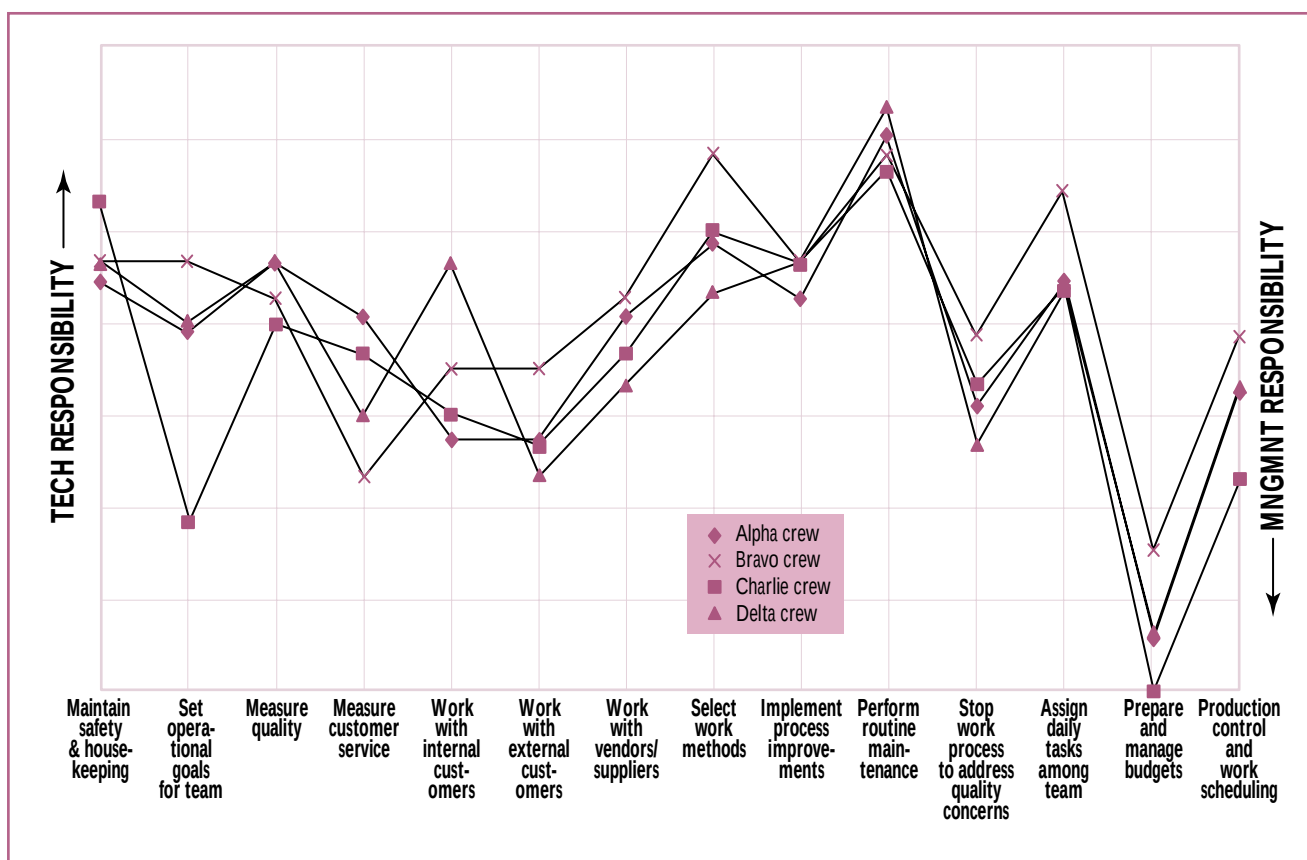
SOMEONE ONCE SAID, "PERCEPTION IS REALITY." Unfortunately, the management perception (reality) is not always the work force perception (reality). As a manager, understanding that your viewpoint is not the only reality in the workplace can be the first step in overcoming what most experts agree is the biggest obstacle in creating and managing an empowered work force: yourself.

Blue Water Fiber Limited Partnership recently started operation of a 220- a.d. tons/day deinked market pulp mill, instituting a team environment from the onset. The facility is operated by four crews, each with a crew leader

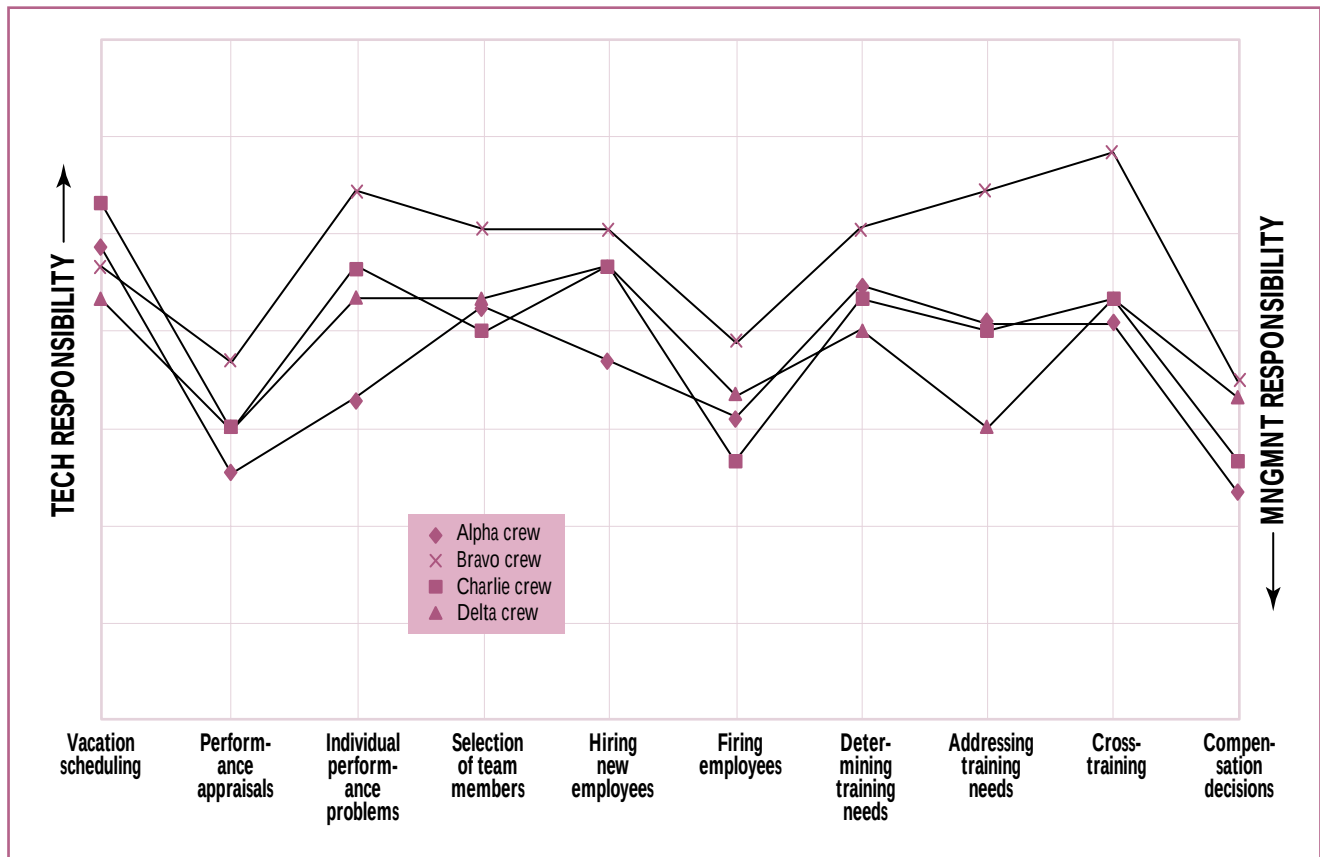
who is a functional part of the crew. There are currently three skill blocks at the facility, including materials, equipment, and distributed control system (DCS) technicians. These crews are supported by resource "leaders" in the areas of technical, maintenance and purchasing.

TEAM SURVEY

After the mill had been in operation roughly four months, a survey was conducted of every team member, including technicians, crew leaders and management. The survey broke down the work environment into operational and administrative responsibilities, with the



1. How crews viewed operational tasks and responsibilities



2. How crews viewed administrative tasks and responsibilities

respondents rating each task as being accomplished by management, by technicians, or as a shared responsibility.

The first segment of the survey results, displayed in **Fig. 1**, indicates that virtually all technicians and crew leaders, even from different crews, perceive the operational work environment in a similar manner. While this is an excellent start for a production team environment, this result was somewhat expected, since the majority of the technicians have production backgrounds and would already feel comfortable taking on operational responsibilities.

The second part of the survey, shown in **Fig. 2**, indicates two important trends that need to be recognized:

- One crew consistently felt more responsibility for administrative tasks than the other crews.
- All crews felt relatively the same amount of responsibility for administrative tasks as for operational tasks.

Numerous books and articles have been written detailing how the biggest obstacle to a healthy, produc-

tive team environment is usually management personnel. The purpose of the survey, even though many strong management personnel would disagree, was not to verify management's perspective of how the team environment was performing, nor was it to plot the technicians' progress on some grand team development scale. Rather, it was an attempt to perceive and understand some different viewpoints (realities).

MANAGING DIFFERENCES

With that understanding, it should be a primary objective of team leadership to manage the difference between management's perspective and the technicians'.

Imagine the chaos and disorganization that would occur if management perceived the technicians to have full responsibility over the operational and administrative tasks in the work environment. Management would constantly be frustrated by a perceived lack of responsibility and accountability from the technicians.

On the other hand, what if management perceived the technicians to have responsibility for operational tasks but not yet be ready for administrative tasks? The

result would be not only a higher technician frustration level but missed opportunities for team building and trust by a management focused on its own reality.

Is there a "correct" reality? I do not believe so. There is, however, a correct vision which should be supplied by management and shared by everyone involved in the team environment. It is this vision of an effective team environment, not agreement on "reality," that team members and management should be striving for. As leaders,

management should provide the proper training, information, and leadership tools so that all team members, no matter how they perceive the current work environment, will continue to grow and flourish in an empowered workplace. **TJ**

Hall is mill manager with Blue Water Fiber Limited Partnership, Port Huron, MI.