



## Doing the right things right

**M**aintenance and reliability is an area of vital interest to the pulp and paper industry. It keeps valuable assets operating at their peak and helps maximize productivity and profitability. No wonder it ranks high on the list of concerns of every mill manager.

In the past we've written about this topic from the perspective of the "skills gap"—the growing problem faced by companies, especially those in the U.S., to find skilled employees.

It is estimated that despite high unemployment, as many as 600,000 U.S. manufacturing jobs remain unfilled because employers can't find people with the right skills. And according to Pöyry, over 20 percent of current pulp and paper industry employees are or will be nearing retirement, affecting roughly 3,000 people in leadership positions by 2020.

Respondents to a 2011 Deloitte report (*Boiling Point? The Skills Gap in U.S. Manufacturing*), when asked to look ahead three to five years, listed access to a highly skilled, flexible workforce as the most important factor in their effectiveness, ranking above factors such as new product innovation and increased market share, by a margin of 20 percentage points.

As critical as the skills gap issue is, there's another equally important aspect of maintenance and reliability, as this month's article from John Yolton explains. While it is vital to have access to a ready source of skilled employees, it is equally important that a mill is doing the right things to ensure optimum efficiency, such as investing in R&D, conducting regular training, creating a high performance work culture, and adhering to best industry practices.

An SKF survey of 285 global pulp and paper manufacturing sites, set out to determine what the "best" companies do regarding maintenance and reliability, what techniques those mills employ, and how global mills stack up. The result turned out to be both good and bad news for North America which had mills ranking in both the highest and lowest categories.

One global company that takes maintenance and reliability to heart is Metsä Fibre. In an interview in this issue, Metsä Fibre CEO Ilkka Härmälä says that it is not just about maintaining but rather about continuously improving.

Realizing that maintenance wasn't their core competency, Metsä Fibre entered into strategic partnerships with maintenance providers at their mills, including their Fray Bentos mill in Uruguay as well as the Rauma, Kemi, Äänekoski and Joutseno mills described in the article. The result, says Härmälä, was a "maintenance plus development" partner who not only keeps a mill running, but also improves it on a regular basis.

While rationalization, globalization, consolidation, and changing product demands have resulted in reduced staffing at pulp and paper companies, mills have done a good job of becoming more efficient to offset changes. Continuing to adopt and adhere to best practices will further improve efficiency while the industry searches for more ways to attract young, energetic and skilled employees.



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