

Ten keys to an effective RCA program

By: LEE N. VANDEN HEUVEL
 Manager, Root Cause Analysis
 and Incident Investigation Services
 ABS Consulting

And

By: DONALD K. LORENZO
 Director, Training Solutions
 ABS Consulting

Many organizations struggle with implementation of an effective root cause analysis (RCA) program. In working with hundreds of organizations to develop and implement RCA programs, we have noted a few common threads that seem to emerge regardless of the business type or size. Here are 10 keys to an effective RCA program:

1. Think long term — Most organizations focus on the short-term because of immediate financial pressures and the push to resume production. However, this near-sighted focus fosters a “patch it” mentality with no fundamental understanding of underlying causes. Certainly short-term performance cannot be ignored, but insufficient attention to long-term fixes usually results in continued repeat failures and a negative impact on organizational performance.

2. Focus on the right incidents — You can't investigate everything that goes wrong. Look for incidents with high learning value where you can learn something that will allow you to make significant positive impacts on organizational performance. These usually include the following three categories: high consequence incidents, near misses to high consequence incidents and chronic lower consequence incidents. Most organizations focus investigations on the first category and largely ignore the last two categories of incidents.

3. Get started right away — The longer it takes to get started, the harder it is to do the job right. Streamline the incident selection and personnel assignment process so that the investigation can get started immediately.

4. Get the right people involved in the investigation — Select personnel that have RCA training and the background to uncover the performance gaps that caused the incident.

5. Get the data you need — Most RCA teams don't get enough data. Data gathering is difficult and time consuming. Teams often take short cuts and only collect enough data to support their hypothesis. Unfortunately, the rest of the RCA process is ineffective if complete data are not collected.

6. Use standard techniques for data analysis — There are many data analysis tools available including timelines, logic trees, logic tables and checklists. Each technique has its own advantages and disadvantages; none are perfect. Pick one or

two and use them for every incident.

7. Require the use of a technique that identifies underlying causes — The better analysis tools guide the RCA team toward the underlying root causes. Each method has advantages and disadvantages in terms of effort required versus thoroughness and consistency. Choose one technique and require its use for every analysis.

8. Get management buy-in for the recommendations — Management doesn't always accept the team's recommendations, frequently due to a lack of communications. Provide management with a summary of the incident, highlighting the performance gaps (differences between what should have happened and what did happen). The performance gaps should address what

The most effective recommendations from an RCA are typically long-term in nature.

occurred out in the field (the causal factors) and in the support organizations (the root causes). Show how the recommendations address the performance gaps (causal factors to root causes to recommendations). This will help managers see why the team recommended what they did. Develop a standard presentation template that RCA teams can use to facilitate this process.

9. Track recommendations to completion — The most effective recommendations from an RCA are typically long-term in nature. Inevitably they will be pushed aside if no one tracks their progress and holds the responsible individuals accountable. A database that facilitates frequent status updates and communications with personnel is the only effective way to accomplish this goal.

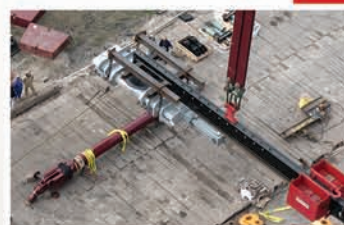
10. Look for long-term trends — Most organizations needlessly tolerate inefficiencies and losses in their processes. The same failures occur often, but they are viewed as “part of the process” and “just the way things are” when in fact simple fixes can be applied to reduce the frequency and impact of these failures. Use work requests, production data and inventory records to help see these chronic problems that may never be reported as incidents.

To download a report template, a PowerPoint template for management presentations, ABS Consulting's Root Cause Map™ and a summary of the various RCA analysis techniques, visit ABS Consulting's Web site at www.absconsulting.com/bic0908. □



We get the job done.

Safely.



Wyatt Field Service Company is #1 in major revamps of Coker Units

Contract awards from satisfied clients continue to come our way for drum replacements, shell section replacements and repairs, un-heading device installations, and related piping and structural revamps.

If you look for proven results — you will find Wyatt....

Turnarounds
 FCCU & Coker Revamps
 Heavy Rigging
 Piping
 Structure Revamp
 Engineering Capabilities

Wyatt
 Since 1913

www.WyattFieldService.com

Houston, TX
 713-570-2000
 800-324-3000

Corpus Christi, TX
 361-241-6930

Torrance, CA
 310-593-4969

Port Arthur, TX
 409-963-3648

Port Allen, LA
 225-749-8033
 800-749-9288

Guayama,
 Puerto Rico
 787-864-4181