What's the secret to CMMS success?

Follow these 10 keys

Gregory Perry, Senior Capacity Assurance Consultant, Fluke Reliability

No matter how large or small your operation, computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) software is an enabling tool that addresses your maintenance needs and turns them into real-time practices. A CMMS collects and stores asset data, work orders, materials and inventory, and other key asset management information in one place.

However, experts estimate that up to 70 percent of initial CMMS implementations fail to meet expectations. Check out the 10 steps below that can help you increase your chances for CMMS success.

CMMS software can help transform the productivity of your maintenance team to "world-class" status by:

- Automating workflows and processes
- Tracking work, including the time required for project completion and the associated costs
- Managing MRO levels
- Ensuring compliance with industry or government regulations
- Housing empirical asset health data that allows priorities to be set and decisions to be informed ones
- Provide the technological prowess to ensure that capacity assurance is attainable then sustainable

The volume of tasks your maintenance team completes will increase substantially with a reduced investment in labor-hours. Likewise, by tracking maintenance activity over the life of your assets, performance is optimized. In world-class operations, an average of 65 percent of a team's time is spent on scheduled, preventive or predictive, actions, rather than on unplanned repairs, according to Reliable Plant magazine.

Even though your organization's finances or procurements may be on separate systems, those systems can be integrated with the CMMS so that they dovetail and support each other.

Here are the 10 steps to help ensure success from a capacity assurance purview:

1. Select a project champion and a cross-functional implementation team

Identify a central owner who understands that capacity assurance is a process of continuous improvement – not just a one-time project. Your champion should choose a supporting team that draws expertise from a variety of departments, ranging from information technology to purchasing to materials management. Consider tapping software developers and other consultants as well.

Wherever they come from, certain roles are critical to fill, including:

- Executive leadership, to approve funding and critical decisions
- Maintenance leadership, including a project owner and future system administrator
- Project leaders, including a manager who documents the requirements and an analyst who defines how the system will be used
- Subject-matter experts, such as individuals knowledgeable in purchasing and Six Sigma
- IT liaisons
- Implementation consultants

2. Familiarize the core team with the CMMS

The core team must become your CMMS experts and future trainers. Your software developer or other consultants should provide hands-on training to bring members up to speed and ensure its capabilities are fully understood and used successfully.

3. Define workflow processes

A CMMS must be blended into every aspect of daily operations – from work orders to preventive action schedules to placement of parts. This is not a time for assumptions; processes for each task must be accurately mapped. A team member who is proficient in flow diagrams can be invaluable, along with a quality management point person or an expert in any other process-excellence system your organization has adopted.

4. Invest time in standard operating procedures (SOPs)

Make sure you document all of the processes captured in SOPs. Likewise, assets should be classified and grouped by type (pumps, generators, etc.), ordered in hierarchies, and defined by location and criticality. You also will need to determine asset tracking levels; assign appropriate codes to items, problems, and costs; specify the person responsible for each procedure, and identify the tasks required for maintenance and the tools and materials needed. Avoid falling into the trap of thinking that SOPs don't have to be written down; failures occur when procedures aren't clearly defined.

5. Prioritize your implementation

Establish the processes you want to automate first, starting with the "low-hanging fruit," and commit to a timeline. A series of quick wins will give your entire team confidence and build support within the organization. Focus only on collecting the data you know you'll need; ancillary information can always be gathered later. Leverage the experience of a seasoned CMMS implementer for guidance. Many lessons have been learned by your industry colleagues; why not benefit from them?

6. Make using the CMMS easy and quick

When configuring a CMMS, keep your users in mind. If system access is difficult or usage isn't intuitive, maintenance members will follow the path of least resistance, and you won't get the buy-in or the data you need.

7. Avoid the 'garbage in-garbage out' trap

Your CMMS will only be as good as the data it contains. If data isn't entered consistently, and according to pre-set standards, it will become corrupted and unreliable. Furthermore, data stored in separate spreadsheets can't be tracked, and should be under one roof.

Likewise, if data is entered and not kept up to date, you won't benefit from quality intelligence. Start with core asset data; you can add attribute information later. Remember that a strategy must be developed for populating the CMMS with the data you've gathered.

Manual entry may be the easiest, but it's also the most time-consuming. If you are importing data from other systems, protocols for conversion must be written and run, and considerable clean-up might be required, necessitating several passes. Identify upfront who will be responsible for this step and how quality will be verified.

8. Maximize training opportunities

The staff members responsible for training CMMS users are perhaps the most critical members of the team. They must be experts at understanding the system's capabilities, as well as excellent communicators and good teachers. Keep in mind that while the "train the trainer" approach certainly minimizes costs, quality instruction will elevate the rollout process.

Another training option is to leverage online learning, whether pre-recorded or live. Although web-based training can be highly effective, nothing replaces face-to-face interaction, including plenty of time for questions and interaction with peers. In that environment, you literally see the mental "light bulbs" firing.

9. Consider a phased approach to a roll out and provide support after you go live

Many organizations choose to roll out a CMMS in stages, enabling maintenance professionals to identify and resolve problems on a smaller scale. It can also help you gain acceptance of the new technology from reluctant members.

Effectively implementing a pilot program in one location first can help ensure multi-site rollout success. If you need to integrate the CMMS with other systems, such as purchasing, wait for future phases to test that out.

10. Adopt a philosophy of continuous improvement

Implementing a CMMS is an ongoing process, and the opportunity to improve maintenance operations is never-ending. Use data collected in your CMMS to drive maintenance decisions, gain a better understanding of asset failures and the cause, and make appropriate adjustments.

Establish success metrics right from the start, along with a team responsible for a continual review process. Set this up immediately after your initial "go-live" to prevent bad habits from settling in. Support and coaching will continue to be needed.

About the author

Gregory Perry is a certified reliability leader (CRL) and a senior consultant with Fluke Reliability. He has nearly two decades of experience in maintenance and operational best practices and is dedicated to positive client relationships. He brings a broad base of knowledge to customers, including MRO and storerooms, world-class maintenance principles, and world-class CMMS consultation and leadership. In addition to providing implementation and consultative services, Perry also presents maintenance best practices sessions at leading industry conferences and has presented at several online best practices webinars.