
Reliability Policy—Do You Have One?—Why Not?

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Reliability for business starts with management. Management uses policy statements to address major issues. What does the reliability policy for your company say to the organization? Does your management know enough about reliability to endorse a reliability policy, which you, as the reliability professional, would propose for their signature?

Management needs clues about reliability details to achieve lasting reliability improvements for products and processes to increase profits. Reliability professionals must help educate managers about reliability in short, tight, clear, attention-getting sound bites to sell the organization on the benefits of reliability. Effective communications from reliability professionals must be short, to the point, and business oriented to emphasize money and time.

As the reliability professional in your organization, can you give a 60 second sound bite to state your view of a reliability policy? Or, do you require a non-productive lengthy, tedious presentation? Remember you must sell reliability--not preach--so ask how your verbal presentation would sound on the 6 PM evening newscast? Would your sales pitch be viewed as a turn-on or turn-off?

Deliver your management sales presentations in listener train of thought: 1) Cost, 2) Time, 3) Alternatives—including the datum cost of doing nothing for improvements, and 4) Benefits. (Tutorials for management cannot drone on about mind bogging minutia concerning probabilities and confidence limits for which management has zero tolerance.)

Effective reliability professionals must help management communicate reliability to the organization with a clear reliability policy statement. Policies can mobilize actions for considering cost of alternatives to prevent or mitigate failures, which

require knowledge about times to failure, and failure modes, found by reliability technology.

Modern organizations have:

- 1) A safety policy that generally says "We will have an accident free working environment",
- 2) A quality policy that generally says "We will ship a defect free product that meets the needs of the customer, and
- 3) A reliability policy that generally says "___"! You have the opportunity to fill the void by saying "Our products and production processes will be failure free in use for a pre-established and specified period of time when performing the intended function with correct operation in the proper environment". If you don't have a reliability policy, then get one—in the end, it's all about money and time!

Of course the simplest statement for managers to adopt would be consistent with quality and safety policy such as "We will have a long defect free life for our products and processes." (Yes, I know you want to tell me a paragraph or maybe a chapter about why this is not precisely correct but the issue is too big and too important for too many small details!)

Managers rarely write their own policy statements. Reliability professionals must mobilize and persuade (sell) management to do the right thing with a clear policy proposal. The proposal must address the need for improvements using a top-down thought process (avoid bogging down in a bottom-up argument as management will not be interested). One way to motivate a policy is to address the cost of **un**reliability (see <http://www.barringer1.com/cour.htm>).

Reliability professionals must do the staff work for their managers and sell the need for improvements in a persuasive manner. Thus reliability professionals must think about their sales strategy—if you can't sell your boss, how are you going to sell the organization? Think about what's in it for people to change their thinking process for reliability?

Communications for reliability improvements require knowing: 1) when things fail, 2) how things fail, and 3) conversions of failures into statements about time and money. Reliability engineering principles help define when and how things fail. The principles providing evidence for making life cycle costs comparisons. Reliability details provide evidence for the lowest long-term cost of ownership driven by a single estimator called net present value, which converts hardware issues and alternatives into money. If you are not speaking in money/time terms involving the lowest long-term cost of ownership then you're missing the boat for management conversations.

Once you have a reliability policy, you can then set reliability procedures. Procedures provide guidance for how the policy should be implemented. Pre-think the procedures so the organization can make monetary decisions in an un-emotional manner as a business fact rather than becoming immobilized with indecisions. The procedures can address the "facts of life" for getting problems resolved rather than promoting endless discussions about what is a failure and how much does our failure cost.

Rules for reliability follow the procedures. Want an example? Think about your safety programs. Safety programs have a policy, which sets the accident free environment. The policy drives procedures for how the policy will be implemented. The procedures drive the safety rules to take or not take action.

Good effective safety programs have been demonstrated to be both altruistic and cost effective. Should you expect anything different for a reliability program?—go sell your programs on this basis.

If you have a top-down reliability program driven by a policy statement, procedures, and rules, then it's easy to perform a reliability audit. What would an audit show for your facility in substantiating your reliability program? Avoid the procedural and bureaucratic ISO-900x audits, and go for a value audit.

Would a value audit show you're doing what you promised for the corporation in moving toward a long failure free life? Most organizations would, by knee jerk reaction, focus on product hardware. However the lost money in most organizations is in the failure of the process to produce the product. This requires an assessment of process reliability and quantification of losses. Get the process under control and then product reliability control will follow. The last place most reliability professionals investigate is control of the process (see <http://www.barringer1.com/may01prb.htm>). Tight process control for reliability is an important place for profit improvement, which is unseen to your competitors.

Have you quantified the cost of reliability failures for your organization by products and processes? If you want management's attention, present issues in terms of time and money! Avoid glibness. Set down details in simple terms so you can sell your position from a professional reliability perspective. Sound simple? It isn't! Get the facts. Make your sales pitch. Remember the sales challenge: Salesmen don't really start selling until the customer says NO!

Reliability professionals---it's your job to sell a reliability policy to your organization. If it's not your job, tell me whose job is it?

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