

Short-Term Mine Planning Process in Perspective

There is an increasing need within the mining industry to ensure that the strategic intent of the company is successfully executed at an operational level of the business. The short-term planning process, typically the last step in the planning cycle, essentially translates the operational objectives of the company into an executable plan. Daily operational challenges such as the availability of mining equipment and working faces, difficult mining conditions and throughput bottlenecks, to name but a few, often conflict with the execution of the company's planning objectives. It is in catering for these operational unknowns while subscribing to the overall planning objectives, that the benefit of standardising and formalising the short-term planning process is realised.

"The short-term plan down to a 'shift by shift' schedule of mining activities forms the vital link between the planning objectives and the execution thereof at an operational level of the business," says **Wally Richards**, Managing Director of Tomahee Consulting Services. He continues: "The lack of a well defined short-term planning process embedded at the operations amidst the volatile nature of a mining execution environment, places the company at risk in achieving the desired business objectives."

Richards continues by saying that although it is acknowledged within the mining industry that the need exists to standardise and formalise the short-term planning process, the challenge remains one of knowing how to address the issue. It is around this challenge that Tomahee Consulting Services, with its service delivery model core to the mining industry, has partnered with their clients to embark on a short-term planning maturity journey.

Their intense involvement within the mining industry at the operational level of the business as a consultancy complemented by their 'in-house' mining expertise have earned them a reputation as subject matter experts on best practice planning principles. Tomahee has developed a unique and systematic approach in developing detailed best practice blueprints but more importantly has a proven



WALLY RICHARDS

record to implement and embed the process at the operation.

Tomahee facilitates a process which typically starts at encapsulating the company's strategic intent and the objectives of company stakeholders into a high level planning policy. The next step, as part of formulating a strategy, is to develop the best practice blueprints and map the short-term planning maturity journey. Strategy implementation starts with populating an activity matrix which captures all activities identified along the maturity journey. These are translated into a schedule of tasks with milestone due dates and deliverables against an agreed timeline. Once this process is completed, good project and change management skills are applied to roll-

out the whole process. The process also involves a quality reviewing mechanism to ensure that the necessary maturity journey activities are being embedded as a way of work.

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the short-term planning process results in opportunity loss that costs mining companies millions in revenue per annum but there are also other significant gains to be realised through embarking on this process, says **Richards**. The process is one which promotes pro-active versus reactive planning which directly result in the reduction of cost per ton produced at the operation such as for instance the re-handling of material movement.

The process furthermore caters for an environment in which the capturing of "reason codes" on deviations from short-term planning objectives lays the foundation for root-cause analysis. Measuring deviations to this level of detail result in improved corrective action management and provides essential feedback into the planning process to optimise subsequent re-planning iterations. Formalising the process also allows for the ability to audit all short-term planning activities against pre-defined planning principles and objectives that is common across all operations, shafts or complexes of the business.

The aspect of knowledge retention within the planning environment is also addressed in the process. At a time where the industry suffers due to a lack of retention of technical skills and resources, the blow is eased through detailed best practice information made accessible to every person involved in the integrated planning process.

In general it must be noted that this approach requires tremendous ongoing commitment at a corporate and an operational level of the business. Although significant immediate benefits can be realised from embarking on a project of this nature, the true value of the process will only be realised over a medium to long term period once the process has been well established and embedded as integral to the operational way of work.

Embedding a short-term planning process best practice blueprint is essentially about striking the optimal balance between people, processes and systems as a total integrated planning process. Embarking on this process more often than not challenges conventional thinking with respect to people's roles and responsibilities. As part of the process integration also embed principles that bridges the gap that often exists within the industry between "planning the work and then working that plan" according to **Richards**.



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