CMMS: Integrated or Stand Alone?

No technical reasoning wins over a well-structured commercial appeal. Marketing and sales techniques are powerful and we all know that many management decisions are taken more with emotion than with reason...

Software and information technology provide an excellent platform to forward attractive messages as the jargon is developing so fast and filled with mystery that you are always sure that the one that uses it is really an authority (of course you never suspect that in most cases he or she do not know exactly what they are speaking about...)

A common selling approach is concentrating on the rather abstract concept of the *information system* suggesting that, if you have such an approach, everything becomes integrated and very easy. Wrong! Maintenance organisation and management has its rules and managers their capabilities. And it is quite challenging integrating maintenance information in the overall information system: you do it easily in process flow chart schematics but when it comes to reality, things are not so simple. You may have a perfect integrated management process, but still, your maintenance department not performing.

Another common argument is having your CMMS totally integrated in the ERP, making it possible that maintenance management interacts perfectly with accounting, purchasing, warehouse operation, asset register and personnel. It is also an attractive approach, however, one has to remember that ERP accounting and administrative procedures follow rules that are quite well consolidated, whereas maintenance has not yet attained such a degree of uniformity and discipline and it is doubtful that it will ever have. The big question is who introduces what information and who validates it and that task belongs to the design of the overall organisation, it does not depend specifically on the software features.

Having software integration is naturally a positive approach and, by all means, the necessity of multiple introduction of the same information should be avoided. In our view, any integration should assume that:

- Administrative management is fully organized and implemented;
- Maintenance management is fully organized and implemented, in accordance with its specific requirements and state of the art practices;
- Management of both domains to interact correctly in the interface areas.

Accomplishing the third requirement without having accomplished the first two appears to be difficult; and it does not seem realistic either to approach all stages at the same time.

A computerized maintenance management system should be evaluated on the basis of its capabilities and features *to support maintenance* operations and, only after such evaluation reveals positive, the integration concept should assume prominence.

Summarizing, we can say that a CMMS is nowadays an indispensable tool to support maintenance management and its selection, in what concerns the degree of integration with other applications, should take into account the following guidelines:

- Software aiming, above all, at responding to the requirements of maintenance management;
- Maintenance management has its techniques and it is not the software that manages maintenance, it is the *people* that manage maintenance;
- Resources should be made available to avoid multiple introductions of the same data;

Maintenance management is by its own right a function that requires deep engineering, management and legal knowledge and its responsibility should fully recognize that profile.