

# TPM drives improvement

*Unilever uses TPM as a key driver for manufacturing improvements worldwide. Paddy Baker spoke to one of the architects of TPM within the branded goods giant*

***"TPM can't be done half-heartedly – there must be widespread engagement throughout the company"***  
***Ian Midgley,***  
***Unilever***

**i**f you've ever thought your company's culture would prevent you from implementing TPM, Ian Midgley is unlikely to agree with you. As senior vice-president for supply chain in Unilever's Home and Personal Care Global business, he's been responsible for introducing TPM into manufacturing businesses in diverse parts of the world. "We've learned that the fundamental principles of TPM are very, very resilient to cultural differences," he says. "Its core proposition of workforce participation, continuous improvement and loss reduction is something that resonates with people the world over. We've had enormous success with it in Latin America and the Far East, for instance – very different regions, but the programmes have been equally strong."

TPM has grown in importance to Unilever over the past decade. "Our Indonesian operation was one of the first to pioneer TPM in the early Nineties," he explains. "Others started to take an interest, and it gained momentum in the business through its own success. It was adopted as a corporate programme in the mid-Nineties."

"From there, its relevance to Unilever strategy has grown enormously. There's no doubt now that TPM is at the centre of our supply chain strategy, which in turn is part of Unilever's overall Path to Growth strategy. TPM is the programme

through which we are lifting the standards of our critical manufacturing facilities."

To what does he attribute its success? "Its great strength is the way it can engage the skills, energy and creativity of the whole workforce behind our manufacturing objectives. There was a time when we believed you could increase efficiency by writing reports and sending them to head office. That's all gone now. The answer lies on the shopfloor – and critical to this is the engagement of our people."

He continues: "TPM also brings opportunities to learn and grow – there's a lot of training involved as people develop skills in areas such as maintenance, problem solving and fault diagnosis. Many employees find this very attractive."

Midgley believes TPM is "much more than a maintenance technique". So does he prefer the term 'total productive manufacturing', or the more traditional 'total productive maintenance'? "We just call it TPM now. Unilever is a branded goods company, and everyone knows that TPM is the brand name for the manufacturing excellence journey that Unilever is following. It doesn't need any further elaboration."

## Safer environment

In addition to improving efficiency by cutting losses, TPM has provided other, unexpected benefits, such as improved safety performance, he says: "That's because the discipline it promotes, and the sound understanding of equipment and processes, are exactly the requirements for making the factory environment a safer and better place to work."

Another benefit has been the effect on new product introduction: "The TPM philosophy and work approach cuts the ramp-up times for getting new lines running at high levels of efficiency. For a business like ours, predicated on high levels of product innovation, this is key."

Not everyone has such success with TPM – so where are the potential pitfalls? "TPM requires a strong consistency of management approach and attention. It's not something that you can follow for a couple of years, then take the benefits and walk away," he warns. "Programmes that take time to deliver can sometimes be unfashionable in today's business environment. They can also be vulnerable to changes of management and leadership."

Midgley concludes: "TPM can't be done half-heartedly. It doesn't work if only one plant director believes in it; there must be a widespread engagement throughout the company. The belief that you can push manufacturing excellence from the top down without engaging the workforce – well, that's 1960s thinking." ■

**PROFIT**  
**THROUGH**  
**MAINTENANCE**

### Hear more



Ian Midgley is a keynote speaker at the TPM 7 Conference, which will be held in Chester on 6 and 7 November. He will discuss the strategic importance of TPM to Unilever, the need to link it with corporate objectives, and his company's experiences in implementing TPM.

The conference is entitled World Class Productivity: Sustaining Competitive Advantage Through Waste Elimination. For details visit [www.networkevents.co.uk](http://www.networkevents.co.uk) or call 023 9263 1331.