

INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY: IS THE INDUSTRY RUNNING OUT OF SOLUTIONS?

EVERY MINING PROJECT IN AUSTRALIA TODAY IS STRIVING TO BE MORE PRODUCTIVE FOR LESS COST. BUT IS THE INDUSTRY RUNNING OUT OF SOLUTIONS? WELL, THAT MOST LIKELY DEPENDS ON WHO YOU'RE TALKING TO. **WARREN FAIR**, GENERAL MANAGER, ACTION DRILL & BLAST WRITES.

The opportunities to make operations smoother, sleeker and more profitable are most definitely there. It all comes down to whether you have the desire and ability to identify them and take action.

The best solutions are those that get the mine producing more with the same resources. The focus needs to be on quality of output instead of quantity of input.

Start with the small stuff

In the quest for greater productivity and efficiency, the small stuff shouldn't be overlooked. Making small changes across drill and blast can lead to big benefits that can have a profound effect on the entire operation.

By simply improving communication and motivation

within the team for example, minor efficiency gains can grow from minutes or dollars per hour, to hours per day, to saving whole shifts of labour time – equating to reduced project costs and greater profit. These gains are free; they require no extra employees or equipment – simply better planning and motivation.

Showing the whole team the improvement path – that is, how investing time gained into taking better care of machinery and implementing other initiatives will achieve greater competitiveness in the market means more jobs rather than less jobs – is important. If the understanding and incentive is there, workers are more likely to look for opportunities and reveal their ability to do better. They will be motivated to use spare time productively while on shift. With an integrated drill and

blast service, any spare time can be spent learning more about other roles.

For example, a driller can assist the fitter on a breakdown. This not only increases the driller's ability to recognise issues before they happen but it can also help get a drill back up and running more quickly. Operators can also make the effort to sit with other drillers and share each other's skills and experiences to improve drilling outcomes.

Blasthole drilling

Another area where productivity gains can be realised is blasthole drilling. It's an area often overlooked in continuous improvement activities and can deliver quick wins.

The key opportunity here is to re-evaluate KPIs. Blasthole drilling outcomes are most commonly measured in terms of immediate

performance, such as penetration rates achieved per shift and number of hours or metres drilled. What's critical, however, is hole quality and durability. If the hole collapses before the blast crew arrives then the drilling efforts have been completely wasted.

A more productive approach is to measure drilling performance based on the delivery of holes at the right location and to the desired depth when the blast crew arrives. Using this KPI, drillers will begin to measure the holes before and after the job, to ensure required depths are met. Drilling practices can then be amended if necessary to reduce rework. Holes drilled a few days earlier will be measured to see how things have changed over time. Holes at the start of a pattern will be given a little extra depth than those last to be drilled to allow for fallback.



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