

Costos y Eficiencia en la Industria Petrolera

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Una consecuencia de la crisis económica mundial de 2008-2009 fue la reducción de costos casi instintiva en la gran mayoría de las empresas; y en la industria petrolera la presión para ello fue particularmente grande al disminuir drásticamente el precio al que se vendía cada barril de crudo o millar de pies cúbico de gas, además de reducirse el volumen de ventas global.

Chris Laurens y Otto van der Molen argumentan en un artículo publicado en *McKinsey Quarterly* que esta crisis es una oportunidad para que las compañías petroleras hagan de la excelencia operativa una alta prioridad, y por ese medio generar hasta un 30% adicional de valor para la compañía.

Una observación superficial o miope puede sugerir que disminuir costos es equivalente a lograr mayor eficiencia operativa, sin embargo los propósitos y acciones de recortar costos para amortiguar la caída en los márgenes de ganancia, son diferentes a los propósitos y acciones para lograr excelencia operativa. Son dos situaciones de decisión diferentes, con diferentes conjuntos de objetivos y, consecuentemente, diferentes alternativas para alcanzar esos objetivos.

Así, la eliminación de ciertos costos puede representar un respiro momentáneo y mejorar las finanzas a corto plazo, pero puede vulnerar la competitividad, seguridad y futuro de la empresa. Diferentes objetivos requieren diferentes unidades de medida de resultados y, en este caso, diferentes horizontes de tiempo de evaluación.

Laurens y van der Molen indican que para lograr la excelencia operativa, las compañías petroleras deben ocuparse de alcanzar:

- Alta confiabilidad mediante mantenimiento total.
- Ejecución ágil de los procesos y cumplimiento de programas.
- Administración de clase mundial de pozos y campos de hidrocarburos.
- Administración de alta calidad de los contratistas.

Además enfatizan que la excelencia operativa aumenta la seguridad y los beneficios económicos y sociales que vienen con ella, y finalmente recomiendan implementar la transformación de las operaciones de manera que los primeros resultados se vean pronto y eso dé impulso a la transformación. Se anexan algunos fragmentos del artículo.

En resumen, una crisis económica es una fuerte motivación para buscar la eficiencia pero no deben confundirse los recortes inmediatos de costos con cambios estructurales que reducirán los costos sin deteriorar la competitividad de la empresa.

REFERENCIA

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This is the time to deliver on upstream operational excellence

Chris Laurens and Otto van der Molen

FRAGMENTS

The recent collapse of oil prices from a peak of \$147 has once again made operational excellence a central imperative for upstream oil and gas companies. Previous industry cycles have shown that companies should use a price drop as an opportunity to drive through fundamental improvements in the way their operations function. Three factors influence a company's ability to do so: a comprehensive approach to improvement across all functions; a continuing focus on building capability; and a permanent shift in leadership attention. Done right, world-class operational execution can add up to 30 percent of value to the production asset base.

The fall of oil prices has exposed an inflated cost base in many oil and gas companies, forcing them to reduce operating costs, rationalize investment budgets, and boost operational efficiency. Many of these programs focus on short-term expenditure reductions by cutting nonessential costs such as travel, minimizing inventories, postponing maintenance, deferring projects, and renegotiating service contracts. Though such measures are useful in a cash-constrained environment, structural opportunities for sustained operational effectiveness can be missed. Worse, as some exploration and production companies learned to their detriment in the last oil price cycle, deep cuts in maintenance and production budgets can damage asset integrity, reduce reliability and thus production, and lead to the loss of the most capable operations staff.

Upstream companies should remain focused on operational excellence for structural as well as cyclical reasons. Many hydrocarbon provinces have moved into the mature stages of their life cycle. Likewise, production facilities reaching the end of their economic if not their technical life spans require modifications and increased maintenance. The widespread application of infill drilling, water-flooding, and enhanced oil recovery schemes has increased activity levels and associated operating costs.

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Operational excellence also pays a safety dividend. Preventive maintenance results in fewer hazardous situations, planning and scheduling allow managers to think about how jobs can be done better and more safely, and efficient processes allow management to be out on the site for most of the day.

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Finally, we recognize that a successful performance transformation needs to be driven both by real impact and by frontline engagement from the start. A common failure pattern occurs when the program's design, start-up phase, and diagnostic take too long, creating the impression that the program is having little impact. As a result, frontline staff do not take ownership of the program. But achieving tangible impact and real frontline engagement early on generates a pull effect from the front line—the work becomes more attractive and employees' performance improves—which then gives the program further momentum across the organization. An operations "project" then exceeds initial expectations and becomes an operations "performance transformation."

Over the past few years, value in upstream operations has shifted from gaining access to new fields and delivering development projects to delivering best-in-class operational performance. Today's challenging economic environment for oil and gas operators means that better operational performance --both in costs and production volumes-- will play a significant role in delivering positive returns over the coming years.