

Characterization of Downtimes in the Automotive Industry in South Africa

John Zvidzayi

Mangosuthu University of Technology
Department of Mechanical Engineering
South Africa
johnz@mut.ac

Abstract

In manufacturing sustainability is determined by the time the machine is adding value per shift. If the machine stops due to breakdown the cost of production increases and profitability falls because of the downtimes. The five causes of manufacturing downtimes in the automotive industry were found to be Manpower, Methods, Machine, Materials and Maintenance of the equipment or the 5Ms. The 5Ms are responsible for the eight wastes in manufacturing hence the need to analyse the manufacturing process and impact of the eight wastes. The Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) strategy that involves all workers reduces the downtimes in the automotive industry. TPM and total Quality management systems is effective in increasing the plant availability and Overall Equipment Efficiency (OEE). To increase availability or uptime of manufacturing equipment need to be services, repaired and operated by trained personnel. Operators are trained to do minor repairs and services whilst specialized technicians do major repairs and overhauls during shutdowns. The automotive industry has incorporated the Poka Yoke and Jidoka tool using machine history to detect and show an error before it happens using visual Andon lights.

Keywords

Sustainability, Total Productive Maintenance, Manpower, Machine, Methods, and Materials.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The manufacturing production lines need to run efficiently with minimum to zero breakdowns to reduce defects whilst increasing profitability. The adoption of Lean principles and methods such as Total productive maintenance (TPM), Total Quality Management (TQM) and Single Minute Exchange of Dies (SMED) (Ondra 2022).

TPM is necessary for operation of a plant at the optimum level by keeping the plant and equipment well maintained. The objectives of TPM according to (Saxena 2022) are to:

- i. Sustain equipment capacity by training, motivating and involve operators in decision-making .
- ii. Establish cross function maintenance teams for continuous improvement.

TPM and TQM are applied at concurrently in the automotive supply chain where Lean manufacturing is practiced. Every automotive part is checked at every value adding section to meet the requirements. The DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, and Control) cycle, Pareto diagram, and fishbone diagrams are used frequently to improve processes and reduce the rejection rate. Total Quality management embraces the continuous effort by employees to ensure high quality products whilst the six-sigma method use feedback from customers to improve a process, system. Its focus is on scientific and statistical methods to reduce the defect rate (Jou *et al.* 2022).

Global competition compels the manufacturing companies to improve and optimize productivity, production, flexibility to and gain competitive advantage. To enhance this competitiveness, the application of SMED and TPM in managing machines and equipment, to reduce waste and lead times has been adopted to improve and monitor Overall Equipment Effectiveness (OEE) (Ondra 2022).

Down time include loading/unloading time, excessive tool changeover, excessive job changeover, unavailability of an operator, machine breakdown, to mention but a few. Tracking downtimes involve monitoring a machine process for shutdown conditions. The expected and unexpected causes of downtime in the shop floor have to be determined and improved to reduce the costs of manufacturing (Achal Kandoi 2023).

The paper focuses on the analysis of downtime and its reduction. The Pareto analysis and statistical analysis of downtime was conducted to identify the downtime factors hierarchically.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The study seeks to establish the causes of downtimes in the production of automotive components with respect to the Manpower, Machine, Materials and Method (4Ms).

1.3 Research questions

RQ1 To what extent does each element affect the downtimes?

RQ2 What improvements are done by the automotive industry to reduce times?

1.4 Scope

The study focuses on how TPM, Poka Yoke, SMED and other Lean tools affects the OEE and improves the quality of the products to increase profitability.

1.5 Significance

The analysis of downtimes and establishing methods of eliminating them will increase the productivity of the manufacturing industry. The study will establish the best practice methods of reducing downtimes in a mass production automotive industry and develop a generic framework for use in various industries other than the automotive industry.

1.6 Compliance to Standards

The extent to which ISO standards are used in the automotive industry to attain the customer quality, protect the environment and maintain the safety of both equipment and personnel. Modern industries use green materials and machinery to minimize pollution.

2. Literature review

The literature will consider how various industries apply TPM and SMED to increase the uptime and availability of the plant equipment for the 4Ms. Downtime in a production line is the period during which equipment or machinery is not operational, leading to a halt in production activities. It can be planned downtime when the equipment is stopped for scheduled maintenance, upgrades, and calibration. Unplanned downtime is an unforeseen failure caused by internal (operator errors) or external factors (power outages, waiting for materials, methods and operator training). Today, manufacturers are urged to invest in monitoring tools, employee training, and continuous performance assessments to sustain improvements.

2.1 Method

Total productive maintenance (TPM) is a popular Lean maintenance strategy that ensure high machine reliability by increasing OEE of plant equipment. If an organization purchases advanced equipment the sustainability will be low if the quality of products and downtimes are high. TPM method is used to fully utilize the equipment by keeping it running in tiptop condition (Chowdury M. L. Rahman* 2014).

The study by (Mthetheli Joseph Kwaso 2018) showed that OEE consistently improved its value above eighty percent (80%) when TPM is implemented in a manufacturing industry in South Africa (SA). The improvement was caused by maintaining the equipment to increase availability.

Similarly the study by (I Rizkya* 2021) showed 10 managers, and supervisors that were directly involved in implementing 5S on the production floor. The assessment revealed a 5S application of 82%, Autonomous Maintenance of 83%, focussed Maintenance of 75%, Planned Maintenance of 80%, Quality Management of 84%, Education and Training of 88%. The Safety, Health & Environment was 78% which was helpful in sustainability of both quality safety and environmental ISO standards. A development management of 75% was realized in the Research and development section using the Poka Yoke method.

The SMED is used to speed up the exchange of dies in the mass production of similar parts for different customers. In SA the automotive industry under study supplies door hinges to Nissan, Toyota, Mazda, VW and Renault. For each mini car the hinges will be similar but different. In batch production, the dies for the doors need to be change quickly if switching from Toyota to any other model. The SMED method is critical in reducing the down times (Ondra 2022).

(C Saleh1* 2019) applied the theory of constraints (Tomoyuki Fujii* and Ojima) method to overcome the challenges in downtimes in manufacturing. The theory effectively manages constraints that prevent companies from achieving their goals. The system focus on capacity constraints to minimizing inventory and operating costs.

2.2 Manpower

(Yang and Yang 2023) hinted that employee participation is reinforced by sharing outcomes, rewarding correct behaviour and practices, and recognising the work of all employees. A sense of belonging pushes the workers' desire to see the company succeed due to longstanding relationship, trust in colleagues and the management and a sense of ownership. The benefits of TPM affect employees' attitudes towards participation leading to acquisition of new skills and knowledge that improves their job security (Figure 1).

The manpower is a critical performance indicator that reduces defects and increase productivity and OEE in in the manufacturing and mining industry in SA. Training and empowerment of operators to stop and make minor adjustments on the machine were crucial for a successful implementation and machine upkeep. Communication among workers, workers and management, and worker motivation was improved through autonomous maintenance and continuous improvement of skills through short courses at the plant (I Rizkya* 2021).

The workforce need to apply the TOC to identify a deficiency and isolate it to allow the production line to run. In Lean the Gemba walk is done by the line manager or delegated employee to asses and evaluate the production line. The evaluation is inclusive of all employees in the department through a brain storming session (C Saleh1* 2019). The method has been found to be very effective in Lean manufacturing.

(Wolska, Gorewoda, Roszak and Gajda 2023) highlighted that the application of TPM by workers determines the maintenance schedules required for each machine in the production line. The indicators for technical problems of the tested production line are MTTR (Mean Time to Repair), MTTF (Mean Time to Failure), and MTBF (Mean Time Between Failures).

The workforce needs to determine the numerical values for these indicators to eliminate failures and, maximize the value of MTBF indicators. The MTTR (Mean Time to Repair) is the time it takes to repair a machine using Standard Operating procedure.

$$MTTR = \text{failure time}/\text{number of recovery events} \quad 1$$

MTTF (Mean Time to Failure) determines the average operating time of a device from the beginning from its last repair until the next failure occurs.

$$MTTF = (\text{available uptime} - \text{failure time})/\text{number of events} \quad 2$$

The Mean time before failure is the period during which the device can operate without interruption given by:

$$MTBF = MTTR + MTTF \quad 4$$

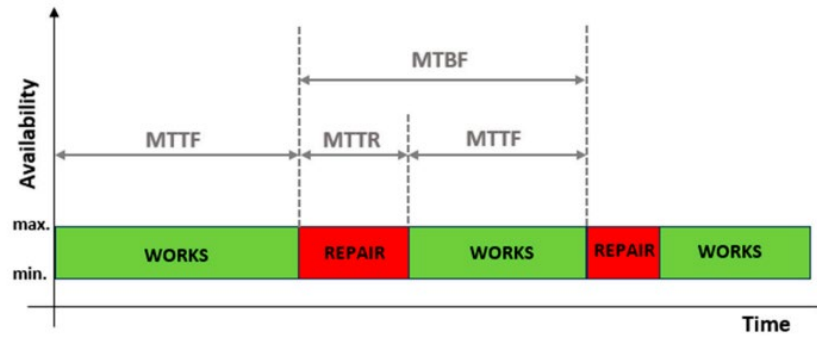


Figure 1. MTTF, MTBF, and MTTR in production time(Wolska, Gorewoda, Roszak and Gajda 2023)

2.3 Machine

TPM significantly reduces machine downtime in production lines by shifting from reactive to proactive maintenance which targets the "Six Big Losses" (breakdowns, setup/adjustments, idling/minor stops, reduced speed, defects, start-up losses). If TPM is implemented the six big losses are reduced significantly (Tamrat Yifter Meles 2024).

(Callan-Villanueva, Núñez-Gonzales and Calderón-Gonzales 2025) indicated that implementing a Lean-TPM production model integrates SMED and Poka Yoke reduced the set-up times by 35.99% and MTTR by 39.71 % whilst the MTBF increased by 32.66%. Integrating SMED and Poka Yoke with the TPM maintenance approach improved the efficiency of machines. The application of the Lean tool Poka-Yoke which is error proof provides customer satisfaction since it is defect free.

Modern machines are fully computerised and have sensors that can detect a defect before it is made using machine history to develop Jidoka programmes that activate Andon lights. The system senses a defect before it happens and send a signal that activates an orange light or alarm. The nearest operator will quickly attend to the machine and rectify the anomaly before a defect is formed. If not attended the machine will stop and avoid the formation of a defective part. This is possible when applying TPM where operators are allowed to do minor services and prevent breakdowns but allows short stoppages (Mouhib *et al.* 2025).

2.4 Maintenance

The TPM pillar of Autonomous Maintenance (AM) assigns minor adjustments and repairs to machine operators and instils a sense of ownership and responsibility among workers. The training of operators to do minor repairs and setting standard operating conditions helps to reduce breakdowns. The operators compile a machine history which the specialized maintenance teams use to plan for the planned shutdown. Today AM is digital and uses the Andon lights to detect a looming fault which the operator corrects at low cost and improves availability (Widya, Suef and Widodo 2025).

The study by (P. Guarientea 2017)Autonomous Maintenance was implemented and associated with other Lean philosophy tools (5S, TPM and Visual Management) with the purpose of improving actions in the maintenance sector of a production line, which would then reduce the stoppage rates resulting from machine breakdowns.

2.5 Measurement

It is critical to focus on doing right things that keeps the business goal of the company by measuring the value created by maintenance process in the plant. Key performance indicator (KPI) is set for measuring the value of maintenance management in terms of rejects, downtimes, and rework. The effectiveness of Maintenance Planning and Control (MPC) processes is set on the Andon lights system where preset MTTF and MTTR is set for the machine and operators (Callan-Villanueva, Núñez-Gonzales and Calderón-Gonzales 2025).

The Andon system is created to increase and improve production lines by notifying worker if the production line needs to be stopped or even stopped by itself. Andon systems are visual management tools used in manufacturing to signal abnormalities in real time to facilitate maintenance response and measurement through various KPIs (Muhammad Ary Murti 2020).

2.6 Materials

Manufacturing industries use material requirements planning (MRP) systems for inventory management and for planning and forecasting the quantities of parts and components required for production. Inadequate forecasting can lead to downtimes due to waiting losses. Poor quality materials in the automotive bending operations tend to crack. Demand uncertainties compel the planning systems to follow either a supply-oriented or a demand-oriented approach. When the materials are stocked in the warehouse first in first out (FIFO) or last in first out (LIFO) approaches can be used. The production logistics in the automotive industrial has several bottlenecks unless they use the Kanban principle (Najy 2020) and (Rahul Hencha 2019).

Materials quality, condition and availability cause downtimes that reduces productivity in the manufacturing industry. (Wolniak 2019) study revealed that downtime in the production line is reduced by using good quality tools and welding electrodes. The failure of welding electrodes in the tested period were 135 with a total downtime of 4,185 minutes. The downtime or MTTR was 31 minutes whilst uptime or MTTF was 5,238 minutes. The mean time between failures (MTBF) was 5,269 minutes, which translates into 87 hours and 49 minutes of machine operation.

(Thanou and Matopoulos 2021) carried out a study to smoothen the flow of materials in a workshop or production line. The application of housekeeping rules inline with the 7S principle reduces the downtime by designing good storage of materials and components in relation to retrieval , sequence of usage and location. Disturbances in material flow in the production line led to unplanned downtimes.

Figure 2 shows the cause-and-effect diagram of the downtimes experienced in the manufacturing sector. Workers and management have been dealt with separately. Method and measurement were treated separately according to (Tamrat Yifter Meles 2024)

The just in time (JIT) tool in Lean manufacturing works with the Kanban principle that only allows required material to the production centre (Ukey *et al.* 2025).

The number of Kanban cards (n) = $\frac{D \times RT \times (1 + \alpha)}{Q}$

Where D = average daily demand

RT = replenishment time or total lead time to produce and restock the item.

α = safety factor based on uncertainty

Q = Lot size

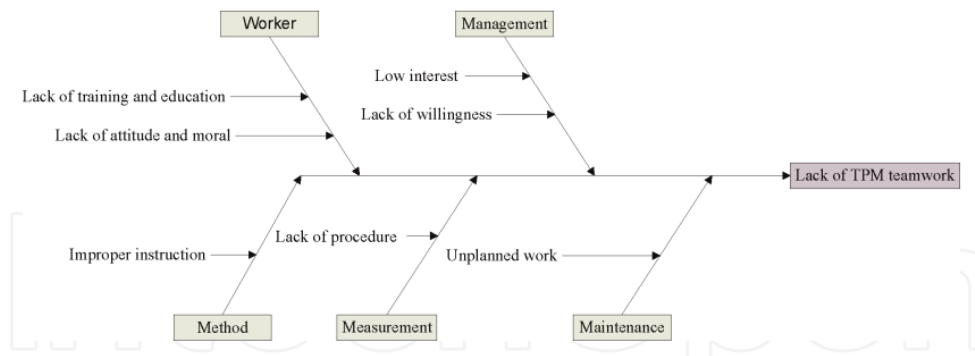


Figure 2. The cause and effect diagram for TPM (Tamrat Yifter Meles 2024)

3. Methodology

The work study method is used to identify the potential bottlenecks and apply the Theory of constraints to eliminate the bottlenecks. The observation method is used to identify and request official data from the respective automotive industry is collected and used for statistical analysis and develop the Corrective Action and Preventive Action (CAPA) plan. The literature survey is critical to understand the Lean philosophy as applied by the automotive industry and the gap to be filled.

4. Results

4.1 Graphical & Numerical

Figure 3 shows the numerical values of downtimes as a percentage for the three weeks of manufacturing door 1 for a specific mini car model.

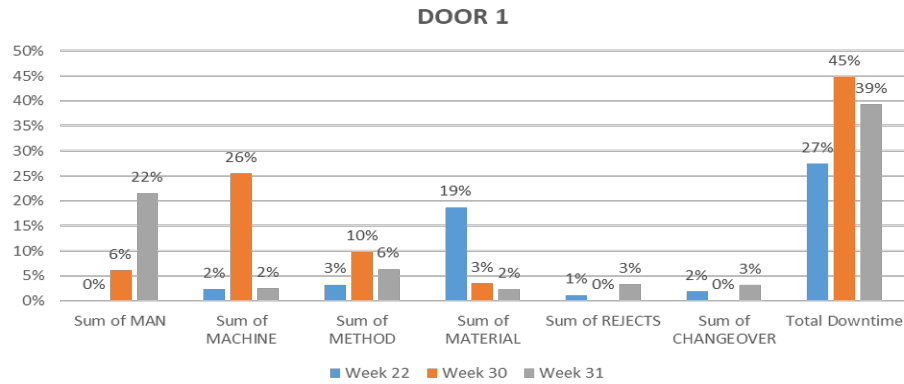


Figure 3. The downtimes experienced in the production of door 1

The work study and observation enabled the study to identify statistics and graphical work for the actual production status in terms of plant availability per shift. During week 22 the downtimes ranged from 0 to 3% and productivity was high because of less rejects and rework. The total downtimes for week 22 are 27% and the productivity was high. In week 30 the downtimes ranged from 6 to 26 % meaning the week had many downtimes caused by minor adjustments, rework and rejects totalling to 45%. The productivity decreased to lowest in week 30. Week 31 downtimes ranged from 2 to 26 % and the total was 39 % (Figure 4).

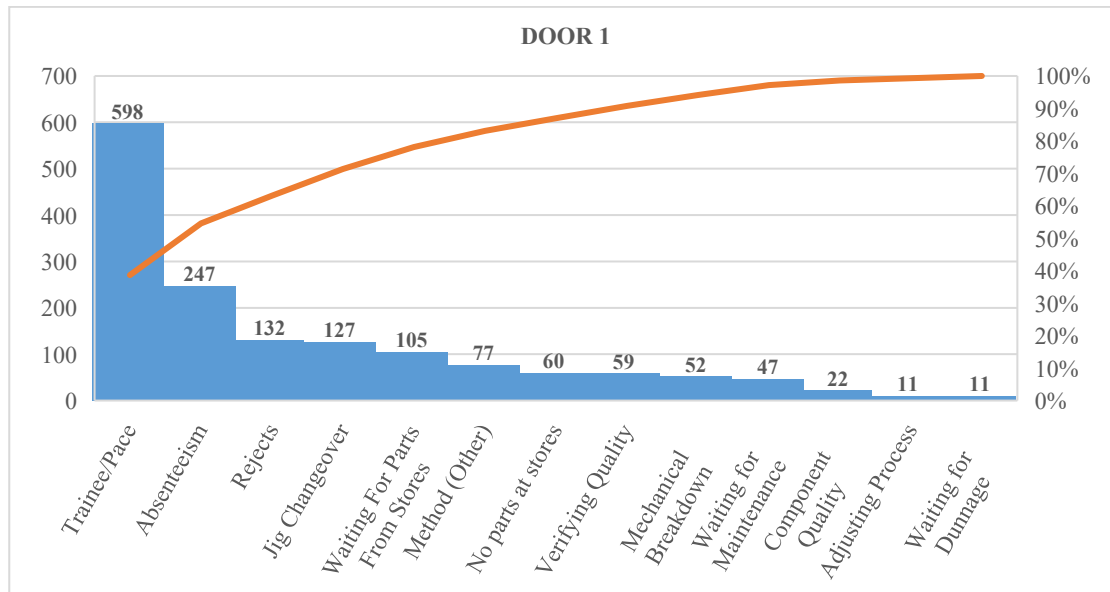


Figure 4. The Pareto analysis of door 1 production

4.2 Qualitative

By appointing a person responsible for the correction of data in technological cards is critical in keeping more accurate data for use. The data must be reviewed periodically to control the production process. The review will help to evaluate areas that cause most problems and need to be prioritized. The data relationship is used to establish the cause of failures or downtimes.

5. Discussions

The key downtime indicators are the 4Ms together with measurement. The manpower requires adequate skills through training, motivation and planning to execute their duties without causing unplanned downtimes. The Lean philosophy requires the employees to be trained in multiple skills then they will be placed where their talent is to be innovative because of self-motivation. Operators are trained periodically and participate in brainstorming and decision making. The managers motivate the employees by consulting and engaging them in most decision-making operations. All employees are made to know the customer value requirements and thrive to satisfy the customers. Job and customer satisfaction is pivotal in the automotive industry.

The automotive industry applies the Lean principle where TPM is the preferred maintenance strategy. The training of all workers to acquire the basic maintenance skills and the mandate to stop a machine for minor services reduces the unplanned downtime durations in the plant. In Lean the organization set standard operating procedures (SoPs) for each department or section which guides the employees to do standard work. For each maintenance activity in the plant a designed procedure is followed every time.

Machines are serviced and maintained periodically to prevent premature failure. The loading and speeds of machines are set and standardized for each operation. The use of manufacturer's guidelines such as oils, cutting fluids, feed rates and speeds help keep the machine up.

Materials used must be as per manufacturer specifications in terms of grade and quality. Any compromise will cause unplanned breakdowns. The cutting tools, dies, jigs and fixtures must be made using the appropriate material to reduce unplanned breakdowns. Lack of material quality causes the material to fail due to fatigue and overheating. Surface protection of materials is critical to prevent damage due to environmental contamination.

The sizes of machines, bill of materials, MRP, and performance measuring is critical for planning purposes to have adequate materials in line with the JIT philosophy. Overstocking materials, machines and finished products is a cost to the company. It can cause downtime in the search for wanted parts and their retrieval.

6. Future Improvements

The automotive industry must thrive to reduce times on their machines and save money in manufacturing. The industry must focus on eliminating the eight wastes by applying different lean manufacturing tools. The personnel need to be educated and trained on the importance of Lean. The training by specialist can be done on the job and at benchmarked companies.

7. Conclusions

Reducing downtime through proactive maintenance of the KIP (5Ms) is essential for modern manufacturing. The production data on downtimes, rejects and rework allows the company to enforce continuous improvement policies and develop standard operating conditions that minimize downtimes. This allows companies to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and maintain a competitive edge in their industries. For each KPI a root cause analysis can be done to identify the causes of downtime and develop the standard procedures. The identified cause of downtime must be seen as an event that initiates continuous improvement rather than fault finding to blame the workers involved. The success in eliminating the problem must be rewarded to the team instead of individuals.

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