How far the project leader or planner needs to go along this road depends entirely on the development of responsibility which was advocated in Chapter 8. If the course of preparing the plan and getting agreement of all parties has been taken, and at this point the actual implementation has been passed over to either line management or works engineer or both, then the planner has no further responsibilities and the information in the rest of this chapter is redundant.

On the other hand, if the planner and his team have been vested with the responsibility for seeing not only that the agreed plan has to be adopted, but that they should ensure that the recommendations are carried through, then much more is required.

MAINTAINING THE PLAN

‘Plans are not self-achieving.’ Whoever said this must have had some considerable experience of factory layout, for in no other field is the truth of this phrase brought home so rapidly! The fact that a large amount of plant and machinery has been laid out to an agreed plan is no guarantee that it will automatically produce the required results.

At the time of the original definition of responsibilities it will, or should, have been clearly laid down at what point in the progression of the layout responsibility for the continuing function of the new set-up passes from the planners to the users. Thus after the full implementation and start-up, the planning function may be reduced to a watching brief to ensure that the methods agreed are being maintained. This calls for a high degree of tact and diplomacy, since the production and output will now be in the hands of line management who will view with suspicion any ‘interference’ with their function.

Points to watch are the correct function and operation of machinery and equipment, which have been incorporated in the new layout and which were not in the original system. Unfamiliarity with controls, unwillingness fully to utilise unknown capacities or
lack of recognition by the supervision or operatives of the production potentialities of a new design can be due to lack of knowledge, insufficient instructions or lack of confidence in the equipment. If this situation is observed, it will require careful and tactful handling. Consult first with the supervisors, making sure that they personally have been fully briefed. Any failings here will have to be tackled first, with the direct intervention of line management as the communication channel.

Provision of printed instruction sheets, handbooks or a short talk by the installation engineers or manufacturers may be necessary. It is often taken for granted by the engineering staff that a particular piece of machinery has a function which is immediately obvious, and therefore no detailed instructions have been given or prepared. If such equipment exists and no specific instructions have been passed down, this is the kind of problem which the layout planner should be concerned with. Make sure that the supervisors understand the function of any such equipment and have adequate information on it so that they are in a position to pass this on to the work-force.

As an example of this kind of problem, a firm producing fractional horsepower motors changed from boring out sleeve bearings on a simple machine to a proprietary boring machine with a high rate of production. The tolerances of the work produced on this machine were much closer than the previous machine, and to some extent were ambient-temperature related. A change of 5–10° in ambient temperature could affect the tolerances sufficiently to put them outside acceptable limits. The supervision spent much time trying to make compensating adjustments for this, without being aware of the basic cause. When the production engineering department was approached, the matter was quickly put right, but their first comment was that they thought ‘everybody knew’ that the new type of machine was critically affected by temperature changes.

Perhaps no one is in a better position to look at the overall changes than the person or team who has prepared the plan. Despite constant liaison, and even if total co-operation has been given throughout the installation and start-up phase, supervision is often unsure of the capabilities and indeed the viability of the new layout. It is the job of the layout planner, if vested with responsibility to this final stage, to act as helper and adviser to the supervision, until at least the planned output has been achieved. This may mean a constant attention to the details of the new layout: to see that the