
Your Maximo Is Not the Problem

Why organizations invest millions in Maximo and still fight backlog

By Karson Wynne | CEO, EAM Specialists | Former Maximo Program Manager, GSA Region 8

I have walked into many organizations that have spent years and a great deal of money implementing Maximo and are still fighting the same three things: a backlog nobody can characterize, schedule compliance nobody trusts, and a maintenance department that spends its week reacting.

Usually somebody in the room believes the software is the problem. The configuration is wrong. The version is old. The integration never worked properly. Sometimes there is truth in that. But after enough of these conversations, I have landed somewhere less comfortable.

The software is almost never the problem. The problem is that nobody built a disciplined planning and scheduling process around it.

Maximo is a faithful system. It records what you do. If your work identification is inconsistent, it records inconsistent work identification. If your planners are approving work orders that have no parts, no labor estimate, and no procedure attached, it records those too, and it reports them as planned work. If your weekly schedule is a wish list nobody committed to, Maximo will show you a schedule.

It does not impose discipline. It reflects it. When the discipline is not there, the system just documents the chaos at higher resolution than before, which is why so many organizations end up with better data about a process that has not improved.

The five things that are not features

When I look at organizations that have genuinely gotten this right, they are doing five things. None of them is a module you turn on.

1. Backlog governance

Someone owns the backlog and it is characterized, not just counted. Work is aged, prioritized by risk and readiness, and reviewed on a cadence. A backlog that only ever grows is not a backlog, it is a graveyard, and everyone in the organization quietly knows which work orders in it will never be executed.

2. Planner-ready work

This is the one most organizations think they have and do not. Planner-ready means the parts are identified and available, the labor estimate is realistic, the procedure is attached, and the person doing the work can start without hunting for anything. If a technician has to leave the job to find something, the work order was not planned. It was approved.

3. Multi-week planning

You cannot schedule a week you only learned about on Friday. Organizations that do this well are looking three to six weeks out, so parts arrive before the work is scheduled rather than because it was.

4. Schedule commitment

A schedule is a commitment made by the people who will execute it, not a document produced by a planner and emailed to a supervisor. If the crew was not part of building it, it is a forecast, and it will be treated like one.

5. Performance feedback

Schedule compliance gets measured, discussed, and acted on. Not to punish anybody, but because a schedule nobody measures is a schedule nobody keeps.

The metric worth arguing about

Most maintenance organizations I meet report PM completion, and most report it high. Ninety percent and above is common. It is also, on its own, close to meaningless. A PM marked complete tells you a work order was closed. It does not tell you the task was performed as written, or that the task was worth performing.

Schedule compliance is the harder and more useful number. It asks whether you did the work you said you would do, in the week you said you would do it. That number is usually uncomfortable the first time an organization looks at it honestly, and that discomfort is the point. It is the only metric I know that surfaces the gap between the plan and the reality quickly enough to do something about it.

What this means for your Maximo investment

None of this is an argument against the software. Maximo can support a mature planning and scheduling process, and newer Suite capabilities make parts of it considerably easier than they used to be.

It is an argument about sequence. Organizations that build the process first and then configure Maximo to support it tend to get value quickly. Organizations that implement Maximo and expect the process to emerge from it tend to spend the following three years wondering why the numbers look better than the plant does.

If you are somewhere in that second group, the good news is that the fix does not require a project. It requires deciding who owns the backlog, agreeing what planner-ready actually means in your environment, and being willing to look at a schedule compliance number that will not flatter anyone for the first few months.

At MAXCON 2027

I am running an interactive workshop this April. Attendees will work inside a live Maximo training environment through the full lifecycle: prioritizing backlog by risk and readiness, evaluating planner-ready work orders, repairing incomplete work packages, building a capacity-based weekly schedule, and responding to real disruptions when they hit.

Not a demo. You do the work, and you leave with methods, checklists, and a decision framework you can apply in your own environment immediately.

MAXCON 2027 runs April 5 to 9 aboard Utopia of the Seas. Attendance is capped at 300.