
Your Backlog Needs Decisions and Owners

Use risk, readiness, and ownership to decide what happens next

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Last month, I wrote about proving a job is ready before putting it on the weekly schedule. That raises another question: how do you decide which jobs deserve the effort to get them ready?

A backlog count cannot answer that. It tells you how many records are open. It does not tell you what could happen if the work waits, what is preventing action, or who is responsible for the next step.

Every valid backlog item needs a reason to remain open, a decision about its priority, and an owner for the next action.

Separate risk from readiness

Risk and readiness answer different questions. Risk asks what could happen if the work is deferred, how likely that outcome is, and how soon it could matter. Readiness asks whether the prerequisites for execution are in place. An important job can be unready. A ready job can be less important.

Use risk to direct attention and preparation. Use readiness, capacity, and operating windows to build an executable schedule. When important work is blocked, the response should include an action to remove the constraint and a decision about managing the exposure while it remains open.

Five decisions for a useful backlog review

1. Confirm the work is still valid. Check the asset, scope, and current condition. Resolve duplicate requests, work already performed, and obsolete scope through your approved process. Record why an item is closed or canceled so the history remains useful.

2. Agree on the consequence of waiting. Bring maintenance and operations together to assess safety, environmental, service, and production consequences using your site's criteria. Consider likelihood and time sensitivity. Record the reason for the priority so the next reviewer can understand it.

3. Identify what prevents progress. Name the specific constraint: unclear scope, missing materials, unavailable expertise, or an operating window that has not been agreed. An urgent label does not resolve any of those conditions.

4. Assign the next action. Give each constraint an owner, an action, and a follow-up date. A backlog coordinator can run the review, but the person able to resolve the issue must own the action. Make escalation responsibilities clear.

5. Set the next review. Decide when the item must be reconsidered and what new evidence would change the decision. Revisit priority when condition, operating demand, or available redundancy changes. An old decision may no longer fit today's exposure.

Make the tradeoff visible

Consider two open jobs. One replaces a damaged cabinet handle in a low-use storage area, with no identified safety issue. The other repairs a standby cooling pump that failed its last functional test. The handle replacement is ready. The pump repair is waiting on a confirmed scope and a required part.

Completing the handle job may be reasonable if capacity allows. It does not resolve the exposure created by an unavailable standby pump. Maintenance and operations still need to assess the consequence of losing the running pump and decide how to manage that exposure.

The backlog review should produce specific actions: confirm the pump's condition and repair scope, establish the parts requirement, agree on appropriate interim controls, and set the next decision date. Closing an easy job must not make the blocked job disappear from attention.

Make the decision visible in Maximo

Use your organization's configured work-order process to keep the scope, priority rationale, constraints, and next actions accessible. Agree on who maintains that information and how the team will review it. A priority field is useful only when people apply shared criteria and revisit the evidence behind it.

Review backlog by risk, age, readiness, and constraint rather than relying on one total. Age should prompt a question about why work has waited. It should not automatically determine which job goes first. Keep the items awaiting decisions visible alongside the work ready to schedule.

Try a twenty-job backlog review

Choose twenty open jobs from one system or operating area, including older items and several marked high priority. Bring planning, supervision, and operations together. For each job, confirm the need, assess the consequence of waiting, identify the constraint, and assign the next action.

At the next review, check whether those actions happened and whether the exposure changed. Count unresolved high-risk constraints as well as completed work. The aim is to make the team's decisions clearer and ensure important work continues to move toward execution.

Start with one question: for the work we are choosing to defer, can we explain the consequence, the next action, and who owns it?

At MAXCON 2027

Backlog decisions are part of my interactive planning and scheduling workshop at MAXCON 2027. Teams will prioritize work by risk and readiness in a live Maximo training environment, then carry those decisions into work-package preparation and a schedule built around available capacity. Come practice how those decisions connect.

April 5-9, 2027 | Utopia of the Seas

Explore the agenda and registration: <https://liquidenterprise.com/maxcon/agenda>