

**"MODELS FOR THE EVALUATION OF
MANUFACTURING FLEXIBILITY"**

by

Pankaj CHANDRA*
and
Mihkel TOMBAK**

N° 90/61/TM

* Faculty of Management, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

** Assistant Professor of Production and Operations Management, INSEAD, Boulevard de
Constance, Fontainebleau, 77305 Cedex, France.

**Printed at INSEAD
Fontainebleau, France**

MODELS FOR THE EVALUATION OF MANUFACTURING FLEXIBILITY

Pankaj Chandra Mihkel M. Tombak ¹

August 14, 1990

¹Of the Faculty of Management, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, and Dept. of Technology Management, INSEAD, Fontainebleau, France, respectively. This research was supported by NSERC grant number OGP0042150, and INSEAD research grant number 2172.

Abstract

We present models by which flexibility for a manufacturing system can be assessed. These models enable a manager to compare different systems with respect to certain flexibility types. These models reflect the view that the flexibility of a system is a function of the technology as well as how well the system is managed. Two of the most fundamental types of flexibility, routing and machine flexibility, are examined. The efficacy of the methods are shown through numerical examples.

1 Introduction

Flexibility, along with cost, quality and service is an important aspect of manufacturing strategy (Wheelwright, 1986). Throughout most of the industrial era a great deal of attention was focused on the cost component in production. In the 1970's and 1980's, as a result of increased Japanese competitiveness, quality was the factor which came into the limelight. Now, with product life cycles becoming more compressed, firms are looking for a way of extending the design life of their plant in order to get more from their capital investment. As a result of this change in the market, together with the advent of new manufacturing technologies referred to as "flexible manufacturing systems", flexibility is receiving more notice. The aim of this investigation is to provide methods for the evaluation of certain key types of production flexibility. Since flexibility is a function of the system layout and operation this will enable managers to compare different manufacturing system designs.

Several researchers have developed alternative taxonomies for manufacturing flexibility (Mandelbaum, 1978; Buzacott, 1982; Zelenovic, 1982; Browne, et. al., 1984; Jaikumar, 1984; and Swamidass, 1988). We make use of the terminology proposed by Browne et. al. and develop measures for certain types of flexibility described therein. In only three studies have measures of flexibility been developed (Chatterjee, et. al., 1984, Graves, 1988, and Kumar, 1987). For a survey of flexibility in manufacturing see Gupta and Goyal (1989) and Sethi and Sethi (1990).

Browne et. al.'s taxonomy breaks flexibility down into eight classes: routing, machine, process, product, volume, expansion, operation, and production flexibility. Routing flexibility gives the system the capability to continue producing a given set of parts despite machine breakdown. Machine flexibility is the ability to easily make changes to a given set of parts. Browne et. al. state that process and product flexibility are dependent on machine flexibility. They also assert that volume, expansion and operation flexibility are dependent on routing flexibility (production flexibility being a function of all the other seven types). Thus, the natural starting points to develop evaluation procedures for manufacturing flexibility would be routing and machine flexibility.

Chatterjee et. al. offered four different measures for routing flexibility. These measures were: (i) the cardinality of the set of routings, (ii) the ratio of the number of module centers capable of carrying out an operation on a certain part to the total

number of module centers, (iii) the number of alternative paths within a module center, and (iv) the possible trajectories through the module centers. An important consideration ignored in these measures is the reliability of machines that make up the system, i.e. if a particular machine has broken down the routes going through that machine do not add to the flexibility of the system. Another factor neglected in their measures was that of machine capacities, as machines with differing capacities are weighted equally under their framework. The measure that we propose takes both of these factors into account.

Graves (1988) provides a measure for what he calls rate flexibility (Browne et al.'s volume flexibility) as the ratio of the slack in production capacity normally available to the variability in the demand process. He then develops a relationship of this flexibility measure with the inventory base stock level. This measure is for a given product mix. Jaikumar (1984) argues that flexibility should be defined over a given family of part types since an FMS is designed in that fashion. Once the family is chosen (which is difficult since it should be viable in the long run) the flexibility has to be defined within that domain. Our procedure also assumes a given part mix, although we seek to appraise different types of flexibility than Graves. Kumar (1987) suggests that *entropy* (a concept used in thermodynamics reflecting randomness or uncertainty in the system) may be a suitable measure of flexibility. However, we demonstrate situations in §2.1 in which this approach is not appropriate.

These measures of manufacturing flexibility (cardinality of the route set, rate flexibility, and entropy) are difficult for managers to interpret. This, in turn, creates complications for managing a production facility to attain flexibility. An empirical survey revealed that, "As of mid-1983, no FMS installation in the U.S. was being managed for flexibility" (Bessant and Haywood, 1986). This implies that those who were managing the aforementioned FMS facilities were not aware of the benefits of manufacturing flexibility. Our procedure demonstrates how operations performance can translate into economic measures relevant for managers. In §2 we outline our proposed method for evaluating routing flexibility, in §3 we discuss machine flexibility, and in §4 we present our conclusions.

2 Routing Flexibility

In this section we propose a method for appraising routing flexibility. As defined by Browne et. al., routing flexibility is exhibited when machines breakdown, as a result we incorporate the reliability of machines in our models. The system design consists of machine centers and the materials handling system. The design specification includes the reliability of the different machines, their capacities for the each part type, and the precedence relationships. Reliability is defined as the probability that the machine is capable of performing an operation at a given time. Capacity is defined as the total number of units of a part type a machine can process in a given block of time. The procedure results in the computation of an expected maximal cashflow for a given production system design and product mix which we propose as an economic measure representing routing flexibility. We first present the proposed procedure for the computation of the measure and then provide an example and explain its relevance.

Consider a manufacturing system consisting of a number of machining centers and a materials transfer system. This network can be represented by a random, planar graph where the vertices (machining centers) are subject to failure. We assume that the failures are independent. Models for the expected flow in networks subject to arc failure are provided in Aneja and Nair (1980, 1982) and Wallace (1987).

We define the following parameters and variables:

- i is the index of the part type; $i = 1, \dots, m$.
- k is the index for machine type; $k = 1, \dots, n$.
- h is the index of an elementary path from the load to the unload station; $h = 1, \dots, H$.
- t_{ik} is the time required to process one unit of part i on machine k .
- T_k is the total number of hours available for processing at machine k .
- p_k is the probability that machine k is operating at a given point in time.
- b_{ikh} is a zero-one parameter which if equal to one indicates that product i can be produced on machine k on path h .

- a_{ik} is the element of the arc-incidence matrix for product i indicating a connection between machine l and k . The element is one if a connection exists and zero otherwise.
- c_i is the contribution margin of part type i .
- d_i is the minimum demand that must be satisfied for each part type i .
- x_{ih} is the flow of part i on path h .

The performance measure to reflect the routing flexibility (RF) of the manufacturing system should combine both the cardinality of the route set and the reliability of the system. The measure we propose is the maximum expected contribution of the system. Such a measure translates operational differences of systems into financial terms which would be of greater use to managers evaluating various designs. This measure can be computed by one of the following mathematical programming models. The first model is formulated by considering flows over a given path as the decision variable while the second model considers the flow between two machines.

Path Formulation

$$RF = MAX \sum_i \sum_h c_i \cdot x_{ih}$$

Subject to:

$$\sum_i \sum_{h|b_{ikh}=1} \frac{t_{ik}}{p_k} \cdot x_{ih} \leq T_k \quad \forall k \quad (1.1)$$

$$\sum_h x_{ih} \geq d_i \quad \forall i \quad (1.2)$$

$$x_{ih} \geq 0 \quad \forall i, h \quad (1.3)$$

(1.1) is the capacity constraint for each machine given the reliability of that machine. $\frac{t_{ik}}{p_k}$ is the expected amount of time to process part i on machine k . Constraint (1.2) ensures that certain minimal demand conditions are satisfied. This formulation involves $n + m$ constraints and $m \cdot (1 + \sum_{k=1}^{n-2} k! C_k^{n-2})$ variables in the worst case (i.e. when the machine network is totally connected). Hence this formulation is preferred when the network is sparse.

An alternative formulation is one which centers around the machine. In addition to the previously defined variables we specify a new variable y_{ilk} to be the flow of part i from machine l to machine k .

Machine Formulation

$$RF = MAX \sum_i \sum_l c_i \cdot y_{iln}$$

Subject to:

$$\sum_{l|a_{ilk}=1} y_{ilk} - \sum_{l|a_{ilk}=1} y_{ikl} = 0 \quad \forall k, i \quad (2.1)$$

$$\sum_i \sum_{l|a_{ilk}=1} \frac{t_{ik}}{p_k} \cdot y_{ilk} \leq T_k \quad \forall k \quad (2.2)$$

$$\sum_{l|a_{iln}=1} y_{iln} \geq d_i \quad \forall i \quad (2.3)$$

$$y_{ilk} \geq 0 \quad \forall i, l, k \quad (2.4)$$

where n is the index for the unload station. Constraints (2.2) and (2.3) are equivalent to constraints (1.1) and (1.2), respectively. Constraint (2.1) is introduced in this formulation to ensure the balance of flows, i.e. the number of units flowing into a machine is equal to the number of units flowing out from a machine. This formulation has in its worst case $n \cdot m^2$ variables and $n \cdot m + n + m$ constraints. Consequently this formulation is preferred when the network is dense. Both of the above formulations are LP models which can be solved using a standard simplex code as is done in the example in the following section.

From both of the above models it is clear that with increasing reliability (p 's) and capacity (T 's) of the components in the system, the expected thruput of the system is nondecreasing. We now give an example to illustrate the evaluation of this flexibility measure.

2.1 An example

Let us use the procedure of the previous section to evaluate the following two manufacturing system designs. The first system has two machines and load and unload stations (Figure 1) while, the second differs in that it has a third machine

(Figure 2) and the reliability of the machines are different. Let $T_k = 300$ time units $\forall k$, $d_1 = d_2 = 10$ units with the part types having the following characteristics:

Part	Processing Times (t_{ik})			Contribution (c_i)
	M1	M2	M3	
1	3.3	3.5	4.5	3.5
2	3.5	3.4	4.9	4.0

The systems are illustrated in the following two figures, where the reliability of the machines ($p_k \forall k$) are the numbers in parentheses (i.e. the probability that machine M1 is operating at a given point in time is 0.9 while for machine M2 it is 0.95).

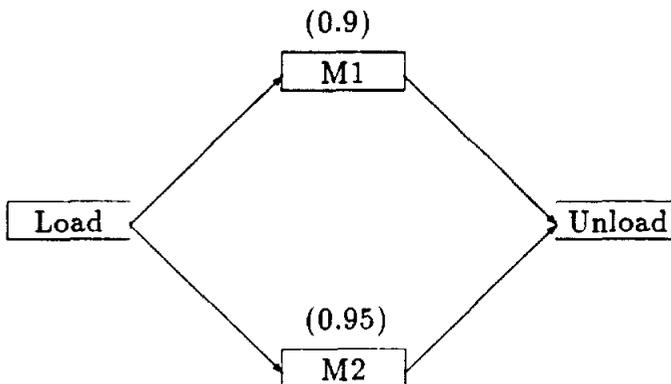


Figure 1 - Sample System Design No. 1

The routes for each part type in this system are:

1. L - M1 - U
2. L - M2 - U

This system yields an optimal expected contribution of 641.2 with 10 units of part 1 processed on machine 1, 67.71 units of part type 2 being processed on machine 1 and 83.82 units processed on machine 2. The design of the second system is,

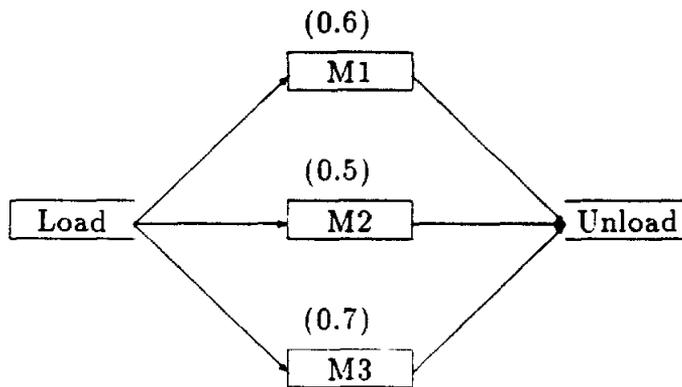


Figure 2 - Sample System Design No. 2

The routes for each part type in this system are:

1. L - M1 - U
2. L - M2 - U
3. L - M3 - U

This system yields a lower optimal expected contribution of 551.9 with 10 units of part type 1 being processed on M3 and the processing of part type 2 being spread out on all three machines (M1 producing 51.4 units, M2 producing 44.1 units, and M3 producing 33.7 units).

It is clear from the above example, that the cardinality of the route set is insufficient for appraising a value of flexibility. In the example, System No. 2 has a greater number of alternative routes (a higher cardinality of the route set) but is less preferable. Thus, reliability must be incorporated along with the number of routes in the evaluation of a manufacturing system. One could examine the possibility of adding more machines on to the first network by using the method described in Wallace (1987).

It can also be shown from the examples that the entropy measures of Kumar (1987) are inadequate. His first measure ($-\sum_{h=1}^H p_h \ln(p_h)$ where p_h represents the proportion of the total flow along path h) for the first sample system would give a value of 0.688, and for the second design a value of 1.07. Thus, by this measure the second system would again seem preferable. This is clearly driven by Kumar's assumption that an essential feature of these measures is that they be monotonically increasing with the number of paths (and consequently has the same characteristics as the approach given by Chatterjee et. al.).

Increasing reliability, however, does not always imply an increase in contribution as the analysis of a more complex machine network illustrates. Let $T_k = 300$ time units $\forall k$, $d_1 = d_2 = 10$ units with the part types having the following characteristics:

Part	Processing Times (t_{ik})				Contribution (c_i)
	M1	M2	M3	M4	
1	3.3	3.5	4.5	3.8	3.5
2	3.5	3.4	4.9	3.9	4.0

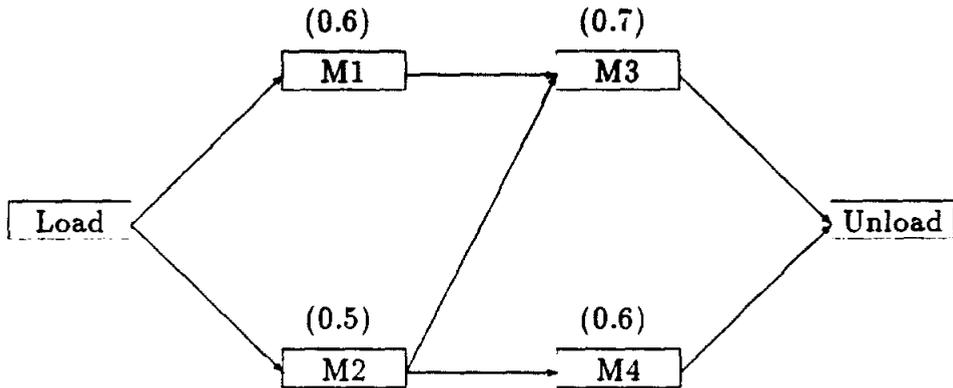


Figure 3 - Sample System Design No. 3

The routes for each part type in this system are:

1. L - M1 - M3 - U
2. L - M2 - M4 - U
3. L - M2 - M3 - U

The optimal solution in this system yields an RF of 346.16 with 10 units of part 1 produced on route 1 and 33.67 and 44.11 units of part 2 produced on routes 1 and 2, respectively. In this system M2 and M3 are bottlenecks, so that increasing the reliability of any one of those machines would yield an increased contribution. If the reliability of M2 were increased, there would initially be an increase in RF, but beyond 0.52, M4 becomes a bottleneck and any further increase in reliability of M2 brings no added contribution. Thus the RF line for System 3 in Figure 4 becomes flat.

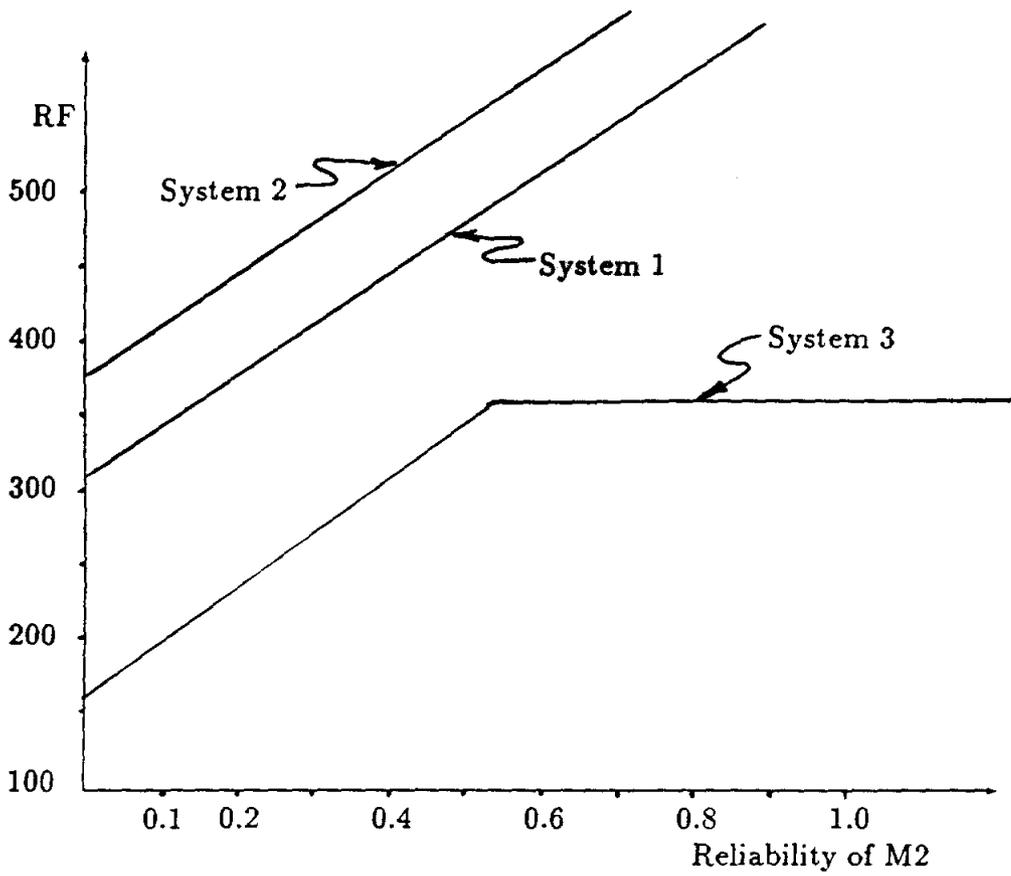


FIGURE 4 - RF vs. Reliability of M2

As can be seen from Figure 4, for any given reliability of M2 system 2 generates more contribution than either system 1 or 3. Thus, system design No. 2 *stochastically dominates* both system designs 1 and 3. With equal machine reliabilities stochastic domination provides a clear indication of the superior performance of one design over another. Stochastic domination, however, may not always be attainable. For example, if we increased the reliabilities of machines in system 3 we could obtain a situation where initially RF is greater in system 3 than 1, but as the reliability of M2 increases RF of system 3 goes below that of design 1.

It is also evident that for the same reliability the value of flexibility for different designs will be affected by the capacities of the machines. For example, System No.1 could stochastically dominate System No. 2 if the T_k 's for design No. 1 were raised sufficiently.

3 Machine Flexibility

Machine flexibility (according to Browne et. al.) is dependent on the ease with which one can make changes in order to produce a given set of part types. One possible measure of this form of flexibility could be the time taken to set up the machine to perform some operation on a different part type. DeGroot (1988) has shown that with a decrease in set up time the scope of product designs produced efficiently increases, thus demonstrating (as Browne et. al. anticipated) how product flexibility is dependent on machine flexibility. Röller and Tombak (1990) have shown the market conditions under which this type of flexibility is desirable. In this section we propose a measure by which alternative manufacturing systems can be evaluated with respect to machine flexibility. Since machine flexibility is not only built into the design of the system but is also a function of how the system is managed, our measure can also be used for control of operations.

Sethi and Sethi (1990) point to “numerical control, easily accessible programs, automatic tool changing ability, sophisticated part loading devices, size of the tool magazine, standardized tools, number of axes, etc.” as sources of machine flexibility. Browne et. al. suggest that the appropriate measure for machine flexibility is the time required to: replace worn-out or broken cutting tools, to change tools in a tool magazine, to assemble or mount the new fixtures required, prepare cutting tools, position the part, and changeover the numerical control program. We have chosen to concentrate on the time required to change tools in a tool magazine, the time required to change the tool in the machine when the tool is in the magazine, and the time required to assemble or mount the new fixtures required. We do so because we believe that these factors are the most significant portion of set up time in many cases.

In order to derive a model to evaluate machine flexibility let us define the following:

- i, j are indices for part types; $i = 1, \dots, m$; $j = 1, \dots, m$.
- q is the maximum number of tools that can fit in a tool magazine
- v_{ij} is the time to position the tool in the machine from the tool magazine if the tool for part j is different from that of part i (this assumes that each tool can be picked from the tool magazine in the same amount of time), also $v_{ij} = 0$ if the tool for part j is the same as that for part i .

- u_{ij} is the time to change the fixture if the fixture for part j is different from that of part i
- s is the time required to change a tool in the tool magazine (this is considered the same for all tools since it involves picking, placing, and returning tools to the same location).

$$b_{ir} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if part } i \text{ requires tool } r \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

$$z_{ij} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if part } i \text{ precedes part } j \text{ on the machine} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

$$y_{ij} = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } b_{ir} = 1 \text{ and } b_{jr} = 1 \text{ for any } r \in Y \\ 1 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

where Y is the set of tools in the tool magazine since the last tool change.

In order to find the minimum set up time for a given manufacturing system and a given part mix one must solve the following mathematical program. We assume that the tool changing time is the same for all tools but the fixture changing time may be different for each part. This is based on observations of many FMSs where the tool size and shapes do not vary as considerably as the part geometry. Assuming that the machines were incapable of changing fixtures and tools simultaneously machine flexibility (MF) can be evaluated using the following nonlinear integer programming model.

$$MF = \text{MIN} \sum_i \sum_j v_{ij} \cdot z_{ij} + \sum_i \sum_j u_{ij} \cdot z_{ij} + s \cdot \sum_i \sum_j y_{ij} \cdot z_{ij} \quad (3.0A)$$

Subject to:

$$\sum_i \sum_j z_{ij} \geq m - 1 \quad (3.1)$$

$$y_{ij}, z_{ij} \in (0,1) \quad \forall i, j \quad (3.2)$$

The first term in the objective function is the tool positioning time, the second term is the fixture positioning time, and the third term is the time required for

tool interchanges. For (3.0 A), $(\sum_i \sum_j y_{ij} \cdot z_{ij})$ gives the number of distinct tool interchanges. The implicit assumption for this formulation of the objective function is that a certain amount of time is taken for each tool change. This is true of systems which have a large central magazine from which tools travel back and forth and it is not economical to have large local tool magazines. The constraint (3.1) forces one to schedule m parts for production.

Note that Y is dynamic and changes with each reconfiguration of the tool magazine. This reconfiguration is done by placing the next q tools demanded by the forthcoming part sequence in the tool magazine.

If the machines are capable of making tool and fixture changes in parallel, then objective function in the above model would be:

$$MAX(MIN(\sum_i \sum_j v_{ij} \cdot z_{ij} + \sum_i \sum_j u_{ij} \cdot z_{ij}), MIN(s \cdot \frac{b_{ir}(1 - b_{jr})z_{ij}}{q})) \quad (3.0B)$$

The use of $\frac{b_{ir}(1 - b_{jr})z_{ij}}{q}$ in (3.0 B) implies that there is a set up each time the tool magazine is exhausted and that the parts are sequenced in the order of tool usage.

The evaluation of machine flexibility requires the simultaneous determination of both the part sequence and the sequence of tools. In order to focus on the set up times associated with machine characteristics (as discussed above) and to make our analysis tractable we assume that the sequence of parts is given. This is not unrealistic since due dates are often exogenously given to the operations manager.

Simple heuristics can be used to solve the above problem. If both the time required to change tools in the magazine and the time to change the tool in the machine dominates over the time to change fixture, a reasonable heuristic would be to group the parts by tool used. If, conversely, the fixture changing time dominates, the parts could be grouped by fixture utilized.

3.1 An example

Say $u_{ij} = 1 \forall i \neq j$ and 0 otherwise, and let $s = 10$, $q = 2$, and $m = 4$. Also let $v_{ij} = 1$ if the tool for part i is different from part j and 0 otherwise. The resulting problem formulation using (3.0A) is

$$MIN \sum_i \sum_{j \neq i} (z_{ij} + v_{ij} \cdot z_{ij}) + 10 \cdot \sum_i \sum_{j \neq i} y_{ij} \cdot z_{ij}$$

Subject to:

$$\sum_i \sum_j z_{ij} \geq 3$$

$$y_{ij}, z_{ij} \in (0,1) \quad \forall i,j \quad (3.1)$$

Let the sequence in which the parts are to be processed be 1, 2, 3, 4 with tools required being A, B, C, and B, respectively. Hence the v_{ij} s are as given in the following matrix:

$$\begin{bmatrix} 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$$

where, for example, $v_{12} = 1$ since the tool for part 1 is A and the tool for part 2 is B, thus setting up the machine for part 2 involves a tool change. Assuming that the fixture and tool required by the first part is already in place the above expression is then reduced to:

$$MIN \{6 + 10 \cdot (y_{12} + y_{23} + y_{34})\}.$$

This minimization involves choosing which tools belong in the magazine at a particular state in production. We know that, $b_{1A} = b_{2B} = b_{3C} = b_{4B} = 1$ with all other $b_{ir} = 0$. Let the initial configuration of the tool magazine contain tools A and B, i.e. let $Y = \{A, B\}$. Then, $y_{12} = 0$ since $b_{1A} = b_{2B} = 1$. In order to process part 3 we need to reconfigure the tool magazine since it does not contain tool C. Y is reset to $Y = \{B, C\}$ since tools B and C are the next two tools required. Then $y_{23} = 1$, since $b_{2B} = 1$ but $b_{3A} = b_{3B} = 0$, and $y_{34} = 0$, since $b_{3C} = b_{4B} = 1$. The result is one tool change removing tool A and replacing it with tool C at a cost of s . The objective function value, MF, would then be 16. A better solution would be the sequence 1, 2, 4, 3, which has the same number of tool changes to the tool magazine (one), yet fewer tool changes to the machine (two instead of three), yielding an MF of 15.

In the above models we have used set up times as a surrogate measure for evaluating the effort required to make the necessary changes to produce a given set of parts. This allows for the comparison of various manufacturing system designs which are capable of producing the same part mix. The models also give the capability of measuring the effort involved in producing various sets of parts with the same production system. In such a case the model must be solved for each set of parts. Thus these models could be applied to the allocation of sets of parts to various plants.

4 Conclusion

We have provided several models for the evaluation of alternative manufacturing system designs with respect to routing and machine flexibility. These models facilitate the design/technology choice process by providing a link between operational performance and economic implications.

We present two models by which routing flexibility can be assessed. The resulting measure is the maximum contribution in monetary terms which is easily interpreted. These models incorporate factors such as reliability of the machines and the capacity available for production. Machine flexibility is assessed by the minimum set up time required to produce a given set of parts. The utility of this measure could be seen in choosing a design or in deciding the portfolio of part types to be produced on a given system. This measure clearly shows that flexibility is a function of operational considerations such as sequencing of parts and the positioning of tools. It also shows what impact such operational decisions have on the plant finances.

Clearly further work is required to strengthen the link between operational measures of a manufacturing system and the corresponding impact on a firm's financial status. Without models defining such links managers will continue to have difficulty assessing investments which contribute to a firm's manufacturing flexibility. Operational measures of the other types manufacturing flexibility eg. process, product, volume, etc., also need to be developed. Finally, relationships between the different types of flexibility need to be more clearly established.

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