Editorial

Managing Data

Data — it's a vital part of business, but how to effectively manage it is still a challenge faced by many in the industry. In attending DaratechPLANT (Houston, TX; Jan. 19–21), Frank Udo, global asset management architect for Shell and one of the keynote speakers of the conference, brought up an interesting analogy between Amazon.com and the world of project management. One of Amazon.com's notable features is the additional related information that is given when searching for a specific item. For instance, if you type in "Perry's Handbook," you will also get historical information about other books bought by people who purchased *Perry's*. Udo raised the question, "Why can't we have that with project information?" The information is there, it's just not at our finger tips.

The problem of effective data management isn't a new one. In fact, it has been discussed for years, but there is no simple solution. A key obstacle is that data is typically spread throughout many disparate systems, such that providing the right information, quickly, to the right person is complicated. Udo noted that "master repositories [for project data] are often unclear." As a result, "the cost of a project can be four times greater, if you don't deliver information right the first time," he said. "If you have the information right at the end of the commission period, the results will be shorter startup periods, flawless startups, faster project delivery, easier information handover, and quicker access to accurate, relevant information and best practices." Another obstacle to effective data management is the lack of standardization on key terms. How one person defines a piece of equipment, such as a heat exchanger, may be different from that of another.

Furthermore, more and more data can be collected via smart instrumentation and equipment, which led Udo to raise another question: "how do we link smart instrumentation to our current IT infrastructure?" Development of a solution has long been in the works by various companies. Recently, I was invited to attend a press event held by ABB, where they unveiled the Industrial[IT] Extended Automation System 800xA, which appears to address all of the issues noted above. The company touts that the new system manages one set of consistent data, for single-point entry, single-point change and re-use across the plant. If ABB's system delivers on all that is promised, then the goal of getting the right information to the right people, quickly, may become a reality.

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