

Butler Bob queries quality

Captain Packer, Butler Bob and Sidekick Sam discuss the need and benefits of a quality management solution. By Gerhard Greeff – Divisional Manager at Bytes Systems Integration

“I give up,” says Sam throwing down his pen on a stack of files. “This is going to take HOURS! There must be a better way!”

“Well Sam,” says Peter looking at the dark outside the office window, “whether we like it or not, we have to find those documents tonight. If only we knew what we were letting ourselves in for with this new contract.”

“Now Peter,” says Bob from the other side of the table “I warned you both when we took this on that the contract is going to put a stretch on our filing systems, but you did not want to listen. It’s too late to complain now!”

“You are right Bob,” interjects Sam “you did warn us. You also shot down my proposal for a laboratory solution about the same time. So don’t try dishing out ALL the blame!”

Bob almost looks hurt (Bob never “looks” anything). “Now how would a laboratory solution have helped us with this Sam? Spreadsheets work just as well, and you have to print out copies to get approval anyway.”

Sam is dumbstruck. He would never have thought that Bob could be so uninformed about anything. Peter watches their interaction with a bemused smile, wondering how Sam is going to react – if he finds his voice again.

“Have you ever looked at a proper lab solution Bob?” Sam is fuming and on the verge of exploding. “If you had, you wouldn’t dish up such drivel in educated company.”

“Whao,” Peter jumps in before things get physical. “No need to get insulting Sam. Bob obviously misunderstood you somewhere. Why don’t you go ahead and educate us.”

Sam sinks back in his chair and seems to deflate slightly. “Sorry for losing my cool there for a moment,” he says, “but I just get so cross when I recognize myself in others. I used to think the same way you know!”

“No offence taken old chap,” says Bob. “I think I know what you mean. If it was up to you, we would still have been doing the books by hand every month.”

“You are right Bob, but then....no one is too old to learn eh? But getting back to what we were discussing. I proposed the lab solution just about the same time I started looking at automation. At that time I obviously did not do a good job of motivating for it. I have learned some things in the mean time though.”

“Like being a know-it-all pain in the buttefitootis,” Bob thinks to himself.

“Lab systems,” continues Sam, “or more commonly known as LIMS or Laboratory Information Management Systems, do a lot more than provide a place to save quality data Bob. A good LIMS have a lot of functionality that would have been useful to us today!”

“For instance, according to the ISA 95 standard, quality systems make provision for eight different activities, including scheduling, resource management, data collection, quality definition, quality execution and the one that would have helped us greatly today.....quality tracking.”

Peter is amazed. He has never seen Sam so enthusiastic about quality. Normally Sam avoids quality people like the plague, and here he is talking about quality like he knows what it is all about! “So explain to me what it all means Sam. How will all this benefit us?”

“OK Peter,” says Sam. “In addition to the ability of LIMS to interface with lab equipment directly, it also has the ability to configure tests for specific products. This means that when a product is tested using the LIMS, the system will warn the tester if any test is left out. We know this happens, or else we cannot match test results with batch numbers. Having a system to track and link these will be of big benefit.”

“I can see how that would have helped tonight,” says Bob. “But what is this about scheduling and the rest? I thought that was part of the MES?”

“Precisely,” says Sam looking smug. “That’s what confuses people quite a lot you know. LIMS fall within the MES domain, but is built specifically for lab environments. They are not built as complete manufacturing quality management solutions. They can however be linked to other systems in the plant to for instance provide on-line or statistical quality control throughout a production campaign.”

“So what you are saying Sam,” interjects Peter “is that LIMS systems complement MES solutions and should be integrated to MES for the biggest benefits?”

“That’s right Peter,” says Sam “stand-alone LIMS systems make it easier to record, track and report on quality results, but they are by no means the end of quality requirements.”

“I agree,” says Bob. “With this new contract we also agreed to implement GMP and HACCP, and it’s these that came back to haunt us today.”

“Sorry Bob,” interjects Peter. “I know I signed the contract and all, but I mostly concentrated on the production and financial side. What do GMP and HACCP mean? I cannot remember seeing that at all.”

“Well Peter,” says Bob looking down his nose at Peter. “They do not mention good manufacturing practices and hazard areas and critical control points specifically in the contract, but the requirements are the same. They are generally accepted standards and procedures in a number of controlled industries. If we automated those procedures using a MES and LIMS, we would have met our contractual obligations and we would not have had to sit here until all hours of the night looking for results.”

“Be that as it may Bob,” says Peter very annoyed, “we still need to find that batch documentation before tomorrow morning. You still have not explained what GMP and HACCP specifically mean, but we can

continue that discussion another time. I don't want to be here the whole night, so let's get cracking and find those documents!"

Look out for the next edition of this continuing saga of Captain Packer and trusty sidekick Sam.

Gerhard Greeff

Divisional Manager - PMC

Bytes Systems Integration

Cell : (+27) 82-654-0290

Mailto: gerhard.greeff@bytes.co.za
