

Captain Packer and the paper imposition

Captain Packer and his trusty sidekick Sam explores ways to reduce the mountains of paper flowing over his desk on a daily basis, and how they can do this whilst increasing production efficiency. By Gerhard Greeff – Divisional Manager at Bytes Systems Integration

Peter Packer is a captain of industry (by his own admission). His trusty operations manager Sam has worked with him for the last ten years. Within his company BestPack Industry, the two are known as Captain Packer and Sidekick Sam. Together they rule the factory with an iron fist. He is a hero to his employees and always appears when a machine turns villainous or raises a ruckus. A frequent comment in the canteen is “Captain Packer sees all” (but only if the Captain or Sam is not around).

One day, Peter and Sam are sitting in Sam’s office discussing the problems of the day. Everyone else has left already, but there is still a mountain of paper to get through before they can call it a night. On top of that, things have not been going very well the last number of months. Despite their continued vigilance, throughput has reduced and customer complaints have increased, as had scrapped materials. Peter and Sam go through shift log-sheets, batch-sheets and production transfers, trying to match these with stores receipts and issues. This monumental task is performed every week, and they believe they get it right most of the time. Lately though, it has become apparent to Peter that things are just getting too much. Errors are slipping through, trusted workers have left for greener pastures abroad and the skills-pool has reduced, leaving gaps in the manufacturing competence.

“If only we could have some collaborative system to help us match all this stuff automatically”, muses Sam, “It would make all of this a lot easier and leave us with time to do what we love most– sort out production problems!” Peter gives him a bemused look. “I always thought you were against systems and automation, Sam. What’s changed?” Sam looks down awkwardly, “I’ve been thinking” he says, “with all the new regulations we have to comply with, and the way things have been going lately, that it may be time to do things differently. I read an article the other day explaining this concept called MES and it got me thinking.”

Peter is amazed. In all the years he has known Sam, he has always been a stalwart opponent to software systems. He is a down-to-earth guy, always claiming that no software can replace the human brain, and now this! “Gee Sam, I didn’t even know you could use big words like “collaborative”, and then in the same sentence as “system” nonetheless!!” says Peter. “Well Peter” says Sam, “however much I like working for you and being called your sidekick by the workers, it is all just getting too much. To tell you the truth, I have been looking into systems and automation for a while now, and I think we can really improve things around here.”

Peter smiles to himself and says “Well Sam, a trusty sidekick is supposed to tell a hero when he needs to change his ways. What do you have in mind?” He is glad Sam brought it up, as he was not sure on how to broach the

subject, given Sam's reluctance on previous occasions. Unbeknown to Sam, he has been doing his own investigation as well.

Sam jumps at the opportunity. "Well" he says "If you are serious about exploring this, there are two technologies we need to focus on. The one is MES. As I understand, this can assist us greatly in knowing what is actually happening in the plant at all times. MES can help us track production down to item level where we need it. It will be able to give us the genealogy of any batch of packaging we produce back to the raw materials used. It will also be able to tell us on what machine it was produced and when it was produced. This will be a great benefit when we are doing these orders for export. You know how we struggle to find the info when they come to us with a query. A MES system can give us the information in an hour where it normally takes us days to search through the files!"

"That's all good and well Sam" says Peter, "but that's just an inconvenience, and it will not help us operate the plant more efficiently." The captain is really starting to enjoy this discussion. He has never seen Sam this enthused before, and although he knows what is coming next, he wants to hear it from Sam himself. "But that's the beauty of MES" says Sam, "in addition to the tracking and genealogy, plant efficiency is one of the other things MES can assist with! We can do away with the manual downtime capture and capture the information into the MES instead. We can define specific downtime reasons for the operators to choose from, making it easier for us to do problem-solving and look for trends. Our availability and utilisation figures will be visible at our finger tips any time of the day, making it easier to identify where we need to spend our efforts!"

"Okay Sam" says Peter, "it seems you have given this some thought. You have convinced me that this MES concept of yours can assist us in a few areas of the business. I have some more questions before we make a decision, but you mentioned two technologies? What is the other one?"

Sam looks at his watch and replies, "Well Peter, it's getting late and this is not a discussion we have time for now. Maybe we can talk about this another time? After all, even superheroes need their beauty sleep!"

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
