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Digitalization in sugar production – mind the foundation!

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Abstract

The subject of digital disruption informed by IoT (Internet of Things) and Industry 4 is omnipresent. These technologies advance productivity gains which many owner/operators of production plants in the sugar industry acknowledge and are investing in to support future success of their businesses. When developing an appropriate strategy, one aspect in particular should be taken into account: automation. It forms the foundation for every digitalization project and is central to its success. The paper navigates through a two-stage process in which the author describes automation in the sense of an unshakable foundation for digitalization projects.

Keywords: digitalization, digital disruption, automation

Introduction

Digital disruption technologies advanced by the Internet of Things (IoT), cyber-physical systems and Industry 4.0 are increasingly being applied in the manufacturing sector to support automation. It is only a matter of time before there is a rapid uptake of the advances in sugar factories. Before examining the prospects ahead from implementing factory-wide digitalization, it is worth briefly reviewing the technological advances in the past that have informed manufacturing operations.

The three so-called industrial revolutions that have taken place to date are largely the subject of consensus among experts. Beginning with the development of the “Spinning Jenny”, the first industrial spinning machine, by the Englishman James Hargreaves in 1764, the first industrial revolution was characterized by the mechanization of manual work by machines using water and steam power. A good 100 years later, around 1870, conveyor belts were used on a large scale in the slaughterhouses of Cincinnati to transport the slaughtered pigs from one worker to the next. The assembly line is regarded as the first key technology of the second industrial revolution. Their

era is marked by mass production and electrification based on the division of labor. Another 100 years later, the third stage: automation begins with the first programmable logic controller (plc) in 1969. Electronic and IT systems are crucial for increasing efficiency and fundamentally changing working methods and processes. And today, 50 years later? Some speak of the fourth industrial revolution, some of the next phase of the third industrial revolution. Only in future generations of history books will a uniform terminology have prevailed. What we have to note in any case today, are two aspects:

1. The basis of digitization is the microelectronics of the third industrial revolution.
 2. If we compare the 50 years that have passed since the invention of the plc with the lifecycles of sugar factories, it is clear that it is practically impossible that all sugar plants around the globe have already completely implemented the third stage.

So, if the digitalization is considered the 4th revolution of industrialization, then most plants still have to master the 3rd revolution.



Figure 1: Fully automated factory operations managed by few operators



Figure 2: Control panel is a cane sugar plant in Indonesia, a very typical installation for so many cane sugar plants globally



Automation in the sugar industry – draft of an ideal (but existing) image

In fully automated plants, there are no manual valves, motors, drives, or any other actuator out in the field, that is not operated centrally. There are no push buttons in the plant which an operator has to activate. You do not need people taking samples to the laboratory and you do not need to verify process values by checking personally. The plant can be fully operated from one central control room, just like a pilot can fly the plane from his seat (see figure 1). A fully centrally controlled and automatically operated sugar factory can be run by 3-6 operators only.

A case in point is beet sugar plants in Germany, in particular, those run by Nordzucker AG. Here, the factory operations are effectively monitored and managed by 4 to 5 people in the control room. The fully trained operators are trusted to manage the plant, whether it is weekday, nights or over weekends, with nobody from management around to seek for guidance!

In such plants, it is normal, that managers, operators or engineers access the KPI (key performance indicators) of the plant, or certain maintenance or laboratory data on the fly and with a tip of the finger from their smartphone or iPad. These includes performance of a centrifugal machine, for example, optimizing the washing times, and crystal quality data coming from the lab.

Such implementations require some means of data acquisition and data handling which allows the user to access only the requisite information. Preferably in a way which is already preprocessed to give some hints on possible improvements. A good example for such application and the needed preprocessing of data is the Siemens Sugar MIS. A sugar factory which delivers approx. 12.000 tags into such a system in a time range between 1 second and once a day (for some laboratory analysis) needs a sophisticated data compression.

By contrast: A glimpse in today's reality

Anecdotal evidence suggests that currently around 80% of all sugar factories in the world are far from even working on a

centralized control system! What does reality look like in those 80% of the factories? If one goes through a sugar factory in southern Louisiana, in El Salvador, Indonesia, China or Kenya he or she will find some control areas where operators have a screen or maybe just a panel to see what may be going on (see figure 2).

You will not see too many active people, because the plant is running more or less on its own, with enough leeway just by enough mechanical flexibility. Most measurements, if existing in the first place have not seen a calibration ever since initial installation. The basic production data is shown on some white boards as written figures calculated from the day before end the operators are the real kings of the plant. They decide the performance they keep the plant running on whatever condition is not relevant for them (see figure 3).

Studies show, that approximately 65 to 80% of all installed PID (proportional-integral-derivative) control loops in this world are not tuned to best performance or even working in a satisfactory mode! Considering the amount of energy, being lost due to the lack of optimization in existing control loops the call for digitalization is understandable, however, this does not solve the root cause of the problem. Normal plant operators must

Figure 3: Production “Dash-board” as seen in a cane sugar factory

be praised for their ability to overcome the failing automation systems. While they really know how to interpret a new noise, a smell or a leak, whether it is critical or just normal, they will react to it with a professional attitude and that may sometime means, just doing nothing and wait for the major failure which will shut down the plant.

In essence, the point here is, and it will be shown below in more detail later, that automation in itself is of no value as long as there is no additional application which will make it successful. And the measurement of success in automation is NOT the existence of a control room! The only true measurement for a successful automation is the reduction of human interface to the process. Each operation on the control system must be questioned and checked whether needed or not. Experience shows, that successful plants have come down to below 200 operations per day from raw material delivery to sugar drying. With such minimised operation a plant can be run like an airplane, where you can achieve a stable production and optimized energy usage while maintaining highest quality. On average, the energy efficiency of these plants is around 15 to 25% higher than the one with more than 200 operations per day!

A fully automated operation of the plant will show results in several other fields as well:

- Better utilization of installed production capacity. As the automation system supports rapid response, process operations can be maintained at upper limits and thereby boast increased efficiency compared with manual operations. For example, with manual operation a tank will have to be maintained at 60% level of the installed nominal capacity, but with automation, it would be safe to run it at 80 or 90% without a problem.
- Fast reaction to process problems, leads to reduction of losses and a higher yield.
- And, as recent comparisons have shown, potential of energy optimization of around 10-25% is possible as well as increased production effectiveness and stabilization at a higher level.

The path to digitalization in two levels

Most of the European sugar producers, in particular Nordzucker have invested in automation. Siemens has been involved in many of these projects. It has to be stress that the path to automation has been incremental to make sure it is built on a strong foundation. Experience gained by Siemens shows, that there are exactly two levels or stages necessary to create optimal conditions for a working digitalization strategy.

Level 1: Eliminate operator intervention!

Level 2: Create a basis for correct decisions!

The two levels embraces the following successive steps:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| LEVEL 1 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data acquisition 2. Data verification 3. Alarm management 4. Optimization of control loops |
| LEVEL 2 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrated data management 2. Predictive analytics |

Data acquisition

The basics for all such ideas lies in the fast, reliable and accurate acquisition of data. Traditionally, sugar producers consider this part of the digitalization story as a given status. Not much thought is put into this part. However, it is the key to any forthcoming conclusion.

Starting in the very beginning of the sugar production is the feedstock (sugar beet or sugarcane) and its quality impacted by weather and crop management.

Then, the logistics of the material transport, storage time on roads or at the factory provide the next set of decision parameters. But the real task is, again, in the pure production process. Literally thousands of datasets are being gathered every second. Hundreds more are provided from laboratory analysis, and again hundreds are additionally calculated throughout the day. These data are a treasure as such and in some cases, they are handled just as a sunken treasure: Gathered, stored and invariably forgotten.

In daily life most of the plant data are not considered valuable, due to the simple fact that they are not considered reliable. The validation of data is in most plants not considered important. One can see this in only a short view to the central operator screen. If you see even one Alarm blinking it is clear that the operator does not take it serious. And most of the cases this is because the alarm setting is wrong in the first place and has never been corrected. Other reasons may be that the transmitter itself need calibration which is not carried out. How to solve that? It is almost too easy, but it costs time and money. And the same management which wants to push digitalization does not spend the money on the daily optimization works in the plant.

• Data verification

Data verification on the other hand is a more complex task but possible in most plants without high investment. What is needed is the application of common sense to existing data. For example, a pump which is operating within its optimized working point has a defined mass flow at a certain speed. In case that the measured flow does not match the given speed of the pump, either the pump is failing or the flow meter needs calibration. Such deviation must be detected and the maintenance team needs to be informed. No general alarm needs to be sounded, it is enough that the maintenance crew will get an automatic message from the system and can act accordingly. In parallel this message must be recorded in the electronic shift book of the installed Management Information System. Once the deviation is analyzed and either solved or considered OK, the corresponding action must be recorded again, and logged away properly.

Similar to any other measurement. Each device will react to any kind of action in the flow of the process and thus it is possible to verify all signals. In applying this policy throughout the plant, it may be found that some instruments are not needed anymore and others are missing in order to analyze. These needs to be corrected. And then the integration of electronic shift book and laboratory reporting in line with the overall DCS (distributed control system) is a must for plants on the way to digitalization.

• Alarm management

Alarm management is the next step which needs to be executed. Modern process control systems, such as Simatic PCS

7 allow highly sophisticated methods to group alarm messages, and to give an alarm hierarchy or alarm avoidance procedures. All such measures will result in a reduced work load for the operators while maintaining overall alertness. Combined with the possibility to open alarm handling SOP (Standard Operation Procedures) in case of alarms, the operators have the means to respond immediately.

Analysis of devices in the field such as pumps, motors, gear boxes, valves etc. under the aspect of condition monitoring are the last of measures and packages to be integrated into the DCS systems. This will allow an early detection of any deviation in performance and will give appropriate information to the maintenance department to act accordingly.

• Optimization of control loops

Once the alarms are eliminated from the measurements, the control loops and interlocks need a detailed review. Loops or sequences which are running in manual that are not working need to be elicited. If the operator has to adjust setpoints or values, the loops may be working but are not optimized. In most cases these loops were probably running adequately during commissioning but afterwards nobody ever tuned them to the current process conditions. It might be necessary to store a fixed set of parameters for different plant conditions or to use auto correction of parameters based on rules of operation.

Such implementation again consumes time, know-how and money. And here it is not easy to decide who can really help. There are literally hundreds of "consultants" offering their service on such optimization. However, one needs good knowledge of advanced process control strategies to really provide added value to the plant.

It is extremely helpful to implement engineering standards for the structure of the automation system in order to help operators and plant engineers to work on the same side of the problem. Once fixed engineering procedures are implemented and accepted, optimization is standard.

• A practical example

Studies assume that 75% of all installed control loops in process plants globally are NOT operating in the optimum performance range. That means, that even if you do have some control loops active in any kind of control system they are either in manual mode or not tuned to the best performance (see figure 4).

What you see here is a control loop or level control in a cane sugar evaporation unit. The level setpoint is at 31% and the process value, quite stable at 33% But the valve action is modulating between 0 and 65%!

As long as the rest of the evaporation is running stable (and no batch pan will pull vapor) the control action will keep the level constant. But as soon as you have such external effects on the control, you will immediately see the level fluctuates and thus the brix changing because the actuator (the valve) is already acting to the limit its performance under normal conditions! The control loop is not optimized in the sense of the process section.

In visiting 'so called' automated sugar factories you will find screens, full of alarms, manually operated pans or process sections and operators being very busy to just keep the plant up and running. Based on process know how, and standardized engineering guidelines it is possible to reduce the operator interference into the process down to one operation per hour. That already would allow the plant to almost run like an airplane. Once that is achieved, the way to digitalization is paved.

• Integrated data management

The steps described so far lead to level 1. Once performed, you will have eliminated most of the operator's interventions. Now it's time to accomplish level 2. We have defined this level as achieving a foundation for correct decisions. Earlier, it was noted how to integrate the data from process, laboratory or energy production. The main data collection system within a modern sugar production plant is the central Control System. In most plants this is a so called DCS.

Figure 4: Semi tuned control loop in an automated factory



The name is misleading, but this is due to historic reasons, when in comparison to huge really central mainframe computers it became possible to use smaller control systems, which could be installed in a decentralized location in a factory but are still able to communicate all information to the central control room. These Systems are organized in an object-oriented way. This means each and every object in a factory which is providing data has a unique number, the so-called tag-number. Such a tag, can be a pump, a valve, a tank or just a transmitter or a single switch.

Traditionally all the tags are operated within the processor unit of the DCS. That means within the DCS all information to each tag is available. That also includes all information to Alarm settings, operator interfaces etc. Every additional system which now needs information from the plant can access the DCS and will be provided with the respective information.

The most relevant system for further data handling is the Management Information Systems MIS. Such a system uses the same object-oriented approach, which has proven to be so effective over the last 30 years. As each tag belongs to one process section an additional level of data management is introduced in the respective process section.

Each process section is defined by certain input parameters and respective output parameters. And as all process sections are closely linked to each other, either through product flow, or energy flow, or both, it is clearly visible, that disturbance in one section will lead to problems in the next one. These key parameters may differ from plant to plant, but in the end, they are the values which need to be shown in any kind of dashboard and which will indicate what the plant is doing at any given moment in time.

Predictive analytics

For further optimization it is a good idea to look into the development of the airplane industry. Not too long ago it was common that the crew of a commercial airliner consisted of 3 highly specialized pilots. One was acting as navigation and on-board engineer. S/He got eliminated as soon as it was possible to combine the available data into computers and into advanced process control procedures. The same is possible in sugar plants. Such ideas were developed in the 1990s. Based on advanced control strategies such as Fuzzy Control and Neuro-Fuzzy Algorithms it became possible to set some process section into a fully automated operation. In the beet sugar industry, this was, for example, drying cossette in high temperature dryers. Or the control of a milling line from bagasse humidity, imbibition water and raw juice brix with the target of optimized extraction.

However, at that time the overall availability of data was not given in the same way as today. Today's control systems have in some cases the built-in functionality of model predictive control loops. Such controllers allow for a mathematical model of the loop, permanently checking the incoming parameters with the output parameters and thus executing a self-learning controller which will handle such complex controls, even if they have a long inherent dead time.

Added to that the possibility to analyze process, laboratory and any other value within the MIS Systems brings the possibility of a statistical process control package. Such package will combine historic data on a totally different method. These data

will be analyzed as a pattern, and similar patterns from the past will produce a message that a certain event is likely to happen. What is known from the weather forecast, becoming more accurate every year is also possible in process control. Here with the advantage that the amount of data is limited to a fixed set of parameters in the surrounding of the plant. All these data are available in the above described MIS packages and "only" need the analyzing software attached to it.

Digitalization – still missing?

Digitalization only needs to be applied and it needs fundamental engineering understanding to make proper use of it. For instance, an app on a mobile device will only show what has been provided by the plant in the first place. Use this – but wisely. Examples in many plants around in the cane sugar industry show how "digitalization" – and not even automation is not carried out properly: You will find automation installations, where the plant managers and process people will proudly show you that the systems are working, fully operational for more than 15 years, and where even advanced monitoring systems are being installed. Showing the plant in 3-dimensional reality. Only the data shown on the screens are all not valid, because the instrumentation is either switched off, not calibrated (even worse) or not operational. So, the whole investment into the 3-dimensional digital twin of the factory is a complete waste of money without any benefit for the plant operations or the operators, who have decided to go back to the old panels!

Conclusion: it's all about the foundation

To create optimal conditions for a working digitalization strategy, the two-step approach described is imperative. Once mastered, your foundation is in place and you are ready to build your digitalization building. What this will eventually lead to operationally at a sugar plant is:

- optimized processes and thus more output with less energy consumption
- less operator intervention and thus more efficiency and higher quality at the same time
- integrated data management and thus better decisions on a verified basis

Siemens is one of the market leaders in automation. The company's automation specialists accompany customers not only to choose the best automation foundation but also on their way in the digital future, providing reliable products, complementing services and tailor-made solutions.

La digitalización en la producción de azúcar - ¡Cuidado con bases!

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Resumen

El tema de la disruptión digital causada por IoT (El Internet de las cosas) y por la cuarta revolución industrial es tema omnipresente. Estas tecnologías alumbran mejoras de productividad que reconocen muchos propietarios /operadores de plantas de producción en la industria del azúcar y que invierten en apoyo de futuros éxitos de sus negocios. Al desarrollar una estrategia apropiada, un aspecto debe ser tomado en cuenta en particular: la automatización. Forma la base de cada proyecto de digitalización y es básica para su éxito. El documento sigue un proceso de dos etapas en el que el autor describe la automatización en el sentido de que es una firme base para proyectos de digitalización.

Palabras clave: digitalización, disruptión digital, automatización

Introducción

Las tecnologías digitales disruptivas impulsadas por la IoT (El Internet de las cosas), los sistemas cibernetico-físicos y de la revolución industrial 4.0 se aplican cada vez con mayor frecuencia en el sector de la producción en apoyo de la automatización. La rápida adopción de tales avances en las fábricas de azúcar es únicamente una cuestión de tiempo. Antes de examinar las perspectivas de futuro de la puesta en práctica de la digitalización completa de la fábrica es conveniente repasar los avances tecnológicos que, en el pasado, han afectado a las operaciones de fabricación.

Hasta ahora, según el amplio consenso entre los expertos, han tenido lugar tres denominadas «revoluciones industriales» Empezando por el desarrollo de la "Spinning Jenny", la primera hiladora multibobina industrial, por el inglés James Hargreaves en 1764, la primera revolución industrial se caracterizó por la mecanización del trabajo manual mediante máquinas impulsadas por agua y por vapor. Unos buenos 100 años más tarde, alrededor de 1870, se emplearon bandas transportadoras a gran escala en plantas de beneficio de Cincinnati para el transporte de cerdos sacrificados de un trabajador al siguiente. La línea de montaje es considerada la primera clave tecnológica de la segunda revolución industrial. Su era está marcada por la producción en masa y la electrificación y se basa en la división del trabajo. Cien años más tarde, la tercera etapa: Se inicia la automatización con el primer controlador lógico programable (plc) en 1969. Los sistemas electrónicos y los de TI son cruciales para incrementar la eficiencia e introducir cambios fundamentales tanto de trabajo como en los procesos

¿Y hoy, 50 años después? Algunos hablan de la cuarta revolución industrial, algunos de la fase siguiente de la tercera. Los libros de historia utilizarán una terminología uniforme únicamente en generaciones futuras. De lo que en todo caso se debe tomar nota hoy día es de dos aspectos:

1. La base de la digitalización es la microelectrónica de la tercera revolución industrial.
2. Si comparamos los 50 años transcurridos desde la invención del plc con los ciclos de vida de las fábricas de azúcar queda claro que es prácticamente imposible que todas las plantas de fabricación de azúcar en todo el mundo hayan completado ya la tercera etapa.

Es decir, si la digitalización se considera la cuarta revolución industrial, la mayoría de las fábricas todavía deben completar la tercera.

Automatización en la industria azucarera - esbozo de una imagen ideal (pero existente)

En plantas totalmente automatizadas no hay válvulas manuales, motores, accionamientos o cualquier otro actuador sobre el terreno que no sea de manipulación centralizada. No existen pulsadores en la planta que deban ser accionados por un operador. No se necesita personal tomando muestras para el laboratorio, ni verificar valores de proceso comprobándolos personalmente. La planta puede operar de forma integral desde una sala central de control, de la misma forma que un piloto puede volar el avión desde su asiento (ver figura 1). Una planta de fabricación de azúcar controlada integralmente y totalmente automatizado puede ser operada por 3-6 personas únicamente.

• Gestión de alarmas

El siguiente paso que es necesario ejecutar es la gestión de alarmas. Los sistemas modernos de control de procesos, tales como el Simatic PCS 7 permiten métodos altamente sofisticados de agrupación de mensajes de alarma, y procedimientos de establecimiento de una jerarquía de alarmas o de prevención de estas. Todas estas medidas resultan en una carga de trabajo reducida para los operadores, al tiempo que se mantiene la alerta sobre todo el sistema. Combinado con la posibilidad de abrir los SOP (Procedimientos Estándar de Operación) de la manipulación de alarmas, en caso de que se presente alguna de ellas, los operadores dispondrán de los medios de respuesta inmediata.

El análisis de equipos sobre el terreno tales como bombas, motores, reductores, válvulas, etc., con el criterio de control de condiciones son las últimas medidas y «paquetes» a integrar en los sistemas DCS. Esto permitirá la detección precoz de cualquier desviación en las prestaciones y proporcionará la información adecuada al departamento de mantenimiento para reaccionar adecuadamente.

• Optimización de bucles de control

Eliminadas las alarmas de las mediciones, tanto los bucles de control como los enclavamientos necesitarán una revisión detallada. Hay que obtener los bucles o secuencias que corren en modo manual pero que no funcionan. Si el operador debe ajustar puntos de consigna o valores, los bucles pueden ser que estén funcionando, pero no están optimizados. Probablemente, en muchos casos, estos bucles funcionaban adecuadamente a la puesta en marcha, pero después de ello nadie los ajustó a las condiciones actuales. Pudiera ser necesario almacenar un conjunto fijo de parámetros para distintas condiciones de la planta, o usar autocorrección de parámetros, basada en las reglas de funcionamiento.

De nuevo, tal implementación consume tiempo, know-how y dinero. Y aquí no es fácil decidir quién puede realmente ayudar. Existen, literalmente, centenares de «consultores» que ofrecen sus servicios para dicha optimización. Sin embargo, se necesita un buen conocimiento de estrategias de control avanzado de procesos para, de forma cierta, proporcionar valor añadido a la planta.

Es extremadamente útil implementar estándares de ingeniería en la estructura del sistema de automatización para ayudar a los operadores e ingenieros de la planta a trabajar en el mismo aspecto del problema. Una vez los procedimientos de

ingeniería fijados han sido puestos en práctica y aceptados, la optimización es estándar.

• Un ejemplo práctico

Los estudios asumen que el 75% de todos los bucles de control instalados en plantas de proceso, globalmente, NO están operando en su intervalo óptimo de prestaciones. Esto significa que, incluso si tiene algunos bucles de control activos en cualquier tipo de sistema de control, éstos están, bien en modo manual, bien no ajustados a sus mejores prestaciones (ver figura 4).

Lo que ve usted aquí es un bucle de control, o un nivel de control, en una unidad de evaporación de azúcar de caña. El punto de consigna del nivel es 31% y el valor de proceso, bastante estable a 33%. Pero la acción de la válvula está modulada entre 0 y 65%.

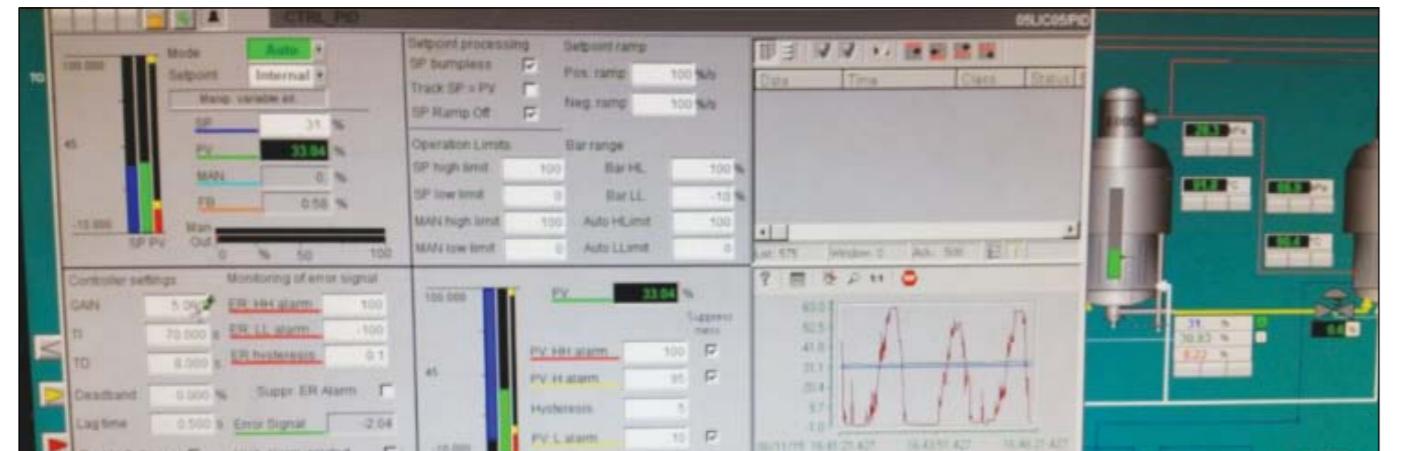
Tan pronto como el resto de la evaporación transcurra de forma estable (y ningún tacho consuma más vapor) la acción del control mantendrá un nivel constante. Pero tan pronto como se tengan tales efectos externos en el control, se verá de inmediato como fluctúa el nivel y, por tanto, el Brix cambia porque el actuador (la válvula) ya está actuando en el límite de su capacidad. El bucle de control no está optimizado en el sentido de la sección del proceso.

Visitando las «denominadas» factorías de azúcar automatizadas verá usted pantallas, colmadas de alarmas, tachos y secciones del proceso en operación manual y operadores muy atareados para mantener la planta abierta u funcionando. Con base al know how del proceso y con pautas estandarizadas de ingeniería es posible reducir la interferencia del operador en el proceso hasta una vez por hora. Ello ya casi permitiría a la planta funcionar como un aeroplano. Una vez esto se ha conseguido, se han sentado las bases para la digitalización.

• Gestión de datos integrados

Los puntos hasta ahora descritos conducen al nivel 1. Una vez ejecutadas, se habrá eliminado la mayor parte de las intervenciones del operador. Este es el momento de conseguir el nivel 2. Hemos definido este nivel como alcanzar una base para las decisiones correctas. Anteriormente se ha tomado nota de cómo integrar los datos de proceso, laboratorio o producción de energía. El sistema principal de recogida de datos en una planta moderna de producción de azúcar es el Sistema Central de Control. En la mayoría de las plantas, a ello se denomina DCS

Figura 4: Bucle de control semiajustado en una fábrica automatizada



(Sistema de control distribuido)

El nombre induce a la confusión, pero es debido a razones históricas cuando, en comparación con ordenadores gigantes, realmente centrales, resultó por fin posible usar sistemas de control más reducidos, que podían ser instalados en una ubicación descentralizada en una fábrica pero que seguían siendo capaces de comunicar toda la información a la sala central de control. Estos sistemas están organizados de una forma orientada al objeto. Esto significa que todos y cada uno de los objetos de una factoría que suministra datos dispone de un número único, el llamado número de etiqueta. Tal etiqueta puede representar a una bomba, una válvula, un depósito o únicamente un transmisor o interruptor único.

Tradicionalmente, todas las etiquetas operan dentro de la unidad de proceso del DCS. Esto significa que dentro del DCS está disponible toda la información para cada etiqueta. Esto incluye también toda la información sobre configuración de alarmas, interfaces de operador, etc. Cada sistema adicional que, ahora, requiera información de la planta puede acceder al DCS y recibir la información respectiva.

El sistema más relevante para un tratamiento de datos en más profundidad es el MIS (Sistemas de Gestión de la información, por sus siglas en inglés). Dicho sistema usa la misma aproximación, orientada al objeto, que ha demostrado ser tan efectiva en los últimos 30 años. Puesto que cada etiqueta pertenece a una sección del proceso se introduce un nivel adicional de gestión de datos en la respectiva sección del proceso.

Cada sección del proceso se define mediante ciertos parámetros de entrada y sus respectivos parámetros de salida. Y como todas las secciones del proceso están estrechamente enlazadas entre sí, bien sea vía el flujo del producto, bien el de la energía, o ambos, se ve claramente que una anomalía en una sección implicará problemas en la siguiente. Estos parámetros clave pueden diferir de planta a planta, pero, a fin de cuentas, son los valores que es necesario mostrar en cualquier tablero y que indicarán lo que está haciendo la planta en cualquier momento dado.

• Análisis predictivo

Para una mayor optimización, echar una ojeada al desarrollo de la industria aeronáutica es una buena idea. No hace mucho, una tripulación de un avión de línea comercial consistía en 3 pilotos altamente especializados. Uno de ellos era el navegante / ingeniero de a bordo. Éste/a fue eliminado tan pronto como fue posible combinar los datos disponibles en ordenadores y en procedimientos avanzados de control de procesos. Eso mismo es posible en fábricas de azúcar. Tales ideas fueron desarrolladas en los años de la década de 1990. Resultó posible, con base a estrategias avanzadas de control, tales como lógica difusa y algoritmos neuro-difusos, establecer algunas secciones del proceso como operaciones completamente automatizadas. En la industria del azúcar de remolacha esto fue, por ejemplo, el secado de cohetas en secaderos a alta temperatura. O el control de la humedad del bagazo en una línea de molienda, imbibición de agua y Brix del jugo, con el objetivo de optimizar la extracción.

Sin embargo, en aquel tiempo la disponibilidad general de datos no se daba de la misma forma que hoy en día. Los sistemas de control actuales incorporan en algunos casos la funcionalidad de bucles de control predictivo. Tales controladores

permiten trazar un modelo matemático del bucle, comprobando permanentemente los parámetros a su llegada con los de salida y, por tanto, ejecutando un controlador dotado de auto aprendizaje que manejará estos complejos controles, incluso si tienen un inherente tiempo muerto largo.

Añadiendo a esto la posibilidad de analizar cualesquier valores de proceso, laboratorio y de cualquier otro valor dentro de los sistemas MIS implica la posibilidad de un paquete de control estadístico del proceso. Este paquete combinará datos históricos usando un método totalmente diferente. Estos datos se analizarán como un patrón, y patrones similares anteriores producirán un mensaje en el sentido de que «es probable que tenga lugar determinado evento». Lo que se conoce de la predicción meteorológica, que es más preciso a cada año, es posible también en el control de procesos. Aquí, con la ventaja de que la cantidad de datos se limita a un conjunto fijo de parámetros en las inmediaciones de la planta. Todos estos datos están disponibles en los paquetes MIS que se describen arriba y «únicamente» necesitan el software de análisis agregado al mismo.

La digitalización - ¿todavía no se ha aplicado?

La digitalización solo es necesaria aplicarla y requiere conocimientos fundamentales de la ingeniería para hacer un uso adecuado de la misma. Por ejemplo, una app en un dispositivo móvil únicamente mostrará en primer lugar lo que ha sido proporcionado por la planta. Usar esto - pero con precaución. Ejemplos en muchas plantas en todo el mundo en la industria de la caña de azúcar muestran cómo la «digitalización» - e, incluso, ni tan siquiera la automatización - han sido ejecutadas correctamente: Encontrará instalaciones de automatización en las que sus gerentes y el personal de proceso le mostrarán orgullosamente que los sistemas funcionan, que son totalmente operacionales durante más de 15 años y en los que se están instalando avanzados sistemas de monitorización. Mostrando la planta en la realidad tridimensional. Solo que todos los datos que muestran las pantallas no son válidos, porque la instrumentación está, o bien desconectada, no calibrada (peor aún) o no funciona. Por tanto, la totalidad de la inversión en la planta digital gemela en 3D es un completo desperdicio de dinero sin ningún beneficio para las operaciones de la misma o para los operadores, que han decidido volver atrás, a los viejos paneles.

Conclusión: Es todo sobre la base

Es imperativa la aproximación en dos etapas para crear condiciones óptimas para una estrategia de digitalización que funcione. Una vez dominada, su base está colocada y usted está listo para construir su digitalización. En una planta de azúcar, eventualmente esto conducirá a:

- procesos optimizados y, por tanto, mayor producción con un menor consumo de energía.
- menor intervención del operador, por tanto y simultáneamente, más eficiencia y más alta calidad
- Gestión de datos integrada y, por tanto, mejores decisiones sobre bases verificadas.

Siemens es uno de los líderes del mercado en automatización. Los especialistas en automatización de la empresa acompañan a los clientes, no sólo en la elección de la mejor base de automatización, sino también en su camino hacia el futuro digital, proporcionando productos fiables, complementando servicios y soluciones a medida.

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