

SCADA is DEAD

The Case for Rethinking Your Approach to Automation

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ABSTRACT

Three major trends are currently converging that is cause for a rethink in our approach to SCADA.

1. The SCADA/Automation workforce is aging, retiring and is not being developed at a rate to keep pace with demand.
2. SCADA/Automation Technology (Operational Technology) is aligning more and more with Information Technology.
3. Operating budgets continue to see downward pressure at a time when physical assets require more and more capital and expense dollars to maintain. (The Aging Infrastructure) SCADA/Automation must compete more than ever against tangible assets that are much easier to justify with the layman.

Some questions to stimulate this discussion:

- In today's resource constrained environment we are operating in, are we taking full advantage of the systems our rate payers have heavily invested?
- Are our IT and OT groups utilizing each other's strengths to deliver their mission?

To draw some parallels to our brethren in private industry, automation is implemented when there is a clear return on investment. Occasionally automation is used to address a quality or safety issue but even those are expressed in financial terms. Private industry drives tremendous value from the automation systems they have installed.

In the regulatory environment, we too often get locked into thinking that states:

"We need to collect and store data." After all, that is what SCADA is for, Supervisory Control And Data Acquisition, right?

“We can’t let SCADA make decisions for us or in place of our operators who are responsible for systems and plant operation.” However, private industry has been doing this for decades, driving every dollar of value out of their systems and providing safer, more reliable and more effective operations.

We must throw away the notion of SCADA and the mental blocks it conveys. These systems are Automation and must be exploited to drive every possible cost out of our operations. Identifying a Return on Investment should be a common goal. By maximizing our use of the capabilities of automation the following benefits will be obtained:

- We will drive costs out of our operation
- We will keep our automation staff excited about the technology they are working on. The next generation of worker wants to be challenged and have a social impact. Money is not the top priority unless the job is boring.
- We will deliver the best possible product to our rate payers, the most efficient and cost effective way possible.

Automation is the future. Are you going to be dragged into it or are you going to take advantage of it?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dean Ford’s entire 20+ year career has involved industrial automation. He is a Certified Automation Professional®, licensed Control Systems Engineer (CSE PE) and promotes manufacturing and automation to government and the public. He is an active Senior Member in the International Society of Automation (ISA), and many Standards Committees. He serves on the Government Relations and Workforce Development committee for the Automation Federation. As an advocate for the automation profession, Dean regularly travels to Washington, DC to educate policymakers and the public of the importance of the manufacturing and automation.

Dean is currently making our Water Supply and Water Treatment systems more robust and safe by serving the outstanding professionals of Westin Engineering as Executive Vice President.

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