

FEATURE TEMPERATURE, PRESSURE & PROCESS CONTROL

COMPILED BY SYLVESTER HASKINS

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Industry body proactive in confronting skills deficit

Sylvester Haskins | Features Reporter

The South African Institute of Measurement and Control (SAIMC) has initiated its own specialised skills development programme to confront the skills deficiency, reports SAIMC president **Paulo da Silva**.

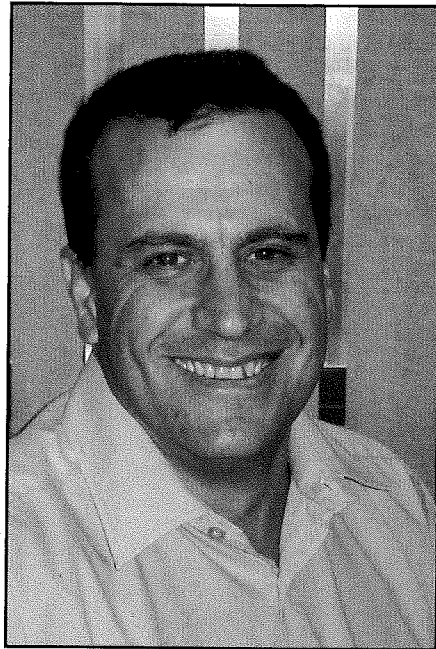
He says the skills deficiency, which has been termed a national crisis by some industry stakeholders, is the main challenge in the process control industry, and the SAIMC is in the process of creating a mentorship programme for students, in order to provide training and enable skills development.

Engineering technology training group IDC Technologies consulting engineer for instrumentation Dr **Rodney Jacobs** says that the lack of skilled people and poaching of skills have created a vicious circle in the industry.

"It is encouraging to note how many companies are sending their staff on training courses. Unfortunately, I think we may currently be in a vicious circle, as many of these skilled staff could get poached by other companies, for more lucrative salaries and benefits," he explains.

"There are South African companies sending a lot of people on training, but how long they manage to retain these skilled individuals is an entirely different matter, and only time will tell," comments Jacobs.

Process control and electrical heating solutions company Unitemp production manager **Uif Hitzeroth** concurs that there is a severe shortage of skills in the local industry, especially in the engineering sector and this, along with the electricity



PAULO DA SILVA

The SAIMC is in the process of creating synergies between students and industry stakeholders

shortage in South Africa, forms part of an immediate crisis affecting every aspect of business.

"These are clear concerns as critics see this as proof of South Africa falling into the downward spiral of becoming a third-world economy," comments Hitzeroth.

He says that the base of experienced engineers is being eroded but this, however, opens up an opportunity for Unitemp, since it operates largely in the service industry.

"We can make our specialised knowledge and skills available to the industry, which is battling with the skills shortage. However, as Unitemp is itself influenced by the skills shortage, the company must,

and does, strive to counteract this by recruiting young engineers and training them in-house. This requires an extensive amount of input and energy," states Hitzeroth.

Pressure and level sensors designer and manufacturer Vega Instruments South Africa MD **Alan Wynn** says the loss of skills in the industry, as well as the challenge of attracting new talent, counts among the foremost challenges in the process control industry.

"The skills shortages are affecting all sectors. We see training as key to the future, and we spend a lot of internal effort to bring competence through. Our motto is, 'If you think training is expensive, try ignorance,'" says Wynn.

The measurement and control industry is a developing industry and fewer qualified people have to make more critical decisions, because of the skills shortage, states Da Silva.

"This is dangerous; therefore, more automation is required to remove the human factor," he says.

Da Silva adds that the South African measurement and process control industry is in line with international best practice and industry standards, and there are a few manufacturers who export their equipment.

Jacobs says that South African products are just as good as, if not superior to, many products found internationally.

"In addition to this, I visit many different countries every year, and it is encouraging to see how many South Africans perform vital functions in some of the biggest companies around the world," he enthuses.

Jacobs says that process control will increasingly play a more important role in industry.

"Initially, there was a drive to replace labour, but, currently, the implementation of process control does focus on quality control and cost savings, possibly in that order," states Jacobs.

Hitzeroth says that South Africa has become known for its ability to compete at world standards in many sectors.

He says that South Africa has become a reference and model of best practice standards in the medical as well as mining and engineering sectors.

Hitzeroth says, however, that there is still much ignorance with regard to the place for measurement and process control systems in the local industry, as many companies do not realise the benefits of these systems.

"The weakening of the rand and dollar, compared with the euro, is also a current challenge for local industrial businesses," he adds.

Unitemp faces the challenge of keeping prices consistent and competitive in order to reduce the effects of the weakening rand, reports Unitemp marketing coordinator **Natalie Pryor**.

"Where possible, we have tried to keep our prices as consistent as possible, so as not to lose our customers," she says.

Electronic solutions and services provider GE Fanuc Intelligent Platforms MD **Daniel Coetzee** says that the company is managing to stay abreast of the needs and requirements of the industry, and that customers are definitely trying to close the information loop in their operations.

"They are trying to connect the plant floor with their business systems, and increase the benefits

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of real-time data to improve quality and reduce waste. GE Fanuc has responded by launching motion technology to make machines faster, more accurate and repeatable. We have introduced new operator interface units to enable operators with real-time data for plant floor decision-making," says Coetzee.

Da Silva says that the main activity of the SAIMC is to advance the arts and sciences of measurement and control technology, in Southern Africa.

"The aim is to contribute effectively, over the long-term, to the economic growth of the region by ensuring that education standards are aligned with industry requirements," says Da Silva.

The SAIMC seeks to add value to its members in the process control and electrical solutions industry, which is an objective of the industry for the current year.

"The long-term objective of the industry body is to be recognised as a valued institution with clout to change and influence the measurement and control industry", concludes Da Silva.

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New valves range provides accurate fluid control

Sylvester Haskins | Features Reporter

The new range of three-port QL valves, manufactured by industrial process control company Spirax Sarco provides a wide range of applications for the control of water, oils and other industrial fluids used in controlling energy and fluid flows for manufacturing and other processes, reports the company.

The electrically actuated control valve options cover from PN25 up to PN40 pressure ratings, with materials in spheroidal graphite iron or cast steel up to 250 °C.

Spirax Sarco reports that its valve body and electric actuator combinations provide reliable and competitive solutions to most fluid control problems.

The wide range of options

provides one source to meet most plant standards and the enclosure of electronic components minimises maintenance problems in dirty environments.

There is provision for optional switches and potentiometers for control and management information feedback.

A plug-in positioner, for easy conversion, reduces spares stocking costs and the long-life valve components simplify and reduce maintenance requirements, as do the constant force stem seals that provide added control, accuracy and reduced valve maintenance, reports the company.

The user benefits of the three-port valve include constant force stem seals for added control,

accuracy and reduced valve maintenance.

Other benefits of the control valve are its long-life valve components, which simplify and reduce maintenance requirements.

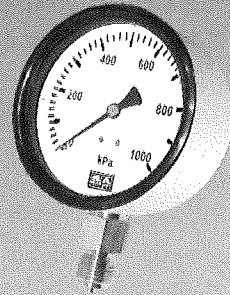
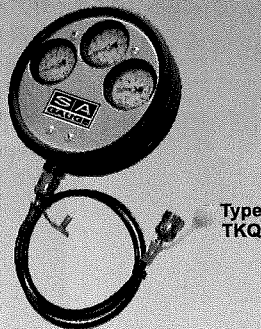
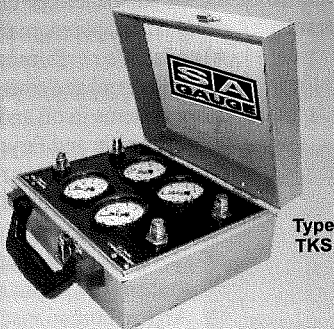
The plug-in positioner enables simplified conversion and reduced spares stocking costs, as well as provision for optional switches and potentiometers for control and management information feedback.

The enclosure of electronic components reduces maintenance problems in dirty environments, and the wide range of options provides one source to meet most plant standards, reports Spirax Sarco.

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PRESSURE PROBLEMS?

The S A Gauge TK series of trouble shooting test kits provide mobile, accurate, on the spot pressure measurement for the hydraulic service technician. All kits manufactured to customer specifications.



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- Storage space for loose hoses, fittings and adaptors
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