

Info - Brief

The End of the Beginning

Plant commissioning and project handover is possibly the shortest process in the asset life cycle of our assets. It is, however, a critical time and an important time. Never before this period and never again after throughout the long life span of an asset is there such a frenzy of activity and an accumulation of excited people with differing expectations and influences. What is this process about and how can we manage it to the best advantage of the ongoing plant operations. The Principal Consultant Ross Francis has been a Commissioning Manager for significant capital projects and from these experiences has pondered the intricacies of this phase. Interesting facets of commissioning include:

- It may be too late to have any significant positive impact on the future life of new assets
- There are tasks we can do incorrectly that have an ongoing adverse impact on reliability, integrity and life
- It is a complex process that requires careful management
- It is a joining phase in major activities often with unclear boundaries
- Many of the commissioning principles apply to ongoing minor projects, modifications and scheduled plant shutdowns
- The outcome from this phase must allow for differing expectations, influences and constraints that affect the plant that is finally accepted

Commissioning is the time when you first see the conceptual plant in its physical form and when you realise what you have got, what you haven't got and understand the gap between what you wanted and what you will live with. It is the moment of truth, a time of good news and bad news, but also a time when good management can still have an influence on the ongoing asset life cycle.

It is important to have maintenance and production people involved in a project from a very early design stage and this needs to be seen as a priority from an asset life cycle perspective. Although the vast majority of asset life cycle costs occur during the long (20+ years) operate and maintain phase the opportunity to influence this in terms of maintainability, reliability, operability, integrity and life is at critical times during the design phase. There is a further very small but important window of opportunity to further this cause during the phase of commissioning. Regardless of how many drawings we study, even three dimensional walk throughs, there is no substitute for seeing the new plant in real life and making final corrections within the project constraints.