

THE REAL COST OF POOR TECHNICAL DATA MANAGEMENT

Both during exploration and evaluation of a new project, and during mining and rehabilitation of a deposit, large amounts of money, often millions of dollars, are spent acquiring data; data ranging from exploration, reserves, planning and production data through to environmental control and rehabilitation data. This data is used to make decisions that can, in turn, involve millions, or in some cases billions, of dollars.

This technical “database” thus becomes the **primary link** between the deposit itself, and the decisions being made about that deposit, in an effort to provide a cashflow and to produce a profit.

The speed, effectiveness and integrity of those decisions will therefore be affected directly by the accessibility and accuracy of that data. The inability to access this data with confidence will lead to delays, errors and re-work that can affect this cashflow and profit in very real (and large) terms.

Why is it then that so often the data supporting these decisions is treated with almost total disregard with respect to its security, integrity, accessibility and concurrency; left to the elements in spreadsheet files, PC databases and ASCII files on the junior geologist’s or engineer’s desk!?

IMPROVING DATA MANAGEMENT

Centralisation of technical data storage with a view to improving security, integrity, accuracy, concurrency and above all accessibility, is the first and most important step. This central database then becomes a data “server”, passing data to the different application packages, and to the users directly, in the format required.

Other factors are however also vital and these include -

- An understanding of the real cost of poor data management, and a commitment to support improvement from the senior management level.
- Integration of the central database with application software and other user systems.
- Utilisation of personnel with real experience and qualifications in **both** the mining / exploration skills and current computing skills.
- The establishment of procedures and standards for data management, and the training of staff in these standards, and in the other software tools they need to use to effectively perform their duties.
- The research and use of current computing tools and practices.

Geological Data Design is a Brisbane based consulting firm that has been working with these problems for some 25 years. Focussing on the centralisation and rationalisation of technical data in the resources industries, GDD’s primary aim is to provide improved access to all data, by all users and systems, at the same time ensuring security, concurrency and integrity of the data.

GDD’s Principal, Mr. Tony Shellshear, believes that senior management in the mining and exploration industries is only just beginning to fully appreciate the enormous real cost that poor data management is having on their projects.

Inadequate security, integrity and accessibility, coupled with the use of old and inappropriate technologies causes evaluation and planning delays which outweigh, by orders of magnitude, the investment in their staffing, training and tools necessary to address the situation.

By fully appreciating firstly, the cost of acquiring the data initially, and secondly the lost or delayed revenue caused by errors and delays in projects, senior executives may start to realise that the problem requires the attention and support of the highest levels of management.

The ultimate aim should be the cost effective management and protection of the data that has cost a great deal to acquire, and to maximise the return on the investment that has been made in that data.