

Standing on Shoulders

By Douglas K. Christensen, APPA Fellow

As one of the “mature” members of APPA, I have had the opportunity to sit at the feet of remarkable leaders. Some have been leaders by example. Others have been able to preach sermons and touch hearts. Other have spent time talking about their vision for the association and the profession. Still others spend their entire life being in the background getting the job done.

Because of the good works that our colleagues have contributed to this project, we all stand a little higher, and I trust that the BOK experience will move us all into the future.

THE NEED TO LEARN

In my tenure as a facility professional I have had to be in places where the wisdom of the present solved problems created in the past. We met reality face-

share a concept that I learned standing on the top of some very strong shoulders. The need to learn this principle took place when an experienced heating plant chief operator of 35 years decided to retire. As a management team, we did everything we could to turn him upside down and take from him all the knowledge, understanding, and wisdom he had learned. As a management team we did a poor job.

What he knew and had shared with his employees was all that we had. All of the important learning of how to handle the heating/cooling plant and equipment during an array of emergencies over the 35 years was lost. We did learn some lessons, but not everything. We tried to duplicate that. We had him write down key learning. It did not work. We saw a lot of experience walk out the door. The impact we saw was the potential of having to relearn our mistakes. We needed to learn another way.

THE PRINCIPLE LEARNED

I learned that we needed to find ways to preserve what we have learned and experienced. The current process of

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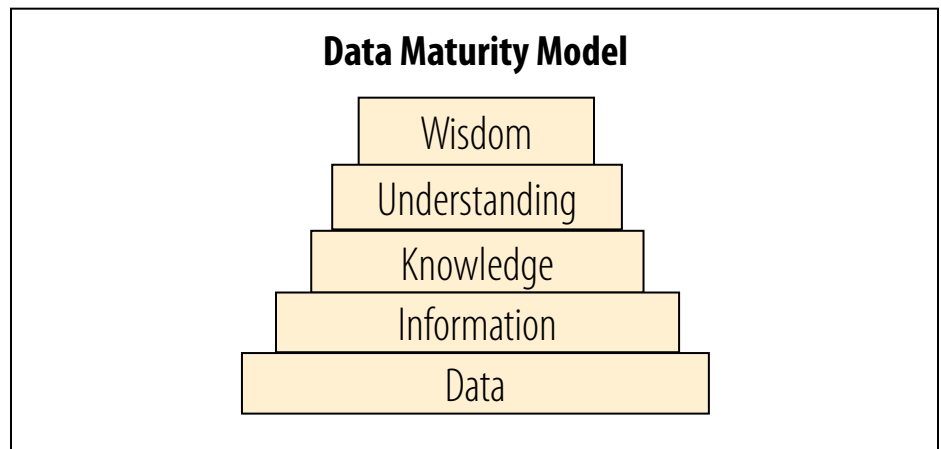
In every case, when you mention the profession, the association, or their contribution to the big picture, they have a story to tell. The stories always include a special moment, a caring person, or an event that allowed them to stand on the shoulders of those who offered helping hands, so that they could someday be in the position to return the favor. If you take time to look back at your journey, no matter how long or short it has been, you will see the helping hands or the encouraging lift from someone who helped with a difficult problem or taught you something that saves time and effort. I would like to say thanks to the many people who have helped me in all that I have attempted to do. The shoulders have been very broad and very strong.

I would also like to say to all of my colleagues and friends that the new APPA Body of Knowledge (BOK) is a way for us to stand on the shoulders of those people whom all of us admire.

to-face and the future won. This seems to happen more often than not as we find the need to deal with change.

A mature leader in our profession stated, “Change has no respect for time and situation, yet the result needs to reflect great wisdom.” When I teach at the Institute for Facilities Management or the Leadership Academy, I try to

Figure 1



capturing experience in people was not the way to go. Then I learned a key principle that would capture what we were learning and allow it to be available for future generations. It was a Learning Principle.

I was reading an article from a study completed by Carnegie Mellon on the subject of the impact the digital age is having on experience titled “The Data Maturity Model.” It concluded that because things are changing so fast with information technology that you cannot get enough experience to make correct decisions. Future decisions will be based on what we are learning from the data

we are gathering. The model is shown in Figure 1: The data maturity model focused on what the best maturity levels are to make decisions. Figure 2 is a model of how organizations need to gather data and share the results, but in the information age it is critical that we turn information into what it is telling us. What knowledge and understandings we can gain so we can make wise decisions. How do you do this?

Figure 3 is a graphic that explains the differences within the model and how you know what level you are at. To get from data gathered information you need to organize and label the data

elements. This informs you like a home utility bill does. The data is the monthly readings and the information is the graphic that show trends. Over time the information will be consistent enough so you will know and by applying that knowledge you will understand so well that you can make the right decision about utilities. This becomes a wise decision using good judgment because of the supporting data.

BEST PRACTICE

So what does this have to do with standing on shoulders? This regular column in *Facilities Manager* is titled Knowledge Builders. In Maggie Kinaman’s article titled “APPA BOK: The Big Reveal” (July/Aug 2009), she introduced a new tool for members to use. We will not need the personal experience of 35 years to cover an entire situation coming our way. Instead, we will have the experience of many at our fingertips 24/7.

As we fill this library with what has been learned from the members and industry, the experiences of so many will help us in our day-to-day decision-making. Over time it will become the premier source of data, information, and knowledge for our industry, and will help us be wiser in what we do and what we say. Today and in the future we are all going to make better decisions.

As this body of knowledge becomes a valuable reference for the education community, we will have a learning tool that can educate us on the good, the bad (or even the ugly) when dealing with our stewardships. We all need to become the builders of new shoulders, producing wise stewards who will be grounded in the ability to use knowledge and understanding in making their own decisions. ☺

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Figure 2

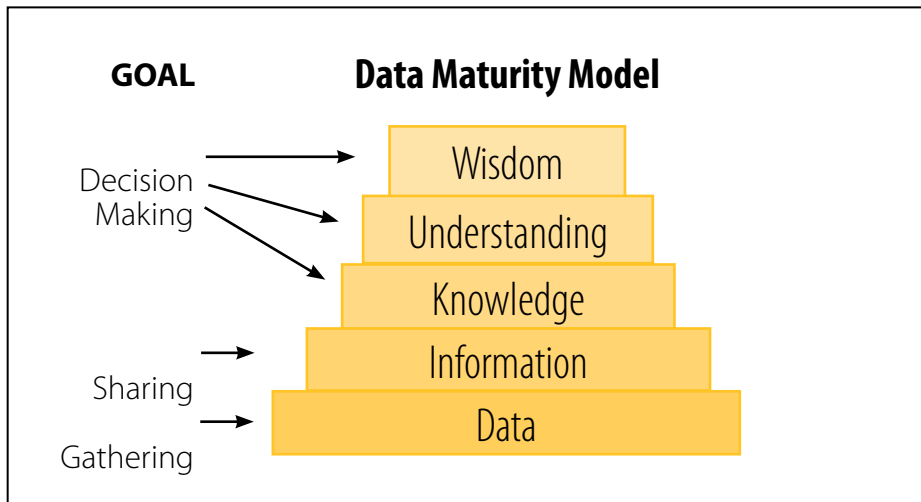


Figure 3

