

Application Note - Frequency Response Analysis

Power transformers are specified to withstand mechanical forces from both transportation and in-service events, such as faults and lightning. However, mechanical forces may exceed specified limits during severe incidents or when the insulation's mechanical strength has weakened due to aging. FRAX is a powerful tool when trying to detect these problems.

Method basics

A transformer consists of multiple capacitances, inductances and resistors, a very complex circuit that generates a unique fingerprint or signature when test signals are injected at discrete frequencies and responses are plotted as a curve. Capacitance is affected by the distance between conductors. Movements in the winding will consequently affect capacitances and change the shape of the curve.

The SFRA method is based on comparisons between measured curves where variations are detected. One SFRA test consists of multiple sweeps and reveals if the transformer's mechanical or electrical integrity has been jeopardized.

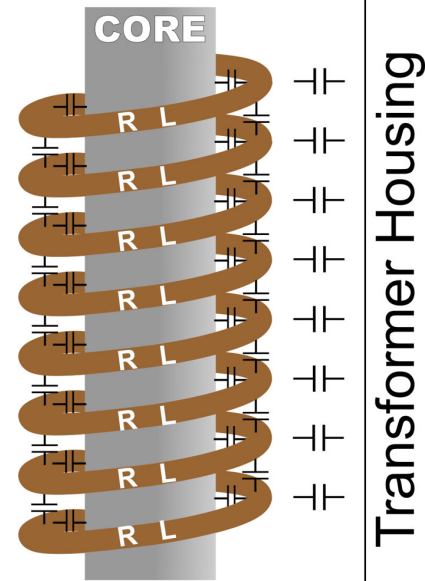
Practical application

In its standard application, a "finger print" reference curve for each winding is captured when the transformer is new or when it is in a known good condition. These curves can later be used as reference during maintenance tests or when there is reason to suspect a problem.

The most reliable method is the time based comparison where curves are compared over time on measurements from the same transformer. Another method utilizes type based comparisons between "sister transformers" with the same design. Lastly, a construction based comparison can under certain conditions be used when comparing measurements between windings in the same transformer.

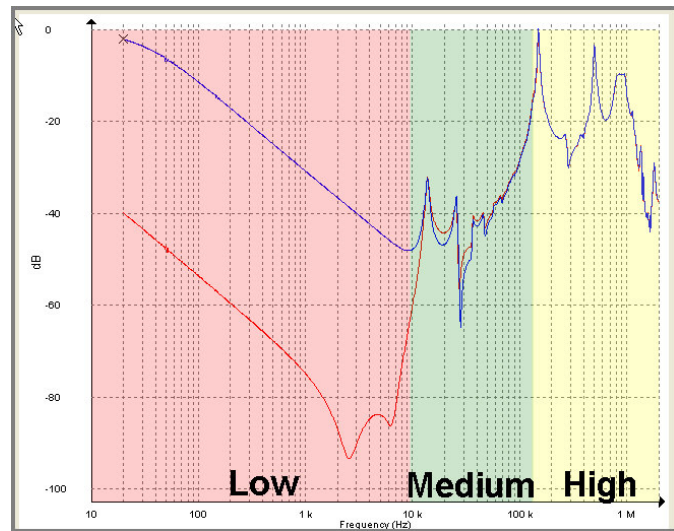
These comparative tests can be performed 1) before and after transportation, 2) after severe through faults 3) before and after overhaul and 4) as diagnostic test if you suspect potential problems. One SFRA test can detect winding problems that requires multiple tests with different kinds of test equipment or problems that cannot be detected with other techniques at all.

The SFRA test presents a quick and cost effective way to assess if damages have occurred or if the transformer can safely be energized again. If there is a problem, the test result provides valuable information that can be used as decision support when determining further action. A reference measurement on a mission critical transformer is therefore a valuable investment as it will make analysis easier and more reliable when an incident occurs.



Analysis guideline

As a general guideline, magnetization and other problems related to the core alter the shape of the curve in the lowest frequencies. Medium frequencies represent axial or radial movements in the windings and high frequencies indicate problems involving the cables from the windings, to bushings and tap changers. The comparisons are simplified using the built-in analysis tools that help identify differences between the curves.



Example

The figure above shows a single phase transformer after a service overhaul where, by mistake, the core ground never got connected (red), and after the core ground was properly connected (green). This potential problem clearly showed up at frequencies between 1 kHz and 10 kHz and a noticeable change is also visible in the 10 kHz - 200 kHz range.

