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Article

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How technology can help you and your people work better together and boost performance

The Covid-19 pandemic didn't only interfere with supply chains – it also messed up the labour supply. People have been off sick, have rebalanced their lives during lockdown, changed jobs or careers; there are many reasons. As with all supply and demand, when there is a shortage of labour, wages rise so, in addition to a shortage of skills, labour is becoming more expensive. As the need to reshore the supply chain has been recognised, the market is getting more and more competitive while labour is getting tighter, so we have to do more with less; it looks like a perfect storm. The oil that can be poured on those troubled waters is automation.

Automation: Not Just Robots and AI

When automation is first mentioned, a raft of fears come to the surface. Workers are worried they will lose their jobs, management is worried it will be expensive or too complicated – or both - but historically, automation has helped to generate more wealth and consequently create more jobs.

Does that mean robots, artificial intelligence and machines will soon be taking over the entire manufacturing floor?

Is automation a threat?

Businesses are becoming more and more convinced that automation helps to boost process efficiency, and are ready to be persuaded that higher accuracy is a benefit too – but it is far from a majority. Of those in APAC surveyed by SSON Analytics, 34 per cent noted an increase in process productivity, and 25 per cent thought it assisted in human productivity and workload management.

That is very low, but it is worth asking: what did those who have achieved success think was key? The answer is employee engagement, according to Willis Towers Watson which found that nine out of 10 successful deployments cited a 'positive employee experience' as key to engagement, productivity and staff retention.

Employees who are frightened of losing their jobs to machines will not engage to make any form of automation a success, rather the opposite.

Engagement – real engagement including sharing objectives and the process – is key.

It is true that getting a machine to perform a task, such as palletising and depalletising means, quite literally, that the person who had been in that job will need something else to do. With any luck the new job will be higher skilled (so the business will get more value from the employee), better paid and less boring, so the employee gets something out of it too.

That's at the basic level and a situation that most people will recognise as a good thing.

So let's talk about processes that can be automated to enable people to work better as individuals, teams and organisations.

Technology is a great enabler, but change is happening so fast that it can be hard to keep up.

As a technology consulting firm we can help you to identify where you can gain from automation and digitisation – but first, it is important to identify where work is needed to make it worthwhile. If you automate a poor process, all you do is arrive faster at the scene of the accident.

Let's talk about monitoring of production, which means real-time data collection and tracking of employees, equipment and jobs, leading to better performances on the production floor.

Let's also talk about automatic data capture from machines and other devices, the automation of quality control, about using something like Microsoft SharePoint effectively, for example.

Automation of the management process, such as report creation for accurate and timely decision-making, is where you can make real differences.

Our people can show you how to make the best of the technology you have and where it makes good business sense to invest further.

Security: a legitimate concern

In a data-rich world, information is more valuable than gold.

Cybercriminals are exploiting the fact that manufacturers cannot afford to be offline for any amount of time, after all even the most tech-averse business isn't going to go back to relying on carrier pigeons and floor runners. But if global giants like Oxo International, defence contractors Visser International, DuPont, Norsk Hydro, Renault Nissan and Mondelez can fall victim, what is the hope for smaller operators, middle stand businesses and SMEs? Better than you think.

For a start, the threat is likely to be clearer and more manageable. Yes, the ubiquity of Microsoft software and platforms means that they are a target for cybercriminals, but they also mean users have access to the most comprehensive anti-hacking software and intelligence available. A global network of users and consultants means that attacks are spotted quickly, and security alerts, patches and resolutions are developed and distributed faster than organisations on their own can manage.

Strength in numbers

There is an idea that, if it isn't under your own lock and key, it's vulnerable; but the question should be around security management and who is better at it.

Data and information are the crown jewels of your company; if you were looking to securely store your own jewellery or cash, would it be safer kept in your own home or held in a safe deposit vault?

Software companies like Microsoft and its accredited partners, like Waterstons, offer levels of security that are beyond the capability of even the most well-intentioned non-specialists. They also take responsibility beyond what can be achieved by self-managed operations.

As well as security, the Microsoft platforms have a huge range of applications – including a lot of plug-and-play solutions that do not require specialist qualifications to operate – and support from across the world.

Make it better

Effective management of production improves efficiency and output – but there are many competing demands on management time. You may have the fullest confidence in your production team and be prepared to let them get on with the job, but let's be honest, the likelihood is that a shopfloor left to its own devices will follow the line of least resistance, picking up the jobs that can be done most easily or quickly.

Everyone will be working pretty hard but if the plan is not being followed, problems will arise; delivery dates may not be met, stock will not be turned over as efficiently as it should be, work in progress will increase and machinery will not be used effectively.

Efficiency can be improved, and cycle times reduced, by connecting machines and digitalising the factory with automated shopfloor data collection, helping to reduce losses. More visible data helps to improve production organisation, minimise changeover and increase resource utilisation.

If you are doing anything from electronic equipment monitoring, to introducing automation, and anything in between, you're already on your way to digital transformation within your business. We can take you to the next level.

Join our Webinar on 26 May, 1-2pm - Everything you need to know about Manufacturing Automation

Join our webinar and learn all there is to know about Automation – From automating emails to AI, join us to see how you can do more, with less, starting today!

Join our webinar

Have a question or need advice?

Please complete the short contact form below to send a message to our team and one of our consultants will get back to you within 24 hours. Thanks.

Contact us