

Is it time for a manufacturing revolution?

Ben Gilbert, Associate Director with Holmes Noble, believes so.

In the years to come, a new wave of existing but not yet widely deployed technologies will transform global manufacturing facilities making them more reliable, efficient, flexible and integrated with their supply chains and customers. Those manufacturers that are forward thinking and proactive, agile, open and willing to train their people in these new technologies are the ones that will derive the most benefit from them. Incidentally, that benefit is a cost saving estimated at half a trillion US dollars globally. It is essential the UK is positioned favourably, which will require both cultural change and strong leadership to ensure it responds.

The first technology in question is virtualisation. This will allow rapid cloud prototyping and assessment of factory layout requirements in tandem. The obvious results being a significant reduction in lead time between a product being designed and the manufacturing processes being defined, ultimately negating 'start of production' issues once a product is industrialised.

Secondly, there will be an inevitable increase in collaboration between man and machine. A new but somewhat immature generation of robots, or in this case 'cobots' (collaborative robots) are being deployed in some advanced factories. This is enabling line workers to collaborate safely with machines, thanks to progressive vision technology. Naturally, these technologies are heavily focused on automation and cost savings, and hence there is a huge degree of concern that headcount reductions will be symptomatic of these perceived advances. In reality, this is enabling line workers to be retrained to 'pilot' while maneuvering away from repetitive and dangerous jobs.

Finally, communication between supply chains, manufacturers and their customers will manifest itself in real time driving responsive and bespoke manufactured products, resulting in supply chain optimisation, inventory reduction and waste elimination.

There is a growing consensus in the UK that the skills and technology are not where they need to be to compete on a global scale. This acknowledgment is manifesting itself in organisations such as the Manufacturing Technology Centre in Coventry, in government funding and in a wide acceptance in industry that we need to invest in skills. For me, however, there is a cultural barrier to break down at the same time. There is an entrenched reluctance in UK manufacturing to spend money on state of the art technology and a culture that promotes 'sweating assets' which in turn leads to a maintenance mindset where quick responses to unplanned breakdowns are commended yet are clearly short-sighted.

Here's hoping the future leaders of our UK manufacturing companies have the wherewithal to lock horns with those that hold the purse strings and those that are fearful of change, to deliver a



compelling story as to why we should invest and embrace the future opportunity. Only in doing so will independents, SMEs, right through to multi-nationals retain a seat at the top table in global manufacturing.

For more information on Holmes Noble's specialist recruitment solutions please contact ben.gilbert@holmesnoble.com, alternatively visit our website www.holmesnoble.com

