

Joe Pacitti: Engineering industry leaders must unite in a clear vision for the future

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There is widely accepted recognition that productivity in the UK & Scotland remains a challenge for economic growth, and there is considerable commentary suggesting significant focus on the introduction of innovative and disruptive technologies to the manufacturing sector is key to addressing this.

Industry 4.0 – the trend of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies – is widely presented as the pinnacle the manufacturing base must adopt to make the significant, necessary step change to a sustainable and competitive economy. Moreover, the need to invest in technology and infrastructure and development of skills and talent (including leadership) are the two pillars we need to address.

There are clearly examples of investment in the latest manufacturing approaches and technology taken up by industry, but the vast majority of understanding and use sits with the top Tier 1 engineering companies – the most important members of the supply chain.

With 80 per cent of the company base being small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the major issue continues to be one of SMEs and their ability to achieve the jumps to modern engineering, with affordability of the actual investment required in some of this disruptive technology (capital investment and training). It should also be clear of the interdependency of the Tier1 firms and their suppliers in an integrated supply chain, and so the ability to make the step change requires all parts to do this together. However, we at CeeD believe the challenge lies in how far we set the ambition and stretch for long term growth, and the creation of initiatives and funding to support this without addressing facts that often some more practical, and sensible interim steps need to be considered.

Creating the right networks of companies exchanging knowledge of best practice, highlighting what did and did not work and doing this across different industry sectors is an

investment we can make and encourage. The barriers for this can easily be overcome by making the time to come together and adopting a culture of peer-to-peer learning as a key tool for success.

Developing existing staff and recruiting the right talent where there are gaps is another key element to meeting this step towards productivity. This does require all who support this element of skills development and talent recruitment to be fully engaged and part of the network – often paying forward and sharing their expertise prior to the contractual aspect of their services kicking in.

This is much easier to deliver with a trusted community where the full elements of business are discussed and shared – this means all the elements of technology and skills (including management) challenges are not delivered in isolation. Lean, wellbeing, innovation, sales and marketing, supply chain, circular economy, energy, leadership, project management ...the list goes on – and no one initiative or organisation can be the delivery expert on all of this. The good news is that Ceed exists to at least try and aspire to providing some way to meeting this challenge.

Skills shortages are a significant barrier to achieving the change in the landscape needed for this rebalancing of the economy and improving productivity. Industries have increasingly voiced the need for graduates to be more job ready – make a bigger, faster impact towards the bottom line within a company. Indeed, the requirement for Higher Education and Further Education to address this with industry partners has manifested itself in a number of initiatives such as graduate and foundation apprenticeships.

A further fundamental is making sure the right talent is found and put in the right place, which can only be truly done when the investment in understanding the needs of industry is met by knowledgeable and fully committed recruitment companies.

To this end, Ceed is working to build a national engineering community in Scotland, united by an aspiration to improve operational efficiency, effectiveness and ultimately profit. With support from the Platinum Sponsor 920 Engineering & Manufacturing, we are hosting the inaugural Ceed Industry Awards 2019 awards at the Glasgow Hilton Hotel this Thursday, 28 February. We will celebrate the achievements of some of the best-established businesses in Scotland, along with the rising stars in the industry. The awards dinner will showcase not just the individual best practice examples across a diverse range of categories but demonstrate how interconnected and interdependent each of these award themes are in achieving sustainable, resilient and high-performing businesses. The sponsors, themselves exemplars in their field and their enthusiasm to recognise the shortlisted nominees, and the ultimate winners, are a testament to the true value and ethos of broad sector peer-to-peer knowledge sharing as a tool to building industry commitment to economic growth.

Read more at: <https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/engineering-industry-leaders-must-unite-clear-vision-future-writes-joe-pacitti-100880>

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