

Martin Welsh: Communicate to innovate - ideas come from staff and collaborators

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Technological innovation alone, however, is not enough to face the complex challenges of today's disruptive world. Such thinking ignores the real and exciting synergies that can be created between human potential and digital potential.

There is choice in the way that technologies are designed and implemented – good choices blend technological potential with human capacity for learning, creativity and innovation. Bad choices remove people from the equation, and you can end up with expensive failures.

Getting the best out of digital innovation is about identifying and designing the digital technologies that help achieve strategic goals alongside a programme of people-centred change to create a new organisational culture and making successful and sustainable change happen.

There are distinct and achievable positive outcomes in this approach which could well outweigh any risks involved. These include improved health and safety at work, greater reliability and consistency of production, improved efficiency and agility, and decentralised decision-making.

Bearing in mind that survival isn't inevitable, Scottish businesses must ask themselves some difficult questions.

Is your business facing up to the challenges of digitalisation, does it embrace sustainable change – or does it have its head buried in the sand?

Is your approach purely driven by technology or are you also embracing the human potential you already have at your disposal?

Is there a pervasive culture of innovation or is change incredibly difficult in your organisation? Is your approach purely driven by technology or are you working towards developing the human potential you already have in-house?

Building organisational and workforce readiness for digital innovation, however, requires action and planning, and we need to create an idea of urgency that there is a requirement to move forward or else there is no doubt you will be left behind. Many Scottish businesses, however, even when they recognise the issues, opportunities and challenges, don't know where to start or who to ask for help.

Collaboration over competition is a key factor in facilitating change. When companies work together, they create collaborative advantage by fast tracking successful innovation. They share ideas and experiences of 'what works' and solve problems as a team. This kind of collaboration is happening in Scotland right now between industry partners, clients, competitors, suppliers, academia and niche consultants.

At Booth Welsh our own journey into workplace innovation began when we realised that, despite the rapid growth in digital technologies we were lacking new fresh ideas and initiatives. Change was necessary to address a lack of engagement.

Engagement was measured through a staff survey, the findings of which formed the basis for the company's new strategic approach to development of its business and people. Key members of staff were given the opportunity to join government enterprise programmes funded by Scottish Enterprise such as Deeper Innovation and the Workplace Innovation Engagement Programme, delivered by Workplace Innovation Europe.

Collaboration of this type is vital to enhance businesses' ability to use digital technologies that transform productivity and enhance capacity for innovation, radically changing the ways in which we produce both goods and services and readying people and organisations for digital innovation.

As well as Scottish government run campaigns such as Open Innovation, the SMAS Industry 4.0 diagnostic, and the much anticipated NMIS (National Manufacturing Institute Scotland), business to business organisations such as Ceed provide a great source of like-minded businesses ripe for collaboration.

Booth Welsh is a member of Ceed, a growing community of businesses and academics, pooling talents, expertise, experience and resource in the pursuit of operational excellence with an aim to improve operational efficiency and effectiveness.

We have an open and progressive culture where everybody's voice is listened to, and we encouraged our staff body to help create a new business strategy that has had an impact on how the company delivers and positions itself for the future. With this, we have seen greatly increased employee engagement. We now look across the whole business for innovative ideas.

Once you allow people to bring their 'whole self to work', to empower them to take the initiative and give everyone a chance to use their voice, then we help uncork that genie of innovation.

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