



In manufacturing, adaptability is the only way forward

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By Prasad Akella • As the pandemic altered how everyone went about their daily lives, it became clear that not even organizations with nearly disaster proof business models would escape making changes to how they operate. By historically focusing primarily on maximizing efficiency, businesses did not have the robustness to withstand any black swan type events, like the COVID-19 outbreak. Vested in many interdependent and well-established systems, manufacturers were hit particularly hard by the pandemic, experiencing cascading disruptions that rippled throughout all business functions, resulting in widespread shutdowns.

In order to understand the full impact the pandemic had on manufacturers and how the industry should move forward in the face of so much uncertainty, Drishti surveyed 400+ senior leaders in the manufacturing space and published a report that details how manufacturing is changing. The results revealed a key theme: adaptability makes manufacturers more resilient to uncertainty.

Adapt or struggle

Of the respondents, 61% agreed that adaptability was more important to survival than efficiency. Welcome to the new normal. Whether it be from a geopolitical crisis, like the current war in Ukraine, or the ever-present and growing risks posed by climate change, or a viral contagion that sweeps across the globe shutting down everything for a few months, manufacturing leaders face a lot of challenges with varying levels of probability. With so much volatility, rigid processes built to perform only during times of stability will not hold up as well as adaptive systems and processes that are built for continuous change.

The question remains, how can companies become more adaptable? When it comes to assembly operations, an overwhelming majority, 73% of survey respondents, agreed that “The more manual you are, the more adaptable you are.” While people aren’t perfect, they add flexibility to lines



Achieving adaptability is not so simple

While respondents agreed that adaptability is the key to success and people are the key to adaptability, 62% of technology investments are focused on improving efficiency, not adaptability. In fact, 41% are focused on installing more automation because it is perceived to be less risky than people. This major industry misalignment stems from the fallacy that “people have reached peak efficiency.”

The key is to *help* people achieve greater levels of efficiency and quality with new technology.

By combining people with AI and other digital tools, adaptive lines are seeing increased rates of productivity with decreased rates of defects.

The new generation of AI and computer vision platforms will empower assembly teams, from the manager to the frontline worker, in making data-led decisions to better optimize lines. With technology guiding the plant floor, constructing teams and assigning workers to stations will more resemble Moneyball than the current process of first come first assigned.

By investing in people and equipping them with tools that can give real time insights, variability on lines can be significantly reduced. Rather than relying on the old clipboard and stopwatch technique, future-fit organizations rely on more accurate artificial intelligence, machine learning and vision systems to make people better problem solvers.

Don't get left behind

The world we are living in today will not be the world we are living in five or ten years from now. Companies that are ready to adapt to any circumstance are better positioned and equipped to deal with uncertainty. A company can't become adaptable overnight — it takes time and commitment to make the correct organizational decisions to do so — but it is never too late to get started on making the necessary changes. Changes give rise to new opportunities, and as it has been proven again and again over the last two years, companies cannot rely on what worked in the past to work in the future.

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