



"The march of technology - are we ready for it?"

The trends in the four key factors that generate the need or opportunity for automation in warehouse operations are inexorably leading businesses to step into the forest that is automation. There are many pathways in this forest – not all of them lead to a successful outcome! As with any critical journey it is vital to be well prepared for the journey and its outcome.

Warehouse preparation for technology

Moving to any degree of sophisticated mechanisation and/or automation may dramatically change the operational culture within an organization. In traditional operations a great deal can be devolved to human initiatives and interventions which leads inevitably to inconsistency. Inconsistency is like a death sentence to sophisticated mechanisation and/or automation, just as organisms need some key in-puts for them to thrive and function successfully, so mechanisation/automation needs key inputs to function reliably and efficiently. These changes need everybody throughout the organisation to understand what they will mean for them. In principle the move to sophisticated mechanisation and/or automation preferably is evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

Things will not be the same!

Critical factors

There are several critical factors that organizations need to assess in preparation for the journey to automation. A Rapid Automation Review needs to be carried out – RAR.

Firstly, define that there actually is a need for automation that will add value to the current operation and will conform to the supplier's supply chain.

Assess that the infrastructure and IT systems are suitable and SOP compatible. Be prepared in terms of human resources and back office and obviously make sure the client is completely on board with the decision as it is a big investment.

In more detail here are the suggested transition steps to consider:

Direct Warehouse

- I.T. Systems suitability –
 - o Integration with Material Flow Control systems.
- Infrastructure suitability –
 - o Systems Architecture
 - o Physical Architecture
- S.O.P Compatibility-
 - o AS IS related to the TO BE
 - o Business process defined and mapped.
- Human Resources
 - o Skills survey
 - o Training/upskilling needs to be identified.
 - o Change to staffing numbers.



Benefits of 'Ready for Automation Review' RAR

A 'Ready for Automation Review' will look closely at the existing operation to optimize infrastructure changes in terms of physical conditions, power supplies and information systems. It will identify any process gaps and define any training needs. Carrying out the RAR will help to define the most appropriate technology solutions and will shorten the program time to effective deployment. Consequently, this will reduce program costs and maximise the success potential of the automation project.

In addition, other benefits can be achieved that are incremental to the operation, for example reassessing the effectiveness of SOPs and rationalising interfaces and relationships between internal functional departments. It is also an opportunity to review future information systems capabilities relative to the business processes.



Summary

In essence an RAR is an assessment of the organisation's awareness of the changes that automation requires both within the company's systems and infrastructures.

It will highlight the risk associated with automation, actions needed to prepare and the direction of travel required.

Having a proper plan will avoid risks of delay and extra costs in the automation program.

If you would like more information please email us on caentomkins@bishamconsulting.com