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Life-work Technology in Practice: Manufacturing



Introduction

Do we “live to work” or “work to live”? In the wake of the Great Resignation, organizations that are people-focused, life-aware, adaptable, and resilient have led the race to become employers of choice for those looking for flexibility and support both at work and in their personal lives. By embracing the right solutions that reflect the connections between life and work, [Life-work Technology™](#) can give organizations confidence when it comes to attracting and retaining the talent they need to be successful. It provides a deeper understanding of the driving forces behind the work patterns, efficiencies, behaviors, and aspirations of your employees, helping them discover what inspires them to be the best versions of themselves and to do their best work. Life-work Tech solutions help your organization navigate the vastly different circumstances and needs of each of your employees, as well as guide you through all the changes brought on by the pandemic.

With many manufacturing organizations still struggling with manual, time-consuming processes and outdated systems, the constant need to monitor compliance rules and stay vigilant about safety risks, and limited flexibility, it's become clear throughout the pandemic that employees want more from their places of work. With a lack of available talent having a visible impact on the industry — from reduced performance and missed product launch dates to late deliveries and increases in unscheduled asset downtime — employers must do more to utilize smart technology and set their people up for success in these uncertain times.

To illustrate the stark differences that manufacturing organizations can experience based on whether or not they've embraced the Life-work Journey, let's take a look at two manufacturers in common scenarios. In both cases, imagine yourself in the shoes of a **shop floor supervisor** responsible for a large team of frontline employees. *Organization A* has not yet taken steps to embrace the Life-work Journey and is characterized by reactive, process-driven behaviors and a transactional people management system. *Organization B* is taking advantage of Life-work Technology and is much more adaptive as a result, with proactive, outcome-driven behaviors and the ability to support employee needs and optimize processes. We'll examine the general challenges of each organization and walk through a potentially stressful week in the life of the supervisor to compare their respective mastery of the Life-work Journey.

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Organization A

Challenges:

- Customer demand is constantly shifting, and with Excel-based labor scheduling, production staffing is a daily challenge
- Management has limited visibility into production labor resources
- Frontline employees have almost no schedule flexibility, so absenteeism and turnover are very common
- Compliance and safety along with achieving production goals are top priorities



Typical week:

- After several hours of coordination, you create the schedule for the upcoming week and post it to the break room bulletin board:
 - Shift assignments are based on the production schedule in the enterprise resource planning (ERP) system and your knowledge of employees' skills and certifications, as well as work rules (e.g., seniority requirements)
- As you're on your way out the door, an employee tells you that they had a personal commitment with their child's school pop up for the following Wednesday and won't be able to work their shift that day:
 - You ask the employee to find someone to cover their shift, which is a time-consuming, manual process — they have no choice but to ask their colleagues one by one to help them out
 - You assume the employee has found someone to cover their shift because you don't hear from them, and then you move on to other things and forget about the conversation
- On Wednesday morning, you're dealing with some material delay issues when you realize your main production line isn't running:
 - It's 15 minutes into the shift, and you walk around looking for the reason for the unexpected downtime
 - You see that no one is stationed at the first machine on the line, so the rest of the line is standing there idle
 - You check your schedule and realize the person who is supposed to be there is the same person you talked to last week about not being able to work that day — you conclude that they never found someone to take the shift and opted to just not show up
 - With this unplanned absence, you're already behind on production goals
- You pick up the phone and start calling around to employees who are not working who have the right qualifications to run that machine, asking if anyone is available to come in:
 - With no luck in getting any workers to fill in, you are forced to ask one of your present employees from another line to stay at work longer, which puts them into overtime, and now your labor budget is off target as well
- After the chaos of the week comes to an end, you must handle the required weekly attendance policy administration, which takes several hours as you calculate the various violations and points, write out the disciplinary actions, and then hand out notices to employees:
 - It's one of the least favorite parts of your job, and it takes valuable time away from more value-added work like coaching your team members

Organization B

Challenges:

- Rapidly shifting customer demand, which can be addressed with intelligent automation, making it easy to align staff with production schedules
- Employees demand more flexibility and control over their schedules and the tools to manage them through mobile technology
- Supervisors must react and adjust quickly by making data-driven decisions, but they now have real-time operational insights to guide them
- Even though turnover is below industry average, your organization still wants to ensure that it is engaging employees, supporting career development, and attracting top talent



Typical week:

- Frontline employees receive a mobile app reminder to update their upcoming shift availability and preferences
- You receive notification that the production schedule is complete, so you use the automated tool to create the labor schedule within minutes, automatically assigning qualified resources and accounting for union and other compliance requirements, all while accommodating employee shift preferences and availability
- Midway through the week, an employee gets notified their daughter is a finalist in the school spelling bee the next day, which they can't miss:
 - Using their mobile device, they initiate a shift swap
 - Only employees who have the necessary skills and qualifications will be able to review the available shift swap
 - An employee claims the shift within minutes of its posting, the schedule is automatically updated, and no production disruptions are caused
- At the week's end, you confirm that your team's attendance records have automatically been updated, thanks to the new automated attendance solution; what used to take hours is now done in minutes, and with this time savings, you now have 15-minute weekly check-ins with all your employees
- During a check-in, one of your top employees expresses a desire to discuss their career development and wants to earn a new certification:
 - After the meeting, you configure an employee progression process in your human capital management system that tracks training, on-the-job learning, and special projects required for the new certification
 - The solution alerts the worker and the manager whenever there's a step to be completed and automatically moves them to the next one when it's done
 - You are excited to help one of your most valued employees expand their skill set, which will help them and your organization
- During your scheduled catch-up time, you set up a survey to check in with your team and to get constructive feedback, allowing you to address any potential concerns:
 - Based on what you find out from the survey, you are able to correct a major concern shared by one employee in a timely fashion, ensuring them that their voice has been heard

Over the course of just one week, you can see the dramatic differences and positive impacts experienced by a manufacturer that embraces Life-work Technology. And this is just the beginning. This model offers the best possible chance for business leaders in manufacturing around the world to truly future-proof their organizations by becoming more resilient, adaptive, and life-aware than ever before.

Employers can proactively identify areas of capacity need and address potential problems before they ever arise. For one example, rather than casting a wide net out into the gig economy, manufacturing employers might create a branded internal gig marketplace for talented employees to leverage their skills and further their careers with projects outside their typical roles.

No matter how workplace norms continue to evolve or what unexpected disruptions await, Life-work Technology has your back for the long haul.

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