Small Changes, Big Results: Successfully Adopting Today's Construction Tech

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Change is hard. This is something that most people, no matter their field of expertise, can agree upon.

Giving up a common practice or a familiar way of working is not taken lightly or given up easily. But lately, it seems like resistance to change has been magnified even further in the construction industry as upgraded and new technology floods the market.

Because no matter how enticing the prospect of improved workflows and better outcomes is, the thought of replacing processes that have always been completed manually or through traditional point solutions is still tough — especially processes that many in the industry still consider to be working "just fine."

One growing school of thought gaining popularity today in change management is the bold approach of "burning the ships," referring to the all-in method of permanently turning teams onto new technology by cutting ties with their past solutions at an accelerated rate on the journey to full digitalization.

While the industry is recognizing that "just fine" isn't the most productive or beneficial mindset, and many are at least contemplating the bolder approach, it's important to realize that there is more to burning the ships successfully than may first meet the eye.

As we welcome technology that will enhance and expand our productivity, there are many shorter phases or "baby steps" needed to truly reach the point of a full (and lasting) digital transition.

It Always Starts With People First

It's often said that "people are a company's greatest asset," and the construction industry is no exception. With that in mind, it is beneficial to get as much buy-in and support as you can before you begin implementing new technology. Discussions will need to be had on how to improve your current processes, so why not begin by involving those who aren't as traditionally comfortable with new technology upfront? Get their feedback and leverage their knowledge first, all to make the roll-out as seamless — and the changes as lasting — as possible.

How to start? One of the best ways of gaining buy-in from employees is by helping them to understand not only why these changes are being made, but by answering the age-old question of "what's in it for me?" What are the gains to be had? How will they each, as people, be positively impacted?

Whether it's increased productivity, decreased manual effort, or removal of duplicate steps, all are a part of streamlining a project and simplifying the work for their benefit as well as the company's. An employee who understands clearly what they will gain may be more willing to use new software. Seeing that they will have fewer point solutions to juggle, less manual data entry to deal with and therefore more time to focus on the important matters of the project at hand can make the difference between adoption success and failure.

Following this buy-in phase, small but steady incremental changes are then recommended within a full reboot of current processes, not only for the sake of your people but also for the benefit of the entire company.

At the same time, proper training and support will help to ease the transition as new technology is introduced. Remember, at the end of the day, it's people who will be the ones using the technology and they need to understand how to use it properly to maximize the benefits as well as feel that all-important sense of ownership for a positive outcome.

Understanding Your Biggest Pain Points

Identifying your typical work processes is a critical step to streamlining any project. It is these processes that span the project life cycle, from design to document control, and from field execution to project turnover.

But without defining what these are, every project will end up looking different, and productivity will decrease as new hires or new employees step out onto a job.

If, however, the same processes are mirrored in the onboarding process, your tech adoption will be much smoother and sharing of project resources streamlined.

While the project information may be different, the gathering of the information is the same. Again, it's important to gain early participation during the identification of these processes because the employees are ultimately the ones who will be in control on a day-to-day basis, and they are the ones who will need to complete tasks to gather project information.

Prioritizing Quick Wins to Build Confidence

Once processes are in place, technology can begin to be implemented across projects by beginning with the identified primary need. But you need to know your priorities. For example, if the document management on projects is lacking and finding information is troublesome, rolling out a new document control system would be a great place to start.

Or it could be project teams getting irregular or insufficient data from field personnel. In that case a field tracking tool may come first. These gradual changes will still bring improvement to projects, and as they compound over time the quick wins will turn into long-term wins with far-reaching effects.

If there is hesitation from your team to bring the new technology to all projects at once, this method of implementing new software on a single process first can often smooth out any potential hiccups as it quickly builds team confidence to eventually make a permanent switch across all processes and systems.

Once the system has been established on a single process, best practices and lessons learned can be used much more quickly as new projects start up, helping you to burn those ships of your old tech in a no less effective, yet much less jarring way.

Today, implementing your best and most lasting digitalization transformation in small phases yet at a more rapid rate will ultimately streamline the tracking of a project's entire life cycle, providing more accurate data and outcomes from pre-design right through to commissioning, handover, and beyond.

As small improvements are being made, it may feel like you're only crawling in the beginning, not even taking those first baby steps. But remember, there is a larger goal in mind. These carefully plotted steps are a necessary part of that goal, providing the intentional, methodical creation of processes for all teams to follow as your technology prowess grows and evolves over time. For after all, that's how real — and lasting — change happens. 🖊

About the Author

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