



# Automation Going Forward

*The automation industry in India has come of age and can breathe easy knowing that most of the global automation development centers are placed in their backyard. The availability and feasibility of employing these solutions is a comforting thought. But, the question facing the manufacturing companies is far from answered by the mere presence of the global players.*

*Automation Tech 2009 held in Mumbai discussed many of the issues at hand and how they could be tackled. Some of the leading innovators and veterans of automation industry were present to be a part of this keynote discussion.*

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Traditionally, the Indian manufacturing industry had taken to automation quite hesitatingly, delving over costs and returns to an effective implementation. The easy availability of labor in India was a factor that hampered the entry of automation. The initial focus though had been only on decreasing the cost and increasing the productivity. But, with time the focus has shifted to improvement in quality, safety of the workers, as well as environment friendliness. Even though, the manufacturing industry as a whole has been embracing automation, there are other elements that govern its quick acceptability. As Mr. Vinayak Deshpande, President & COO, Hindustan Construction Ltd. mentioned reporting for the triple bottom line of financial, social, and environmental responsibility is going to be the order of the day.

One of the grievances that an end customer of automation faces is the evolving new systems at a pace much faster than they can keep up with. The typical life cycle of an automation system is outdated before the customer is able to reap benefits of the system and exploit it to the fullest. A new product is always available and sales engineers are ever pounding with analysis of how the latest system will imbibe more out of the process. Mr Shyam Bang, Executive Director at Jubilant Organosys Ltd., pointed out that most companies concentrate on their core businesses and are updated about the advancements in the same. However, they fail to track advancements in automation which leads to a disconnect. The manufacturers are in agreement.

Another problem at hand is the absence of quality process and control engineers who understand the actual process and take a call. An anonymous opinion is that an automation supplier does not revert back when it comes to



servicing legacy systems and sometimes even the existing not-so-old systems. The big manufacturing companies such as Reliance have been able to implement automation as a more holistic approach and reap the benefits. Their improvisation and re-use of the resources has allowed them to get returns for investing in the right kind of talent.

Tech-automation industry accepts some of the charges leveled against them, but the pace of technology evolution is something much beyond their scope and they are falling in line with global standards. However, they refute the charge of new technology up sale despite the inability to service the existing one. Their concern is the divide between the purchase of a system and incomplete implementation of the same. Especially, since there is a disconnect between different units of manufacturing which contributes to an overall loss. A lot of small and medium level manufacturing companies, miss the point that automation can largely upgrade the quality and maintain standards. The reasons can be many, but it can be largely attributed to the hesitation of manufacturing companies to recruit and retain expert resources for their processes. The overall opinion though is the dearth of awareness about what the requirement is and whether the available system can tackle the issue at hand.

The issues can be resolved though with small measures from both sides. To start with - the customer and the suppliers can come to long term contracts that would bind them to a mutually beneficial relationship. The supplier would be accountable for providing spares and services while the customer would be tied in for new updates and purchases. This would increase the stakes for both sides and hopefully would bring in stability. Mr. Sunil Khanna, President - AIA-India & Managing Director, Emerson Process Management(I) Pvt. Ltd. opined that “...companies that cater to the unique demands of users and empower them with low cost and value products, will gain a sustainable advantage as the Indian market growth climbs...”. If this can be implemented, it would help the supplier and the customer to work together as a team from very early stage to develop or customize the system to suit the requirements and obtain maximum from the system. While any single side cannot be held responsible for an absence of talent, this concern should be jointly addressed by the industry and initiatives taken to enhance the expertise of the existing workforce as well as attract new talent. The level of awareness about automation and how it can bring about growth for small and medium scale industry is not satisfactory. AIA can play a major role in bringing about this change and take the onus for moving it forward in the right direction.