

Skills Gap

Rethinking the U.S. Skills Gap in Manufacturing: Challenge or Opportunity?

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What You Need to Know

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Valuable, skilled and experienced talent is leaving the manufacturing workforce faster than it is coming in. But before those of us in the industry sound the alarm, we must consider this: In addition to the aggressive networking and partnership efforts we typically employ to identify and attract a skilled workforce, the skills gap challenge requires that we begin to think differently about the assets we have at our disposal. These assets are our existing and highly talented workforce, a vast and engaged community of like-minded manufacturing industry professionals, and the recent boom in manufacturing technology. With collaboration and ingenuity, these may be the most important keys to solving the skills gap and, more specifically, the diminished productivity, adaptability and competitiveness associated with it.

The “New Normal”

In many ways, the U.S... is undergoing a renaissance in manufacturing. Cloud-based technologies, advanced equipment and automation, additive technologies and others are transforming the way the manufacturing industry operates and creating opportunities for greater productivity and more efficient operations. They are challenging the industry to rethink the way it does business.

One major change we can make is to leverage new technologies and specialized training initiatives with existing employees specifically aimed at driving greater efficiencies on the shop floor. This is one area where our company, MSC Industrial Supply Co., has invested significantly.

Instead of assuming that when a worker retires, the only option is to replace him or her with someone else with manufacturing experience, we must consider that availing existing employees to the new technologies available, creating operational efficiencies and offering continuing education can achieve the same goal even more effectively. Someone else on the shop floor could increase their own productivity – and effectively bridge the perceived gap left by the departed employee.

Event-driven Education

Many manufacturers have found success in embracing industry-wide educational opportunities that are helping many manufacturers stay competitive. One great example is Manufacturing Day. In 2015, more

than 2,600 events were held worldwide to mark the celebration of Manufacturing Day, an initiative created to help inspire the public to pursue opportunities in manufacturing, debunk common misconceptions about the industry and educate individuals on the new and exciting things happening at the cutting edge of our industry. Each year, industrial and manufacturing facilities open their doors to students, families and communities to learn about and celebrate modern manufacturing.

As an example, MSC partnered with Seco Tools, a leading provider of metal-cutting solutions and the well-known Joe Gibbs Racing to host hundreds of students at in-person training workshops to highlight unique career options in manufacturing. These types of events offer a way to garner interest and educate the public about the great progress taking place and the bright future of our industry.

Seeking Strategic Suppliers

Another common refrain among manufacturers is that they have trouble keeping up with the pace of change in the industry. They need greater support and more reliable information to help them adapt to the new landscape, adopt the new technologies that come with it and stay competitive, which can be even more challenging without employees who possess the right skill sets.

The truth is that manufacturers must be proactive about equipping their workforce with the right support and tools to operate in this fast-paced environment. One way to get access to this expertise without additional investment is through strategic supplier partnerships with others who possess technical and industry expertise to help manufacturers increase the skills, knowledge and productivity of their current workforce and effectively transform their operations.

MSC has achieved this by developing a unique recipe for bringing highly sought-after technical skills to the plant floor. Through a customized program developed in partnership with Tooling University, along with its own rigorous, proprietary technical curriculum, MSC employs a multi-pronged approach to bringing solutions to manufacturers that enable them to scale and grow their business. This intensive skill and knowledge development program focuses on bringing the concept of total cost of ownership to the plant floor. MSC associates are simply measured and held accountable for bringing and developing innovative solutions that will enable their manufacturing customers to overcome their mission-critical challenges.

MSC also serves as a strategic partner to our customers. Our business philosophy is built around the importance of creating strong relationships with customers. We help customers by understanding their business and delivering knowledge vital to their ability to improve it. This knowledge drives productivity improvements, cost efficiencies and agility by elevating the awareness of new technologies and processes to their current workforce. To date, MSC's extensive network of expert field technicians have delivered more than 10,000 custom application-specific solutions.

We have helped our customers educate their employees on new technological innovations and critical job skills. We help them optimize their operations by eliminating redundancies on the shop floor and creating greater cost savings, which then translate to opportunities for the company to reinvest back into their bottom line. So when one employee retires, another employee who already has been educated on new, innovative processes can potentially take on the retiree's job or portions of it, while still fulfilling his or her original duties. By educating internally and availing them to new technology, employees are better informed and equipped to leverage this technology to benefit the business. As a result, our customers' operations are becoming more effective, efficient and seamless every day.

Our Collective Outlook

The U.S. skills gap presents an opportunity for manufacturers to explore new and interesting ways to solve this ongoing challenge. This is an opportunity to figure out how we can all work smarter; how we

can harness the power of partnerships, knowledge, information and new technology. This will help lessen the pressure of closing the skill gap solely through traditional approaches, such as hiring new employees, by employing a healthy combination of technology, training and skill development.

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Key Takeaways

- The skills gap challenge requires that we begin to think differently about the assets we have at our disposal.
- Cloud-based technologies, advanced equipment and automation, additive technologies and others are transforming the way the manufacturing industry operates and creating opportunities for greater productivity and more efficient operations.
- Through a customized program developed in partnership with Tooling University, along with its own rigorous, proprietary technical curriculum, MSC employs a multi-pronged approach to bring solutions to manufacturers that enable them to scale and grow their business.
- The U.S. skills gap presents an opportunity for manufacturers to explore new and interesting ways to solve this ongoing challenge.