DOODLE INSTEAD OF DATA SILO

Four approaches for smart mobile solutions in production

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Be honest – do you think the idea of "paperless production" is absurd? Obviously "tangible" analog processes provide the certainty of routine. Fewer misunderstandings occur when settings and changes are noted down on paper, taken to the machine and then entered. Printing out the shift plan in an Excel chart twice a day means that all employees have the information available at a glance, right? Not by a long chalk, because anyone who clings to this or similar processes and ignores those little "digital helpers" is neglecting considerable improvement potential.

Paper and ink as the standard form of information may be a classic problem in manufacturing, but it is by far not the most pressing. Dependency on outdated technologies creates a hidden drain of unnecessary costs, as it tends to hinder the efficient flow of information and deployment of staff rather than advance them. However, the situation is now changing dramatically with mobile applications for smartphones, tablets and laptops since, firstly, most employees now already use a smartphone privately with corresponding apps and are therefore familiar with the logic and with how to use them. And secondly, developing mobile software programs for existing devices is now much cheaper than producing new devices and equipment to achieve the same goals.

There are of course other good reasons for turning mobile applications into a natural tool in the work processes of a manufacturing company. Besides improved productivity and increased sales, they allow closer relationships to be established in customer, partner and supplier

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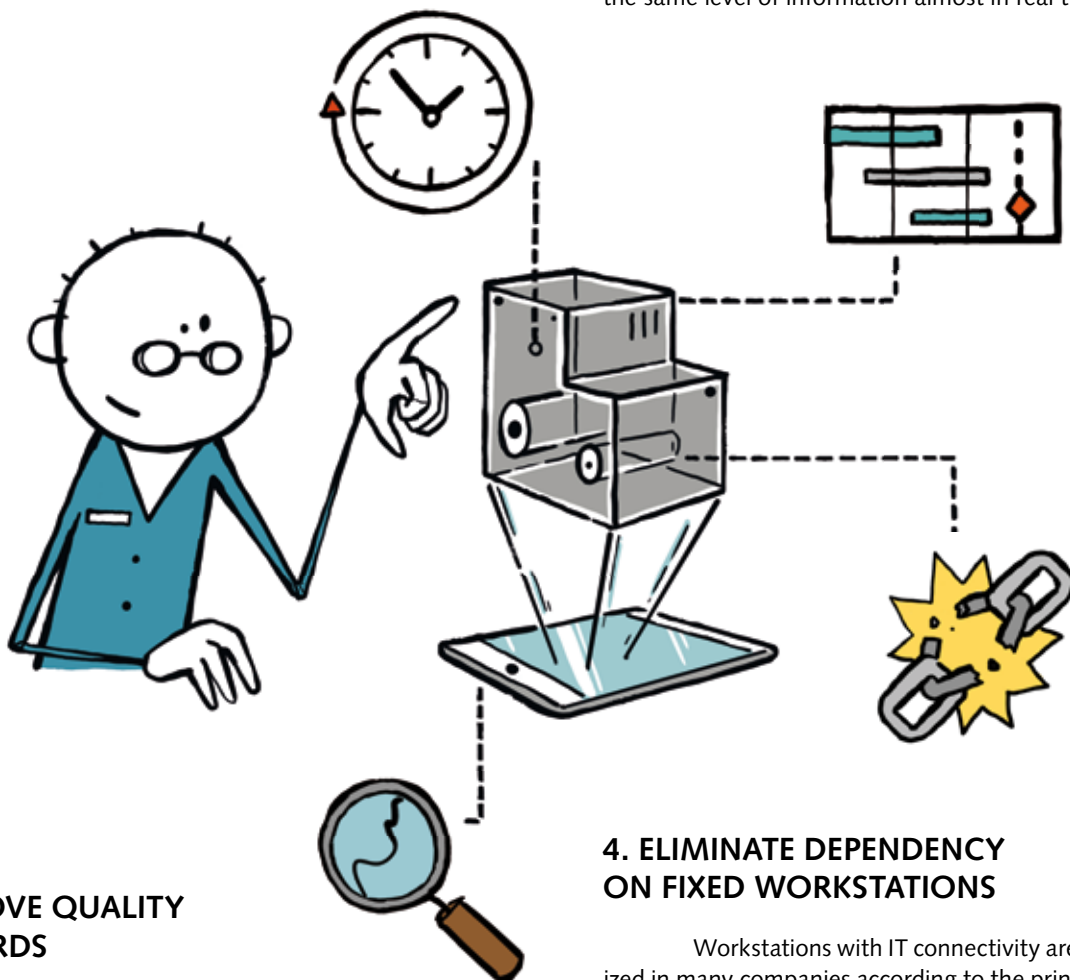
networks. Currently available apps are already lowering production costs and simplifying personnel planning significantly. Companies wishing to take advantage of these and other benefits should develop an "app strategy", including the following elements when shaping it:

1. PROMOTE TRANSPARENT SCHEDULING

Scheduling apps like Doodle can be installed on any popular smartphone in a matter of seconds and customized for planning processes such as shift plans or regular team meetings. Besides ease of use, the key benefit is the direct dissemination of information. For example, if staff call in sick using the application, the person responsible for planning can immediately send out a request for a stand-in to the employees who, according to the system, are available. The app can also be customized. For example, a chat function can be added that can then be used to arrange car sharing among the team. A process easily taking an hour by telephone can be reduced in this way to a few minutes.

2. GENERATE CLEAR INFORMATION

Mobile applications provide ready-to-use, understandable input masks for data that companies can adapt for their own requirements without any major additional programming effort. The Evernote app allows teams, for example, to develop key indicators, notes and drafts in a shared format. Unlike with common software programs, there is no need to send, store and forward different versions, and the application is not tied to a workplace. When a change is made to a process in several locations, access is available to common documents and the same level of information almost in real time.

3. IMPROVE QUALITY STANDARDS

Quality controls are generally required to be very small, widely distributed checkpoints in the value chain. Using exact digital "stamps with GPS and time information, mobile devices and apps allows for far more flexible and precise checks on goods, equipment safety or even official regulations. The Android app "Oil & Gas Safety Management", for example, not only enables exact quality assurance and inspections, it also makes it possible to manage emergency precautions and planning.

4. ELIMINATE DEPENDENCY ON FIXED WORKSTATIONS

Workstations with IT connectivity are still organized in many companies according to the principle of "information silos". Specialist and operational departments primarily collect and share their own data within the boundaries of their own departments. Mobile applications will accelerate the breakup of these boundaries. Using apps like Fluke Connect, inspectors can forward pictures of machinery, goods or plant they have examined to teams and link them to a job order for the legal department or a maintenance agreement with just a few clicks.