

Growth of the Manufacturing Sector

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With the availability of technologies like IoT and AI, the Manufacturing sector stands to gain a lot in terms of efficient operations and mining of data for actionable insights.

THE WAY WE WORK AT UFLEX IS, WE LOOK AT WHAT TECHNOLOGY IS AVAILABLE AND THEN SEE IF THERE IS A BUSINESS USE CASE. WHAT IS THE BUSINESS VALUE THAT THIS PARTICULAR TECHNOLOGY OPTION IS ACTUALLY GOING TO GENERATE. IF THERE IS A BUSINESS VALUE, WE GO FOR IT. IF WE DON'T HAVE A BUSINESS VALUE, WE EVALUATE AND KEEP IT FOR LATER. ”

Mudit Agarwal – VP & Head Of Information Technology, Uflex

Given the scale of operations that Uflex has over four continents, how is it that you deploy technology to bring in efficiencies when the environment across these different operations may be very different? When we are talking about geographical spread, four continents, different time zones, what we have done as an organization, is that we have standardized the way we use IT. The core business applications that we use, is common across the time zones and geographies. In terms of even the infrastructure, the connectivity options, something which is not visible to

the end user, but of course what is in the background, has been standardized. The way people access applications, the way they get onto their e-mail, etc. all of that is standardized. So, what we have done is that with the help of this standardization, we have been able to optimize our resources. We have been able to bring back all these support services as far as IT is concerned, back to India. It is all supported and run from India.

Now coming to the business operations, these core applications that we have, all business processes are mapped onto these. Every single transaction that happens as far as business is concerned, be it purchase, sales, or in terms of manufacturing, it is all done through IT systems. The optimization, be it in terms of the logistics, how you plan your production schedules, what is to be produced when, what is to be dispatched when depending on the customer preferences, all this gets optimized or is planned in the IT applications. And which brings enormous benefits to the business because we are then able to optimize and economize on the various costs that are there for running the business. At the same time, it has helped us be in better contact with the customers. We have actually deployed a particular portal wherein customers across geographies, are able to check in terms of the status of the order, what has been there transaction history, etc. all of this is available to the customers. This gives them a phenomenal belongingness with us. Being the manufacturing industry that we are into, we are more B2B, than B2C. So, this is how we create our relationship with our customers and that's has helped the business.

Can you give us an example of the business process which you have most recently automated or revolutionized using technology?

The business process that we have been working on and the processes that we have been trying to automate is – how do we integrate with our customers. The idea is to look at customer purchase order, which is the order that we get from the customer's side and how do we integrate that into our application. So until now what is being done is that you get the purchase orders and people are punching the system manually. And there could be errors etc as well. Having said that, with the availability of technology like the RPA, you can automate this process. So irrespective of whether you get this document in terms of a soft copy or a PDF or is it coming in an e-mail or maybe on paper, you just scan that document. So, it is that simple from a business efficiency perspective.

Since your products are customized to your clients needs. Can you tell us what is the level of automation that you have across shopfloors and what is the human involvement there?

The automation that we have done at the shop floor level varies from business to business. There are businesses where we have actually integrated the machine with the IT application. This means that the

production that happens on the machines automatically goes into the system without any manual intervention. So that is the kind of integration that we have been able to achieve in some of the businesses. So a lot of these kind of integrations have happened from a shopfloor perspective. So it gives you a lot of you know ease when you bring a production process or the shopfloor processing because the person doesn't have to necessarily go into the system to make an entry into the system. So all that kind of you know manual effort is reduced to a large extent.

What kind of technologies have you deployed here? Is it an IoT based technology?

This particular integration that we are talking about, is sensors. This is not exactly IoT. These sensors generate Data which is again integrated into the applications which straightaway goes into the database. As far as [IoT](#) is concerned, being a manufacturing organization Industrial IoT actually makes a lot of sense for us. And we are working on certain projects as far as Industrial IoT is concerned, which is to improve some of the capability of our machines as well which we send to the customers.

What are the unique challenges faced by companies like yours when it comes to adopting new technology? Are people adopting technology because it is fashionable or are they using technologies because it brings value to their business?

The way I look at it is that here's a Technology and I should evaluate it and see its potential. The way we work at Uflex is, we look at what technology is available and then see if there is a business use case. What is the business value that this particular technology option is actually going to generate. If there is a business value, we go for it. If we don't have a business value, we evaluate and keep it for later.

Uflex has in-premise storage devices. When the industry is moving towards storage on cloud because of the efficiencies and the lower costs involved, why is Uflex sticking to its in-house servers?

The way we look at it is that it is a journey. We are on premise, that does not mean to say that we don't have cloud options, we have good [Cloud](#) options. But having said that I'm not sure whether we'll be moving that core application or the business critical application to cloud immediately. The reason being that all is said and done when you are moving to the cloud, you are not just moving to the cloud. There are different configurations of Cloud. You could be hosting or getting your server or you could actually be working on a shared model. Given the models that are available, if you want to say can I communicate my server there, yes, there's a possibility. But that's again just a difference of you know whether you're placing it in your real estate or someone else's real estate. So I think, at Cloud, we are looking at it more from the perspective of development or test environment and not from a production environment

at this point in time. Because right now what we feel is our dependency on Cloud and those external partners somehow we are not very comfortable with at this stage.

How are technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain or virtual reality changing the landscape of the industry and do you see a good use case for your company, Uflex?

There are enough use cases and given the kind expenses and complexities that we have, one way or other we will find a use case. There's no denying the fact that we have use cases. The point is when we look at these technologies, one thing is to be excited about it, explore and experiment with them. So that's where the experimentation part comes in. The question of are we able to come to a situation where we can deploy it in the production environment is another issue altogether. Yes, potential is there. I'll tell you why I'm saying the potential is there because we are a process manufacturing organization. When you come to a process manufacturing you generate data every second, every mini-second of the process and that data can then of course be mined and I am sure there could be a lot of insights in that data, which is where AI, Deep Learning and other such technologies come in. [Blockchain](#) typically, so far has evolved from the financial services industry. But then again as the technology if you look at it and its supply chain solutions which I think you'll be exploring in times to come. So use cases are there and I am sure we will be able to experiment and actually deploy some of these technologies. So that's something we are looking at as an option.