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Workplace Technology: Assessing the Threats, Meeting the Challenges

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Remember the huge leaps forward in ease of use that resulted from using a typewriter, then a word processor, then a computer? Even if you don't or can't remember, imagine carting around several devices (video camera, camera and laptop) instead of one cherished, incredibly efficient smartphone.

[Louis Lessig of Brown & Connery](#) admitted to treasuring his sleek smartphone during an XpertHR webinar on "[Your Workplace and Technology: SWOT Style.](#)" But he encouraged participants to understand the evolving workplace challenges posed by these technologies, addressing both internal and external concerns, while still appreciating improvements.

Engaging in a SWOT analysis – that is, assessing internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats – enables an organization to make informed decisions regarding the strategic use of technology in the workplace.

'What Do We Need to Achieve?'

Decisions regarding which type of technology to introduce into the workplace need to be guided by business goals. Lessig advises that because technology is changing faster than any organization can adequately track, it is most important to ask "What do we need to achieve?" when evaluating the implementation of a new gadget or system.

Investments in technology without a clear vision of how the investment is going to help complete tasks, meet objectives or exceed goals can turn the entire exercise into one of simply wasting money.

Lessig emphasized that all stakeholders should be included in this assessment, including any employees who will be affected by the change. In some respects, employees may best guide an organization on technological change and how best to achieve it – especially those employees who may already be using a device outside of the workplace and who can champion its adoption by other, slower-to-adopt co-workers.

Adopting technology at an organization requires an involved introspective analysis. That's why Lessig urges organizations to assess how technology is viewed within a company by asking these questions:

- Is technology viewed as a help or a hindrance?
- Does the perspective change depending on the internal department or team? For example, how does IT view technology versus HR?

Having this information may assist in a more thoughtful approach to communicating an impending change.

Once a specific type of technology is adopted, it is helpful to consistently implement the process or device. Lessig described the challenges in enforcing policies in an organization that may have a variety of offices with varying technological capabilities. For instance, one office may be embracing biometric screening; another may use timeclocks; while a third requires that workers sign in and out of work using hard copy paper.

Workforce Changes

Lessig also described the likelihood that [advances in robotics](#) in the next five to seven years could eliminate the need for employing workers for more mundane tasks. Though this could result in the elimination of about five million jobs and therefore presents communications and staffing challenges, Lessig says the development could create opportunities for an organization to invest in the workforce in alternative ways.

An employer should be open to these advances and not assume that its own industry would be unaffected. Even if a significant investment in a particular type of technology, such as robotics, is not foreseeable for a particular industry, other developments could present opportunities. For example, advances in [wearable technology](#) could be particularly relevant for employers in the following sectors:

- Oil and gas;
- Retail;
- Construction;
- Healthcare;
- Media; and
- Agriculture.

Know the Facts

While savvy marketers can make any device seem vital to improving operations, Lessig warns that employers should be careful to research the facts. For example, voice decryption has been favored by some companies over passwords for improved security. However, some reports show that voice-activated smartphone devices may be easily hacked into.

A device's quality and practicality should also be weighed because reduced battery life and unreliability may result in decreased overall usage.

Attracting and Retaining Talent

During the webinar's Q&A session, one participant asked whether technology could play a role in recruiting and hiring top talent, especially millennial talent. Lessig explained that, in every industry, there may be expectations regarding what is considered a "staple" device, piece of equipment or tool. Knowledge of the marketplace and what competitors are providing new recruits will assist in attracting and retaining top talent – especially tech-savvy talent.

As a result, surpassing employee expectations of available workplace technology – although requiring an investment of time and money – could pay off in increased overall productivity and retention rates.

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