

AV Metals Leading Digital Transformation programme empowers leaders to manage change and drive digitalisation strategy.

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Chris Shires
CAD Engineer



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A sheet metal manufacturer has created a digital leadership team to accelerate its digital transformation.

AV Metals participated in both Made Smarter's 'Leading Change for Digital Champions' and 'Leading Digital Transformation' programmes.

The Challenge

AV Metals, based in Bolton, manufactures sheet metal for operators in the construction, furniture and lighting sectors.

Launched in 2018 the company's investment in technology - including an ERP and integrated 3D CAD software, networked CNC machines, and cloud-based sales management software - has supported rapid growth.

This meant that when the business engaged with Made Smarter's Digital Transformation Workshop, an analysis of its people and processes, the outcome was that digital transformation was well underway. However, Made Smarter's Organisation and Workforce Development (OWD) team identified opportunities to embed new digital leadership skills to help its team of 25 navigate change.

Simultaneously, Made Smarter's technology advisers identified the opportunity for the business to become more data-driven to improve stock management, and introduce live scheduling and capacity planning. Scott Brooks, Managing Director, said: "Over the last

five years we have pursued a digital strategy, investing in new technologies from design to machining to become more productive, efficient, reliable and sustainable. What was missing were the tools and skills to really drive home that change and take it to the next level."

The Solution

In order to create impactful and lasting change through an entire organisation, AV Metals were offered places on two pioneering Made Smarter leadership programmes.

The Leading Digital Transformation programme, a fast-track course delivered with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), aims to give participants a set of practical tools and a strategy for digital transformation using a blend of face-to-face workshops, online webinars, case studies and site visits to smart factories, including Print City, MMU's 3D additive and digital manufacturing hub.

Meanwhile, the Leading Change for Digital Champions programme aims to upskill those involved in implementing digital change.

This meant that co-managing director Scott would benefit from a strategic role, while CAD Engineer Chris Shires, would benefit at an operational level.

The Benefit

The key outcomes for AV Metals were that the programme developed and established a five year digitalisation strategy and two empowered digital leaders to drive it strategically and operationally.

Scott said: "Having two of us on the programme was fantastic. As MD I could apply strategic thinking to what we were learning, whereas having Chris involved from a production perspective enables him to lead from the shop floor and bring everyone along for the journey. The toolkit we have at our disposal for existing and future projects is phenomenal."

Another main takeaway from the programme was the value of communicating change to the workforce, especially with the arrival of AV Metal's new MRP and new quoting software. The technology will effectively create a new technical sales department and free up the time of engineers and designers to focus on more high value tasks.

Chris Shires, CAD Engineer, explained: "We are undergoing sweeping changes to a data-led organisation and a new digital culture. For that to be successful we have to build trust and buy-in from the whole team. That means convincing people that a little pain will bring a huge gain. Communicating our vision correctly is vital."

The programme has also created a network of like-minded SME manufacturers.



"Small businesses tend to keep their cards close to their chests," Chris added. "This programme flipped that. It created alliances between an incredibly diverse group of manufacturers. We have forged a network of people who share the same challenges and can help each other overcome them."

The Future

Once the new data and systems technologies are in place, the next focus will be to leverage that insight to drive efficiency and productivity improvement.

The business also anticipates that as it becomes more proficient at its data-led

approach, deploying machine learning and AI tools to identify and drive areas for investment is inevitable.

Chris said: "I think the biggest takeaway from our partnership with Made Smarter is the benefit of embracing the possible. Once you take that first step, admit your flaws and grasp the opportunities to fix things, you won't look back."

