



Comprehensive data at just one mouse click

Main image: Paperfree digitised workplaces thanks to Amagno document management.

From left to right: Employees save time and can focus on their core tasks. Digitised business processes offer huge chances for German small and medium-sized businesses. Jens Büscher, CEO at Amagno. Photo: © Thomas Weber Jörg Högemann, CEO at consulting agency einfach.effizient. Photo: © Timo Lutz

‘Industry 4.0’ is a term often used when referring to the age of digitalisation. But what exactly does digitalisation mean and how does it change the traditional workplace? We have asked two experts: Jörg Högemann, CEO at einfach.effizient., a consulting agency and Jens Büscher, CEO at Amagno, a company for document management.

TEXT: SILKE HENKELE | PHOTOS: ISTOCK

What are the implications of digitalisation for the traditional workplace?

Jens Büscher (JB): “A PC in your office does not automatically digitise your workplace. Imagine the following: company data, documents, and emails are all digitally stored in one central and secure spot. You can access these data from your PC, tablet or whatever appliances you are using, and use this data similar to a sheet of paper. Click on, let’s say, the order number on any digital sheet and all relevant documents will pop up within seconds.

Manual and tedious filing procedures or folders are history. Interactive, digitised documents are the next logical step after paper.”

Jörg Högemann (JH): “The traditional workplace has disappeared. Digitalisation has progressed and has consequently changed office workplaces into computer-assisted areas. All in all, digitalisation facilitates the implementation of efficient and quick work processes, which consequently reduces the duplication of work, mistakes, and idle times.

However, very often the side effects of a rushed introduction of digitised processes are overlooked and neglected. Take, for example, semi-automated processes, which come to a standstill at any unforeseen circumstance; too many parallel and contradictory signals through different channels distracts employees, or digitised systems laid out to represent an exact copy of a traditional paper processes also leading to a ‘waste’ of resources. The process of digitalisation demands a highly strategic approach.”

Will workplaces remain safe? Will employees be overtaxed by the new processes?

JH: “If digitalisation is strategically approached, employees don’t need to worry. Progress very often enables us to organise repetitive tasks in a way to eliminate sur-

prises and to be taken over by machines. Competition will force us to actively use these possibilities. With this, new workplaces will be generated to develop and administrate these automatised processes; and where new products, business models or customer solutions will be conceived. Work, all in all, will become more diverse - and whether this new situation will entail more or less work in total primarily depends on how we are going to use our chances to increase our competitiveness in an increasingly global market place."

JB: "Fear is the biggest enemy of digitalisation! A high level of user friendliness and a perceptible added value can help to gradually remove this fear. Only companies that decide for digitised processes will remain competitive. In the end, digitalisation is thus going to safeguard jobs."

For small and medium-sized German businesses, is there still potential to digitise day-to-day processes?

JH: "Small and medium-sized businesses have only just started or are about to start. If companies want to remain competitive, they will need to combine two basically contradictory strengths: they will

need to digitise/automise repetitive tasks. The future job, on the other hand, is going to entail varied, non-repetitive processes that will ask for a flexible, cooperative workforce, which is able to solve potential problems and come up with its own ideas."

JB: "There is still huge potential as only about ten per cent of the companies have digitised their business processes yet. Digitalisation positively affects business performance. It makes processes much more transparent, delivers a high level of quality and, above all, generates legal certainty. Let's also not forget financial advantages: the digital receipt of invoices, digitalised validation and clearance processes as well as automated booking processes may save up to 50 per cent of current costs; particularly if cash discounts are consequently made use off."

Are businesses sufficiently diligent when it comes to integrating production and administration processes? And how does this effect parallel business structures?

JB: "Parallel structures compromise the advantages of digitised processes. It is therefore really important to digitise processes

on all levels and get external help for the conversion."

JH: "A difference between production and administration will become irrelevant in the future. Rather, we will need to differentiate between repetitive tasks we have to automise no matter where and variable tasks that need to be carried out by humans and which thus need organisational solutions that take into account novelties and surprises."

Where will we stand in five years?

JH: "New business models will have evolved, we will see an increase in fully-automated processes and the first approaches towards a fundamental change of working environments as well as the principles of management and teamwork."

JB: "We will see paper-free workplaces as well as cross-company digitised business processes. We will also see established businesses which will have missed the crucial moment to adjust to digital reality - and the according dramatic consequences."

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