

# 3 Bad Habits Furniture Manufacturers Need to Break

The pandemic and related business issues of the past few years created unprecedented disruption for furniture manufacturers. To overcome these challenges, entire supply chains were forced to get creative and innovative. Surviving - let alone thriving - the times demanded that they embrace technology and collaboration like never before.

With the pandemic in the rearview, manufacturers must avoid falling back into their old habits – actions that slow down operations, limit productivity and leave you unprepared for the future. Those that effectively abandon these old ways of working are positioning their organization to leapfrog the competition.

## Bad Habit #1: Avoiding Technology



While the events of recent years drove record adoption of automation and technology for some, antiquated manual processes and traditional management practices are still commonplace in the furniture industry. With many aspects of operations returning to relative normalcy – or at least to a “new normal” - these producers have deprioritized the

technology initiatives deemed essential only months ago.

To maintain a productive, motivated team and a competitive business, manufacturers must provide managers and production workers with the tools and technology needed to increase productivity, reduce non-productive (wasted) time and overall lead time, and improve visibility into processes and performance.

Automated equipment, for example, can eliminate mundane tasks and free-up employees performing a specific job to focus on value-added activities. Adding equipment like a CNC cutter or router impacts individual jobs.

On a broader scale, advanced production management software like IPE’s shop floor control systems provides up to real-time performance and process visibility for production teams and managers across the entire manufacturing operation.

It’s also clear that the pre-pandemic workforce differed greatly from today’s. Few workers want to do mundane tasks. Employee engagement and empowerment are critical to attracting future employees to factories.

As new generations enter the manufacturing industry, they want to work in a modern, digital environment. In a recent [Deloitte and Manufacturing Institute survey](#), manufacturing employees ranked technology as the #3 most important factor in job satisfaction. Only physical well-being and flexibility in where/where they work ranked higher.



### About the Author

Brad Mikes has spent the last 25 years solving manufacturing challenges through improved business processes and information technology. He focuses this expertise on sewn products, consumer goods, technical textiles, and other discrete manufacturers.

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To optimize productivity, IPE's tablet computer-based IP-Realtime solution engages and empowers production workers to pace and track their performance, get instant access to product details, job requirements, and work methods, call for help and alert managers

to non-value added activities (downtime, wait time, poor quality, etc.).

The bottom line is that avoiding technology makes you more likely to miss major business growth and differentiation opportunities.

## Bad Habit #2: Making Decisions Based on Instincts



*Traditional Production Management Tools*

Consider some age-old, error-prone industry methods used to collect and report production information, such as using paper production tickets and gum sheets to measure performance and calculate incentive payroll. Other such inefficient practices include employees waiting in line at time clocks and walking the production floor to track orders and check work-in-process visually.

Given the past's lack of timely and accurate production information, it's little wonder why manufacturing managers have traditionally relied on gut instincts to make critical decisions. But, as noted earlier, business is much different today. Some of the more pressing demands on today's manufacturers further highlight why decision-making must become more data-driven in today's business environment.

- » **Business Velocity** – everything must be done faster today.
- » **Little Margin for Error** – even small errors/delays can cause big problems.

- » **Non-Productive Time** – results in excess costs that no business can afford today.
- » **Transparency** – is being demanded by suppliers, customers and consumers.
- » **Agility** – pivot quickly to address multiple/rapid changes to plan.
- » **Quality** - early detection and fast resolution are essential to staying on schedule.
- » **Workforce Development** – quickly train, engage, motivate and build trust.

These and other industry changes illustrate how traditional tools fail to provide today's executives, managers, supervisors and production employees with the timely information and performance feedback they need to make faster, better-informed and more productive decisions.

Perhaps that is why, despite current economic uncertainty, manufacturers are moving ahead with digitizing plant and

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factory floor operations. Smarter factories are, indeed, advancing. More than 85% of respondents in a recent [survey conducted by the Manufacturing Leadership Council \(MLC\)](#) said that they expect digital investments to continue unchanged or increase this year. The primary drivers for this bullish approach include the possibilities for better operational efficiency (59%), better decision-making (51%) and cost reduction (50%).

When one objectively considers traditional production management processes and practices, it's clear that conventional thinking and gut instincts are no match for today's complex manufacturing challenges.



## Bad Habit #3: Taking a Reactive Approach to Disruption

As recently revealed, business information based on industry trends and market intelligence is usually too late and too broad. It lacks clear directives on what must be done to resolve the disruption of the day. To stay ahead, manufacturers need information specific to their business situation that enables them to anticipate trouble and pivot quickly as conditions begin to change.

In today's fast and furious disruption environment, real-time systems can proactively identify and alert teams with the information needed to make better-informed decisions quicker and easier. This data must be presented in a way that can quickly be converted into action and execution.

IPE's IP-Realtime™ solution provides the ultimate in visibility and transparency. Using standard Android tablets with Wi-Fi and onboard scanners on the production floor, this always-on system tracks all activities immediately as they occur throughout the day/shift. Supervisors and managers rely on real-time dashboard displays to make data-driven decisions.

## Taking Stock

Disruption is the new normal in today's business environment. Traditional industry thinking and practices are ill-equipped to enable companies to survive and thrive at the pace of change we are now experiencing.

While technology is not the panacea to all challenges, furniture companies need to accelerate the use of digital technology in their manufacturing and supply chain operations. When asked about roadblocks to implementing their digital strategies, one-third of respondents in the MLC survey cited an organizational structure or culture that resists change.

Taking stock of your organization and its habits – those to keep and those to abandon – can help you accelerate operations, increase productivity, and better prepare for the future. Here's to leapfrogging the competition!

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Want to improve your manufacturing operations? Not sure how or what changes will provide the biggest bang for your buck? Take the first step by phoning IPE at (864) 498-1310, [email](#) or [visit the website](#).