

## The digital transformation is here to help – don't leave it waiting

The digitalisation of industrial processes is fundamental for businesses to thrive in a market that is ever more demanding and where competition is fierce. With a plethora of innovative technologies available, driving this transformation with a sustainable strategy is key. This must suit the specific needs and challenges of a company in order to maximise the return on investment (ROI) and benefits of digital transformation projects, while eliminating any disruption.

*John Browett, General Manager of CLPA Europe, looks at the benefits of digital transformation and how to embark on a successful journey.*

The digital transformation is a fresh, forward-looking approach that focuses on having an empirical, comprehensive understanding of processes, operations and equipment conditions in order to drive efficiencies. Enhanced productivity, responsiveness and flexibility are just some of the key benefits around the corner for companies embracing this change.

The insight at the core of digitalised frameworks is primarily obtained by gathering key data and turning it into knowledge that supports factual decision-making as well as smart, automated control and operations based on accurate predictive models. These setups are achieved by connecting disparate systems within an enterprise to share pieces of information that, like the pieces of a puzzle, offer a full picture when put together. In particular, a holistic view can be generated by integrating the insights from information technology (IT) and operational technology (OT).

### Not just about technology

While technologies are extremely important to support the digital transformation of businesses, this requires much more than the simple, default implementation of more machines, robots and automation solutions, which can require substantial investment. A genuine and successful digitalisation strategy involves the fundamental rethinking of the way industrial activities and business models have traditionally been set up in order to make them significantly better.

Technology and innovations are purely a means to achieve this goal, and it is important to select the solutions that can best address the specific goals of an intended application. In effect, businesses should not rely on buzzwords, but should invest solely in what can help them succeed.

Ultimately, digital transformation is a mindset. It is not a single project or a destination, but rather a long-term, ongoing journey. It requires continuing iteration, as the company itself evolves and suitable technologies become available.

This also means that businesses do not need to replace or upgrade all their existing equipment at once to become digital. Instead, it is possible – and even recommended – to proceed in stages, reducing costs, and ensure support for legacy devices. It is then possible to adapt processes and frameworks over time.

## Embarking on a successful journey

To fully reap the advantages of digitalisation, companies should set up a custom plan divided into small projects. These should address their most immediate shortcomings, challenges or bottlenecks first and then move on to the next issue. By overcoming these limitations, it is possible to benefit from quick ROIs as well as rapidly enhance competitiveness.

Typically, companies can start by automating a particularly repetitive task. This would help them begin to gather key data for monitoring purposes. Once this project has been completed, it is then possible to use the insight generated to reshape the activity more radically, innovating it further, such as leveraging this new in-depth understanding to set up automated control systems.

## The role of TSN as enabler

In addition to selecting suitable projects and technologies, it is necessary to select a suitable solution that can transfer data to and from all necessary parties. The most effective way to achieve this is relying on an open industrial Ethernet network that supports Time-Sensitive Networking (TSN). This is key to offering the level of connectivity necessary to converge the IT and OT domains while ensuring deterministic, reliable communications. In effect, such a solution offers the 'plumbing' infrastructure for digitalisation.

In addition, is it favourable to select a solution that can help business make sense of their data. Understanding what information is needed and what type of analytics is required is crucial to succeed in these projects. This means incorporating information modelling within industrial communications frameworks. This can be done via files that contain information on machine specifications, the data to be acquired from the machine and its acquisition method as well as linked information between machine information and machine data.

Currently, the only solution able to offer both these capabilities is CC-Link IE TSN. This is the first open industrial Ethernet that offers TSN functions, and it supports information modelling via CSP+ for Machine device profile technology. This provides XML format files that describe devices and pieces of equipment as well as the information they generate.

By utilising CC-Link IE TSN, businesses can therefore benefit from a strong backbone for digital transformation strategies, fully realising the potential of futureproof data-driven industrial activities. As a result, they can build a competitive edge for the years to come.

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**Image:** Digital transformation requires continuing iteration

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CLPA378 How can companies join the digital transformation

## About The CC-Link Partner Association (CLPA)

The CLPA is an international organisation founded in 2000, now celebrating its 20th Anniversary. Over the last 20 years, the CLPA has been dedicated to the technical development and promotion of the CC-Link family of open automation networks. The CLPA's key technology is CC-Link IE TSN, the world's first open industrial Ethernet to combine gigabit bandwidth with Time Sensitive Networking (TSN), making it the leading solution for Industry 4.0 applications. Currently the CLPA has almost 3,800 member companies worldwide, and more than 2,000 compatible products available from over 340 manufacturers. Around 30 million devices using CLPA technology are in use worldwide.

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