



POINT OF VIEW

The people pillar of the digital workforce

Going digital may be more vital to your utility's talent strategy than you think

Apart from the overarching trend towards new technologies across business and society at large, there is a hidden urgency for utilities to go digital. It's not just for the sake of improving current operations, but also to hire and keep the latest generation of employees for success with today's evolving consumers.

"A recent Avanade cross-industry survey shows that 91% of businesses believe that their organization's workforce will "need to change substantially as smart technologies become more widely used."²

Today's employees are digital... what about you?

We all hear about a retiring workforce, shrinking domain knowledge and antiquated systems that, in some cases, may not have been significantly upgraded in a generation. These are obvious drivers towards change, and digital technologies can help. But another, equally important element is the human dimension of going digital. Today's emerging workforce is the first generation to grow up with the Internet in full form, and they expect innovation - smart phones, apps, the cloud, and more.

In a recent article, one utility industry veteran observes that, "Your technology choices and the choice to 'go digital' in your plant operations will not only determine how efficient and effective you can become... [they] will also contribute to attracting and retaining the right talent."¹ Hiring digital-age workers can be especially hard in some European markets, based on the limited availability of local, tech-savvy talent.

In short, prospective high-quality employees expect potential employers, including utilities, to be appropriately digital. To respond to this challenge—and opportunity—the question becomes,

"What is your utility doing to become the *digital workplace* of the future?" And what does that mean in terms of changes to people, processes and technology? Ultimately, the digital workplace is all about improving employee engagement, optimizing employee interactions across business functions, and using digital tools to help employees serve and support customers.

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¹ "Navigating the Future of Plant Operations: Fly, Don't Drive," Electric Light & Power, October 27, 2015

² "Smart technologies are delivering benefits to the enterprise -- is your business one of them?" Avanade, March 2016



The impact of the digital workplace on your employees and your customers

First, let's look at some facts about the current and near-future state of the utility workplace. How are the people, processes and systems at today's utilities performing in their customer-facing and operational roles? While figuring this out involves technology, it is also about culture, vision and leadership.

Did you know?^{3,4}

- 50% of some utilities' workforces will be eligible to retire over the next five to 10 years.
- 71% of utility consumers want to have digital channels and communications with utility employees for things like outage management, notices, alerts and bill payment.
- 80% of utility CEOs plan to increase efforts to strengthen engagement with employees.

Moreover, utilities customers are about to get a lot more involved with your employees, for all sorts of reasons. For example, in the past, customers would engage with their electric utility for only about nine minutes each year.⁵ Today, over two-thirds of utility consumers expect much more interaction from their utility, on issues like getting help to reduce their energy bills.⁶

At the same time, the volume, variety and velocity of data that utility workers must manage are all increasing exponentially. Most utilities are not prepared with the people, systems or processes to manage this data. The lack of real-time, shareable data is the root cause of many of the utility industry's biggest challenges in areas ranging from inaccurate billing, to inefficient communications with field crews, to a lack of real-time information for better decision-making around asset management.

But things are changing: utilities now seek capabilities to help employees communicate and interact with each other as a standard procedure (vs. the exception). They are adopting new tools and systems to improve collaboration, update their technology architectures, and increase mobile device/application usage.

A key concept in this journey is *digitalizing employee experiences*—giving employees the right insights at the right time on the right device to make them more productive. The right employee experiences tailor information and tools to an employee's role, location and task – efficiently connecting them with appropriate, real-time information that is directly relevant to their work and customers.

Ideas for building the digital workplace of the future at utilities

How can utilities embrace and implement digital technology to support today's changing workplace? Here are a few ideas around the effective marriage of people and technology:

- **Elevating the customer experience**
 - Today's utility customer experience spans multiple touch points, from billing to outages to demand-response and energy-efficiency programs. The customer experience is now about increased engagement, optimized interactions and delivering new products and services—all led by your employees and the processes and systems that support their work. The ability to gather customer data—along with the ability for you employees to act upon data—will power success with consumers.

Three things you can do

1. Engage employees and customers in ways that work for them – apps, social media, gaming.
2. Optimize employee-customer interactions with customer insight to deliver greater personalization.
3. Leverage existing systems, processes, and data to improve the quality of services – e.g., a complete view of the customer.

³ Based on excerpts from Industry Business Issues Mapping Project and Digital Workplace Playbook, with research completed by [VentureForward](#), November 2015

⁴ See also, [New Energy Consumer Handbook](#), Greg Guthridge, Accenture, 2015

⁵ "Consumer Behavior & Electricity Usage," Intelligent Utility, June 16, 2010

⁶ [The New Energy Consumer: Architecting for the Future](#), Accenture, 2016

- **“Smart technology”** – We hear this term all the time, but “smart” for utilities providers is more than just the grid. It’s about technologies that allow computers or machines to enhance the work or decisions by humans. This could mean intelligent workforce management tools, tablets to measure and manage plant-level KPIs, and even wearables for monitoring and communicating all manner of data. The real value of smart is helping utilities build and manage the systems required to collect, analyze and utilize the vast amounts of data at the right time and place to optimize assets, work processes and operational efficiencies. As a result, employees get more visibility, flexibility and control to do their jobs.

Three things you can do

1. Manage big data from smart systems more effectively – collection, analysis, reporting.
2. Use integrated apps to increase situational awareness and reduce process complexity.
3. Enhance collaboration outside the utility using data from smart systems - e.g., new product sales with partners.

- **Legacy-to-digital infrastructure and operations (I&O)** – Operational excellence, situational awareness and employee engagement are all I&O mandates and performance levers for tomorrow’s utility. There is considerable opportunity for utilities to modernize their systems for increased engagement, better collaboration, and greater shared situational awareness to improve operational efficiency and financial performance. Today, the sheer volume, speed and complexity of data challenge utilities to execute on the full potential of their assets, presenting liabilities as well.

Three things you can do

1. Get digital workplace tools, like executive dashboards, dynamic reporting, mobile apps.
2. Improve visibility and reporting across assets with predictive maintenance applications.
3. Use analytics to help automate functions like compliance, outage support and trading.

Going digital from the inside

A key challenge, and opportunity, for utilities will be equipping the workforce with digital platforms and tools to optimize assets to their full commercial potential, while delivering exceptional service.

The digital capabilities described above can drive all of these outcomes. While considering the digital orientation of today’s evolving workforce as an indicator of things to come, it is easy to see that many utilities will have to change their “come work for us” pitch to attract the right talent required in the not-too-distant future. Getting the right digital technology in place will help close the gap, and pull the right people in to do the job.

We’d love to hear your thoughts, so please feel free to join the conversation at <https://www.avanade.com/en/industry/utilities>.



About Avanade

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