



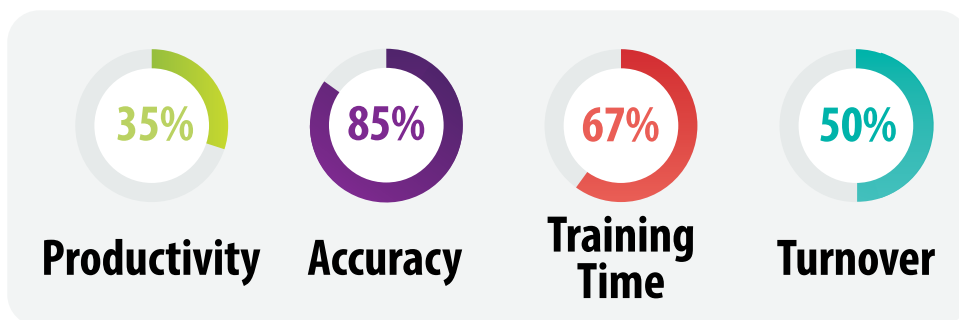
THE HUMAN SIDE OF VOICE TECHNOLOGY IN THE WAREHOUSE: A CHANGE MANAGEMENT PLAN



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If your DC could benefit from higher accuracy rates, productivity increases generally from 10% to 25%, and/or reduced training time, then voice-enabled work could be a considerable benefit to your organization.

Voice-directed work has been continuously proven to significantly boost productivity, accuracy, safety and job satisfaction in distribution centers (DC's) and warehouses around the globe. While these results are nearly always attainable, most organizations will find the quickest results occur when there is a plan in place to address the often overlooked part of a voice implementation: the people who will be using the solution.



THE HUMAN FACTOR

The most successful voice implementations will include multiple and varied approaches to address the human factor of voice deployments, with many involving front-line staff and union management from the beginning. Providing supervisors with the necessary background and training will allow them to model and coach the new skills required to use voice for the warehouse, and prepares them to actively ask and consider employee feedback. Your front-line workers will be the most immediately impacted by the changes you will be implementing, so it is important to recognize and understand their point of view.

Conversely, when organizations fail to recognize the importance of the human side of voice, they encounter employee resistance, union roadblocks, training inefficiencies, and a delayed ROI. While trying to recoup the damages of these issues, additional issues may occur, like damaged employee trust, decreased management credibility, and ultimately, wasted financial resources.

Companies that carefully consider and plan for human resource issues often achieve the most impressive results from their voice deployments. For example, ContainerWorld, a leading beverage logistics provider (3PL) in Canada, was facing a common supply chain challenge: how to boost efficiency in a distribution network that was struggling with an influx of SKU's.

"With more than 300 customers, all with different labeling guidelines and SKU's, we had to find a way to improve efficiency," explains Aaron Christmas, Director of Strategy and Technology for the British Columbia based company.

After extensive research and analysis, the company began to implement their Vocollect Voice into its DC. The goal? To boost order selection accuracy and productivity. Deployed throughout the company, the voice solution has generated very impressive results.



Even with the skyrocketing number of SKU's spurred by the craft brewing trend, ContainerWorld was able to maintain stable productivity numbers. As for accuracy- the voice solution allowed the company to remove two order checkers, since the voice process lends itself to increased accuracy.

How was ContainerWorld able to quickly generate such extraordinary results from its voice effort? "We were concerned from the beginning about change management," said Christmas. "Going from pen and paper to voice was a large jump in technologies, so we knew we had to stay focused on communication and training."

A blue banner with a white arrow pointing right. The text reads: "Want to learn more? Find out how ContainerWorld used voice to improve job satisfaction and keep their managers where they are needed most. [CLICK HERE >>](#)"

CRUCIAL STEPS TO TAKE

While the deployment approach and internal issues can vary greatly between countries, companies, distribution centers and individual workers, there are some general guidelines that companies can follow in order to avoid any potential issues that may arise on the "people side" of the implementation.

STEP ONE: Identify a Project Champion

The development of a voice implementation team typically starts with identifying a champion – someone to spearhead the project. This person can range in title from COO to DC Manger, but they must be someone who understands the strategic benefits of voice and has the cross-functional authority and responsibility to manage the installation, training and deployment. The champion should also be an effective communicator who is not only respected by DC personnel, but also has the commitment and support of their executive management team.

STEP TWO: Create an Implementation Team

A cross-functional approach is essential when deploying voice. In addition to having a high-level voice champion, an ideal team includes:

- **The DC operations director or manager:** This individual needs to understand the impact of a voice implementation on DC production and how to prepare for the changes it will create.
- **The IT director:** This person should help to ensure the readiness of the site for installation, as well as to assist in any logistics necessary to support voice.
- **Local IT support:** Ideally, on-site IT personnel would be responsible for the network infrastructure, managing and configuring the system hardware, maintaining and supporting the deployment, supporting the site acceptance testing and acting as a liaison with the system provider. Wherever possible, organizations will want to involve programmers who understand the warehouse management system (WMS), plus wireless and local area network specialists.
- **Logistics personnel:** Electricians should be involved early in the process, to determine the electrical needs of battery charges and terminal cradles and to install the proper amount of outlets in the equipment storage location.

Step Three: Recruit Frontline Employees from Each Shift

Employee representatives from every shift must be involved in the implementation and roll-out team to ensure the entire DC operation is equally represented – which is important in gaining employee acceptance. Finding supervisors or highly respected workers will be key, as it will be easier for them to "sell" the concept of voice, and they are also the ideal people to train other workers on how to use the new system.

It's also especially important to involve frontline supervisors early, because most DC personnel involved with monitoring production may not be immediately pro-voice. Initially, some supervisors may believe that the changes will not benefit their production, which could make their employees doubt the solution. By identifying the least resistant supervisors, and making them the first to train on the system, many companies can overcome objections.



Step Four: Involve Workers in the Process

In any effort that requires change, it is common to face employee resistance - and voice implementations are no different. Employees can be fearful of losing their jobs, incurring safety issues, or simply feel like the way they have always done it is the best way. To address these and other potential concerns, it can help to include frontline workers in the process and face their concerns early on.

Here are some of the messages you can use to help counter and address employee objections:

Employees who are fearful of losing their jobs due to increased productivity: Instead of stressing the productivity benefits of voice, emphasize how easy the system is to use, and how it will make their jobs easier and more enjoyable - they will work smarter, not harder.

Employees fearing for their safety: Emphasize the number of workers who use voice comfortably - there are almost a million workers using Vocollect Voice around the world every day. You'll also want to talk about the safety benefits of voice, and how it enables 'hands-free, eyes-free' work, allowing them to pay more attention to their surrounding environment.

Employees who are uncomfortable with change and new processes: Before conducting employee training, be certain employees are aware of the training and mentoring that will be available to help them adapt to the new technology. Also, convey that voice is easy to use, and that many employees also find it enjoyable to operate.

Bilingual workers who do not understand or speak the company's native language very well: Reassure them that the switch to voice does not mean their job is in jeopardy. Let them know that voice supports over 35 different languages, it will actually help them be even more effective and successful on the job.

Employees showing resistance after a voice system has been installed: There are often two main concerns after a voice implementation- that workers will no longer be able to talk to each other, and that their every move will be tracked. In that event, tell them you aren't going to stop them from talking with each other, and that there are ways of putting the system to sleep temporarily. From a management perspective, the primary goal is for employees to meet their accuracy and productivity levels. Once those objectives are accomplished and standards have been set, opportunity to continue building their on-the-job peer relationships will represent itself.

Truly listen to what employees tell you about the system: These are the people who work with it on a daily basis, and their concerns and enhancement ideas should be carefully considered. For example, at one company some of the employees didn't like some of the intermittent "beeps" in the system, and felt that some of the information given through the headset was excessive. Management was able to address the concerns easily. Demonstrating that you are listening to them and willing to take their issues seriously can go a long way toward combating post-deployment resistance.

Step Five: Get Support from the Human Resources Department

Although human resources (HR) professionals are not typically heavily involved in voice implementations, it's wise to keep the corporate HR staff apprised of the implementation and determine, early on, whether the HR department has any services that can help smooth the transition to voice.

Especially in large or multi-national corporations, the HR operation has a treasure trove of tools and tactics for bringing employees on board with change. Also, companies will want to make sure that HR understands the many health and safety benefits of voice.

Step Six: Collaborate with Union Representatives

In unionized companies, it's crucial to involve union representatives early in the process to gain their support and commitment to voice. Typically, unions will have the same concerns as employees do. It's important to address safety concerns up front, to communicate that employees will not lose their jobs because of increased efficiencies, and that production credits won't be lost in the transition from paper to voice. If unions and employees do not receive adequate communication - both early in the process and throughout the deployment - they may fill their information gaps with erroneous perceptions instead of the facts. Often, they won't have overt objections, just questions they would like answers to.

In fact, many times union leadership embraces the extreme fairness of a voice system, because there is no favoritism – voice clearly identifies the high performers so that they receive their fair share of merit for strong performance.

Step Seven: Train Employees Using a Train-the-Trainer Approach

After employees are aware of the changes that will be created by a voice deployment, organizations can begin to train them on using the system. Typically, system providers will cover the basics of system operation in their client orientation, and they will train the training staff. But ultimately it is your organization's responsibility to make sure there are enough trainers in place to roll out the training in a timely fashion.

Some questions to consider about the training include:

- How much training is required?
- How will it be offered? Monthly? On demand?
- What are my options for training?
- Should the roll-out be gradual or all at once?
- How long will it take for my team to reach the productivity levels I'm expecting?

Of course, the answers to these questions will depend upon the size of your organization. Large organizations may have corporate staff to manage their training efforts, whereas smaller companies must rely on their DC management team and on-site voice champions. Either way, after you train the trainers, you'll want to verify that they are comfortable with the training approach and can handle any issues that might arise.

Step Eight: Partner with Your Voice Provider

The best voice suppliers have proven expertise with voice deployments and experience with hundreds, if not thousands, of installations. Many years of working closely with customers on diverse implementations has given them a strong sense of what works and what doesn't.

Your voice provider should have a time-tested methodology that incorporates many tools, templates and processes to help companies with their implementations. These services can include posters, DVD training materials, quick reference cards and other items to communicate the upcoming change to employees, as well as Train-the-Trainer programs packaged to meet specific customer requirements.

Step Nine: Train Managers on How to Use Voice Data as a Management Tool

Managers and supervisors will also need training on how to maximize the use of the new voice system. Voice systems provide real time individual and team productivity data, which will allow supervisors to manage work flow much more proactively. If productivity is lagging in certain areas, they can use system information to reassign workers, or track the performance of individual workers to identify the source of the bottleneck. They can also track performance across multiple DCs, to see how their site compares. All of this allows DC leaders to make better decisions about how to use and reassign labor throughout the shift.

In order to make the most out of the new reporting tools, supervisors will need system training. Although voice systems and their information dashboards are quite intuitive, management should not assume that DC leaders will know how to use the data without training.



Step Ten: Reward and Reinforce Performance Improvements

In the past, many companies have been frustrated by their inability to orchestrate fully equitable incentive programs because they didn't have accurate individual employee performance data. Voice in the DC affords the opportunity to change this situation, by helping organizations to measure, monitor and reward individual employee productivity.

Voice allows companies to track employees from assignment to assignment, as well as from task to task, so they are better able to monitor employee progress, share improvement data with the employee and create performance incentives.

As you might expect, such incentive programs come in many different forms. Some companies calculate each employee's "fair share" per shift. Once users complete their fair share of workload for the day, they can go home with eight hours' pay. In other organizations, the employee with the best productivity that day does not have to stay and perform clean-up activities.

At Harbor Wholesale, employees are rewarded on individual productivity, with each employee having the opportunity to earn or lose compensation based on productivity or errors. The company, based out of Lacey, WA, provides fresh produce, meat, and supplies to convenience stores and fast food operations, so having a correct order is important.

"We have a compensation program set up so workers can earn a little extra money if they pick faster and more accurately. Our operational costs dropped so much after implementing voice, we figured we could transfer some of those savings onto the workers on the floor," said Noah Skelton, PM Warehouse Manager and Technical Operations Specialist for Harbor Wholesale. After installing voice, Harbor Wholesale saw a productivity increase of 50%, accuracy improve to 99.9997%, and training time decrease by more than 200%.

OTHER TIPS AND TACTICS

After surveying multiple organizations who have experienced successful voice implementations, here are the most common pieces of advice they had to give:

- If corporate employees are involved on the implementation team, make sure that they work with the individual regions. Typically the local management has to own the system for it to work optimally.
- Don't regard voice as an IT project – it is fully an operations strategic initiative. Voice implementations are most successful when they have people throughout the business driving the project.
- Get any new labor standards completed early so that employees don't get used to performing at the old rate.
- Reward members of the implementation team with specially made T-shirts, pizza lunches, or other appropriate incentives to show you appreciate their efforts.
- Do advance trouble-shooting with IT to anticipate RF coverage issues and make sure you have enough equipment to cover peak periods.
- Form a corporate SWAT team to configure the voice system and train the on-site trainers. It is often helpful to have actual users conduct the training – whether union representatives, supervisors or workers.
- There can sometimes be a gap between the long-term employees and newer employees when it comes to their willingness to embrace change. By involving frontline workers who can speak to both groups, companies increase the likelihood that all employees will adapt to voice.



- Devise some type of label and tracking method for the equipment and employ a problem-tracking log, especially in the beginning. Also, ensure that support processes are well designed and in place prior to the system going live.
- At the outset of a voice deployment, meet with union officials to explain why changes will result from the voice deployment, why management feels those changes are necessary, and how it will have an impact on labor standards. Invite the union to send representatives into the DC to look at those changes once the voice system is in place.
- Supervisors may need coaching on managing with real time data for individual performers.
- Position your successful voice implementation as an asset in your recruitment and retention efforts.
- By establishing a cross-functional implementation team, anticipating employee, union and supervisor resistance, communicating the change well in advance, using on-site peer training and rewarding employees for adopting the new system, companies will be able to realize the promise and potential of voice much more quickly.



ABOUT HIGHJUMP

HighJump is a global provider of supply chain management software that streamlines the flow of inventory and information from supplier to store shelf. Named to the Inc. 5000 Fastest Growing Companies list for 3 years running, HighJump employs more than 440 team members worldwide, and supports more than 4,000 customers in 66 countries, ranging from SME business to global enterprises.

HighJump's functionally rich and highly adaptable end-to-end solutions help users achieve new levels of supply chain responsiveness, performance and profitability, from the warehouse to the storefront, from the desktop to the driver's cab. HighJump's suite of warehousing, manufacturing, transportation, distribution, mobile delivery and retail solutions allow users to seamlessly drive growth, customer satisfaction and revenue by delivering goods faster and more profitably. **HighJump: supply chain accelerated.**

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Since 2005, Vitech has helped our customers select, purchase, design, implement, administer, and upgrade their Vocollect Voice solutions. As a Premier Vocollect Voice Total Solution Provider, and a Vocollect Partner of the Year, we know how important it is to get a voice system that meets your expectations. Our team is committed to seeing projects through from concept to completion, and we bring our voice expertise and best practices to every implementation. With a broad base of voice customers around the globe, every day Vitech continues to deliver customized voice solutions that meet the needs of our customers, both today and in the future.

For more information, please visit www.vitechgroup.com.

