



# S.M.A.R.T. Communication Manufacturing

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In my last few articles, I wrote mostly of the impact COVID-19 is having and will have on collaboration in manufacturing companies. Like all of you, COVID-19 impacted my life, my business, and my clients' businesses. I've spent a lot of time and energy imagining what kind of changes the pandemic is going to drive, in order to prepare and not be disrupted by them. The more I talk with clients and factories during COVID-19, the more I realize some of the most important and strategic changes needed are with collaboration and communication.

As I frequently say, we are in the middle of a disruption, everything will transform, and we will find a "new normal". New normal is a buzz word, but I believe it's probably the most important one. Not because we will find a different world at the end of the pandemic, but because we can use this disruption to build the "new normal" we want and design it—instead of suffering it.

We can imagine and design the “new normal of communication” in factories, building the communication and collaboration tools needed to manage it. I personally imagine communication will need to be S.M.A.R.T.: Social, Mobile, Actionable, Retrievable, and Targeted. I know S.M.A.R.T. is an abused term, but it’s meaningful and easy to memorize. So, what does my interpretation of S.M.A.R.T. mean?

**S - Social:** My interpretation of social means easy to use, engaging, and natural. I believe that communication in factories needs to promote fast and short messages, conversation, and sharing of ideas between colleagues—regardless if they are on the same shift or plant. Manufacturers need a wide network of people connected that can effectively cooperate.

**M - Mobile:** Communication and collaboration tools need to reach operators wherever they are. This is especially true for the post-COVID future, as many people will continue to work remote and will need to connect as naturally as possible. Mobile is almost a commodity, but it’s not in manufacturing. Many processes in factories are built for in-person presence. A tool that could help to comply with those processes remotely would be extremely helpful. The ability to share information gained by this mobile tool would be helpful in multi-plant environments.

**A - Actionable:** All communication needs to be informative and actionable, as information that does not enable decisions is basically noise. In business and personal life, we are overwhelmed with information and communication, sometimes much more than what we’re able to manage. It’s important that we start to filter information that does not drive value.

**R - Retrievable:** One of the biggest challenges in plant workers going remote is keeping their knowledge and expertise consultable. Many companies were already facing this with the “aging workforce” phenomena. The problem is even bigger now with COVID-19. For this reason, it’s important that any information shared between working entities can be searchable and retrievable. The collaboration tool itself can become a knowledge base, keeping and protecting expertise. In this way it become a company asset and not an operator-only asset.

**T - Targeted:** Connecting operators, users, machines, and systems can be fascinating. However, it can be a mess if communication is not correctly segmented and targeted. Excess broad communication can hide important information. All departments need to be properly managed to guarantee that each message is

delivered to—and only to—an interested user.

This is not a new need, but it's a need that COVID-19 drew immediate attention to. Collaboration is a business necessity that must be addressed professionally and with total attention. It will impact not only employee's wellbeing, but also can significantly impact production and supply chain performances.

*Originally published on [Automation World](#) - Nov 30, 2020*