Book Review

Towards the Automated Factory? The Need for Training by Peter Senker. 125 pages. Price £28 Published by IFS (Publications) Ltd, 1986.

The main thrust of this book is that if Advanced Manufacturing Technology (AMT) is to have the kind of impact that is claimed for it then companies must be prepared to train and develop their staff. To support this argument, Peter Senker draws on research that has been carried out in association with the Engineering Industry training Board (EITB), much of which has already been published in the form of research papers by the EITB itself. The chapters of the book cover such areas as CAD/CAM, CPICS, the growing gap in maintenance skills, the influence of Japan and the prospects of the automated factory. Each chapter has, at the end, the references that apply to that chapter, a touch which I particularly like.

Of course such a book tends to be a snapshot in time as the technology is developing at such a pace. Because of this there is a danger of the text becoming outdated. In this case however, Senker argues that though the technology is changing rapidly the problems of training are much as they were five or six years ago. The industry needs to recognize that training is an ongoing function and requires constant investment. Indeed, Senker considers that one of the major barriers to the increased use of automation, whether it be CAD, CAM or FMS, is the lack of a pool of skilled maintenance personnel, from shopfloor upwards.

The message of this book is one that needs to be made over and over again. Backed up by the author's own research into the industry, a powerful argument is developed for such training. When the findings of that research is then compared with that of Japan then the case for such investment is overwhelming.

What we are about is the management of technological change. Senker impresses the point that technology itself is only a part of the problem. There is a great deal of fear associated with such systems and this is often made manifest at the time of implementation. However beneath that there is

also the problem of management where senior managers are not allowed to develop the skills necessary to implement and operate the systems. This book could well become one which is required reading for all managers who are tasked with the selection, implementation and operation of such systems.

If there is one sour point it has to be the absurd pricing of the book. At £28 it is not the kind of textbook easily picked up off the shelf by the browsing manager. Corporate bodies may well purchase the volume for their libraries, and so much the better, but surely the message needs to get to the whole spectrum of management and this price, I feel, will not achieve that. Such a vital message for the engineering industry should not go by default due to this unfortunate pricing decision and I think that the publishers should reconsider this aspect. In spite of the price the book deserves a wide readership, and I would hope that the main message is not lost on those it is aimed at, the manager in engineering companies.

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The following books have been received recently, and may be reviewed in future issues:

Personal Bibliographic Indexes and their Computerization by Richard Heeks. Publisher: Taylor Graham.

The Hidden Manager by David Andrews and John Kent. Publisher: Taylor Graham.

Expert Systems in Libraries. Edited by Forbes Gibb. Publisher: Taylor Graham.

Structured Analysis and Design of Information Systems by A. Ziya Aktas. Publisher: Prentice-Hall Inc. New Jersey.

Managing New Technology by David Boddy and David A. Buchanan.

New Methods and Techniques for Information Management. Editor: Mary Feeney. Publisher: Taylor Graham.