

Construction industry can no longer delay adoption of technology

In South Africa, the pandemic exacted a heavy toll on the construction industry, leading to severe financial hardship and even closure for many companies. Those businesses that survived were forced to drastically change the way they operate in order to overcome the devastating effects of a stringent five-week lockdown.



Morag Evans, CEO, Databuild

But, says Databuild CEO Morag Evans, if there is one lesson to be learned from the events of 2020, it is that the industry can no longer afford to delay the adoption of technology, both on and off the construction site.

Global survey on impact of technology

This is in line with research done by The Big 5. Conducted in November 2020 among more than 3,000 construction professionals across the globe, the study shows that contractors (26.7%) and professionals (35.7%) regard building information modelling (BIM) as the number one technology to impact construction businesses over the next two years. Additionally, artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly gaining momentum across all types of businesses.

Interestingly, however, the report also reveals that companies are not yet ready to implement this technology. Of the respondents surveyed, only 16% indicated their employees were “fully trained” on BIM, while 37% said their employees were “sufficiently trained”.

When it comes to AI, the figures show even less preparedness for adoption. A mere 8% of respondents said their employees were “fully trained” in AI, while 22% said they were “sufficiently trained”. A further 7% indicated that they didn’t expect any training in AI to be done.

“This mindset has to change,” says Evans. “The pandemic has confirmed the increasingly beneficial role technology has to play in the construction industry, and it should not be discounted as being too expensive or too complex to implement and provide training.

Broader benefits

“Besides reducing costs and keeping project timelines on schedule, technology can increase on-site security and safety, which is imperative in this coronavirus age where social distancing regulations require the number of people on sites to be minimised.

“Some may even argue that AI will increase unemployment, but the information technology industry (one of the largest job creators) has shown that if anything, technology actually creates jobs and enhances sector sustainability.

“The South African construction industry cannot afford another crisis of coronavirus proportions and companies need to rethink their business models if they wish to thrive in a post-pandemic future.”

Evans is hopeful that the Covid-19 pandemic will become the catalyst for construction role players to incorporate technology into their business models.

“I have no doubt that companies which invest in technology now will not only gain a significant edge over their competitors, but also ensure business resilience over the long term,” she concludes.

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