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**Manufacturing gets a resilience boost at 2018 AMTIL National Conference**

*‘Strategies for Manufacturing Resilience and Growth’ was the theme at the 2018 AMTIL National Conference, on 22 August in Melbourne.*

Held at Leonda by the Yarra, the one-day conference brought together around 150 delegates from across Australian manufacturing. Over the course of the day they got the opportunity to learn ways in which they can build resilience in their businesses and in their professional and personal lives. The Conference offered a program of expert speakers from across manufacturing and beyond, examining everything from automation for small manufacturers, to developing effective leadership skills, and much, much more.

The day’s presentations got underway with a keynote address from Michael Grogan, Director for Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales for the Advanced Manufacturing Growth Centre (AMGC). Grogan discussed recent research by the AMGC, which found that Australia has one of the most volatile manufacturing industries in the world. He cited companies such as ANCA, Marand Precision Engineering, Lovitt Technologies Australia and Sutton Tools as examples of Australian manufacturers that exhibit the three attributes of resilient manufacturers: superiority, diversity, and flexibility.

“The good news is that when you focus on resilience, you can also become more competitive,” said Grogan. “There’s no doubt there is a cost involved with building your resilience. But the question is: when that next downturn comes, or when that customer drops us, what is the cost of not having taken those steps to ensure that degree of resilience?”

One market where resilience is vital, and where the opportunities for growth are significant, is the defence industry, and this was examined in the second presentation of the day. Rick Shalders is the Director of the Industry Development Unit (IDU) at Raytheon Australia, and he discussed some of the opportunities to work with the US defence giant. He outlined the IDU activities in promoting the engagement of Australian SMEs in his company’s supply chain, and what sort of challenges those companies can expect to face.

“The bottom line is you must win on merit,” Shalders explained. “It is not an easy road. It takes time, it takes a lot of effort, and it may take extra funding. But there are a lot of agencies out there that will help you, both Commonwealth and state, and each of the Primes has an organisation like us.”

**Technology, leadership and personal growth**

After a short break, the remainder of the morning sessions were split into two streams, exploring the themes of technology and leadership. The first technology session was led by Peter Hook, National Sales Manager for Bosch Australia Manufacturing Solutions, who offered some insights on Industry 4.0, digitalisation and the relevance of automation for small businesses. He described some of Bosch’s recent projects in this area, and some of the support and funding options available to companies taking steps to digitalise their own operations.

“We are putting together pilot programs around the world running Industry 4.0 applications,” said Hook. “So as we learn about Industry 4.0 and what it really means, we’re developing more products and services related to that.”

Meanwhile, the first session of the leadership stream saw Ian Cattanach, Director – Business Advisory at William Buck, offer some advice on how to structure your manufacturing business for growth and profitability. He gave comparisons between different posssible approaches, such as standard company structures or the various trust options, and examined issues ranging from tax relief on research & development (R&D) through to estate planning.

“When I sit down with a client to discuss structures it’s not about the here and now,” Cattanach stressed. “You really need to look at what [the business] might look like in five or ten years time. You have to look at what the end goal is.”

The second technology session looked at the fast-moving field of additive manufacturing. Alex Kingsbury of Additive Economics provided a round-up of the latest advances in the technology and the growth in its usage. She also gave a snapshot of the current status of additive manufacturing in Australia. Kingsbury focused in particular on how additive manufacturing is moving beyond its initial take-up in making one-off parts for prototyping.

“One-off parts are great, but that’s not really the commercial future of the technology,” she explained. “The commercial future of the technology is in doing production. We’re looking at what’s being produced, what’s being put into production. And because of the nature of the technology, it’s possible to produce really complex shapes, and that enables a whole lot of applications in a lot of different fields.”

Session two of the leadership stream was led by John Downes, Strategic Mentor and Managing Director of acorro. Downes explained how leadership styles are a function of fear, love, desire, and intuition, and looked into ways to build the leadership, communication and relationship-building skills that are the foundations for inspiring high-performing teams.

“For me, leadership is about courage,” said Downes. “It’s about having a vision and having the courage to share that vision. It’s about having the curiosity to understand where I add value. And it’s about actually having the humility to know that I can be wrong, I will be wrong, and knowing that every time I will learn from it.”

After that it was time for lunch, and more networking among the delegates. As the afternoon sessions got underway, the focus moved more towards personal resilience and growth, and how you can get the most out of yourself, and the people you are working with.

Opening up proceedings was Gary Bertwistle, best-selling author of ‘Who Stole My Mojo?’ and a leading expert on innovation and creativity. Bertwistle invited the audience to reflect on which businesses and business leaders have ‘mojo’, that spark of energy and creativity that drives them to high levels of achievement. He explored the qualities that set these organisations and individuals apart, and the lessons we can all apply in our own working lives.

“When you think about these people, the number one attribute is that they can envisage a future that doesn’t exist yet,” said Bertwistle. “What’s the dream? What can you see as a leader that doesn’t exist yet, that you can see that no-one else can see? That’s what these guys do.”

If resilience in business is about being ready to take on whatever the future holds, then a key component of that is becoming equipped to engage the upcoming generations that will provide the workforce of the future. This formed the basis for the next presentation, from author, social researcher and media commentator Claire Madden. Technological advances and changing lifestyles are creating widely differing attitudes and expectations among the emerging millenial workforce. Madden shed light on what these incoming generations want from a workplace, and how you can create a culture that engages them successfully.

“All the generations need to learn from each other,” said Madden. “The strength that we can build in our teams is as multi-generational teams, where we have the experience of baby boomers, of Generation X and Y and Z, all working together.”

Finally, the closing session featured Deanna Blegg, endurance athlete, entrepreneur and motivational speaker, who shared her own personal resilience story in conversation with Conference MC - Warwick Merry. Having represented Australia at the Commonwealth Games in the triathlon, Blegg was diagnosed with HIV in 1994, when she was 24. Refusing to be defeated, Blegg instead went on to become a champion in the World’s Toughest Mudder endurance contest, while also having two children. A further setback came at the age of 46, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, but after an arduous treatment process, Blegg again overcame illness and is still competing in athletics events to this day.

“Everyone’s been through tough times,” said Blegg. “And you have two choices: to be a victim or to be a survivor. You can let it have that negative effect, or you can say ‘Right. This has happened. How am I going to get through it?’ And just by making that choice, it just changes something in your brain, it fills your body with positivity, and then you become solutions-focused.”

**Building networks**

As well as the speaker program itself, the Conference featured exhibition stands from a number of organisations servicing the manufacturing sector in Australia. Exhibitors included Applied Machinery, Dimac Tooling, Leap Australia, Recruit Australia, Renishaw, Rigby Cooke Lawyers, Phoenix PLM, and the Conference’s main sponsor – William Buck.

“The speakers today gave a real holistic view of resilience in manufacturing; it was really well put together in terms of the program,” said Estelle Pentland, Marketing Manager at William Buck. “For us as a sponsor that’s what we try to talk about all of the time. Having a stand has been a great opportunity for people to come and talk to us. We like to be visible in the manufacturing space so it just gives everyone a chance to have that face-to-face contact. It’s definitely been worthwhile.”

Daniel Fisher of Applied Machinery also felt that exhibiting at the Conference had been a valuable activity: “It’s been fantastic. We’ve spoken to a few good contacts that we haven’t met before, about current and upcoming projects they’ve got going on. The day’s been really positive.”

Throughout the event, there were abundant opportunities for delegates to make new acquaintances and catch up with existing contacts. As well as a series of networking breaks during the day, the event was followed by a cocktail function with drinks and refreshments. As AMTIL CEO Shane Infanti brought the Conference to a close, he thanked the delegates for taking time from their schedules to attend.

“It’s been a terrific day,” said Infanti. “We’ve had a lot of members here, and a lot of non-members, which is very pleasing to see. A big thank you to our major sponsor William Buck, and our other corporate partners AGL and Association Insurance Australia. Thanks to all our speakers, to all our exhibitors, and to our MC - Warwick Merry. Thanks finally to the AMTIL team, particularly our Events Manager Kim Banks. And look out for our upcoming events, including our flagship Austech exhibition next May. We’re looking forward to a really good event next year.”

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**About AMTIL**

The Australian Manufacturing Technology Institute Limited (AMTIL) is the peak national body that represents the interests of manufacturing technology suppliers and users within the precision engineering and advanced manufacturing sector. Since its establishment in 1999, AMTIL has engaged in a range of initiatives aimed at supporting and promoting the industry in Australia. These include: Austech, Australia’s premier advanced manufacturing and machine tool exhibition; the industry-leading publication AMT Magazine; and an array of other services for its members.

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