

The New World

History records that in the late 18th Century, there were a series of innovations within textile industry which transformed production when the factory system was introduced. This marked the beginning of a whole new world within the manufacturing sector, in what became known as the Industrial Revolution.

In reviewing the history of the Industrial Revolution, it is recorded that it took place from the 18th to 19th centuries, in a period which featured predominantly agrarian, rural societies in Europe and America. These rapidly changed from urban to industrial societies. Prior to the Industrial Revolution which began in Britain in the late 1700s, manufacturing was often done in people's homes, using hand tools or basic machines. The advent of new technologies meant that industrialization brought about a change which lent to the wide use of powered, special-purpose machinery, factories and mass production.

A major element of the Industrial Revolution which impacted on the textile and iron industries was the development and introduction of the steam engine the steam engine played a significant role in the iron and textile industries. As it is today in the electronic and information age, the introduction of the steam engine was heralded as the key to improving efficiency and productivity. It is a fact that at the time of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, it served to improved systems of transportation, communication and banking. From a positive standpoint, the contention was that industrialization brought about an increased volume and variety of manufactured goods and an improved standard of living for some. On the negative side, the argument was advanced that the revolution resulted in often grim employment and living conditions for the poor and working classes.

It became apparent that despite the negatives, the introductions of new technologies at that time were embraced. Nonetheless there were protests by workers, as an English group known as 'Luddite', led by a man named Ned Ludd, attacked factories, damaged and /or destroyed equipment. This has not been the case in the 21st Century in which we live. The introduction of the internet and mobile communications has been received and embraced with open arms. It is now widely promoted that the world has become a global village, where upon digitally technology allows for constant connectivity. This in itself is considered a plus for organizations, as they benefit tremendously from the fact that members of the workforce are exposed to the new digital technologies in various forms; for use both in the workplace and the work environment.

Organizations and business enterprises can bask in the fact that they can now move away from the traditional ways of work, to those that offer a measure of greater flexibility. The utilization of the technologies provides the opportunity for organizations and enterprises to drastically

reduce their operational expenses. Many would have scale down their operations, with the result that there is a lesser demand for both physical space and staff personnel. Transacting business by the use of the internet has become a way of life. The demand for staff to be onsite may not be a requirement in many instances, as work can be done from a home location, through the use of the internet and with devices such as the computer, table and smart phone. Home working is now a feature of today's world of work as it was in the 18th and 19th Centuries. This seems to concretize the notion that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

The move to home working represents a major cultural shift, as it has implications for removing direct face to face contact in some areas of business. It however moves with the times by allowing for electronic transactions and reducing the need for a high use of paper. This sits well with the idea of promoting a green economy. Employer can feel far more comfortable that business can move a pace, since the digital technologies using internet, tablets and smart phones have ready and easy access to materials and information. Employers can feel relatively comfortable that available to them is a more knowledgeable work force.

One notable feature of the current technology revolution where communication via satellite rules supreme, is the fact that there has invariably been a change to the eight hour working day. This has virtually gone unnoticed. Some workers can now discharge their role and functions as times convenient to them, and engage their management, colleagues and customers far more readily. What it brings into sharp focus and question, is the relevance and the merits and demerits of the debate on a 24/7 hour workday.