

SMART PORTS OR SMART PEOPLE?

AN SPSCT 2018 EVENT REVIEW

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PTI recently held its first Smart Ports & Supply Chains Technologies Conference (SPSCT) in Rotterdam, and I thought I'd take this opportunity to explore, review and explain some of the findings therein. Port Tech MD James Khan and I wanted to bring the SPSCT event to the industry for many years, thinking it very much the natural offshoot of our Container Terminal Automation Conference (CTAC) in London which has developed over the last few years into a multifaceted event growing out beyond its remit.

The reality of the terminal automation explored during the CTAC conferences naturally lends itself to greater conversations around overarching new technology which unites once disparate elements of the supply chain. However, wanting to ensure CTAC didn't lose its core theme in the hype and density of technology and the wider industry, we created SPSCT to branch out beyond terminal automation and involve ports, smart technologies and players focussing on the wider supply chain.

After all, if the technologies of tomorrow (blockchain, IoT, etcetera) allow players along the whole supply chain to seamlessly interact, shouldn't we be charting the

development of that journey and taking a holistic overview of the global chain via the prism of the smart port? The answer to that has proven to be yes and no.

EVENT CONTENT

The SPSCT event was spread over two packed days of content. Day one began with an insight into the Port of Rotterdam's journey to becoming a world-renowned smart port, and covering such issues as port digitalization, the smart end-to-end supply chain, standardization, blockchain and smart global trade. The standard of debate was exceptionally high. We had a blend of professors, executive port insiders, solution providers, consultants and international trade representatives taking to the stage for 10 minute presentations, followed by Q&A sessions with our moderators and the audience.

The response we've received from our delegates has been very positive, with many commenting on the deep level of insight offered, however, my personal view is that we could've invested more time fleshing out conversations and I will certainly be more mindful in the future of the rabbit-hole of data discussions which can

dominate and deepen debates to a very complex level. I think it's very important for us to straddle the line between facilitating the high-level discussions that need to take place for us to be able to confidently utilize data, while also being mindful of clearly articulating the definite and direct benefits of new technology.

Day two began with us looking into supply chain logistics, followed by sessions on new business models, smart data, smart terminals, and the challenges in recognising the end-to-end chain. This day was very positively received again, but perhaps where I have had the most pause for thought. I am under no illusions that our role at Port Technology is to provide a fertile ground for discussion, to ask the difficult questions and get conversations between key figures started, as well as to hype up technologies for our contributors and experts to corroborate or dismiss, all with the aim of pushing our industry forward. Yet it is here, with the attendant complexity and vastness of the supply chain, that we've found the boundary. From hereon I see this as our mission at Port Technology; to chart, develop and present new technologies and their potential, whilst assuring they're held



up to the utmost scrutiny in terms of their actual ability to influence a highly complex, interconnected chain. A chain with vast opportunity for evolution within its myriad niches.

EVENT TAKEAWAYS

The presentations will be available on the PTI website at the time this journal is published, so please head to the site for an insight into the key content of the conference, however to offer some key takeaways I amassed the following:

1. The supply chain is vast. Really, really vast. While we were eager to offer a holistic overview of the global supply chain and the technology that can empower it, such an undertaking proved to be all but impossible as the intrinsic complexity makes it very hard to chart a linear line throughout it. That said we opened up so many powerful niches at the conference, each ripe for innovation, evolution and/or automation.
2. There's a split between those who believe new technologies will come in and overhaul everything, changing the whole landscape of the industry (and the wider world) and those who believe that we need standards before we can do anything at all. I look forward to furthering each side of this dichotomy as we move into 2019.
3. Data is the new oil, yes, but are we harnessing it in meaningful ways? As prior stated, data became a main theme in many of the sessions as the values/risks of sharing data remains in nebulous territory. Dr Eva Savelsberg (who's fantastic '2038: A Smart Port Story', which I wrote about in these pages in the last edition, is now available for download at the PTI website) made a very interesting prediction that the future will show it is more risky to not share data than to share data.
4. The evolution of the smart port is more than enough for us to focus on at present. The smart port directly implies supply chain integration, IoT, smart cities, 5G and AI, as opposed to getting grander and grander visions of the future, increased focus on the iterations of developing trends within the smart port can act as a microcosm for the macro-level conversation.
5. It may seem a cliché to say people are vital to future technologies and port operations, but it really is more than marketing speak. If the people our leading port, trade and technology providers are employing don't understand 'smart' notions then we won't be able to develop in any meaningful way. The way in which we see anyone involved in the port sector and supply chain

is going to have to innately change. Post-event discussions can be neatly summarised in our company name 'Port Technology', for smart ports mean we need an aptitude in port operations but also technology, both as standalone fields, but also as terms together.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we are happy with the foundation we have developed at the Smart Ports & Supply Chain Conference for 2018, and it's something we hope to build upon year on year. In many ways, the answers that we want for the industry just cannot be answered – yet. But with 5G on the very near horizon and block-chain trails happening all over the place, next year's event will capitalize on the developments that have been mooted in Rotterdam in October. In the meantime we have our CTAC conference which will bring us back to the terminal and the automation therein. While the subject matter is different, it affords us another opportunity to network and build bridges between key voices in the sector. It's great for ourselves, our readers and our clients that we now have a dedicated terminal automation conference and a dedicated smart port conference in our yearly calendar. I hope to see you soon at one, the other, or both.