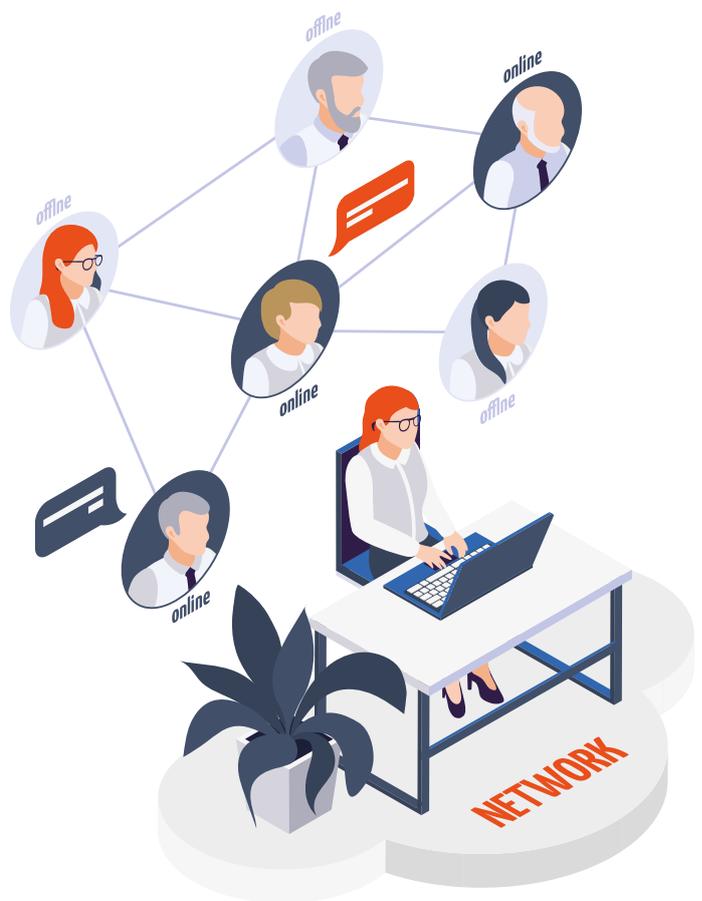


How can we thrive in the face of ongoing disruption?

20 Leaders representing small, medium and large manufacturers gathered to share perspectives on managing their teams during the pandemic; strategies to enhance collaboration internally and to win new business; and approaches to investment decision making in these uncertain times. Here are some of our key takeaways:

How can we help our people be resilient and deal with uncertainty?

- Many businesses have introduced regular meetings with employees to discuss welfare related issues. Leaders recognise their responsibility to workers including understanding personal and mental health needs, supporting the social aspects of work and protecting workers' families.
- It is hard to replace physical interactions once the novelty of online wears off. Leaders are exploring differences between on-site and off-site roles. The aim is to create a good balance, to address inequity and respond to employee preferences.
- Traditional attitudes towards working from home are also evolving and some assumptions have been challenged. For example, younger workers have not always been the most enthusiastic advocates of new technology.
- Onboarding and training new workers has been particularly difficult with limitations due to remote working, site access and furlough.
- The initial lockdown generated strong commitment and engagement from people. However this was harder to maintain as restrictions eased. The mental strain of subsequent lockdowns and new restrictions have not helped.



How can we collaborate to drive value and manage risk?

- Leaders highlighted increased adoption of online technologies as an enabler in breaking down barriers and increasing collaboration with colleagues around the globe.
- It has been much harder to manage external partners especially with new projects.
- Some leaders have successfully explored using innovative technology (e.g. using a Go-Pro or HoloLens) to recreate site visits, line walks and informal customer conversations. In some cases this is creating even stronger customer relationships than before the pandemic.
- Winning new business is tough – especially securing initial meetings remotely.
- The pandemic has changed the nature of risk management, bringing new challenges eg Covid testing, social distancing, dealing with outbreaks and managing site closure.



How can we innovate when investment is tight and we don't know what the future holds?

- The pandemic has removed barriers and increased the pace of adoption of some new technologies. Key areas include addressing specific challenges (e.g. remote working, remote sales visits) and enabling rapid innovation (e.g. ventilator challenge).
- Approaches to innovation are changing with increased external collaboration. This is promoted through platforms that support communication of ideas more quickly and across wider geographies.
- Innovation workshops need to be short (max two hours) and more focused when working remotely. This makes in depth innovation more challenging.
- Some leaders are reinvesting savings into further innovation, for example re-deploying labour time savings and cost savings from reduced office space requirements.
- Will the future lead to even more flexible manufacturing such as off-site manufacture / manufacture at home? There are exciting opportunities to explore however other barriers to agility and flexibility will have to be overcome (e.g. logistics, insurance).

EDGE Digital hosts regular invitation only events for manufacturing leaders to share insights and perspectives amongst peers.

If you'd like to join the conversation please get in touch with us or visit www.edge-digital.co.uk/events to find out more.

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