



## **Innovation in Manufacturing webinar executive summary**

### **Overview**

Chaired by Peter Holland of Linear Structure, a panel of directors from some of the UK's leading domestic, contract and office furnishing manufacturers discussed diversity in manufacturing to beat COVID-19, recovery strategies and the significance of circular manufacturing. The webinar took place on Thursday 18 February 2021. It was part of a four-part series themed 'Innovation in Times of Crisis' from The Furniture Makers' Company, the City of London livery company and charity for the furnishing industry.

### **Chairman and panellists**

- Peter Holland, principal of Linear Structure
- Ian Oscroft, managing director of Whitemeadow Furniture
- Simon Spinks, group chairman of Harrison Spinks
- Charles Winn Jones, operations director of Herman Miller

### **Headline points from webinar**

Below is a summary of the points made by each of the panellists when asked about the headlined themes. The full recording of the webinar is below.

#### **Leadership and innovation**

##### ***Ian Oscroft***

- Lead from the front – be visible – directors carried on working safely in offices. Gave team confidence and clear direction.
- Whitemeadow was able to continue manufacturing because of safety adaptations – one way working, PPE, extra wash stations etc, daily COVID-19 reports.

##### ***Simon Spinks***

- Decided to go on front foot during the lockdown.
- Kept the development team working and as a management team.
- We focused on an innovative new spring unit and its development during the lockdown. We flew a machine from USA and bought exclusive rights to use the new machinery and spring development outside USA.
- Kept everyone positive and their mindset focused on future business opportunity.
- We had to change how we sell so set up a website but directly connect it with retailers many of whom were not selling online.
- Harrison Spinks discovered when they started back up and brought back their top workers productivity went up – (80/20). It forced Harrison Spinks to look at how they could raise productivity by helping train others to this standard.

##### ***Charles Winn Jones***

- Increased communication is key to combat isolation. Andi Owen, CEO, had fortnightly meeting senior managers globally.
- Despite working from home, we tried to push forward on any projects that still make business sense.
- How and where we sell has changed. There was a shift from contract furniture to furniture for people working from home.
- Manufacturing from made to order – make to stock.
- Adapted product ranges for size restrictions
- Logistics – deliveries to homes not warehouses.

- New product ranges developed for COVID-19, including screens.

## **Effective communication**

### ***Ian Oscroft***

- Whitemeadow created a workplace Facebook Group, video updates every two weeks from Ian.
- A daily Health & Safety bulletin was given.
- Communication was supported by a Joint Communication Committee consisting of Ian, Human Resources and 15 other members of staff.

### ***Simon Spinks***

- Daily zoom meetings in the early days of the crisis

### ***Charles Winn Jones***

- Herman Miller had an internal communications application that enabled employees to message each other and share pictures and videos– gave a sense of community.
- The company found it easier to communicate with the office groups but communication at the factory was more of a challenge. Had to reformat by reducing size of groups. Four groups of 50 down to 20 groups of 10 people due to the size of conference rooms to make communication safe and effective.

## **Current challenges**

### ***Ian Oscroft***

- Acceptance of longer lead times – large number of orders – retailers limited storage delivery.

### ***Simon Spinks***

- Making most of our own components helped Harrison Spinks but space has been an issue.

## **Wellbeing**

### ***Ian Oscroft***

- Office staff work on rotation – it keeps people connected with the office but also allows more flexibility on daily basis.

### ***Charles Winn Jones***

- Managers have been given training to help identify behaviours potential issues, keeping in close contact via Teams to maintain team spirit. Day of purpose – community work to keep people engaged.

## **Audience questions – answered by *Charles Winn Jones***

### **What are you learning from international countries?**

With our Covid journey we were able to quickly develop a global playbook with best practice protocols that meant we could keep our people and factories safe

***Do you think webinars are the way forward after lockdown? Or do you think customers will miss face to face events?***

I think it will be a mix, face to face I very important and through this time it has been missed, but the last year has proved us that technology has moved forwards so much in the last few years and the ease and reliability of connections and systems that have a wide reach at low costs will certainly continue to be a part of business life after lockdown.

***Are you expecting another consumer boom post lockdown or will holidays take the bulk of consumer spending?***

Hard to answer, but for this area we will continue to expand our product range, hold correct inventory levels and continue to develop our systems to help support growth in this sales channel.

***Has BREXIT influenced the choice of raw material suppliers from EU: refused ones or continue cooperation anyway?***

No change so far, we have some really good and key suppliers in Europe and will continue working with them. As we bring new products to market, we will continue with our current approach in building the supply chains to be reliable with high levels of quality at competitive full price, and when we do this we included transit, documentation and stock costs.

**Watch the webinar**

The Furniture Makers' Company  
the furnishing industry's charity

**'Innovation in manufacturing' webinar**

18 February 2021, 11:00am – 12:00pm

A panel of directors from some of the UK's leading domestic and office furnishing manufacturers.

**Charles Winn Jones**  
Operations Director at  
**Herman Miller**

**Ian Oscroft**  
Managing Director at  
**Whitemeadow Furniture**

**Simon Spinks**  
Group Chairman at  
**Harrison Spinks**

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**Thank you for joining -**  
the webinar will begin shortly

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**Panellist biographies**



**Peter Holland, principal, Linear Structure**

Peter Holland spent the first two decades of his career in sales and sales management in the Office Furniture industry, working for leading design-led companies such as, Vitra and Fritz Hansen. In 2010, with a keen desire to help sales and management professionals maximise their sales performance he founded Linear Structure Ltd.



**Ian Oscroft, managing director, Whitemeadow Furniture**

Ian Oscroft is managing director and majority owner of Whitemeadow Furniture, a manufacturer of upholstered sofas, chairs and bed frames, supplying most major UK and Eire retailers for the past 26 years. Ian started working as a sales representative 42 years ago within the grocery trade, before moving into the furniture industry 33 years ago. Initially working as a sales representative for Contour Mobel, a Christie Tyler company, he worked his way up the group organisation to managing director at Ultra Furniture. He was appointed managing director of Whitemeadow in 2003 and led a management buyout in 2007.



**Simon Spinks, group chairman, Harrison Spinks**

Simon Spinks is group chairman at fifth generation bedmaker Harrison Spinks. Previously managing director, Simon has been in the business since he began painting bed legs at age eleven. Simon has always had a passion for manufacturing beds and began officially working at Harrison Spinks full time in 1989, and then became managing director when he was 25. During his time at the business, Simon has been instrumental in the company's journey towards a greener future, and personally designed the Millennium Award-winning Revolution® pocket spring.



**Charles Winn-Jones, operations director at Herman Miller**

Charles has held the position of director of operations at Herman Miller since 2018. This move came after joining as head of UK manufacturing in 2011, during which time a state-of-the-art manufacturing plant was purpose built. A champion of lean manufacturing, Charles has taken his 20 years' experience in all areas of operations, including logistics, marketing and customer care, to promote a bespoke kaizen-based system at the Herman Miller plant. Charles oversees an operations department of over 250 people, including logistics, engineering, options, customer care and manufacturing teams at Herman Miller and subsidiary, Naughtone and Colebrook Bosson Saunders (CBS) across the EMEA region.