

Manufacturing together: Solving supply chain challenges through collaboration

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Contents

- 4 **Setting the scene**
- 5 **What the room agreed on**
- 6 **Ideas that came up repeatedly**
- 7 **Where the room diverged**
- 8 **Questions for the wider Digital Supply Chain Hub community**
- 9 **What's next?**

Part of, and inspired by, the Made Smarter movement

Our **vision** is to transform UK manufacturing through digitally empowered supply chains that are more **efficient, resilient and sustainable**.

Delivered by Digital Catapult



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Setting the scene

The scenarios

- 1 Automotive manufacturing
- 2 Food manufacturing
- 3 Aerospace manufacturing
- 4 Construction materials manufacturing

The format

In small breakout groups, participants acted as an advisory board to a fictional manufacturer, helping it decide priorities for the next three to five years.

No sales pitches and no single “right” answer. The focus was honest discussion, shared experience and practical problem-solving between peers.

In the room

The workshop brought together 40+ attendees across manufacturing, tech, supply chains, consultancy, and more, who were tasked with discussing the sector specific scenarios.

What the room agreed on...

Uniting people and processes makes transformation stick

Bringing everyone from the factory floor to the boardroom and upskilling existing staff builds the trust and buy-in.

Phased pilots over a rip-and-replace keep risk low and momentum visible.

Growth comes from building the ecosystem

A partnership-led approach spreads cost and risk while bringing in the fresh thinking that keeps a business from stagnating.

Understand the problem before the solution

Starting with a proper diagnosis and connecting data, systems and people means investment targets the right priorities and can prove its return before capital is committed. Stronger traceability doubles as evidence of capability when supplier status is at stake.

Ideas that came up repeatedly

Diagnose first

Risk analysis, maturity assessment and finding real bottlenecks before choosing a solution.

Data as the foundation

Accurate, connected data and a single source of truth — the basis for visibility and traceability.

Pilot, then scale

Test beds and prototypes on one line, iterate, prove ROI, then roll out.

People who make it work

Buy-in and change management, upskilling, skills audits, Lean Six Sigma.

Look to the ecosystem

Pool energy, partner with universities and banks, bring in external specialists.

Promise & caution of AI

Useful, but not a 'golden bullet' — mind IP, cyber-security and readiness.

Where the room diverged

Is AI a golden bullet?

Whilst enthusiasm is promising, a degree of scepticism is needed too. Weigh intellectual property, cyber-security and readiness before leaning on it.

Invest now, or de-risk first?

Some backed quick wins on low-hanging fruit; others said resolve market and sector risk before any capital spend.

Compete on price, or on quality?

Cost against the quality, reliability and specialist capability that earns loyal customers in the first place.

Is there a single right answer?

The same brief produced different priorities. A reminder that sequencing is a judgement call, not a formula.

Questions for the wider Digital Supply Chain Hub community

Who has connected legacy systems and improved data visibility, without disrupting day-to-day operations?

What programmes and tools are available to support a business through this kind of transition?

What's the day-to-day tool that genuinely helps improve the supply chain?

On the same brief, two groups chose different priorities — so where should focus really go first?

What's next?

Continue the conversation

Keep building on the discussions you have had today and connect with those in your group [HERE](#).

Feedback

Let us know how these sessions could be improved for future version [HERE](#).

Supply chains **made smarter,** together.

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