



DMi case study

# Ulster Weavers – Weaving Success

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ULSTER  WEAVERS

TIMELESS TEXTILES & HOMEWARE

business turn-over  
increased by 160%

## The Company

Ulster Weavers are based in Northern Ireland and come from a long and proud history of textiles and linen weavers in Ireland. They supply worldwide garment manufacturers for most UK and US retailers. From its heydays in the 1960s/70s when there were 50 spinning and weaving companies the Northern Irish industry had been on a long term and deep decline.

When Declan Gormley joined the business as MD he immediately saw its potential as a leading player in the global linen market. However they would need to outperform their competition, which was going to be easier said than done. Gormley's vision was "we weren't going to be the cheapest but we would be the best. We are going to become a world class business, the very best textile business we can be". "It was a great focus but understanding the reality of changing peoples' mindsets was a large issue for us".

In a fixed cost business the key was growth. "I recognised that the business wouldn't grow unless we could sort out proper planning and control. If you are running a business on an ad-hoc basis you make big errors because you are simply not informed of the issues and your assumptions are wrong". Gormley adds, "there was no planning and no chance of forecasting".

Having learnt about Dave Manning, who was then with Oliver Wight, he decided to begin the

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journey to excellence with Dave by starting with basic work on organisational structure, processes and systems. The key areas for improvement were 5 KPIs:

- On time in full customer service (OTIF)
- Supplier delivery performance
- Schedule adherence
- Inventory accuracy
- Adherence to plan

All of which were no where near world class standards to begin with, all being less than 50%! A full time Project Manager, Gerry haw, was approved to act as the catalyst and driver, which lead to the creation of a Steering Group made up of the Leadership Team and Dave Manning.

One of the challenges that Gormley faced was to get commitment from the Management Team to see it through and to pay more than lip service to the change. Everybody wanted to be world class but would everybody make the necessary changes.

The shop floor on the other hand were very positive, they said “we can tell you how to do it better”. “They were the biggest supporters of the change” said Gormley. Also engaging with the Sales Team was key, “getting your demand forecast right is a very important part of the S&OP process”

says Gormley. They now have an effective S&OP process in place and it continues to mature but creates visibility of information and issues that enables clear business management decision-making that would have been impossible before the transformation.

Over the four years of the programme the business turnover increased by 160% completely meeting Gormley’s growth ambitions and he says that S&OP “was the best thing that’s happened to our business”. Gormley is convinced that the company has changed because its people changed their behaviours. Most of the success, he believes, is a result of attracting, retaining and developing the right people not least of all through education and training.

Dave Manning commented “Ulster Weavers are part of a traditional industry where you would not necessarily expect to find leading edge thinking. They are also based in an area which has not had significant investment in people development for decades”, “however what I found at Ulster Weavers was an MD who was passionate about being world class and a group of talented, committed management who were full of enthusiasm. So once the direction was set and commitment demonstrated they were totally determined to make Ulster Weavers world class”.

