

NEIL R. SMITH



Experienced Manufacturing Leader & Consultant

Profile Overview

With over three decades of hands-on leadership in manufacturing, I bring a wealth of experience from building factories from scratch, turning around challenging operations, and guiding international teams through periods of intense change and growth. My career has spanned Europe and Asia, with extensive time in China, where I've navigated cultural nuances, regulatory landscapes, and supply chain complexities to deliver tangible results.

I partner with manufacturing organisations facing critical transitions – whether stabilising a disrupted site, optimising efficiency, or scaling for growth. My goal is to provide interim senior oversight that bridges gaps without the long-term commitment of new hires, allowing your team to focus on core business while I drive execution.

What clients value most is my pragmatic, results-driven mindset: I cut through complexity to identify what truly moves the needle, then implement with discipline and accountability.

Key Services

I specialise in high-impact interventions tailored to manufacturing challenges. Here's how I support your operations:

Factory Efficiency Optimisation

Enhance the performance of your existing facilities by streamlining processes and aligning resources for maximum output.

- Simplifying production flows and eliminating bottlenecks to increase throughput smoothly.
- Improving demand alignment with planning, purchasing, and operations to reduce waste and inventory friction.
- Engaging teams around clear, measurable targets that foster ownership and sustained improvement.

Interim Leadership Solutions

Provide steady, experienced guidance during times of uncertainty, such as leadership vacancies, expansions, or crises.

- Rapid stabilisation of operations to restore direction and protect key metrics like service levels and margins.
- Reinstating structure through defined roles, regular cadences, and accountability mechanisms.
- Seamless transitions by preparing the foundation for your permanent leader, ensuring knowledge transfer and continuity.

Strategic Planning & Execution

Convert high-level vision into actionable, grounded plans that deliver without overwhelming your team.

- Prioritising initiatives by distilling strategy into a focused set of objectives with realistic timelines.
- Establishing efficient governance that supports decision-making minus the bureaucracy.
- Ensuring operational realism by sequencing efforts to mitigate risks and maintain momentum.

Experience Highlights

My track record speaks to a career built on delivering in demanding environments:

- Over 30 years in engineering, manufacturing, and international management, starting from a mechanical engineering apprenticeship with the UK Ministry of Defence.
- Served as Managing Director for multiple China-based operations at voestalpine Böhler Welding and voestalpine Wire Technology.
- Held senior executive roles at ESAB across Europe and Asia, plus leading private-equity-backed ventures through growth phases and turnarounds.
- **Proven expertise in greenfield startups:** Designed and launched new plants in China, integrating local teams with global standards for efficient ramp-up.
- **Turnaround successes:** Stabilised underperforming sites by addressing root causes in processes, culture, and leadership, resulting in improved throughput, cost control, and team morale.
- **Cross-cultural leadership:** Managed diverse teams across Asia-Pacific, Europe, and the UK, fostering collaboration in multicultural settings and adapting to time zone challenges.

These experiences have honed my ability to operate effectively in high-stakes scenarios, from rapid expansions to market disruptions.

My Approach & Style

At the heart of my consulting is a calm, collaborative style that emphasises sustainable impact over quick fixes. I believe in working alongside your team to build internal capabilities, rather than imposing external solutions.

- **Focused Objectives:** I start with a small set of agreed priorities, ensuring everyone is aligned from day one.

- **Direct & Transparent:** Communication is straightforward and fact-based, highlighting progress, risks, and adjustments without sugarcoating.
- **Team-Centric:** I integrate closely with existing leaders, empowering them to own the changes for long-term success.
- **Thoughtful Handover:** Every engagement includes a careful exit strategy, embedding processes so improvements endure beyond my involvement.

Clients often note my ability to remain composed under pressure, drawing on deep operational insight to make decisions that balance short-term needs with strategic goals.

Geographic Focus

Available globally for select engagements, with particular strengths in China and the Asia-Pacific region. I maintain strong connections with European stakeholders, enabling seamless support for multinational operations.

Get Started

Ready to bring clarity and momentum to your manufacturing challenges? Let's discuss how I can support your team.

For a confidential conversation:

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**Neil R. Smith Consulting -
Leadership that Delivers**