World leading medical technology company Stryker has its genesis in the passion and determination of one individual to improve the lives of others.

Stryker Case Study

The company was founded in 1941 by Dr Homer Stryker, an orthopaedic surgeon and inventor from Kalamazoo, Michigan.

"He had a phrase, 'if your tools don't work, make them work. If you can't make them work, make some that do work'", says Stryker Vice President of Operations David Butler. "He started to invent devices that would improve the lives of patients when he was working as a surgeon in the 1930s."

Increased uptake for those inventions led him to set up The Orthopedic Frame Company, later to become known as Stryker. With more than 43,000 employees worldwide, the company's success and growth since then has been based on a diverse array of innovative products and services in orthopaedics, medical and surgical, and neurotechnology and spine that help improve patient and hospital outcomes.

"Our mission is that together with our customers we are driven to make healthcare better."

Stryker's first Irish operations were established in Carrigtwohill in Cork in 1998 when two separate manufacturing facilities, one for orthopaedic implants and the other for instrument/cutting accessories, were opened. That same year, Stryker doubled in size with the acquisition of Howmedica, including its Limerick facility and the company has continued to grow in Ireland both organically and through acquisitions.

That includes the acquisition of Boston Scientific's neurovascular business in 2012 resulting in the construction of Stryker's Neurovascular facility in Cork (2013) and the acquisition of Physio Control and the integration of its facility in Belfast where mobile defibrillators are manufactured.

An Instrument Innovation Centre focused on Technology Research and New Product Development was opened in Cork in 2015 and this was followed by the AMagine Institute, the world's largest 3D printing facility for medical devices, also in Cork, in 2016.

Stryker's presence in Ireland now includes eight locations including the company's global Research & Development Innovation Centre, its European Manufacturing headquarters, and six manufacturing facilities located in Belfast, Limerick, and Cork. In total, the company has 3,700 employees in Ireland.

8

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Those Irish operations make a significant contribution to Stryker globally. "A number of key products that have contributed to Stryker's success and improved patient outcomes originate from Ireland."

The pandemic has reaffirmed the company's commitment to its people. "People are a core value for us," says Butler. "We have a high touch environment and are a very relationship-based company. We have a very strong diversity, equity and inclusion focus. The pandemic has strengthened and supported that focus and has brought it home to us that we should always strive to maintain an environment where all diverse people have a sense of belonging and are fairly treated."

The pandemic also provided a reminder of the importance of its products. "During the pandemic we made an Emergency Relief Bed, a limited release bed to support critical needs. This went from concept to launch in only seven days. In Ireland, our Innovation Centre and Tullagreen facility worked together to make face shields for hospital staff. We were delighted to be able to make a contribution."

3,700

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40

40 years of continuous growth

The pandemic is not over, but the company continues to focus on the health of its business. "Our focus now is on restoring growth trajectory. Our business is very robust with a very strong order book. We have a good pipeline of new product innovations as well."

The environment could be improved, however. "We need to build a more joined up and connected ecosystem," he says.

Talent is another area of focus. "While we focus on developing talent within Stryker, attracting high calibre talent into Ireland is challenging and people can find it difficult returning to Ireland. That could be made easier. Another part linked to that is housing. That is a big challenge when asking people to move to live near a facility. The government also needs to continue to invest in universities to ensure that students emerge with the appropriate skills both for the present and the future."

And there are skills challenge related to areas like digitalisation. "If we want to continue to be competitive, digitalisation is very important. That requires skillsets that include data analysis, automation, systems engineering and analytics. The challenge for an industry which has traditionally employed scientists and engineers is that it while we continue to require these skillsets we must now compete with big tech and other industries for these digital skills also."

The same applies to the software skills required for the new generation of wearable sensor-based devices which will provide surgeons with pre-operative and post-operative data to facilitate better patient outcomes and recovery. "These devices will help improve patient outcomes and support post-operative care. They are reliant on software, and as an industry we will require more skills in that area as well'.

The company is playing its part in nurturing the skills pipeline including through participation in Coop, graduate and apprenticeship programmes. "We have a number of programmes for manufacturing associates, and we are taking on apprentice engineers. We are also partnering with universities on course content. We also do a lot to promote STEM in schools."

Collaboration with universities and other partners across the healthcare ecosystem will also remain a key area of focus. "We need to bring that to the next level. We will maintain the alliances that we have made in the past and develop new alliances in the future that we may not even have thought of yet. That comes back to having a strong connected ecosystem in Ireland, that's very important."

The future is bright, he believes. "People are at the heart of our business and without the talent and the environment where people have a sense of belonging you are not going to get very far. That's been at the heart of both our success story in Ireland and the wider Stryker organisation and we will continue to focus on that."