

## **PetCom: Complete Re-engineering and Renewal of Skills**

### **What does this case study demonstrate?**

The main motivation for an overarching workplace innovation of the management and the employees was to overcome a lack of competitiveness. Huge investments in the machinery park and the qualification of the workers were made to become competitive again. Driven by the exceptional modernisation of the whole production process, the staff had to be trained for the new machinery. Therefore it was not only a re-engineering of the production but of the qualification of the existing staff. A modernisation with new production machinery took place – giving the necessity and the possibility for new qualifications and new positions and jobs in the company. The employees took this chance for the benefit of their competences and job security and the competitiveness of the company. Every worker can now take over every task in the production line. Additionally the opportunity for every worker to improve his/her skills and to get a new position in the company, independent of his former position and qualification, was given.

**Workplace innovation elements:** work organisation practice (self-managed teams, integration of technology), learning and reflection partnership, structure and system improvement, workplace partnership (involvement in change).

### **Context**

The company is currently part of a holding and produces animal food. A few years ago it had to go through a complete upheaval in order to survive the market conditions. The whole production process was modernised by introducing machines instead of craft based production. All the steps of animal food production are now implemented within the company (insourcing of former external production) and the production dramatically changed from mainly craft to machine production. The new production requested new qualifications of almost every employee in the production area and new positions were set up in the company as well.

### **Overall Competences: Ready to do any job in the production line**

An overall qualification was given to the production staff, enabling the employees to take over every job in the production. After the mechanisation of production most of the employees (including some of the back office staff, unskilled workers) were trained to take over every task or job in the production process. Every employee had the chance to upskill and take over a skilled worker's task. Former unskilled workers and helpers were trained in robotics and are now machine operators. This qualification offer was in the beginning not accepted by all of the employees. But after the first positive examples of such an upgrade of skills, most of the employees followed. Also administration staff help sometimes in the packaging area. One example is that the head of the personnel development and the production manager were both bakers before they started the company internal career. Now there is a new mood of working, everyone can take over every production activity. Beside formal qualification (existing or not, independent of the kind of existing qualification) every employee gets the chance to upskill and a new position in the company.

## **Training and Career Plan**

Based on the experiences of the re-engineering of production and qualifications, new company and individual qualification objectives were fixed based on the (future or recent) needed qualifications and individual career perspectives. The initiative came from the employees' representatives of the holding. The holding and its works council gave advice to the site because no pro-active personnel development concepts were implemented up to then. Background was to train employees for the job of new shift supervisors and foremen. The new worldwide orientation of the company (now part of a holding, company group) demanded new export and language skills. Every employee (even unskilled workers) was given the opportunity to develop his skills and competences. The company is investing in this improvement of qualifications, if an employee fails the formal examination support is given for a new trial or another job will be offered. Higher qualification is honoured by good and more demanding jobs.

## **Self-responsible work organisation**

The workers at the production site have leeway to organise their work e.g. in particular situations (like football championship games, social meetings) they can have a break, fulfilling the production objectives later. The main orientation is the need to fulfil the deadlines given by the customers.

## **So who benefits?**

The initiative for workplace innovations came from the management (and partly the employees' representatives of the holding) but the innovations were adopted and taken up by the employees. The employees are mainly in line with the perspective of the managers. They like the job and production flexibility and the chance for every worker beside his/her former qualification and education to improve their skills and competences as well as taking over new positions. The employees (and as well the management) had no choice because of the situation of the company. Anyway, after a short hesitation phase they took the opportunity and they are quite happy with the results.

## **Prognosis**

The main impact is the survival of the company in the market and a better competitiveness level. Based on the new overall qualification the employees do have more self-responsibility for the production and the products. Insourcing of former external production and a modernisation of the production process together with the renewal of the overall or all-round qualification of the production staff are the ground to survive in a competitive market. Therefore new ways of qualification were taken, beside the existing formal qualification, even for unskilled workers. The experience of overcoming the company crisis by a common effort of management and employees will be also a new and sound basis for further workplace innovation.