

## **UAB Intersurgical – where people grow together with the company: WPI practices contribute to retain the company's leading positions in the world**

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

The company uses a number of workplace 'innovation' elements as part of the natural effective functioning of the organisation with particular attention to self-managing teams and organisational learning and development.

**Workplace innovation elements:** more job autonomy for employees, self-managing teams, supporting employee initiative, facilitating learning and development.

### **Context**

Intersurgical is Europe's leading designer, manufacturer and supplier of a wide range of medical devices for respiratory support. The company provides flexible patient solutions for airway management, anaesthesia, critical care, and oxygen & aerosol therapy primarily for use within the hospital environment but also at home. The factory in Lithuania is the main production and scientific research site part of the Intersurgical international company group with headquarters in the UK. The company employs over 1700 people in Lithuania. It was established in 1993 in a small town about 30 km from the Lithuanian capital city just after a large producer of electronic devices, which served the entire Soviet Union at that time, got bankrupt leaving the area without jobs and opportunities to develop. The company saw a unique opportunity to take off by using the local infrastructure and, most importantly, locally accumulated expertise, skills and knowledge. Today the company is recognised as a global leader in their product area on international markets.

Reinforcing self-managing teams at the ground production level and their line managers even below the middle management level was an intentional action of the company from around 2009 as a reaction to a fast company's growth since 2000 when both products and processes were becoming more complex every day. In the meantime, organisational learning and development was an organic process throughout the entire life course of the company. A unique feature of this process is the company's provision of all possible support to each motivated employee to become a director even if they start as an assembler or a process operator. You just need to show an enthusiasm, be proactive and show your abilities to learn to progress in the company.

### **Workplace innovation practices**

#### **Empowerment of production workers and line managers**

To empower the ground production level and their line managers below middle management level as well as the middle management for more job autonomy and self-management was decided in 2009 when a particularly fast growing production variety and complexity required new approaches in developing more effective and extremely high quality standards' in the production process. In 2010-2011 special training was organised to all 1<sup>st</sup> line / middle level managers with primary focus on soft skills and other team facilitating working qualities. Now the teams at the

production lines are more responsible for planning (especially production time management), quality and other aspects of the production process.

### **Support to employee initiative**

Another workplace innovation practice at this company supports employee initiative – each person despite their position in the company's structure, is invited to submit proposals in terms of product or production process improvements. This can be done by submitting proposals electronically or in the post-boxes around the company. Each proposal is then reviewed and feasibility assessed. When an initial agreement is given, responsible people are assigned to organise the implementation process.

### **Organisational learning and development**

Organisational learning and development is another workplace innovation practice in the company. A number of aspects are important in this respect. First, ongoing learning and professional development – this is strongly encouraged by the company. Every year common professional development goals and training needs are identified and training and professional development opportunities are offered and scheduled to all production floor employees to enable them to work with constantly changing technologies and production specifics, but also paying attention to individual career aspirations. The performance of high skilled employees is reviewed annually by the line-manager, development and training needs identified and professional development and training plans are set together. In addition to the annual review process, each employee is encouraged to submit their reflections on how the working environment and work organisation in general could be improved in the company, which contributes towards organisational learning and development processes. Second, wide internal career opportunities are offered to employees depending on their abilities. Starting at the very low position and climbing up the career steps in the company is seen as very positive sign. The company provides all the support needed for the person to develop either internally (training, assessment, career orientation) or externally (for instance, gaining a formal education diploma). It is a rule to look for a specialist internally before advertising a job place externally. This rule applies to all positions in the company. Third, occasional learning and awareness raising sessions are organised for employees where product distributors show how one or another product is used in practice. Fourth, investing in people – the company brings over high level specialists from abroad for internal company trainings or sends its teams abroad for training. The company also runs and apprenticeship programme, cooperating with vocational and high schools (funds study programmes and teachers, gives grants to very able students etc.). Fifth, the company uses new technologies in the learning and professional development process. For instance, use of mobile training stations by senior assemblers to familiarise the team with the assembling process of a new product with the help of video material right at the workplace – saves time, resources, better adherence to product quality standards etc.). At the end of 2014 the company has deployed an electronic Learning Management Information System – in the system each team and employee will have their own profile with all training needs and undertaken trainings recorded. It contains a so called training metrics: required training and a common frame when it has to take place. It is planned that this system could also contribute towards recognition of non-formal and informal learning (especially gained through the working experience) in the future, and especially for low skilled or employees without formal education.

### **How did they do it?**

Intersurgical uses an incremental approach where changes and further developments are implemented step by step by allocating appropriate financial resources. The employee is at the core of all changes and developments either they are implemented by the company's management

or suggested by the employees themselves. Many innovative ideas evolve from annual employee performance reviews, where employees and their line managers among other questions together discuss arising issues and possible solutions and possible solutions to solve them.

### **So who benefits?**

There are a number of positive attributes that benefit the company and employee, such as: multi-dimensional organisational learning, professional and personal growth, high staff engagement and commitment to the company, ongoing capability to innovate, retaining international competitiveness, company's sustainability over a long-term perspective.

### **Prognosis**

Employee-centred company managements is likely to be continued as, according to the company, its people are the main asset in retaining company's competitive advantage.