

## **ING Greece. Ensuring sustainability and future competitive advantage.**

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

ING has widely understood that all employees have a potential for creative thinking and are able to contribute to innovation and change by taking part in processes where knowledge and ideas are exchanged.

To this aim, the company focuses on facilitating employee collaboration by enabling dialogue, supporting employee development and improvement, facilitating employee engagement and encouraging employees to generate innovative ideas.

*Workplace Innovation elements: Work organization, Learning and reflection, Workplace partnership*

### **Context**

[ING Greece](#) has been operating since 1980 helping customers to secure their financial future through its pension, insurance, investment and bank assurance products. With more than 200,000 customers and a network of 16 branches and 25 offices throughout the country, the company has one of the largest networks of financial advisors, consisting of more than 1,000 people and employing about 400 administrative employees.

In the last years, significant changes are taking place in the company's structure. The Insurance sector of the company is in the process of being separated by the banking sector. The new Bank that will be created will be called ING and the new insurance NNG. The procedure of transition into this new structure is taking place slowly and is expected to be accomplished by 2016. Within the next year (2015), the rebranding of the new company (a new logo, new mission statement etc.) will take place.

The above mentioned decision, which was taken by the central offices, has affected workplace innovation. The general aim was to create less layering in hierarchy and a more decentralized company structure, placing important decision-making authority in the hands of front line and local managers, instead of reserving all critical decisions at the top.

*"We adopt and will continue to implement WPI practices because we want to stay competitive, improving ourselves and offering the best services to the customers, stakeholders and society". HR Manager*

The main approach was to respond to the company's needs having satisfied employees and customers. They started with the Preparation: most importantly through employee commitment surveys they realised their needs, for example, their wish to participate in top management's decision making or their need to receive advice on how to handle a difficult situation. The Assessment of each practice was carried out from the HR department and the top management. Finally, they defined a time line for the Implementation with certain policies and procedures.

### **Enabling employee dialogue by "Showing all that Matters".**

A new platform of corporate social networking has been implemented to facilitate employee collaboration called "S.A.M." (Show All that Matters). The platform is an interactive tool not only for one side

communication but for enabling dialogue. Even employees who are remote or scattered all over the world can come together in a common place to converse or exchange ideas. It creates a community that helps them connect. By making it easier for employees to find the resources and expertise they need to do good work, confidence increases and so does performance. It gives employees the ability to sort through the most relevant information or find the right subject matter expert. Also, it facilitates the transfer of knowledge between experts and the rest of the company. Those with deep expertise based on years of experience can participate in answering questions, or share links to valuable information that new employees might not be aware of. Over time, these answers and insights become a searchable knowledge repository. They share documents including policies and how-to instructions, they create virtual or project groups to encourage peer-to-peer collaboration, brainstorming and idea-sharing. They collaborate on projects, such as the planning and implementation of an improved service concept, the introduction of a new savings product in real time, engaging relevant experts and key stakeholders. They post corporate goals and initiatives and encourage discussions and comments. The employees create a “Profile” and share areas of expertise and domain knowledge with the rest of the organization. They find and follow experts that can help answer questions and solve problems quickly. They use “Like” to publically recognize those who are adding value to the company by answering questions or sharing expertise to information that has proved to be most useful or relevant.

## **A Learning academy for the employee’s improvement**

For one and a half years they have been operating a learning academy called FYI -For Your Improvement- under the umbrella of the board’s training team and the leadership team. The courses include: a seminar on Positive psychology for personal development in cooperation with the University of ALBA (located in Athens). This is carried out in two parts, a three- month’s duration seminar for all employees with the team leaders who offer mentoring on a personal and organizational level, on topics such as resilience, work-life balance etc. Furthermore, two working groups of thirty people are focusing on labour issues and compensation. Finally, special support is provided to insurance employees who cooperate with the company for more than twenty years, on topics such as: how they can cope with events related to serious diseases, i.e. like client’s claims for cancers which they frequently come across.

## **Engaging employees through breakfast with the C.E.O**

For a year and a half the company’s C.E.O. meets a group of 10 employees every Friday, the initiative is called “breakfast with the C.E.O.”, to discuss the developments of the company, without having any specific agenda. All employees have been invited to this open dialogue procedure which creates opportunities to talk openly and deepen the relationship of trust. It is an ongoing, face to face process of receiving feedback and communication between the top management, represented by the company’s C.E.O., and the employees. Employees share their needs, special preferences and goals on a real-time basis so the C.E.O. can get a better understanding of the company’s expectations as well as having a real contribution in running the company. The Breakfast with C.E.O. initiative, apart from improving the quality of information exchange, increases employee’s degree of engagement, by making them feel more included in decisions in which they have a vital stake: their rewards, their careers and their work environment. It fosters an overall culture of engagement based on a long-term commitment of the top management who is seeking and considering employees feedback.

## **“Talent council - Personal development through action”**

Every year, one or two of the company’s most talented employees form national teams (Talent councils) and take part in a challenge. The teams from all company branches worldwide take part in a challenge defined by the top leaders and are trained on how to achieve it, i.e. on how to find real solutions to work related issues (e.g. how to double their sales). They are supported by a coaching session with mentors and the CEO and they are offered development tools to work and collaborate virtually. The duration of the

training is ninety days and serves as an example of how the ideas from young talent pass on to the leadership team. The idea came up because the company's talented employees wanted to make their voices heard and the company wanted innovative ideas to be freely expressed.

The core "moto" of the training is "Personal development through action". Therefore, it is divided in two parts. The first is about action and includes the challenge that the participants will have to face and the second is about learning by doing and reflecting.

The benefits of the "Talent council" initiative for the participants is that they gain experience and they learn valuable tools that they can advance further in the coming years. Furthermore, they increase their personal development, they expand their professional network and they attract higher management's appreciation and recognition. The company becomes aware of new and innovative ideas, as well as solutions, in everyday work issues. Finally, the retaining of the company's talented employees is secured while the company is assisted in the creation of a succession plan for each employee and at the same time the personnel commitment gets stronger.

## So who benefits?

**Work organization:** A true "open door" work environment is created, with more friendly forms of working, by bringing executives and employees together, facilitating their collaboration in a more employee friendly and flexible form.

*"Communication across different departments is very effective....The decision making is decentralized, tasks are delegated to teams..." Employees focus group.*

**Learning and reflection:** Continuous employee improvement by participating in learning and development is facilitated. Their shared knowledge and experience is enhanced and supported involving all employees to this aim. A high degree of employee involvement in producing innovating ideas, in relation to specific company areas, is achieved.

**Workplace partnership:** Sharing of ideas, in an open way of communication, through dialogue, is encouraged. In this way, strategic knowledge which is exchanged, between experts and the rest of the company, is successfully integrated. Conditions for active employee participation are created, making them feel more involved in the decisions related to any company changes that are going to take place.

*"Practices such as "Breakfast with the C.E.O" are applied through an open and transparent process. It is a very inclusive procedure as, until now, all employees have attended" Employees' representative.*

*"The company has a very high rate of employees' commitment. It has built a fair working environment..."Employees' representative.*

## Prognosis

The company is resolute in making the best use of the applied workplace innovation practices to achieve results that will ensure its sustainability and future competitive advantage with committed employees. Therefore, continuous support to upgrade the quality of services maximizing the value of in-house expertise, their capabilities and cooperative skills, is well designed and effectively applied.