

## **Horticulture Industry Company: Workplace Innovation Based on Trust**

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

The company is improving an intrinsic working motivation and good working conditions, looking at this as a basis for company success. This leads to a typical win-win situation for the benefit of the management and the employees, and not least for the success of the company. All in all a holistic approach is visible, giving the employees as much self-responsibility as possible and enabling a communication without (formal) ceilings. Important WPI are fixed by company agreements. This worldwide acting company has high employee orientation, taking its human capital as the main factor of company success and enabling a comfortable and non-stressful working atmosphere and culture where people like to work and to be successful and innovative.

**Workplace innovation elements:** work organisation practice (job autonomy, flexible working, and self-managed teams), learning and reflection partnership, structure and system improvement, workplace partnership.

### **Context**

The company is a worldwide acting, more than 100 years old chemical company in a rural area of Germany producing (organic) substrates, base and peat products, covering the full diversity of growing means for the commercial horticulture industry. They see themselves as a world market leader with customers in more than 70 countries worldwide on all five continents, delivering innovative standard and customer oriented products. The 910 employees worldwide (about 200 of them are at the head quarter in Germany) are seen as the backbone for success, a (formally fixed) participation culture exists for many years. The company is engaged in sustainable production and delivered a first company related sustainability report.

### **Working Times Based on Trust**

Employees can work at any time they want, being self-responsible without any formal controlling by the management or line-managers. In this way they could combine much better private and family life with working times and relate working times to their own personal bio-rhythm (e.g. some like to start early, some later). However, the employees have to tune their own preferences with their working team (teamwork is the core element of work organisation) and respect work peaks. Apart from this, no constraints exist. These Trusted Working Times are part of an official agreement between the management and the employees and their representatives.

### **Theatre Pedagogy Factory / Workshop**

This joint project with a Theatre Pedagogic Centre is a personnel development measure to improve the team spirit and bring together or “bridging” different “cultures” of working groups (e.g. commercial and production related staff, different professions). The participants develop an own play performed before all the employees as an audience. Teamwork, work division and organisation are the main themes, presented by a dialogue and scenes of different working cultures (e.g. commercial and production staff).

## **Junior and Elder Staff Exchange**

A personnel development measure for 30-35 year old engineers (new employees) is intended to manage demographic change (bringing together old and young employees to exchange knowledge). Elder skilled workers (practitioners) and young engineers are coming together at the production machines exchanging practical knowledge. Another approach is to work in worldwide projects ("The Company in 2020"), looking for product innovations and future advantages of the products for the customers.

## **On Feet Meetings**

Spontaneous standing meetings of the staff on the work floor are held. Workers, managers, clerks etc. meet each other spontaneously to discuss problems, strategies, work division etc. This reduces the time and number of formal meetings, improves the day-to-day work organisation and management time and makes the meetings, adjustments and cooperation more lively and productive, short-termed, effective and efficient.

## **Health promotion during working time**

Developed by a health circle (with participation of the company's medical officer, the employees representatives and management representatives) health promotion is offered by the company: e.g. training for back muscles, financial support for fitness centre. Because there is still a lot of physical hard work to do, this is helpful to avoid negative physical consequences. Training for back muscles is made in-house in meeting rooms but also at the work floor directly beside the production machines and in the peat lands. The training is also offered to the customers.

## **Improvement system**

Innovation proposals from the workers are asked for in a systematic and formal way (written down in a company agreement). 80 to 100 proposals a year are coming from the administration staff and production workers. A strict and anonymous procedure guarantees a fair selection of the proposals being rewarded. A feedback is guaranteed, a prize (money) for relevant (workplace) innovation proposals is offered, and small gifts for not selected but creative proposals are given as well.

## **So who benefits?**

The impact is directly found in the organisational and personnel development of the company regarding self-responsibility, new competences, and flexibility for the employees. The reasons for WPI are to secure and improve the motivation of the employees, to maintain their health, to work together self-responsibly in a team and not least to improve the competitiveness and economic success of the company. The intrinsic motivation of the employees is seen as the main ground for company success, looking for the needs of the employees and a meaningful work.

## **Prognosis**

The co-deciding process and practical co-deciding implementation of WPI, fixed – in some cases- in a company agreement combined with a monitoring of the execution of the practices by the management and line managers is giving a good ground for the sustainability of the WPI. Responsibility instead of controlling is the motto to keep the company innovative and successful on the market. The company is looking for a working atmosphere that is intrinsically driven, and as much as possible not controlled by formal systems. Instead of formal monitoring and controlling a system of self- and group-control is appearing, which might be much more effective (and efficient).