

PROGRESSIVE THINKING

- PEOPLE
- LEADERSHIP
- IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS
- VISION & GOAL ALIGNMENT
- WORKPLACE STANDARDS

Continuous improvement, or CI, is a philosophy which looks to engage and empower front line employees to continuously improve business processes. Health and safety (HSE) is embedded in a CI culture.

Disorganised, inconsistent, hectic and exhausting. These were just some of the words that our colleagues used to describe working conditions in our plants at St Helens, Cwmbran and Shelbyville in the days before Continuous Improvement.

Productivity, morale and most importantly health and safety performance were all in need of improvement. For Ian Gornall, Knauf Insulation's Industrial Performance Director GMW Europe & CIS, empowering front line employees was a logical step. *"Managers are only around for 30% of the time, so it is obvious to devolve expertise to the people running the processes 24/7,"* he says.

This was the starting point for the CI journey which started in St Helens in 2011 and fits perfectly with Knauf Insulation's values of commitment, entrepreneurship, partnership and menschlichkeit.

So, how does it work? First, through workshops, and by asking the people at the sharp end of production (operators and engineers) to create standards for their workplace, their processes and the maintenance of their equipment. Creation of standards which all of the teams buy into provides a strong foundation for future improvement and results in more reliable performance (so less fire-fighting) and increased understanding and partnership between production and engineering teams. Critically, this is a process which is supported by but not led by managers.

"If we do a workshop and a number of actions come out of it – it's imperative that those actions are delivered on by the management team. This starts to form a kind of virtuous circle – operators keep their promise to maintain the standards and managers keep theirs. It's how you build trust," says Ian.

"Everyone is in this together and the improvements spread from one plant area to another as more standards are agreed. Operators become vested in CI because the solutions are their solutions. The work becomes easier and more rewarding. Operators and engineers take ownership, they become empowered and the culture starts to be 'simply the way we do things around here'."

This momentum is maintained by allowing operators and engineers to take part in the day-to-day management of their processes – the day-to-day issues, measuring their performance against targets which are aligned to business objectives, checking that their standards are being maintained and prioritising day-to-day tasks. They do this through daily meetings which are attended by area stakeholders. Support requirements are then escalated to the daily management meeting. Not only does this drive the engagement of operators and engineers, it frees managers up to focus on more strategic issues.

There is also a CI initiative that encourages all employees to submit ideas to improve their processes, equipment or work areas. Suggested improvements are reviewed on their merits and feedback is given for all ideas in a visual way so teams have access to all information. St Helens and Cwmbran plants receive in excess of 200 ideas every year, most of which are implemented.

The big question is how can you quantify the success of a change in working culture? At the end of the day there must be an improvement in the site's Measures of Performance which are usually efficiency, customer service, manufacturing cost and health and safety.

Continuous Improvement is now being implemented in all our plants in Europe and the USA. In Europe, St Helens and Cwmbran received 68 visitors over five separate reference visits between November 2016 and January 2017.



INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM AWARDS

The East European HSEEQ Leadership Award was presented to Natalija Domjanič, an HSEEQ Manager at Ajdovščina in Slovenia. A team award also went to Novi Marof in Croatia where employees achieved the most goals outlined in our annual HSEEQ KIEE & OEM improvement plan.

AT THE SHARP END OF HSE

"When it comes to health and safety, dozens of small actions can soon add up to making a big difference," says Bernd Göckert, Health and Safety Officer at our Simbach plant in Germany.

One of those 'small things' was as simple as replacing the use of box-cutter knives with special safety knives where the blade retracts automatically when not in use. *"Suddenly, cutting packaging in the plant is a much safer occupation,"* says Bernd.

Such attention to detail has certainly paid off. As of August 30, 2017, the plant had marked 526 days without a lost time accident (LTA).

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE SAFE

There is a lot to learn from both good and bad observations when it comes to work safety, says Jamie Cain, our HSE Manager at Shelbyville.

"Good observations reinforce proper safety behaviour and negative observations are a good coaching tool," he says. Our STEP-UP programme – or Safety Takes Every Person's Unrelenting Participation – asks for colleagues to submit good or bad observations about the plant to engage everyone in conversations about safety at work.

"This helps keep safety on everyone's mind throughout the day."

BUILDING A BETTER CULTURE

The HSE culture within our plants plays an important role. We have developed a set of expected HSE behaviours – for manager, supervisor and 'everyone' level – to create an HSE Expectations Framework.

Erkan Üçok, Plant Manager Eskisehir says: *"The organisation helps to create a warm environment instead of a formal workshop. At Eskisehir, it was very positive since the voice of the employees was captured in a structured way with feedback tackled transparently."*

Jan Brazda, Plant Manager Krupka, adds: *"The message from colleagues was to improve feedback and recognition for those who contribute to HSE culture. Now any colleague without a record in the HSE area is recognised and awarded a gift and certificate."*

- PHOTOS
1. NOVI MAROF PLANT
 2. SHELBYVILLE PLANT
 3. SIMBACH PLANT
 4. KRUPKA PLANT
 5. ST HELENS PLANT
 6. ESKISEHIR PLANT

