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OPTIMIZING PROJECT MANAGEMENT AT THE SCHWEIZER ELECTRONIC AG

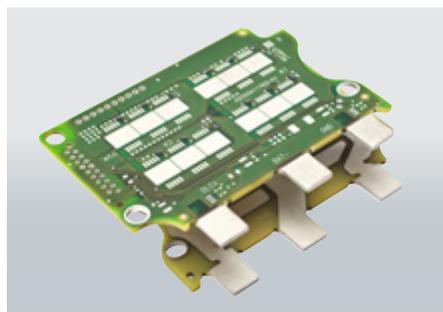
Lean Project Processes Support Growths

To ensure that future projects are more precise and efficient, the Schweizer Electronic AG in Schramberg decided to get professional help. Together with Ingenics experts, specialized workshops were prepared, based on Schweizer's individual requirements, to show how project management processes could be streamlined and made more sustainable. As a result, the Schweizer Electronic AG is now better prepared to manage each phase of its future projects. And to ensure consistent results in the future, the final results were compiled in a new project management handbook.

At the Schweizer Electronic AG, leaner processes in project management were vital for its continuing growth. Because after all, increased growth also means increased orders and new projects – all of which needed to be fulfilled with the existing personnel and facility resources. That's why they turned to the Ingenics AG as a consulting partner - to be certain that their rising customer demands could be satisfied over the long-term – with reliable deliveries, effective processes and the efficient use of all available resources. The key question that needed an answer was: Which of the existing processes in various project phases needed to be enhanced using lean management principles?

The ultimate goal was to create more efficient and effective processes in their project management – which were individually tailored to suit the company's various projects. This included integration of

Schweizer Electronic AG's customer projects, its internal IT projects and the overall organizational structure. Although there were similarities in some projects and in certain projects phase – especially in the start and end phases – “there were also significant process variations when we looked at them in detail,” adds the Ingenics expert: Eike Ehlers. In cooperation with the Schweizer staff, he and his team developed new structures as well



The Schweizer Electronic AG is Europe's third largest manufacturer of circuit boards.

as methods which would later serve as a foundation for future projects.

Workshops for Project Teams and Decision-Makers

At the start, Ingenics experts analyzed the existing project management processes. Interviews and discussions with the Schweizer staff then helped to quickly identify those working processes with the largest improvement potential. Those proposed improvements were reviewed in the follow-up workshops with Schweizer employees. The various workshop groups were also subdivided into project team members and those decision-makers who would later be responsible for the final results. Here, Eike Ehlers praised the excellent support from the Schweizer staff: Thanks to the dedication of the employees they immediately accept-



ed these process improvements – which of course had an enormous influence on the success of the overall improvement process.” And with a Web-based project management software, an overview of the accomplished as well as the pending tasks and decisions was also prepared. In this way, transparency for all processes was ensured – for all participants.

Reducing Paperwork and Streamlining Procedures

“What the consulting team found at Schweizer is actually pretty typical for most companies. Everything was there as usual: The standard procedures and forms that are suppose to guide project processes,” explains Eike Ehlers. “But there’s far too many of it – with every division or project manager creating individual procedures for his or her team. The result was a jungle of information which was differently interpreted by the employees.” That’s why one of the consultants main tasks was to re-establish unified, standardized procedures. That also included simplifying the project manager’s duties. In the future, employees will receive standardized briefings on projects and processes to give everyone involved the same level of knowledge. In addition, reporting procedures were also unified and clear descriptions of responsibilities, lines of communication and conflict guidelines were established.

Thanks to greater process transparency, a project manager can judge every project’s progress better and quicker, as well as identifying deviations much earlier.

er. Here, his or her working efforts – e. g. compensation or correction measures – could therefore be reduced depending on the type and size of the project involved. The more visible a project’s progress is, the better its manager’s performance evaluation becomes as well. Similar progress was also observed by managers involved in multiple other related projects.

Active Involvement of the Executive Board

Throughout the entire optimization phase, the executive board was involved and informed through regular updates. In this way, key decisions could be made efficiently and also implemented. In close cooperation with the executive board, Ingenics experts prepared a project management vision for the entire company and these written guidelines also provided added orientation for the internal workshops. Plus, there was an added benefit of keeping the upper level executives involved in the improvement process: Because each employee understood the importance of the project and the leading project participants. “The realization of how important efficient, effective project management processes are – both for our daily work and long-term business growth – is a vital factor,” according to Dr. Marc Schweizer, Executive Board Chairman at the Schweizer Electronic AG. And in an upcoming project at Schweizer, the currently used project management software will be upgraded, based on results from the latest process improvements.

Naturally, the decisive factor will be how all of the proposed improvements are

actually implemented in the daily project management practices at Schweizer. And here, the new handbook for project managers will provide help as an already available reference. In addition, Ingenics also offers basic and advanced training programs, so that on a day-to-day basis, everyone involved with the new instruments and structures always has a long-term support. “User-friendliness and user acceptance are definitely the key ingredients,” adds Eike Ehlers. “Nothing is achieved, if you just change a system and forget the people who keep it rolling.” That’s also why at Ingenics – all process improvements are ultimately based on “empowering people”. ■

About the Schweizer Electronic AG

The Schweizer Electronic AG is headquartered in Schramberg, in Germany’s Black Forest region. It was founded as a family-owned company in 1849 and is now managed by the sixth generation of the Schweizer Family. Schweizer specializes in the development, production and sales of technically advanced circuit boards. Today, it operates across Europe primarily in the industrial (including solar energy) and automotive sectors. Schweizer is Europe’s third largest producer of circuit boards and with its partner, Meiko Electronics, is one of the World’s Top 20 Companies.