



## Learning Network QSE – Cristal Union (France)



### Context & Issues

In the organization a number of sugar and alcohol plants come together. Traditionally those plants were very independently run and had their own industrial policies as well as safety, environment and quality processes and practices.

A few years ago, Cristal Union decided to create a number of centralized functions in order to create a more coherent industrial strategy group wide. One of those functions is the Quality, Safety and Environment Department, headed up by a QSE director and staffed with a small central team that was charged to develop a common policy across the different plants of the group.

### Our Analysis of the issue

It was obvious that it would be very difficult to roll out a policy that would be centrally decided and forced upon the formerly independent plants. Moreover, one of the reasons for centralizing QSE policy was also to allow for 'cross group learning' in such a way that all plants could profit from a number of interesting practices or experiments that some plants were putting in place.

So our analysis was, that we should not so much go for a 'centralized developed policy' that then subsequently had to be rolled out (or shoved down their throat), but that we would need a process that allowed for learning by working together on a 'shared policy', result of collaborative work of all plants and the HQ, without predefined 'outcomes' or 'hidden' agenda's.

### The intervention process

So we decided to create a 'learning network' (or a Community of Practice) consisting off all QSE managers of the different plants and the central QSE plant. This group would come together every six week for a 'network day'. The objectives were :

- Learning from each other
- Create common / shared projects on common problems or challenges
- Develop an 'overarching' strategy for QSE
- Follow-up of the strategic QSE plans / projects
- Share information in all directions

It started mainly the few first meetings to get to know each other, sharing information on projects that were going on in different plant, start working on the SAP implementation, ... Gradually we also started to prepare the mid-term strategy plan and the yearly 'common' objectives for the activity QSE.

After a few meetings we decided to open up once a year our network and invite the roughly 60 employees working in the QSE area in the plants. The activities that we did during those 'open network days' were largely prepared by the different plants and piloted by the QSE managers of the plants. Another step was made when we started to 'outsource' the preparation and facilitation of the meeting to individual 'plants' thus giving them (instead of the HQ Team) the responsibility over the meeting and installing the idea of mutual interdependence between the plants.

Specific methodologies used: Force Field Analysis, Intervision, experiential games, projects-fair, specific workshops in subgroups, etc...

## Outcomes

It is difficult to say that the QSE strategy as such is better, then would have been the case when elaborated by the HQ team, but what we can say is that there was a genuine input from all plants into the new strategy, the yearly objectives were very much considered to be 'shared objectives' and we also saw growing collaboration between plants (within the network, but also other initiatives started where plants shared information, or supported each other's projects, etc... An obvious outcome was also that the divide between plants and between 'the plants' and 'HQ' was a lot less pronounced after a few months and the energy and initiative gradually shifted from the HQ to the network as a 'shared governing body'. Another outcome that inevitably was realized was the fact that individual initiatives of plants were far more coherent and fitted in the shared 'strategy' and were often already discussed in the network in a very early stage which allowed to pull together competencies and resources out of the network for the plant projects.