

Successful Teamwork – From the Analysis to the Implementation

Michael Kurr and Jan Eilers (Schuh & Company) in conversation with Uwe Tomschin, Managing Director of SCHOTT forma vitrum ag in St. Gallen, Switzerland.

Mr. Tomschin, how would you characterize the project overall? What was special?

We were faced with enormous operative challenges in this for us relatively new and quickly growing business unit. Together with Schuh & Company, we were able to quickly isolate the most important problems in the order management process during the analysis phase. The employees of course already knew many of the emerging problems, but it was necessary to gather them in a condensed, cross-functional manner across the whole process in order to identify the underlying causes. This increased the employees' motivation and spread confidence to tackle the right issues consistently and to improve the operative results further.

To me it was important that the project was transparent to everyone involved, that it was not perceived as a typical cost-cutting project, but that we were searching together for solutions to support the emerging business unit with a relatively lean order management process. This required a quick elimination of the most pestering problems and the consistent monitoring of the implementation of the concept to reorganize the order processing.

What were the largest challenges in the project?

In the majority of comparable change projects it is difficult for the employees to shrug off their habits and to shift from functional thinking and acting towards a process-oriented operation. The corporate structure certainly brings with it certain process interfaces. Because of the local proximity of the different corporate functions, the challenge in our case was more or less in aligning every function towards a common goal and at the same time cope with the specific requirements of the individual process steps.

“Unfortunately, good processes are often misunderstood as missing creativity – in an emergency room the urgency is not “felt” for the benefit of the patient.”

Uwe Tomschin

During daily business this sometimes means that the specific interest of an isolated process step was last in order to achieve the best results for the overall process and thereby the customer.

A core element at this point was the segmentation of the order processing into two separate processes, which lived up to the different requirements of requested services. It was important that the classification of the orders was performed as objectively as possible.

What do you regard as key factors for a successful cooperation with external consultants?

The basis for a constructive cooperation is to first build trust between the internal project lead, the external consultants, and the employees, which was also the case in this project. After an initial phase of skepticism, we were able to achieve this by involving a broad base of employees participatively in the development of solutions, avoiding solely top-down input and relying on an intensive communication of the project goals.

Additionally, it is important that the external consultants have a deep understanding of the content to be accepted as a partner on the same level. This was quickly realized in our project. Lastly, a consistently holistic evaluation of the whole processes across functional and departmental borders was performed, which might have been difficult without external help.

Right away, we considered to involve Schuh & Company beyond the initial concept development phase for the implementation of the developed process. We made this dependent upon the quality of the work together and not commission all parts right away.



(from left to right) Michael A. Kurr (Schuh & Company.), Uwe Tomschin (SCHOTT forma vitrum ag), Jan Eilers (Schuh & Company)

How do you determine the success of the work?

We knew from the beginning that we needed thorough changes in the process flow of the order processing in the evaluated business unit if we wanted to create sustainable success. This did not deter us from stating activities with short-term results and successes that could quickly be realized in many cases. The employees can trace many of the realized effects to the positive effects of the intense content-related discussions of the cross-functional teams and the respective awareness. Besides the operative improvements, we also see a change towards a process-oriented thinking and acting. This can be attributed to the structural changes and the roles of the cross-functional process owners.

Looking back, would you do a similar project again and are there any specialties that you noted when working with Schuh & Company?

Yes, our expectations were very completely fulfilled in the project. We always prolonged the project with Schuh & Company in the upcoming phase over the past few months. The project was offered in modules and we could have aborted it at any point, which we did not do. On the contrary, we also plan to work with Schuh & Company in the future when we face similar challenges.

In my opinion, this is not a usual result, because the project started under difficult circumstances and we had to pull ourselves together. However, looking back, even this worked in our favor. We were always able to treat each other openly and honestly, which is not common. In retrospect, I would definitely say that we learned a lot over the course of this project and celebrated many successes together.

About

After receiving his engineering degree from the University of Wiesbaden, Germany, in 1992, Uwe Tomschin held many positions in the production environment of SCHOTT AG in the UK and Japan. After several years in venture capital, he managed a site for TFT Display Glass in Korea. Mr. Tomschin is currently managing director of SCHOTT forma vitrum ag in St. Gallen, Switzerland, since 2008.



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