



Westinghouse UK Fuel Business

The Springfields site embraced the principles of partnership as a way to high performance and mutual benefits over 10 years ago. Since then, the principles have been applied to many challenges facing the business, ensuring its continued profitability, adaptability to change, improved morale and motivation, reduced absence and improved safety performance.

“People have to deal with the future, not the past if an organisation is going to survive and be successful”, Allan White, Human Resources Advisor

Processing uranium to supply fuel to commercial power stations in the UK and overseas, the Springfields site employs around 1,400 people involved in fuel manufacture, clean-up and site decommissioning activities. Amicus, T&G and GMB represent industrial staff, while Prospect represent administration, professional, scientific and technical staff.

Competitive tendering was introduced in the 1980s. This presented considerable challenges for both management and unions in how the site was run. However, without a shared vision for the future of the site, management’s efforts to introduce initiative after initiative met resistance from the unions and cynicism from the employees.

Where previous initiatives had failed, it was not because they made bad business sense, but that they had been impossible to implement effectively without the engagement of the workforce at a local level.

One of the main reasons partnership has lasted so long, is that both the management and unions saw employee involvement not simply as a means to an end, but an entirely new way of working.

Behavioral change

Joint training and visits to other organisations undertaken by the senior management and union representatives during the mid 1990s, made both aware of the impact that training focused on self-awareness, motivation and involvement could make to business performance.

Business information

Company:	Springfields Fuels Limited, Westinghouse
Business description:	Manufacturing
Location:	Salwick, near Preston
Staff:	1,400
Sites:	Single site belonging to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority

Training was arranged for all employees and behavioural change workshops are now a regular event, organised and run by management and unions, and considered an accepted part of the induction process for new starters.

The way forward

The next step was to ensure that the new emphasis on joint working was matched by real opportunities for employee involvement and engagement in improvement activities.

It was essential that there were some early successes from the new style of working. However, the catalyst that gave credibility to the change was a decision to retain an apprentice training centre and continue training apprentices at Springfields.

In 1999, a new company contract was developed according to partnership principles between the management, trade unions and employees. Negotiated at company level, Springfields was responsible for the smooth introduction of the new package at the site.

The principles of the new contract were to:

- Work safely and with concern for the public and environment at all times
- Recognise and reward contribution and achievement
- Work flexibly
- Seek continuous improvement
- Focus on training and development to update skills and acquire new ones
- Give individuals and teams the authority and responsibility to perform to their best, whilst the company continues to work in partnership with the unions to agree effective, collective agreements.

Implementing the changes

Employee representatives worked with managers to implement the change. The benefit of this approach was to enable issues and concerns to be raised and then amended or clarified before the changes were formally introduced. This raised levels of awareness, enhanced understanding and enabled a smoother transition to the new arrangements.

Mutual benefits

A survey carried out by Amicus demonstrated that some 98% of those surveyed were aware of the partnership between management and the unions and 79% found it a success. A quarter suggested further improvements, which underlines the cultural change that joint working from the top down had been able to achieve and sustain.

The site will gradually reduce in size over the next ten to twenty years, but it is held up as an example not only of how to handle managed decline, but also how to change the culture of an organisation in a way that supports innovation, improvement and even win new business.

It is also a model for health and safety management both here and abroad. The trade unions are key ambassadors in this. By working together the site is more marketable and is winning contracts that secure jobs in this fiercely competitive, if declining market place.

Health and safety

Springfield's health and safety record has improved, from 88 lost time accidents (LTAs) requiring more than three days absence and 900 incidents requiring medical treatment in 1988 to just one LTA in 2004/5 and 73 incidents requiring first aid treatment. Alongside these figures, sickness absence has also been reduced from 10.2 days in 1988 to 6.7 days per employee in 2004/5.

Employee involvement, with union support has been a key contributor to this transformation. Site safety is now overseen by a cross sectional forum of employees.

In addition, local safety improvement teams and over 300 safety observers are responsible for monitoring and improving local practices and ensuring that safety becomes a team activity.

Also since 2003/4, DTI Partnership Fund money has been used to train and develop 40 workplace stress listeners. These are independent of management and unions, but advocated by both. They offer an ear and advice to employees suffering from stress or stress related symptoms in the workplace. Over time, it is hoped that, by providing support to employees, the number of stress related absences reported each year will fall.

The high performance workplace

This case study forms part of a project entitled 'Adaptable Enterprises'. The project includes educational and networking activities on: high performance working, healthy working and performance, the future of work and organisation, and intellectual capital.

The project is conducted by the UKWON, coordinated by the IPA and supported by the European Social Fund. Further information is available from juliet.webster@ipa-involve.com

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This case study was researched and written by Robert Stevens, Research and Information Manager, IPA. The views in this case study are those of the participants and may not reflect those of the IPA.



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