

Playmobil-Malta...a Thriving Corporate Culture

Culture

When Playmobil (Brandstätter Group-Malta) management and the Human Resources department committed a year to DATT training across all levels of its 700 employees, Mario Schembri was skeptical. Then Schembri, a section leader in Playmobil-Malta's Injection Department, sought his team's best thinking about new packaging of plastic material. Dissatisfied with their poor response, he proposed using PMI and got markedly better results. One employee, thinking of the Interesting points, came up with an idea Schembri called brilliant.

Similar responses have come from the Printing and the Mould-Making Departments. Frans Lia, section leader in Printing, finds employees more conscious of their own judgment, evaluating situations and looking into them more deeply since thinking skills training. Instead of just agreeing or disagreeing, they consider other alternatives.

The company-wide immersion in Edward de Bono's Direct Attention Thinking Tools (DATT) was only a part of Brandstätter Group-Malta's bold initiative to continually improve their world famous product line for children by helping each employee fulfill his or her potential. The initiative is a ten-year effort to develop a thriving corporate culture based on shared values while balancing organizational goals with individual growth. The success of the immersion rested heavily on the Human Resources Department, led by Mrs. Antoinette Caruana.

Sandra Azzopardi and Noel Borg, of Playmobil's Human Resources Department, faced many skeptics as they taught thinking skills throughout the company. "Unlike other training that is normally expected by employees," they report, "training in thinking [was] not so familiar. Thinking is personal, . . . and [employees can] become defensive when challenged to . . . change the way they think. Many walked into the training room thinking 'This is a waste of time.'"

Playmobil Managing Director Helga Ellul thought differently. She saw the de Bono thinking methods as means for contributing to the development process of the group's whole culture - as glue for connecting a number of initiatives introduced in the company over the past decade.

Mrs. Ellul was introduced to the de Bono thinking tools by Anthony Rizzo (now a Six Hats Certified Instructor), who heard Master Trainer Susan Mackie's presentation of the Lonmin Mines use of de Bono's methods at the Third International Conference on Creative Thinking. K,Rizzo, who is responsible for the Brandstätter Brainmobil Suggestion Scheme (explore this fascinating program on Playmobil's website noted below), saw the potential for generating more creative ideas by training Playmobil employees to use thinking skills.

Mackie conducted pilot DATT training for the first group of Playmobil employees, then certified Azzopardi and Borg and helped them develop implementation strategies for company-wide training and applications. When employees encountered Dr. de Bono's theories and began to use the tools in their initial workshops, they gained more empathy for each other and greater confidence in their own thinking, regardless of previous academic achievement, report Azzopardi and Borg:

"Bringing together people from different departments and grades ranging from executives to operators makes it possible to participants to understand and appreciate each other's roles and responsibilities. This has helped us achieve our organizational objectives.

Following initial training, we helped managers and leading teams of three different departments - Printing, Injection, and Human Resources - formulate a sequence of tools for conducting seminars or 'thinking sessions' in their departments. They used the sessions to communicate annual department objectives to all employees and generate a list of action steps toward these objectives.

This gave us the chance to experience the effectiveness of the tools applied to real company issues. We must say that the action steps set during these seminars are still being used as guidelines for achieving this year's departmental objectives."

Convinced of the value of de Bono thinking tools, the Brandstätter Group has committed to the longevity of this ambitious training and implementation program. Several initiatives have been taken to keep the process thriving:

1. Logo - The THINK KIT logo was created to help employees identify with the thinking program.

2. Maltese Manual - A course manual in the Maltese language was published and distributed, with both APTT's and Dr. de Bono's permission, to all company employees.

3. Blue Hat Bulletin - The company magazine now features a regular bulletin to update readers on the thinking processes and other information regarding thinking.

4. Charts - Charts of all the thinking tools have been posted in all departments.

5. Training Room - The company's training room layout has been changed to create an exceptional atmosphere during training.

6. Brainmobil Suggestion Scheme Enhancers - The "Grow an Idea" card has been designed to help employees structure their thinking about suggestions. It encourages them to generate different alternatives (APC) and evaluate each idea (PMI) before forwarding it to evaluators. In addition, several employees participate in monthly meetings to generate creative ideas on specific focus areas. This initiative has resulted in a 100% increase in the number of suggestions.

7. Champions - Individuals from all departments are now being identified for designation as "Champions" of the thinking process. Their role will be to

- **promote use of the tools in employees' work life**
- **trigger thinking**
- **pass on further knowledge about constructive or creative thinking**
- **look for ways thinking tools can be integrated in all existing initiatives in the company in order to simplify and challenge the way things are done.**

Playmobil management thinks these tools are too good to be kept inside company walls. They've sent their certified corporate trainers out to share information about Edward de Bono's creative thinking methods with local shop stewards of the General Workers Union and with thousands of 8-year-old students.

Our thanks and admiration go to Sandra Azzopardi and Noel Borg, certified corporate trainers in Playmobil-Malta's Human Resources Dept., for the key role they have played in this initiative, and especially for preparing the superb report from which this article was written.

See <http://www.playmobilmalta.com> for more about this company and to explore the Brainmobil Suggestion Scheme online.