
Equal opportunities and collective bargaining in the European Union

A case study on Coloplast A/S Thisted from Denmark
Phase III

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**EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**A CASE STUDY ON COLOPLAST A/S THISTED FROM DENMARK
PHASE II**

by

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FOREWORD

This report has been produced for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin. It is the third report in the series on Collective Bargaining and Equal Opportunities. The report is a case study and was drafted by Lotte Valbjørn, Athene ApS, Denmark.

The case studied is that of Coloplast A/S Thisted, and the material was collected over years of cooperation with the enterprise, amongst other things on the integration of equal treatment in the firm's strategies and policies. I would like to say a big word of thanks to production manager Henning Sandahl, centre manager Else Sixhøj and trade union convenor Anne Marie Faaborg for having so willingly made themselves available for interviews and discussions.

SUMMARY

The case study describes a development project at the firm Coloplast A/S Thisted, a production unit of the Coloplast Group. The development project aims to develop production in autonomous groups comprising both unskilled operators and skilled metal workers.

The equal treatment aspect is a feature of the project because the intention to alter the skill boundaries also poses the question of gender differences in cooperation, since the unskilled employees are women and the skilled employees are men.

The development project centres on training activities involving cooperation and communication, finance and computer systems. However, it also focuses on the characteristic differences between women and men with regard to cooperation and communication. Equal treatment is an element in the strategy of development towards autonomy: we must understand and accept differences in ways of experiencing, perceiving and reacting to events and learn to use those differences as a positive factor, instead of using them to perpetuate the myth that women and men can never understand one another because 'that is the way it has always been'.

The development project is prepared and discussed in the works council, where management and employees debate subjects of crucial significance to the development of the enterprise.

The works council has set up a sub-committee for training, which provides the anchorage for the more detailed planning and monitoring of the project.

The firm has for many years had a training policy, facilitating a constant improvement in employee qualifications. The scope of training measures is covered by the local agreement, which has for several years improved on the provisions of the industry-wide collective agreement.

The equal treatment approach stems from the obligation on the firm to pursue equal opportunities in accordance with the supplementary agreement to the Cooperation Agreement (*Samarbejdsaftalen*) of 1991.

The firm is generally development-oriented and makes use of all provisions contained in collective agreements in order to pay wages during maternity leave to both women and men and to offer facilities for parental leave and training leave.

The development project is considered a success by all those involved. The jobs of all the employees have become more interesting and more challenging, with more demands in terms of skills and personal qualifications. However, at the same time it has uncovered a number of problems which have to do in particular with anchorage and control and with the fact that a project such as this commits both employees and the firm to continued development and to the fulfilment of each other's expectations.

The equal treatment aspect is reported by all concerned to have been a crucial factor in the success of the team cooperation. The common experience of working with male and female cultures / modes of communication and socialisation was used as a basis on which to build up and develop understanding between the two sexes and between the skilled and unskilled employees. At the same time a marked change has occurred in the women's sense of self-worth and in their approach to tackling leadership-based tasks in the teams. The group-based cooperation approach has strengthened the women's desire and capacity for self-fulfilment.

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CHAPTER 1

I DESCRIPTION OF THE FIRM COLOPLAST A/S

Coloplast A/S, Thisted, is a plastics enterprise producing colostomy bags. The plant at Thisted is one of the three Coloplast-production-units in Denmark, all of which supply products for the hospital and health care sector.

Coloplast A/S, Thisted, is a production unit of the Coloplast Group which has app. 2000 employees in 14 countries.

Over 95 % of the Group's production is for export

The firm's production at Thisted, in North Jutland, was set up in 1964 at a time when several enterprises with their main centers of operation in Copenhagen were also setting up production facilities in North Jutland under regional development policy arrangements being implemented in Denmark at the time.

Coloplast A/S Thisted produces mainly stoma drainage items, accounting for about 80% of the group's output of these products, and it is a very efficient and productive plant.

The plant has grown in terms of both number of persons employed and surface area. At 1 April 1997 there were 265 hourly paid employees, including the 220 in production, of whom about 200 were women. The remaining hourly paid employees, among those are 60 skilled metal workers who develop, manufacture and repair the machines and about 25 male employees engaged on material production and internal transport. In addition about 20 clerical and supervisory staff are employed in management, administration and production development. It is a workplace with a stable workforce and a good reputation in the local area, so that it is easy to attract qualified labour.

This applies both to the group of unskilled employees and to the skilled workers in the metals and engineering sector, which is otherwise a difficult area on a national basis.

Coloplast A/S, Thisted, has in recent years recruited a sizeable group of extensively trained staff for development activities in the enterprise. It is easy enough to attract people for the work but difficult to get them to move to the geographic area in question, which is why a group of enterprises in the area has launched a 'two job development project' for families in which both partners have a job.

The Group of Coloplast-production-units as a whole is going through a growth phase and is constantly establishing itself in new areas outside Denmark. The individual production units in Denmark are also engaged in a process of reorganisation and change, aimed at maintaining competitiveness through the development of a workforce able to meet increasing demands on quality and security of supply. Internally this imposes requirements on workers' capacity for cooperation and flexibility, which includes both a higher level of qualification in terms of

knowledge but also ability to keep pace with the technological challenges with which the enterprise will continue to confront its employees.

Coloplast A/S, Thisted, is headed by a production manager who has five production centres under him, each headed by a centre manager. In addition there is a department which handles stock-keeping and oversees the extrusion of the plastic material, which is the raw material for production. There is also a machinery department, where machines for production are developed. The production manager's department includes a small administrative unit.

In 1996 the firm was awarded the Ministry of Labour's equality prize, the first Danish enterprise to achieve this honour. The prize was awarded in recognition of the firm's efforts in the field of equal opportunities as part of its development and personnel policy.

II TRADE UNION ORGANISATION IN THE ENTERPRISE

The enterprise is covered by the framework agreement between the employers' organisation, Confederation of Danish industries (DI - *Dansk Industri*), which is a member of the Danish Employers' Confederation (DA - *Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening*), and the employees' organisation, Central Organisation of Industrial Employees in Denmark (*CO Industri*), which is a member of the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO - *Landsorganisationen i Danmark*). The enterprise has three local agreements, which operate under the framework agreement. The three local agreements are with *Kvindeligt Arbejderforbund i Danmark* (KAD - Danish Union of Women Workers) and *Specialarbejderne i Danmark* (SID - Danish Union of Unskilled Workers), the two unions organising the unskilled hourly paid employees, and with *Dansk Metal* and *Dansk Elforbund* (the metal workers' and electricians' unions), the latter two agreements covering the skilled metal workers in the enterprise. The more highly trained staff are not covered by local agreements, which is also the case for the administrative staff, but by the framework agreements applicable to their particular sectors.

1.1 Drafting of the national framework agreement for industry

a. How are the demands formulated?

Requests for matters to be covered in the agreement negotiations are put forward at the individual workplace, coordinated by the local branches of the unions and passed on to union headquarters. The central executive boards of the various unions meet and select the special demands on the basis of reports from local branches. In the main committee the special demands are listed together but, when the negotiating committees first meet, the employers' and employees' representatives, respectively, set the priorities: what do our people want from us?

The process from formulating demands at the individual workplaces to the conclusion of the agreement in the normal way usually takes 1½ years. This means that one agreement is hardly concluded before preparations begin for the next.

b. Who negotiates - women/men?

The main trade union and employers' organisations in the private sector - LO and DA - have concluded agreements at the general level, as previously indicated: the main agreement and the cooperation agreement, amongst others.

They themselves are not directly involved in the agreement negotiations, but they coordinate the process in the light of joint meetings within the individual federations and their unions/member organisations.

An example of the way roles are apportioned:

The central bodies representing the employees' and employers' sides are responsible for the general negotiating programme. The two parties form their teams, each with its main committee, consisting of the union presidents on the employees' side and the employers' organisations' executives together with enterprise representatives on the employers' side. The main committees set the direction for the negotiations, and they negotiate on such matters as general demands in respect of working hours, wages and pensions. The main committees jointly set up a number of negotiating committees, which conduct bilateral negotiations on groups of issues and specific clauses.

There is on-going contact between the negotiating committees and the two main committees, and the main committees meet regularly to take stock of progress.

An increasing trend towards decentralisation has been apparent in collective agreement negotiations in the private sector in recent years. This means that the general terms for wages and working conditions are hammered out in the central negotiations at the level below the main organisations, i.e. at the level of tributary organisations on both the employees' and employers' sides. Thus, with respect to the collective agreement negotiations in the spring of 1995, 'soft' demands, such as training, maternity, sick pay etc., were also discussed. As the tributary organisations put it: "Pay and all the rest must be settled locally - in fact it is the 'soft' demands that we are increasingly concentrating on".

In the pay field the private labour market has three different main pay systems: normal pay, minimum pay and a minimum wage.

The normal and minimum pay systems are both built up from a basic rate plus various supplements. The basic rate is the same for everyone, who are covered by the same, specific agreement.

The difference between the two pay systems is that an increase, laid down by agreement, in the basic rate can be offset in the supplements in the minimum pay system.

In the minimum wage system there is neither a basic rate nor supplements, only a minimum payment for the individual employee. This pay system gives the enterprise greater scope to determine individual pay than the other two systems.

Flexible and individual pay is increasingly finding favour with enterprises.

Among the member organisations of LO, four unions are led by women: *Kvindeligt Arbejderforbund* (KAD - Union of Women Workers), *Dansk Beklædnings- og Tekstilarbejderforbund* (Clothing and Textile Workers' Union), *Restaurations- og Bryggeriarbejderforbundet* (Catering and Brewery Workers' Union) and *Socialpædagogernes Landsforbund* (National Union of Social Educationalists). Even unions in which women predominate are led by men.

There are no female presidents in the federations and other umbrella organisations.

In the area covered by the Salaried Employees' and Civil Servants' Confederation (*Funktionærernes og Tjenestemændenes Fællesråd* - FTF) three of the main member organisations, namely *Børne- og Ungdomspædagogernes Landsforbund* (BUPL - National Union of Infant and Child Care Specialists), *Dansk Sygeplejeråd* (Danish Nursing Council) and *Danmarks Lærerforening* (Danish Teachers' Association), have female presidents.

In the area covered by the Central Organisation of Academics (AC - *Akademikernes Centralorganisation*), there are also very few female presidents.

On the employers' side, DA and its member organisations *Sammenslutning af Landbrugets Arbejdsgiverforeninger* (SALA - Federation of Agricultural Employers' Associations), the Ministry of Finance, the National Association of Municipal Authorities in Denmark (*Kommunernes Landsforening*) and the Association of County Authorities in Denmark (*Amtsrådsforeningen*), the main negotiating committees consist exclusively of men.

1.2 Drafting of local agreements

As was pointed out above there is an increasing trend towards decentralised negotiation, in particular on pay, but also on the framing and implementation of company personnel policy.

a. Who presents the demands?

At Coloplast A/S, Thisted, the company-based representatives of the female and unskilled workers' unions, KAD and SID, and the metal workers' and electricians' unions each conduct their own negotiations with management. KAD and SID have the same local agreement, but conduct their own separate negotiations nevertheless. Demands are put forward by the individual company-based trade union representations - and by the members.

Up to now pay has been negotiated annually, but in 1996 two-year agreements were introduced, which means that pay will be negotiated again in the spring of 1998.

Pay is determined by the following factors: basic pay is the same, but wages vary according to qualifications, including courses and experience; results, i.e. how much is produced with what percentage of wastage; flexibility, i.e. how many machines an employee can operate, how available an employee is, etc.; care and tidiness in the work situation; and commitment to tasks forming part of the job.

Employee interviews form the basis for individual assessments. These interviews take place once a year.

Other subjects for local negotiation include agreements on job-related noise, time off in connection with personal and other circumstances, overtime in the run-up to holidays and other company-based staff concerns/agreements.

There is always scope for improvements to the general agreement.

There is also scope for negotiation at any time - only pay negotiations are governed by deadlines.

b. Who negotiates?

For KAD the negotiating delegation consists exclusively of women but, for the others, the negotiating delegations are male.

c. The results

There is almost no difference in content between the three local agreements, apart from the fact that there are still pay differentials between the unskilled groups covered by KAD and SID and the skilled workers organised by *Dansk metal* and *Dansk Elforbund*.

In 1986 Coloplast A/S, Thisted, had an equal pay case brought against it by the female operators, with assistance from their trade union, *Kvindeligt Arbejderforbund* (KAD). The case hinged on the fact that members of SID were getting higher pay for work of equal value to that performed by the women organised by KAD. The case ended with a conciliation settlement between the enterprise and the union. The settlement was based on the descriptions given by the women, on the one hand, and the men, on the other hand, of the content of their jobs.

The enterprise had not itself been aware of the inequality.

1.3 The supplementary agreement on equal treatment - under the Cooperation Agreement

The supplementary agreement on equal treatment was discussed in both report 1 and report 2. The agreement, which came into force on 1 April 1991, came about as a result of negotiations between the main organisations. The inspiration for such agreements arose from a number of factors: the other Scandinavian countries have had similar agreements since the beginning of the 1980s and, in Denmark, political pressure was beginning to be exerted on the social partners to frame an agreement which would amplify the legislation on equal treatment of women and men. For example, sections of the social democratic group in the *Folketing* (Parliament), together with representatives of LO, launched a study which took as its starting point the American legislation on affirmative action. Traditionally the two sides of industry in Denmark seek to avoid the imposition of legislation on the labour market, so the study served as a direct challenge to address the question of equal treatment.

1.4 The tradition of cooperation on the Danish labour market

The main organisations are agreed that a constant improvement in the competitiveness of enterprises and in employee job satisfaction is a precondition for the continued development of industry and for greater prosperity and security for the employees.

The development and increased efficiency of enterprises is in the common interest of both management and employees. The use and development of new technology is crucial to the competitiveness of enterprises and to employment, the working environment and job satisfaction.

There is agreement that these aims should be achieved through systematic cooperation between management and employees at all levels of the enterprise.

In firms with 35 employees and over, day-to-day cooperation is monitored by a works council consisting of representatives of the management and workers in the firm. It is the task of the works council to discuss and assess how it can contribute to promoting and coordinating the cooperation endeavours in the enterprise in accordance with the current agreement.

The works council sets the agenda for cooperation between management and employees at all levels of the enterprise.

The overarching task of the works council is to develop cooperation throughout the enterprise in such a way that it benefits the firm and the individual employee. That is achieved by:

- monitoring and developing day-to-day cooperation and involving as many people as possible in this work
- bringing about and sustaining good and settled conditions of work and employment and increasing employee prosperity and security
- increasing the employees' understanding of the operational, financial and competitive situation of the enterprise.

The works council has to be involved in the following tasks:

1. Establishment of criteria for local labour and welfare conditions and of criteria for the firm's personnel policy in relation to the staff groups represented in works council group b.
2. Drafting of criteria for the training and retraining of employees who will have to apply new technology.
3. Establishment of principles for the firm's internal logging, storage and use of personal data.

4. Exchanges of views and discussions regarding proposals on guidelines for the organisation of production and work and the implementation of major reorganisation schemes in the enterprise.

5. Assessment of the technical, financial, staff and training-related and environmental consequences of the introduction of new technology or changes in existing technology, including computer-based technology and systems, when such innovations and changes are of considerable scope.

6. Study of proposals for the basic structuring, operation and applicability of any pay systems geared to productivity and possibilities for the establishment of funds for training-related and social purposes.

1.5 Cooperation at COLOPLAST A/S, THISTED

Coloplast A/S, Thisted, has a works council in which all changes in the enterprise are discussed. The production manager chairs the works council and the convenor for the employees' organisations acts as vice-chair. The chair of the committee is a man and the vice-chair a woman, a representative of KAD. It has been decided in the COLOPLAST works council that all shop stewards should be members, which means that there are three representatives from KAD, one from SID, one from *Metallforbundet* and one from *Elforbundet* (three women and three men). On the management side there are four representatives (three men and one woman). Usually management and employees are represented equally, but at COLOPLAST there are more employee representatives. The employees also have a representative on the Group board.

The works council meets four times a year, though sub-committees set up by the council may meet more often - as is the case for the training committee, which the enterprise set up in connection with the development project.

CHAPTER 2

I CONTENT OF THE CASE

The enterprise has always been development-oriented and has therefore pursued a structured approach to its information and training policy. This means, amongst other things, that it has sought to build up a system of information on development in the enterprise, not least geared to the production units and their function in relation to productivity, reliability of supply and quality. In addition the firm has in recent years cooperated with training institutes in the area on the continued qualification of employees.

In the assessment and further development of these activities increasing attention has been paid to apparent differences in motivation and participation among the skilled and unskilled employees.

The first time the question of equal treatment was addressed was in connection with an equal pay action brought by the female operators in relation to the male unskilled workers. The background for the case was the appraisal of work of equal value performed by the two groups but with a pay differential between them. The case, which was discussed above, ended in a conciliation settlement involving equal pay for the male and female unskilled workers.

At all events, the case has meant that the female employees are aware of their pay-related conditions, something which is also relevance to the development of their tasks with the introduction of autonomous groups; this will be discussed in greater detail later.

1.1 How did the changes take effect and who negotiates?

Changes and desires for change in the enterprise are discussed in the works council. At some point during the period 1993/94, management put forward a strategy for the enterprise including a concept for autonomous groups, in other words the assignment of a number of supervisory tasks to the skilled and unskilled workers. The works council put forward proposals on training and proposed that each department make its own arrangements for ensuring future cooperation. There was no doubt that the skilled and the unskilled workers should have the same training.

In the development of the autonomous groups great emphasis was laid on the fact that it meant a blurring of the demarcation boundaries, which had been found to be very rigid and inflexible and had been experienced as a source of irritation.

The enterprise wished to launch a project for autonomy centring on the production of a couple of machines, i.e. involving a group of about 40 employees.

Until then production had been divided up into machine-based functions, in which the particular function of the female operators was to feed the machine with plastic, which is

produced in the extrusion department, to ensure that production continued without too many interruptions, to remove products from the machine and pack them.

Individual orders were distributed by the work supervisor and the machines were tended from a centrally located mechanics' unit, from which the mechanic had to be called out or requisitioned. Under the arrangements for quality control the very experienced women judged for themselves whether the process was operating normally, but specimens were also taken from each production run and tested in a central quality department. Stockmen carted the packed crates off to the dispatch area.

Day, evening and night shifts are worked, and there is a reduced weekend shift, in other words the machines are only shut down from late on Friday afternoon until Saturday morning.

The aim of the project is to establish a process of cooperation between the skilled and the unskilled workers, to break down demarcation boundaries and hence to boost productivity and effectiveness.

The original plan was that the unskilled workers should - by increasing their qualifications - be in a position to take on more tasks in production and achieve greater flexibility and greater freedom of action in the resetting of their machines, a function traditionally performed by a skilled worker, which gave rise to delay and dissatisfaction.

The firm realises that the breaking down of demarcation boundaries also has equal treatment implications, since the traditional segregation by sex means that the unskilled workers are predominantly women and the skilled workers are exclusively men.

This realisation did not emerge immediately from the work on the supplementary agreement on equal treatment - referred to above - since the works council at first rejected the agreement, because the section on sexual harassment was considered ludicrous and because insufficient knowledge was available properly to address the other areas in the agreement.

Nevertheless the agreement gave an indication that there were areas the firm should address and, through an external contact (the project of the Cooperation Board to promote the use of the supplementary agreement as an instrument for equal opportunities), it became clear that the skill demarcation problem was also a gender-specific problem which had much to do with communication/language, motivation and cooperation.

The enterprise and its management and employees had previously viewed equal treatment as a form of 'politically correct' action to secure access for women to men's fields of work, as engineers and electricians, and access for men to women's areas of work, as operators.

It is now generally felt, however, that the equal treatment agreement views all individuals as people of equal value, taking into account the differences they represent in terms of sex, age, function and status in the enterprise.

Moreover, it is easier to work with equal treatment from the perspective of the enterprise, its strategies and policies, rather than just within a framework determined by others outside the enterprise.

1.2 Anchoring of the development project

The development of the project was anchored in a sub-committee of the works council, a training committee comprising representatives of both management and employees.

The sub-committee made use of the possibilities offered by the framework agreement under the collective agreement for training, planning of working hours over a period of six months etc.

At the same time use was made of the agreements on payment for continuing training available under the Adult Education Act, the Labour Market Training Act etc.

The regional employment services and the regional labour market council were also involved in an advisory capacity and to provide financial support.

An agreement was concluded with training institutes in the local area (*Voksenuddannelsescentret* (Adult Education Centre - VUC) and *Handelsskolen* (Business School)) and a three-week course was planned for all employees: one week on cooperation and communication, one week on financial matters and one week on computer systems. The Business School seconded a staff member to the enterprise in order to oversee the whole process of planning and coordination between the schools and the enterprise.

The teaching approach was also adjusted to meet equal treatment considerations, both as regards differences in language and ways of communicating between women and men and as regards the teaching of subjects such as finance and working with computers to women and men; subjects which traditionally motivate the different target groups in different ways.

The aim was to teach the work groups which were in day-to-day working contact with one another together, in other words a day shift, an evening shift and a night shift, respectively, would be taught together.

Before the general instruction began, two development activities took place with the aim of focusing on the differences between men and women and on differences in the capacities they bring to their work. What these activities sought to achieve was an increased awareness, understanding and acceptance of those differences and of ways in which women and men could cooperate more effectively.

The first development activity was aimed at members of the training committee and other key employees of the enterprise.

The second activity focused on the large group of employees covered by the pilot project on production involving selected machines. The team of about 40 persons covered all shifts, day, evening and night.

Equal treatment thus came to constitute a necessary and supportive element in a process of development and change. This avoided any direct personal confrontation of the individual with his/her incapacity and ignorance with regard to equal treatment. The advantage of this approach is that an external framework, an agreement, facilitates internal development without that giving rise to personal confrontation.

The development activities in the equal treatment field made it easier to foster understanding and cooperation between the sexes, because the participants gained a common awareness of working with male and female culture, communication and socialisation which was translated into individual experiences, experiences gained together with the employees with whom they would be cooperating in the future.

The follow-up training focused on the subjects dealt with in the topic-related sessions on equal treatment and on the agreements concluded as a basis for future cooperation between skilled and unskilled workers, women and men.

1.3 Who were the key persons in this development?

- The Group management, which has clearly stated its strategies.
- The local management, the production manager and centre managers, who were the day-to-day resource and who performed a development function.
- The trade union representatives, who gave sound support and showed great confidence in the project, even though the project could be viewed as presenting certain direct threats as regards transfers of technical expertise etc.
- The training institutes selected, which showed great willingness to adjust their approach, in respect of form and content, to the circumstances of the enterprise.
- They were also skilled at incorporating the equal treatment aspect into the teaching methods used and the subjects taught.
- The Cooperation Board and equal opportunities experts.

The women of course played a major role in the negotiations on and organisation of the move towards autonomous production groups.

On the one hand, women account for the majority of the employees concerned, the operators, who form the core group in the process of change. On the other hand the female trade union representatives are recognised in the enterprise for their objectivity and know-how - convenors are also elected from among the women.

It was of great importance for the enterprise to develop its workforce, and the focus here will be on the female employees.

1.4 Results of the development project

a. Organisation

The same development has now been set in motion in all five production centres. Each centre has between 20 and 50 employees, all grouped into teams. Each team includes day, evening and night shift workers, with permanent staff.

Each team has selected a coordinator, whose main task is to log information between the different shifts in the team - a very difficult task. He or she is also the person the centre manager contacts in order to relay information.

The coordinator is chosen from among the members of the team. It is easy to avoid acting as a coordinator, for there is always someone who is interested in the job.

In each shift there is a planner, who is also chosen by the shift and who spends his or her time partly on planning and partly on production. The planner reports each week, to the department and to each machine team, what has to be produced and by what deadline and what materials are needed. It is the responsibility of the operators to organise production, procure materials, ensure that the machines are working, take care of the stock function etc. There are also operators who take responsibility for quality and another has responsibility for registration and for ensuring that all manuals are updated.

The groups run production themselves, and they have a busy time of it. They plan the necessary workforce themselves and arrange time off in relation to the amount of work and delivery times involved.

The skilled men are attached to teams, which means that there is always a skilled person on hand on the day, evening and night shifts.

The stock-keepers and people who work in extrusion have their own team, but a stock-keeper is always attached to the day shift.

Every quarter there is a general meeting of the teams at which agreements are concluded, decisions taken and sometimes guests invited to report on/present topics of interest.

The work supervisor - as centre manager - has taken on another function as adviser. It imposes different but no less demanding requirements on the supervisor, who faces different demands from the employees. The content of the job has changed from having to solve day-to-day production problems to working as a personnel officer and being concerned with long-term technical planning.

Work is proceeding on many development tasks which affect the everyday activities of the teams, hence the operators participate in inter-departmental planning groups. Development tasks on which work is currently in progress include the following:

- Quality control in all five production centres. Teams have to take on the routine quality control of what they produce - central control of raw materials and random sampling will remain. Training will be provided using the relay method, in which a few employees in each shift are taught and they in turn pass on what they have learned to their colleagues.
- A packaging centre, which is currently being planned in a group consisting of production engineers, the centre management and operators.

b. Job content

For the operators the development project meant:

- a greater variety of functions;
- working on technical problems which the skilled workers have increasingly relinquished;
- greater personal responsibility;
- a need for cooperation and communication across gender and demarcation boundaries;
- supervisory responsibility in the form of coordination, planning and 'feminisation' of work tasks.

For the skilled workers:

- new work tasks as the unskilled workers take over the readjustment etc. of machines;
- a need for cooperation and communication across gender and skill groups;
- new skilled functions in the centres and in the development of production technology.

For the work supervisors:

- a need to provide advice to employees engaged in production;
- personnel management;
- a need for long-term planning.

With the greater attention being paid to the differences between women and men and the resources they can contribute to cooperation and task accomplishment, there is a need for centre management to develop human understanding. At the same time there is a need for them to be able to 'let go' and hand over responsibility for production to teams.

c. Personal development

For the unskilled workers:

- "get up and go";
- visibility;
- makes demands as regards information, training, knowledge, influence and involvement;.
- greater knowledge of the firm's development etc.;
- happier frame of mind due to more direct communication;
- confidence in the face of new challenges.

For the employees as a whole the changes mean a much more direct pattern of interactions across the gender and demarcation boundaries. A climate of helpfulness in task accomplishment has evolved which is no longer tied up in the deferential red tape that was previously associated with the established skill demarcations.

It is no longer a question whether women and men are willing to take on new roles - women have taken on the task of group coordinator with great self-assurance, and this is an important basis on which equality can be developed.

d. Career development

The enterprise will continue to challenge its employees on an occupational and personal level. The female operators expect to be confronted with ever greater technical challenges, because technological development is unfolding at a very rapid rate. It may be expected that functions will change and/or disappear - a development from sorting to supervision is taking place.

The general view, however, is that the jobs have become more interesting, with more challenges and more opportunities.

e. Flexibility

Flexibility is increasing, but the operators still prefer what they are familiar with, and the idea that the skilled workers should pitch in and become directly involved with production has been shelved.

The dream of seeing women working as mechanics and men as operators in large numbers has also not become a reality.

The managers likewise have a tendency to slip back into their old roles of controller, planner and the person who knows everything.

f. Problem areas

The enterprise is challenged by demands from the employees for continued development opportunities - some of the employees want tasks, a challenge, culture and decency in working conditions, a good name for the enterprise etc. The enterprise seeks to impose ever greater demands; the balance is important and expectations must be met.

It was promised that a development such as that outlined above would bring with it both challenges and opportunities. It is no longer possible to rein back expectations, there will be continued pressure for ever greater generalisation and a greater breadth in demands and opportunities.

The requirement that employees should perform more and more tasks and resolve personal conflicts themselves is one of the greatest challenges in any autonomous organisation.

It is difficult for the individual to build up professional cooperation with colleagues, cooperation which is based on mutual respect and not exclusively on close personal relations. Everyone mentions the fact that openness and directness in personal/inter-occupational contacts, through which an effort had to be made to regulate effectiveness, productivity, quality etc. internally, was the worst aspect of all.

Moreover, it is in precisely these areas that it is important to be aware that women and men resolve such conflicts differently, that they build up close personal relations at different levels and to different depths and that they communicate on personal, cooperation-related problems in widely divergent ways.

Both the centre management and the team members must know the mechanisms involved and must understand female/male language in order to be in a position to establish meaningful and effective cooperation.

The anchoring process in the enterprise failed, with the possible outcome that it may take more time for some results to emerge, and the centre managers have been left very much to themselves to discover their role etc.

For equal treatment this meant that there were insufficient resources to investigate, analyse and lay down criteria and future perspectives and, last but not least, to establish criteria for the persons who take responsibility.

Equal treatment is a major problem for most enterprises because they consider it too narrow. If it is to have any influence, it must be linked to the development of the enterprise itself.

It is difficult to depict the day-to-day activities of the autonomous groups and to show how the process is developing. This question is difficult to tackle precisely because the process is so very complicated. It becomes impossible to learn by example - it has to be learned almost exclusively by direct personal experience.

The new roles arising from autonomous working but which also have to do with the closer cooperation between women and men and the new challenges, which the women in particular are taking up, are difficult to teach because, to do that, management or the training institutes must be very certain of what concepts need to be developed for the group function/management function/dialogue function and what tools need to be inculcated in order to ensure that those functions can be performed.

1.5 Key findings

Developing equal treatment into an enterprise strategy requires openness, awareness, acceptance and implementability.

Nevertheless, incorporating awareness of equal treatment into a development project is a crucial factor in the success of the project, because awareness of differences is made operational and this promotes communication and cooperation.

Cooperation processes can only be furthered if an effort is made to demonstrate and mediate acceptance and an understanding of gender-based, generational and function-related socialisation.

A framework agreement on equal treatment is a good tool, but it must be transposed to the particular strategic considerations and policies of the individual enterprise.

Training institutes must work on the aspect of equality and self-worth in all training procedures; that will ease the work of enterprises in developing concepts.

Central and local agreements/contracts can provide support for the development process and for the work on equal treatment.

The enterprise must develop expertise internally and provide an internal anchorage for development activities comprising an equal treatment dimension.

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