

TILES WITH A SYSTEM

New development organization at Schlüter-Systems KG



"If you do not keep up with the time you will be left behind" is one of the most popular sayings of the last few years. Or even centuries, since one of the authors it has been ascribed to is Friedrich Schiller. The imperative of permanent change may by now sound trite but its implementation is all the more demanding. How demanding this can be is illustrated by the experience of Schlüter-Systems KG, a family-run business located in Iserlohn that is an international leader in products for tiling.

With over 800 employees in Europe and North America the company supplies a range of around 10,000 system solutions for laying tiles and natural stone. However, the company's market environment has changed irreversibly in recent years. As market and quality leader Schlüter-Systems must nowadays not only supply increasingly complex products but also meet ever higher expectations with regard to quality. This is the only way for it to maintain its current competitive position as well as to secure its leadership in a globalized market.

The changing requirements can be seen not just in marketing but also in development and production at its locations in Germany and North America. It is against this background that the company decided to undertake radical process restructuring as part of a project supported by ROI consulting. Particular focus was placed on a clear definition and implemen-

tation of the product development process (PDP) in order to be able to drive product development in a locally and globally structured manner.

Product development across the Atlantic

"Our product innovation and development are primarily based on the problems of the tiling industry, which are growing increasingly complex. We are being asked more and more to supply system solutions that have to meet the standards and regulations of different countries," explains Marc Schlüter, Managing Director of the family business. "This is where our evolved organizational forms and processes came up against their limits." For this reason a two-year project was initiated with ROI in October 2012 aimed at creating the basis for a sustainable structure.

There was no question of introducing a neutral best practice solution for the PDP since ultimately the knowledge and experience of the employees in Iserlohn and the North American locations in Plattsburgh and Montreal were to be optimally com-



Marc Schlüter
Managing Director,
Schlüter-Systems KG

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bined in the future structure. The basic requirements for the project therefore called for the close involvement of the departments affected by the changes. A further success factor was systematic support and backing for project staff by senior management, which has always emphasized the central role of change in project work. "Collaboration in an international team and the choice of a methodology that satisfied the different development cultures in both Germany and North America were particular challenges that we paid a lot of attention to from the outset," says Marc Schlüter. Besides the precise definition and subsequent introduction of the PDP, the aim was also to integrate the required methods for product development and project management and, where these did not already exist, to develop them.

From flagship project to global roll-out

The redesign of the PDP followed a proven methodology that was to a large extent developed by ROI. Following a detailed situation analysis, the complete process design and the required PDP methods for two different types of product development were developed in several project steps. The aim was to handle the two types of processes developed with a single process description in order to maintain the same underlying system. Flagship projects were then defined and implemented on the basis of this. "The flagship projects demanded a great deal from all those involved but were the necessary baptism of fire for the new concept," reports Marc Schlüter. "The pilot projects proved to us that we had a solution that would actually be feasible in the company's everyday practice. This applies across national and departmental boundaries."

ROI provided support for the Schlüter team in particular in the pilot phase. Regular training sessions and workshops were held in Germany and North America and targeted project marketing was undertaken. For example, a flyer was created and the regular training sessions were used to ease familiarization with the new structures. A PDP manual was prepared as a supporting measure and process documentation was set up in the customer process management system.

Stable processes develop when people act together

The experience gathered in the pilot phase and the best practices provided by ROI ultimately formed the basis for the roll-out of the new process design and the newly defined PDP organization. This phase of the project was also accompanied by ROI with

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Schlüter-Systems KG:

Schlüter-Systems offers a comprehensive range of practice-tested system solutions for laying tiles and natural stone. These include the Schlüter®-SCHIENE - the original edge protection and transition profile for floors - as well as solutions for waterproofing, drainage and uncoupling insulation, heated ceramic-tile flooring and state-of-the-art LED lighting technology. www.schlueter.de

training and coaching, with special focus being placed on the management of the process interfaces. The next few months will now see comprehensive training for all

employees involved in the PDP. The training modules developed for the various process roles will then be used to introduce the new methodology to further employees who deal with product development. There are also plans

to set up global and local product management and to define the development organization. As a final step, it is intended to provide for a continuous improvement process so that the new structure can grow with changing demands. "The fact that we were able to realize such a comprehensive concept that radically changed the processes that we had grown accustomed to over the years, is largely due to the constructive collaboration with the team and to the consultants from ROI," sums up Marc Schlüter. "Paper is patient. Something really new only comes about when people act."