



WORLD WIDE WEAVE

GKD: Knowledge shared globally and increased cooperation

The course is set for further growth

Courage and innovative strength are in the genes of the GKD group (GKD – Gebrüder Kufferath AG), now under management in its third and fourth generation. To maintain their lead among the international competition, the technical weavers therefore invested in internationalization and global work distribution early on. Yet strong growth and the expanding complexity of processes, structures, customer requirements, and quality standards were increasingly revealing the limits of the conventional means that had so far been in decentralized use. Structured systems need to be created in order to support processes across the group, to connect sites, areas, and departments, and to organize global knowledge sharing. Solutions to these challenges include the introduction of a GKD-wide CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system and an internal communication and collaboration platform known as the INFOBASE.

What has long been standard for global concerns is often still the exception in small and medium-sized businesses: central digital platforms for recording, controlling, and analyzing all activities in the company. Over recent years, GKD began homogenizing the data environment in production. Machine connection and the introduction of an MES (Manufacturing Execution System) for controlling production in the main factory in Düren marked the beginning of the digital transformation in manufacturing. This makes the family-run company a pioneer among SMEs. Nevertheless, the recent strong growth took the group to its limits: Information and knowledge were



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exchanged only at management and executive board level, if at all. For geographical reasons alone, cross-location cooperation between teams couldn't be implemented efficiently. In order to eliminate these obstacles to growth and get the most out of existing synergies, what needs to be done now is to digitalize all business processes in the group. The stated aims of this transformation are stronger cooperation in the group and ensuring group-wide knowledge transfer. Under the leadership of Lara Kufferath, who is responsible for corporate development and thereby digitalization, the company has been driving forward this pioneering issue since the start of 2019. The first step was an intensive process analysis lasting around five months: At all locations, the business processes, systems, and functions used were analyzed, structured, and redesigned to set the course for the desired multiplier effect. With this as the basis, a digital strategy encompassing all locations was developed to support the corporate strategy. The GKD group's previous strategy of numerous satellites on fine threads was to be transformed into a firmly networked entity. "We need systems in order to achieve more with less effort," says Lara Kufferath, explaining the fundamental premise on which the entire digital transformation in the company is based.

Focus on customers

To begin with, the primary focus was on the core process of order acquisition and market development, which was to be supported in the future by a group-wide CRM system. From now on, all customer data and customer-related activities are centrally recorded and available in this system. Comprehensive and structured overviews, functionalities, and evaluations support all sales processes across all sites. The 360-degree view of customers' needs that this creates also makes it possible to identify new business areas and respond proactively to altered requirements with



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corresponding product innovations. Accompanying marketing campaigns allow specific target groups to be approached personally, and services and touch points can be geared to specific customers. As such, GKD customers worldwide immediately benefit from a significantly greater depth of consultation and even faster solutions to problems. "With the CRM system, we have redefined cooperation in the GKD group – with the result that everything works faster, more effectively, and more efficiently," says Dr. Stephan Kufferath, Commercial Director.

Worldwide interactive cooperation

In parallel to this, GKD internally rolled out the INFOBASE – a global knowledge database that unites three elements. As an intranet, it pursues the goal of bringing employees together and strengthening the team culture. Open exchange and arranging to meet for lunch or leisure activities, such as the weekly running meet, are just as likely to be found here as employee interviews or introductions by new coworkers. At the touch of a button, all 900 employees can also view important information that was previously posted on local information boards. Plus, the database is also a collaboration platform for meetings and workflows. For the first time, it allows communication and cooperation within project teams that goes far beyond any previously known scope. This modern form of interactive cooperation – also with service providers and suppliers – increases speed as well as transparency. Highly complex projects can be realized together in a far better and simpler way. Examples include processes such as the introduction of the CRM system or the IATF (International Automotive Task Force) certification that is currently underway. This increase in efficiency is supported by the third function of the INFOBASE as a company wiki, which brings together the collective intelligence of the company. Knowledge and information that was previously only available locally or in the heads of employees is recorded



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and made available centrally. Whether it's product, market, or application knowledge, internal processes or the right specialist contact person: a quick search here will find staff what they need instantly. Any open questions are asked in the INFOBASE and answered promptly by coworkers in the know. This transparency lowers inhibitions surrounding asking questions, increases the knowledge of the individual, and strengthens team spirit. For customers, this even better command of processes means higher quality and consulting competence throughout the group as well as lower costs.

Well received

Within GKD, these advantages quickly became apparent in day-to-day activity, helping to generate a high level of acceptance for the systems among employees. They contributed to its development with a wealth of ideas. Even the company suggestion scheme received a huge boost through the increased visibility of the individual and a previously unmatched level of active feedback from coworkers. All to the great satisfaction of Lara Kufferath: "Now that we have brought the knowledge present within the GKD group together in a solid data platform and are continuing to push forward with this, we can make use of many synergies at operational level. Here we have created the requirements for further growing the company while having also increased employee motivation and customer satisfaction."

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GKD – WORLD WIDE WEAVE

As a privately owned technical weaver, GKD - Gebr. Kufferath AG is the world market leader in metal, synthetic and spiral mesh solutions. Four independent business divisions bundle their expertise under one roof: Industrial Mesh (woven metal mesh and filter solutions), Process Belts (belts



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made of mesh and spirals), Architectural meshes (façades, safety and interior design made of metal fabrics) and Mediamesh® (Transparent media façades). With its headquarter in Germany and five other facilities in the US, South Africa, China, India and Chile – as well as its branches in France, Spain and worldwide representatives, GKD is close to markets anywhere in the world.

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