

10 Autoplastica

Overview

Students read about Autoplastica, then listen to a discussion of three options to resolve the issue of its R&D teams being divided between three different sites. They role play a meeting to decide which option to choose, and finally compare their decision with a real company's decision.

Preparation

One copy of the case per student.

Procedure

- Hand out copies of the first page of the case. In groups of four students discuss how mobile people are in their countries.
- Students read about Autoplastica and answer the questions.
- Students listen to the recording and complete the table.
- Hand out copies of the second page of the case. In their groups of four, each student takes a role. (If you only have three students, take the role of International Director of R&D yourself. If you only have two students, omit this role and take one of the others yourself.) Students role play a meeting to decide which of the three solutions to choose. Hold a short language feedback session.
- Students read about Plastic Omnium's decision and compare it with their own.
- Optional written assignment: students write up the minutes of the meeting.

Answers

- R&D is very important because the automobile sector is fast-moving, highly competitive and very technical. Customers' requirements are complex and ever-changing.
The current organisation is unsatisfactory because the R&D staff is split between three sites. Students may like to speculate about the problems this can cause – communication, travel costs, distribution of resources, redundancy, competition, jealousy, etc.
- much too expensive
 - communicate with the other centres
 - travelling to meetings
 - time and money
 - refuse to move
 - be unhappy
 - new facilities
 - expand
 - canteen
 - twenty million euros
 - two or three years
 - improving our existing centres
 - resources and investment
 - building a new site
 - communications
 - more prestige
 - logistics, disruption

Recording script

Track 1.19

A: ALBERTO E: EVA

- A: Hm, pizza again, Eva?
E: Oh, hi Alberto. Well, I don't like fish soup very much. And as for the sausage ...
A: Yes, I know what you mean. Well, perhaps the canteen will be better in the new place.
E: New place? What do you mean?
A: Eva, which planet are you on? Haven't you heard? They say we're going to have a new R&D centre.
E: Oh, that. That's just a rumour. We have a lot of rumours here. Like last year, they said the management wanted to centralise all the R&D teams. It will never happen. If you put 400 R&D people all in one centre, you need to upgrade and expand the labs – it's much too expensive.
A: Well, I think it's a good idea. At the moment, it's very difficult to communicate with the other centres. And we spend a fortune travelling to meetings. If all the R&D departments were in the same place, we could save a lot of time and money, and be much more efficient – as long as they centralise everything here in Bari, of course. I certainly don't want to move to Biella – it's cold up there! And Rome – ugh!
E: Mm, well that's one of the problems. If we centralise, a lot of people will refuse to move. But if we do nothing, at least nobody will be unhappy.
A: But if we don't change, we can't build the new facilities we need, like a crash test lab.
E: Yes, or a paint shop, and a pre-production line. I know, it's just not possible here, there's no space to expand.
A: So, build a new R&D centre. And a new canteen!
E: Hm – but what about the cost? They say a completely new centre will cost 20 million euros. And it will take two or three years to build. Don't you think it's better to stay where we are and spend the money on improving our existing centres?
A: Hm, maybe. Or perhaps to centralise – to concentrate resources and investment in one existing centre – that would be much quicker and easier than building a new site. On the other hand, if we did build a new, modern R&D centre with good international communications, well, it would give us a lot more prestige with our customers.
E: Well, I suppose so, but just think about the logistics and all the disruption!
A: Yeah. Hm. It's really difficult to decide.
E: Well, fortunately, you don't have to decide, Alberto – that's management's problem.
A: Huh? Management's problem? Oh, I see. No, I mean it's really difficult to decide – between the cheese and the dessert!