

## Overgas: Mobilising internal resources for long-term sustainability

### What does this case study demonstrate?

[Overgas](#) is a company with a strong engagement in social projects in public interest, mainly in the fields of education, environment and culture. WPI practices presented in this case study involve active work with external stakeholders (mainly high schools and university) for the promotion of technical education and a better internal knowledge management. Each WPI practice is implemented as a separate project which contributes to clear goals, transparent implementation and accountability. At many levels in the company these projects foster linkages between different departments and employees. In general, the organisational culture is conducive and supportive to employees' participation in WPI practices and the launching of new initiatives.

*Workplace innovation elements:* work organisation; structure and systems; learning and reflection; workplace partnership

### Context

Founded in 1992, Overgas Inc. is the largest private natural gas company in the country specialised in developing and building infrastructure as well as providing infrastructure services in the field of gasification. Its main purpose is to provide an energy alternative and make natural gas available for Bulgarian citizens. The company builds and operates gas distribution networks and sells natural gas to end users. Since its establishment, Overgas has been investing non-negligible parts of its annual net profit in social projects in three main directions: ecology, education and culture, and sport for the youngest.

### Description of WPI practices

#### How to constantly replenish your staff

Launched in its current form and scale in 2007, the **Summer Internship Programme** lasts for approximately 3 months from June to September and aims to serve as the main entrance point into the company for starting level positions. After going through a serious selection process, each summer 20 to 30 university students graduate full-time paid internships in various departments in Overgas. The practice has been established in order to alleviate labour force shortages by nurturing experts according to the specific organisational and business needs of the company. Overgas has a well-developed culture of hiring interns and, regardless of changes in the high and middle management, the company policy continues to exist. Many employees have had the opportunity to be mentors and the common perception is that mentoring is a 'useful change of perspective' and a 'chance to learn a lot'. In the words of the Internship Programme's manager himself: 'I think that our colleagues value our interns because each year there is a sense of anticipation. They bring new energy and dynamism.'

## **Joining internal efforts for societal good**

The **Professional Education Initiative** is a response to the lack of well-trained technicians with secondary education. To improve the quality of professional education, in particular in specialties such as gasification, Overgas works closely with schools by organising competitions, training teachers, sending mentors and investing in laboratory equipment. To challenge, identify and attract the best students, the company organises the National Educational and Professional Contest for Gas Technicians and the National Contest for Young Researchers among professional high-schools across the country. Two employees coordinate the Professional Education Initiative and many experts and managers contribute with ideas or as evaluators. A lot of the students who participated successfully in the competitions are offered positions in Overgas. While around 20 people from different departments are directly involved each year with organising and carrying out trainings and competitions, assessing students' project and other activities, there are approximately 30-40 employees who contribute indirectly on an ad hoc basis.

## **A journey towards making knowledge sharing a norm**

In 2013, the establishment of the **Knowledge Management System** called OGpedia began. It is a single virtual space for sharing and structuring information, know-how and expertise. Content is created and uploaded by Overgas employees on a voluntary basis and includes technical knowledge, minutes from conferences, innovative trends, etc. The project champion argues that 'the fragmented distribution of knowledge is problematic and we strive to collect it at a single, easily accessible place. Knowledge management requires excellent culture of sharing which is hard to create.' The knowledge management system also includes an e-learning platform with an abundance of information about the core business of the company and the sector, a series of online training for new employees, and a dedicated space discussion of technical and economic case studies. Based on the information gathered through OGpedia throughout the year technical conferences for the innovations and knowledge exchange meetings are planned to take place on a regular basis.

## **So who benefits?**

**Longer term sustainability for the organisation:** the interviewed Training and Development Manager of the company argues that 'the business is very specific and the labour market cannot provide qualified experts. The same goes for the professional education; therefore the easiest way to avoid labour shortages is to develop experts yourself according to your own organisational and business needs.' In terms of internal knowledge management, OGpedia enables knowledge sharing so that 'when experienced employees leave the organisation, they take with them their expertise and know-how'.

**Active jobs, participation and learning opportunities:** Employees share that 'as a mentor you invest a lot of time in training your intern but it is very rewarding. Most colleagues maintain contact with their interns for years after their internship. The experience is incredible and I know that many colleagues feel about it the same way as I do.' Even though the conditions on the labour market triggered the launch of two of the described WPI practices, employees confirm that 'there are also strong intrinsic factors that motivate everybody who is involved to contribute. Most importantly, everybody can see the positive impact.' In terms of elaborating and proposing new initiatives, employees appreciate that there are clear internal procedures and that 'the voice of employees is definitely heard'.

## **Prognosis**

Both the management and the employees share the view that the single most important impact of the introduced WPI practices in Overgas is related to human capital development. There is a strong commitment at all levels of the company to continue, expand and constantly improve existing initiatives. Overgas is a visionary company which manages to translate detrimental extrinsic factors of the country's business environment into a catalyst for organisational change and increased employee participation.