



People

Anchor point

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So that a production line can run smoothly, various subsystems and stakeholders have to be brought together. Managing the resulting complexity is a huge challenge – one faced by Christopher Stuhlmann, executive vice-president of the Line Product Division, for instance.

PHOTOGRAPHY / ILLUSTRATION

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COVER PHOTO

After working for KHS in Kleve for twelve years, Christopher Stuhlmann moved to Dortmund where he has now headed the Line Product Division for over two years.

In his job, day in, day out Christopher Stuhlmann has to manage a process that is marked by enormous complexity: the input from five market zones, 18 regional centers, four other product divisions, twelve product centers and ten production sites dotted around the globe requires a huge amount of coordination and amalgamation. The common goal is to develop perfectly attuned filling and packaging lines comprising single machines and components that smoothly interact with one another. “Being an anchor point for my many colleagues and at the same time helping to ensure customer success is a highly complex, three-dimensional task that really motivates me,” Stuhlmann explains.

“We need this diversity of people; each and every one of them counts in the overall execution of a successful project. The conditional independence of our product divisions and product centers is essential, as it forms the basis of our innovative strength. This must be specifically channeled so that at the end of the day all of the pieces of the puzzle fit together. To this end, we draw up the requisite guidelines and roadmaps that function as a superior entity and interface for all issues that concern the line.”

»Only if we make our customers' success our own concern can we be successful ourselves.«



Christopher Stuhlmann

Executive vice-president of the Line Product Division, KHS

On the right track

Stuhlmann has headed the Line Product Division for two-and-a-half years now. Lots of changes – some minor, some quite big – have been made in this time, he says. “This was a very intensive period but in the meantime we’ve achieved a lot,” Stuhlmann tells us. In describing how he works, he quotes a modified Japanese proverb: “‘If you’re in a hurry, go slowly.’ This may sound like a contradiction in terms, but if you consciously give yourself more space for individual activities when you’re stressed and under time pressure, you can do more and get better results. I’m a fan of largely understanding all of the details before I make a decision. If you take one step in the wrong direction, you end up having to take several. This is why the first few months featured a lot of what I call ‘core drilling’.”

Once the relevant findings had been made and assessed, however, the first structural changes were made, such as ensuring heavier involvement of the international production sites. “With all of this, the third dimension then comes into play, namely that of the human factor,” claims Stuhlmann, referring to the fears that any alterations or changes in culture frequently instill among employees. He emphasizes that it’s never a matter of taking something away from the individual but always of becoming better together and turning KHS from a good into an outstanding line supplier. The product division has since entered calmer waters, he smiles, and customers are also noticing the positive development.



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Ready for the racetrack: Christopher Stuhlmann can wind down fastest on his sports motorbike.

Profile: Christopher Stuhlmann

Since 1996 the 53-year-old mechanical engineering technician has worked for the KHS Group for a total of 20 years with one intermission and is now executive vice-president of the Line Product Division. In his free time the father of two and former avid handball player loves to speed around the racetrack on his motorbike – a hobby that challenges him to the full and that he finds especially relaxing for just this reason.

Committed cooperation

Stuhlmann never tires of saying that progress is not an individual achievement – and by no means a mark of his own personal success – but the result of the committed cooperation of a great number of colleagues both in and outside Germany. “Our international team especially is one of KHS’ really big strengths and we want to exploit this even more in the future.”

Looking back, Stuhlmann doesn’t only consider countless major projects in the USA and Canada to have been notable successes, for instance – all of which went smoothly thanks to the excellent teamwork of Sales, Technology, the production sites and Project Management from the offer phase right through to acceptance. He’s also extremely pleased with the way lots of smaller and medium-sized orders have been concluded. And there’s more: “We’ve also been able to implement or drive lots of measures geared to the future – from the launch of our ECOS offer tool, a clarification tool that supports the offer phase through to order acceptance and makes it more efficient, to line layouts in 3D. We’ve made great progress in operational technology regarding piping, for example. Or take Innoline MES*, which my division is product owner of; I’m really proud to be part of the team pushing this and many other projects for KHS.”

* MES = Manufacturing Execution System, the process-related execution level of a multilevel production management system.

Before moving to Dortmund in June 2019, Stuhlmann spent twelve years at KHS primarily at the factory in Kleve, also in Germany, his last post being head of the Packaging Product Center. True to his motto of always wanting to look behind the scenes, he was able to get to know the company and its processes in detail during this time. He developed products for KHS and helped sell them. He managed installation sites in Saudi Arabia, Finland and France – to name but three examples – and earned himself a very good reputation among his colleagues and customers. His extensive specialist knowledge in many different disciplines now stands him in good stead in his current position. “Our product divisions and product centers want to continue to advance their outstanding line parts and machines. The task of harmonizing these sometimes seemingly incompatible endeavors and integrating them at the installation site to form a functioning whole is, to compare this to soccer, like playing in the Champions League. It calls for everyone to put in 100% but also hold back and compromise if needs be – and I speak from experience here.”

No success without hard work

Treating tasks as if they affected him personally is something Stuhlmann learned as a teenager. Growing up in a family in the hospitality trade in Frankenberg near Kassel, from a very early age he wanted to be a chef. But not just that; he also knew that cleaning the restaurant on Sunday mornings and serving guests during the day to bump up his pocket money was also very much part of the job.

He thus realized early on that success doesn't come without hard work – a lesson learned for which he is now very grateful. “My parents having their own business had a big influence on me. That still hasn't changed: only if we as KHS make our customers' success our own concern can we be successful ourselves – in a classic win-win situation. I therefore constantly ask myself what I can do to improve a situation and how I can motivate others to do the same. In this sense, I look to surround myself with people I can openly and trustingly reflect on my ideas, free of any personal or political reservations, colleagues who perhaps aren't afraid to voice unpleasant truths outright

from time to time. Of course I make mistakes – just like everyone else. A frank word really helps me to do things better next time.”