

How can I help you?

On 11 October 2016 BMW Regensburg, Bavaria, hosted an 'Excellence Day' attended by among others New Future Formula. This is a brief account about an unforgettable day.

BMW is an iconic brand and let alone its name spurs happy dreams all over the globe. BMW counts in excess of 120 000 employees, and like Toyota the renowned carmaker has over-performed during recent decades. Over and over again the company has gained market shares – and consistently generated profits way above average. An industry that for a century has not only 'delivered vehicles' but in fact has been the very essence and defined what an industry really is – and has re-defined the concept despite, or thanks to, fierce competition countless of times.

BMW's long range of companies and 30+ manufacturing plants have been working according to the EFQM Business Excellence Model for a many years, and last year the perhaps best production unit – BMW Regensburg – was awarded the European Excellence Award. This award is the most prestigious recognition to be achieved by companies and organizations throughout Europe. A total of 30,000 companies are evaluated every year for this award and less than one per mille are among the top candidates with the chance to be hailed as the best and achieve the European Excellence Award. Behind it all we find the EFQM whose purpose it is to promote the competitiveness of European business life. The EFQM is a nonprofit organization founded by some of the top notch businesses in Europe.

On 11 October 2016 the company management of **BMW Regensburg**, Bavaria, hosted an '**Excellence Day**' for almost 200 specially invited guests, members of the EFQM. Thanks to New Future Formula's activities and work for the EFQM, we also received an invitation and attended as the only guests with a Danish background.

The event became a unique experience for Peter Nymand and myself.

Let alone the arrival was overwhelming. A company parking lot with room for the vehicles of 9,000 members of staff – or more likely BMWs of all shapes and sizes – brought out happy smiles. The old saying that 'the cobbler's children have no shoes' certainly did not seem to apply here.

The morning offered presentations given by six different members of the BMW Regensburg top management team – well organized, dedicated and concise, the best of German hosting skills. And yet also with a touch of something that I despite numerous visits to German manufacturing industries have not witnessed as markedly before, a



sincere and natural interest in the human aspect. Why am I here? What are our values? Why do we build a bond of mutual trust throughout all parts of the organization? And how do we eliminate the fear of failure while at the same time striving for perfection? To me this was new and sweet music – but do the niceties and well-intended words come with a long life? Would these words merely stand out like nice music on a sheet of paper? Peter and I secretly cast sceptical eyes at each other more than once. Most likely many other attendants had the same thoughts. When you accept 700 deliveries by truck from sub-suppliers every day, when all actions are defined to last no more than 57 seconds, and when you spit out 1400 finished vehicles each and every day, you can easily imagine how hard it will be to find the time and energy to link Value Stream Mapping, problem solving techniques and end-to-end optimization to values, personal development, team development and coaching.

The afternoon was spent visiting all central sections of the huge manufacturing facility in small, individually guided groups where each group met with managers and members of staff who informed the attendants about their work. An unforgettable experience. The groups made visit upon visit, had conversation and conversation and all we could conclude was that the music we heard during the morning presentations was not just ‘music on sheets of paper’, the music was performed in harmony throughout all corners of the wide-ranging organization. We were deeply impressed by the educational and positive spirit of community that we encountered and the multiple times we heard ‘**How can I help you?**’. In the words of a manager ‘The idea is simply to service your employees to make them succeed.’

Throughout the afternoon we heard a host of examples of improvements and processes of improvement all down the chain. As a few examples the final quality control pointed out some defects in an installation department and the manager’s role was to facilitate root cause learning with a smile and without reproach – and was trained to do this. Production managers and engineers are trained in performance coaching and describing problems in words to employees who are to identify their own solutions – solutions that over and over again turned out to be much better than what they had imagined would happen.

Visiting BMW Regensburg was **an invigorating event**. The company is not only an outstanding carmaker, it is also a positive place to work for thousands of people who go to work every day and who excel to the benefit of the company, themselves and the local community. No nauseating CSR drabble and unclear HR speak but vivid improvement efforts as a natural part of people’s daily lives and working lives.

Perhaps we should wish for a car tax reduction for Christmas and replace our old, slightly dilapidated Volvo with a BMW out of Regensburg?



