



LABOUR RELATIONS

(Re)building Conditions for Dialogue

Long-established tension between the management and the personnel representatives, a legal conflict over the collective bargaining agreement... The BPI project manager had their work cut out to restore conditions for dialogue between the actors as the company's profits steadily declined.

► Context

OBSERVING THE DAMAGE

The factory employed 400 people in a small industrial town. Labour relations had been a power struggle for some years. Three quarters of the employees belonged to the same union. Whether this was a cause or a consequence, the management were not prepared to talk.

When the branch collective bargaining agreement was terminated, the company committed a procedural error that the personnel representatives did not fail to spot - the company was recognised as having defaulted by the courts. The general management wanted to handle the issue with an expert.

► Task

RELAYING FOUNDATIONS

The BPI consultant began the preparatory work on site with the HR department - 200 agreements and customs to be listed, a negotiating position to be defined for each. Faced with the management who had prepared themselves, the employees only wished to discuss newly-acquired entitlements. The liabilities were huge, and the set of actors had to be modified - the drop in profits required the situation to be resolved. The decision was taken to nominate a new factory manager - a prepared and strategic choice on the part of the MD. A new HR director also took up her functions at the Paris headquarters, and together they re-started the social dialogue.

PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT AND REDEFINING THE ARCHITECTURE

The personnel representatives had special links with the local press that had become a one-sided vector of information for the employees. To counterbalance this, BPI supported the publishing of regular **press release** which progressively rebalanced the information distributed.

In parallel, the MD and the executive team «went live» and began planning a true reorganisation. To build a rigorous approach and respect the regulatory framework, the consultant, who had become project manager, recommended the constitution of an **official economic dossier (« Livre IV »)**. Its contents were built step by step around three objectives - reducing costs, increasing production capacity, recentering the business. BPI ensured the legal formalisation of the document. It became the master document for **different supports presenting the project**.

CHECK PLANS

The company kept losing money at higher rate, and a project could no longer be run without changes in the workforce, and the redundancy programme approach became necessary. A second social dossier (« livre III ») was prepared along the same lines as the reflection already begun. When the dossiers were ready, the steering committee decided to favour the social acceptability of the project by cancelling the ten redundancies planned and recomposing the workforce using age-related criteria and rearrangement of work hours and an outsourcing operation."

► Perspectives

STARTING THE PROJECT

The legal procedures related to the economic dossiers were launched simultaneously in order to answer questions on the handling of the social aspects of the operation. Although the project has only just begun, the first task entrusted to BPI has been accomplished - reestablishment of a «normal» dialogue between the management and the unions which have remained the same but changed their attitude. Reorganisation is coming.

Communication

Using the economic dossier and the redundancy programme, the steering committee prepared and «staged» communication for :

- The group - they gave the go-ahead to the project and the investment it represented ;
- The supervisory authorities - BPI recommended making a presentation to the DDTEFP (regional authority for employment and professional training) and the Prefect ;
- The employees - Educational communication about the project before beginning the procedure, ensuring the step taken was safe from the risk of the offence of obstructing the works council from functioning, organisation of a "works council 0" to get to grips with both dossiers.

Objective : Ensure comprehension before trying to convince.

The same type of communication tool was planned in order to inform both on-site employees and the local press.

- Facts and figures.
- Education.
- Objectives.

« Livre IV » – Economic Dossier (article L 432.1 of the labour code)

Contents :

- Overview of the enterprise
- Problem encountered
- Scheduled actions and expected results
- Consequences for structures and jobs
- Introduction to the social handling of the operation.