

Experts with a Difference

Getting to work rather than just talking about it—the consultants from Bietigheim don't put their solutions on paper; they put them into action

□ HORST WALTER

The welcome in Genoa was scarcely cordial. “Germans, go home!” striking employees in front of the factory gates of the Piaggio Aero aircraft manufacturer yelled into their megaphones. José Di Mase, chairman of the board, was pale as he gazed out his fourth floor-window. Then he spotted one of the German consultants, an imposing figure, in intense conversation with the Piaggio Aero shop chairman before they vanished into the building. An hour later, the furor had passed—Porsche Consulting could get to work. “Federico Magno, the managing director of Porsche Consulting Italia, sat up there in the conference room, already wondering when he would be heading back to the airport,” recalls Eberhard Weiblen, the managing director of Porsche Consulting. A miracle, it would seem—and yet the explanation is quite down-to-earth. It is an essential ingredient in Porsche Consulting's company policy and one of the reasons why the Porsche subsidiary has expanded as it has. From four consultants sharing a back room in Zuffenhausen to 220 colleagues in a modern office building in Bietigheim. From DM 3.4 million in sales to over €55 million today. And rising. The selection of consultants is a critical element. Edgar Ebersoldt, for instance, whose confidential conversation in Genoa back in 2006 persuaded the shop committee, was trained as a master mechanic and was already over 50 at the time. He knows what he is talking about—and he speaks the employees' language.

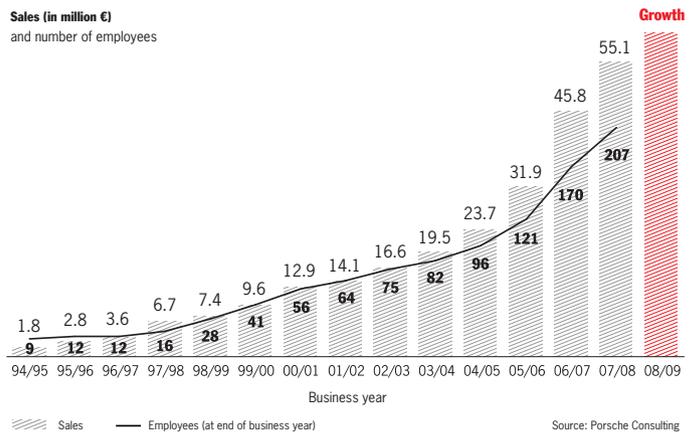
The Italians, who came to call him “Eddi,” realized that he wasn't there to abolish jobs and put their colleagues out of work. Rather, his aim was simply to share his own experience, to show them where and how savings in a company are possible, why waste is unnecessary, and why added value is a deciding factor. “Our clients' employees are always included in the process; we want them to see for themselves what can be improved,” says Weiblen. Seventy percent of his colleagues have practical experience in the field, and all of them enter the factory building in work clothes, not in suit and tie. This philosophy speaks for itself. You must be willing to dive into someone else's day-to-day chaos to be able to create a remedy and apply lean methods. The Italian employees were gratified to see that thanks to “Eddi,” even their chairman of the board showed up in blue overalls to take his place with everyone else in a clean-up project—using grease remover to scour grime from the machines. Porsche Consulting has a different approach to its work. And that is in part due to its own experiences in the parent company. During the 1992 crisis, Porsche AG realigned itself according to lean methods—and even today follows the principles of the continuous improvement process (CIP). As a result, the sports car manufacturer has been toughened and far better prepared to face times of crisis. “Many clients come to us saying, ‘Make us the Porsche of our business industry,’” says Eberhard Weiblen. And this

“We’re not regaling them with fairy tales; we are telling them our own story.” Porsche Consulting GmbH is located in Bietigheim-Bissingen. It was launched by the car company itself



Fifteen years of growth due to successful project work

Sales (in million €)
and number of employees



Source: Porsche Consulting

was a pivotal factor during that critical hour in Genoa. Master mechanic Ebersoldt’s eyes light up when he speaks of how and why Porsche was able to emerge from the crisis in the early 1990s. And that the entire staff has benefited. At that time, Porsche swiftly attained a double-digit increase in productivity. “For our clients, this is trustworthy evidence. We’re not regaling them with fairy tales; we are telling them our own story,” says Weiblen, who can’t imagine a better reference project than that. This is how Porsche Consulting came into being in 1994. Other companies, including Recaro and DaimlerChrysler Commercial Vehicles, wanted to learn the secret of Porsche’s success and adopt it for their own use if possible. Then, when a furniture manufacturer that had run into difficulties paid for Porsche’s services with their own products, a small office was furnished for the four gentlemen working on a turnaround in Plant 3 on Schützenbühlstrasse in Zuffenhausen. And with that, Porsche Consulting GmbH was ready for business. Fifteen years later, commissions are on a rather larger scale—in individual cases, up to five million euros. This is because the subareas initially structured by the Porsche consultants have since become an integrated approach. Their field of activity includes not only sustained optimization of production itself, but also development, personnel, sales, suppliers, and controlling. “The principles remain the same,” says Weiblen, who firmly believes that anyone who has succeeded

in restructuring a car manufacturer will meet with success in any other sector as well. And that is undoubtedly another reason for Porsche Consulting’s rapid growth. They have acquired their skills in one of the most complex sectors of all: automotive engineering. “A car is made up of up to 12,000 parts, each of which must be developed and produced. To ensure that these 12,000 parts can be assembled according to plan, numerous employees and suppliers must work together in synchronized processes,” says Eberhard Weiblen. Since then, Porsche Consulting has been successful in a variety of areas: from beds (Völker) to road construction (Kirchhoff) and plugs (Fischer)—and the consultants have not even shied away from hospital surgeons. For instance, they have operated on the medical services at the University Medical Center Freiburg—open-heart surgery, as it were. “We aren’t physicians, of course. But we do know how to make a company lean and efficient,” Weiblen notes—and that is something his team has proven time and again—50 times, in fact. And upon a project’s completion? There again, Porsche Consulting demonstrates its very different approach. “For us, completing a commission does not mean sending a lengthy report to our client with instructions on what needs to be changed. Our job is not done until the company’s staff change their working methods and understand that this is to their benefit. This is the only way to set the stage for a continuous improvement process,” says the director.