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**BMW Group Plant Oxford employees switch roles to boost performance**  
27/10/2003

BMW Group Plant Oxford has scooped this year's CIPD People Management Award, with its Working in Groups project, which established self-steered teams, broke down traditional hierarchical structures and in 2002 saw the plant exceed its target production volume by 60% (an additional 60,000 MINIs) and deliver cost savings of £60,000 directly as a result of ideas from employees.

This critical project was a part of a wider programme of change known as the New Oxford Way (NOW), launched in 2000 following BMW Group's decision to sell the Rover Group business and move the MINI production to Oxford. At that point, the BMW Group Plant Oxford faced the challenges of upgrading the site to a world-class standard, integrating the Rover and BMW cultures and launching a completely new car in the form of the new MINI.

Heike Schneeweis, Human Resources Director, says: "The central element of NOW was the Working in Groups project which created a turnaround in both working practices and employee behaviours. This move from a strongly directive management style to a much more autonomous team working approach was heavily supported by training and coaching.

"The main element of the programme, the development of self-steered teams, diminished the power of the traditional hierarchical structure and gave much more responsibility to the working teams in the manufacturing area. It placed continuous improvement and the achievement of plant improvement targets directly into the hands of the team members."

The programme elements included:

- \* A Team Co-ordinator for each team, released for 50% of the time from their normal role, to facilitate the teams in their self-steering activities.
- \* Training around effective communication, leadership, conflict resolution in teams, goal-setting and assertiveness.
- \* Team talks - fortnightly 45 minute sessions (per shift) built into the production schedule.



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- \* An eight themed checklist to provide guidance to the teams about where they should focus their activities. These were audited monthly to measure progress.

- \* Visual techniques and team target boards designed to monitor progress.

- \* A dedicated logo to help raise the visibility of the project.

Adds Schneeweis: "We have seen real business benefit as a result of Working in Groups, and we are delighted that the philosophy has been expanded into the non-manufacturing areas.

"This includes a voluntary scheme that encourages every employee who does not work trackside to spend a week each year in a production role, to increase their understanding of the challenges that exist and to see how they might further support the manufacturing teams to meet their targets."

Geoff Armstrong, CIPD Director General, says, "The judges were very impressed by the transformation of what used to be a notorious industrial relations "hot spot". BMW has systematically worked with people at all levels to change the culture of the Oxford site.

"Teamworking, continuous learning, open communities and building a climate of trust have generated real bottom line benefits. They have also opened up opportunities for people to develop and to contribute their initiative to their work. A well-planned, implemented and measured win-win solution."

The CIPD People Management Award was launched in 1995 and is designed to celebrate and recognise excellence in the field of people management and development. The Award highlights organisations that have managed positive changes through the effective implementation of innovative practice and is a joint venture between the CIPD and People Management magazine.

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