



Go With The Flow

The macro-trend of operational excellence has unlimited interpretations when it comes to its micro-integration. To be able to purposefully and accurately define and manage a project that has clear goals is the function of project management, with operational excellence usually at its heart.

Operational excellence is defined as creating value for customers and shareholders thanks to the execution of its operations in the most efficient, effective manner. The idea being that two comparable businesses can have a clear winner depending on who works in the most excellent manner. At a time when globalisation means we can buy almost anything from almost anywhere, that excellence is what makes the difference – and wins the customer.

But what does operational excellence mean on a day-to-day basis? Is it just something that people say because they've heard someone else say it in a meeting, or do they actually know how to turn that zoomed-out concept into the hundreds of tiny actions it requires from an engaged team that know what they're doing?

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Global PET, HDPE and rPET packaging solutions manufacturer RETAL takes operational excellence so seriously it has devoted a multi-lingual project team to its integration across its 19 worldwide sites. By understanding that every element of its product lifecycle management must be analysed and perfected in order to streamline and standardise wherever possible, RETAL is making sure that all its manufacturing plants are working to the same high-quality assurances.

Arturas Scerbakovas is EU Purchase Director at RETAL and part of the core team for the operational excellence project, codenamed 'Validage' because of its focus on the global validation of multi-elements of the RETAL portfolio – caps, closures, preforms and films production testing and quality.

Scerbakovas explains, "As a company, we are always pushing towards greater sustainability, so Validage is just one of the RETAL projects that has this at its heart. Working with many multinational global food and beverage brands means that we specialise in quickly and effectively producing packaging solutions that meet the strict demands of these brands across different markets; Validage is a centralisation project that brings together data, process of approval and other quality and commercial aspects of manufacturing at RETAL.

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The underlying focus on sustainability means that effective Life Cycle Management is driving Validage. Scerbakovas says, “The whole project was initiated when we realised that the new material approval needed for either existing customers in new markets or for new customers that wanted to understand our processes could be streamlined. For new additives or colourants for example, or a new recipe, or a new customer product, Validage recognises the need for a workflow that does not repeat data or testing unnecessarily. By having one system that harnesses the knowledge of our experts across quality, engineering and manufacturing, we keep that knowledge easily accessible throughout the RETAL Group worldwide and help speed up the process for our customers.”

Customer advantage

Speed is not the only customer advantage of operational excellence in the Validage project. By having a standardised and centralised product life cycle management, the opportunity for cost savings and supplier diversification increases too, even if the product requested is outside of the standard portfolio. Scerbakovas explains, “The irony is that standardisation can actually help us to be more nimble because whatever elements of the products requested are the same, we can quickly repeat them, and so it is only the new elements that need to be assessed from scratch.”

This results in a welcome hybrid of bespoke packaging solutions at standard portfolio prices, allowing RETAL to be flexible at a local level for global customers, as the Validage system quickly recognises the elements that are not currently standardised – even if the testing and monitoring has been carried out at a RETAL factory in another location. Scerbakovas adds, “This gives us the edge over both local and global competitors as we can deliver the best of both worlds. But the target is not to centralise everything, it’s far more sophisticated than that. It’s about keeping our global business connected through experience, sharing the aspects of each product that streamlines our workflow and allows us to see what other RETAL teams have already analysed – and then use it to the customer’s advantage to their specific requirements.”

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Operational excellence projects such as Validage at RETAL also help to support global customers in their ongoing quest for increased Corporate Social Responsibility, which is an ever-increasing demand in tenders as well as between established suppliers. Purchasing from suppliers that have already established standardised testing and monitoring supports their own CSR targets at a time when ‘nice to have’ is giving way to ‘must have’. By understanding that responsible manufacturing is a current- and future-focused macro trend, projects that increase operational excellence and promote sustainability are always going to be in fashion.

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