

People

A PEOPLE-CENTRIC APPROACH, NOW MORE THAN EVER

COVID-19 HAS RADICALLY CHANGED THE PLAYING FIELD, ALSO FOR PEOPLE-RELATED MATTERS. NAVIGATING THE WORKPLACE IN 2020 WAS NO SIMPLE TASK.

AT BESIX, SOME COLLEAGUES WERE SOCIALLY ISOLATED. OTHERS HAD TO JUGGLE A FULL-TIME JOB WITH CARING FOR ELDERLY PARENTS OR YOUNG CHILDREN. EXPATRIATES HAVE BEEN BLOCKED ON PROJECT SITES IN REMOTE PARTS OF THE WORLD, UNABLE TO TRAVEL OR REUNITE WITH THEIR FAMILIES. DIFFICULT DECISIONS HAD TO BE TAKEN AND SOME COLLEAGUES HAVE BEEN FURLOUGHED OR LET GO. MANY FACED SEVERE SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS AND SANITARY CHALLENGES ON CONSTRUCTION SITES. SOME WERE ALSO STRICKEN BY THE VIRUS. NO ONE AMONG THE 11.000 BESIX EMPLOYEES WAS SPARED.



THE CRISIS DIDN'T PUT AN END TO RECRUITING AS THIS DIGITAL JOB FAIR SHOWS

#WECARE

The virus has forced BESIX to step into uncharted territories; but 2020 has shown how resilient and courageous the staff were. BESIX is proud and grateful to the teams around the globe who ensured business continuity and to those who carried out critical tasks to manage this crisis. The all-round resilience and commitment to deliver have generated positive drive within the company in such a way that a good balance has now been found between safeguarding both the health of its employees and its business.

Before the crisis struck, BESIX had already started redefining its transactional HR practices into a more people-centric strategy, where support, innovation, environmental awareness and quality of life are central. Who could have foreseen that this strategy, dubbed '#WeCare', would have become so crucial a few months later... The pandemic proved, if need be, that care is today more important than ever in people policies and that an employer needs to focus on both the mental and physical health of its employees to boost its capacity for resilience. If BESIX has been able to get through 2020 with resilience and focus, it is partly thanks to its caring and people-centric HR policies.

A NEW WAY OF RECRUITING

New People practices have emerged from this forced new way of remote working, especially in the field of recruitment. The crisis didn't put an end to recruiting, but it certainly changed the way to do it. Very quickly, BESIX recruiters realised that attracting, selecting and recruiting talents could be greatly facilitated by technology. For instance, a virtual interview saves time and resources for both BESIX and

730

NEW HIRES

11,813

EMPLOYEES AT 31.12.2020

44 years

AVERAGE AGE

79

NATIONALITIES IN THE GROUP

9.72 years

AVERAGE SENIORITY

THE EXPERIENCE OF THIS CRISIS WILL HOPEFULLY MAKE US ALL BETTER AT WHAT WE DO. TOGETHER, WE CAN INNOVATE AND PUSH OUR ORGANISATION FORWARD INTO A 100 % PEOPLE-FIRST COMPANY. //



**GEERT AELBRECHT,
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER**

the candidates, as there is no commute or meeting place. Even more daringly, the organisation recognised that, in some cases, recruiting virtually increased the reach of the recruitment process and enriched the return, as doing things remotely eliminated potential hassles such as travel arrangements. In 2020, as many as 730 new talent were recruited and on-boarded digitally.

A NEW WAY OF GROWING

Before the virus struck, some 80 % of training at BESIX was classroom-based. Not surprisingly, Learning and Development emerged as one of the earliest and hardest hit People activities, with most in-person programs cancelled as soon as the virus spread. Again, by luck or foresight – or because it was already planned as a smart strategic move – BESIX had launched its eAcademy platform a few months prior to the pandemic.

BESIX turned the forced standstill in L&D into an opportunity to review its training offer as the worldwide crisis raised new types of challenges. Today, the eAcademy platform has moved away from a prescriptive approach to a more entrepreneurial format: the employee has access to a myriad of blended learning opportunities, allowing him or her to develop and progress in their own way.

Take for instance the monthly brown bag sessions that used to be held in-person at headquarters over breakfast. Today this knowledge-sharing moment has been transformed into a virtual get-together, accessible to all colleague around the world, live or in replay from the eAcademy platform. Participation to these brown bag sessions has skyrocketed and has seriously boosted internal knowledge sharing.

A NEW WAY OF PLANNING

Manpower planning is an important aspect of any organisation, but is particularly difficult in an activity subject to as many variables as construction, where tomorrow's work depends on winning yesterday's (public) tenders.

At BESIX, specific efforts have been made in 2020 to reinforce the efficient match of manpower supply and demand. In order to foster and secure the competent colleagues needed to achieve its projects in the pipeline, BESIX undertook a formal mapping of skillsets present at the various stages of a project's life cycle (tender, design, execution...) and a cartography of all profiles active in the company.

This detailed, worldwide mapping of skills and profiles allows the 'pre-booking' of talents on up-coming jobs. By ensuring an optimum match between available manpower and future work volume, BESIX is killing two birds with one stone: it boosts career prospects for the individual employee, and it secures project start-up by allocating the right resources in time. In 2020-2021, this pilot for dynamic career management based on tomorrow's volume is being tested in France and will be soon extended to Europe.

CHALLENGES GOING FORWARD

Even when the crisis is over, several challenges will remain. Going forward, BESIX will specifically explore its leaders' ability to coach remote workforce and preserve the company's culture in the 'new normal'.

The pandemic and its effects have highlighted the need for adaptability in today's workforce. The social dynamic between employees will no longer be the same due to varying working conditions, such as travel restrictions, less face-to-face interactions and an increasingly dispersed workforce. As a 110-year old engineering company, BESIX has a legacy of traditional face-to-face management system – which now requires a shift to agile and remote management. Leaders need to increase their facilitation skills to coach their virtual organisation efficiently: be straightforward in their expectations, provide clear guidelines and unite teams around results, not means.

At BESIX, a third of the white-collar workers has less than five years' seniority. It is therefore crucial that leaders are explicit about the culture and attitudes expected, that they formalise what used to be taken for granted when employees saw each other every day.



CONCLUSION //

Even as we move forward and look to a better 2021, one of the most recurring People themes remains: how can BESIX best connect, recognise and support its staff in today's unpredictable environment? To remain in tune with the overall feelings of its workforce, BESIX will conduct a worldwide satisfaction survey as a way to check and ensure that everyone is well and engaged. This will also capture the nuanced experiences of employees in different countries.

In 2020, as various levels of lockdowns were introduced in the many countries where BESIX was present, the company was quick to implement digital solutions to enable some of its employees to work remotely. Working from home was not entirely new, as it had been introduced at BESIX a few years earlier – a move that was then considered quite innovative for the construction sector. Going forward, BESIX will keep offering a hybrid working culture that supports both in-person and remote staff – with one constant: the employee at the heart of its people-centric culture.

While 2021 may not be plain sailing, BESIX People is prepared and ready to meet challenges, to continue on the path of agility and resilience.