

# Casebook

**2021**



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# Introduction

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## Reading our casebook? Good idea.

*Hello*

*It is nice to see that you are interested in what Square Circle does, and especially: how we do it.*

*In this casebook, we would like to show you four cases in which – if we may say so ourselves – we played an indispensable role. These are four different projects, in terms of company, problem definition and solution.*

## Two more things before reading the cases

1. In our cases, we do not mention names of companies or employees. Why? Because we want to be worthy of their trust. We often work in the shadows, get access to very confidential information and make companies stronger without revealing their problems. When we say management, we are referring to the CEO but also to senior management, middle management and team leaders.
2. These are just four cases out of more than 200 projects and 100 negotiations that we have successfully completed. Would you like to know more? Find more cases on **our website**.



## **Your company and Square Circle: one team**

We use our practical expertise to help you and your company: together, as one team. That is exactly what we do at Square Circle. We focus on people, your people. We have a keen eye for your tailor-made solution. We don't use chit-chat, long presentations and slides with analyses. But we do use action plans: doing, putting theory into practice and getting to grips with our tasks. Can we bring that into the real world? Yes, we can. Because your investment in our approach immediately pays off.







## This is how we work ...



### **Together with you**

When working together we become a member of your team: we share the challenges and work closely together with you and your teams on achieving the objectives.



### **Sharing expertise**

How do we work? We share and integrate our know-how with your teams, so they can successfully widen their expertise and add value to your business.



### **Practical, no chit-chat**

All our customers appreciate our no-nonsense approach. We turn advice into action. Your figures will confirm that.

## We help your company with every challenge

At Square Circle we are known for our practice-based approach that has already brought hundreds of restructuring and transformation processes to a successful completion. But that's not all: social negotiations, crisis and risk management, ... whatever your challenge may be, we can assist you.

# About Square Circle

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What do you need to know about our team at Square Circle? We have a closely-knit team: complementary in our areas of expertise, working closely together, but still mutually independent. When you work with Square Circle, you get one in-house expert with the expertise of four.

At Square Circle we know that we can assist any company in facing their challenges. How? With advice that gets to the bottom of the challenge. With solutions that show immediate results. And with a cost-effective plan that is ready to use.



# The Square Circle team: 100 years of practical experience

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## **PARTNER**

### Katrien Decroos

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Katrien has been advising companies for more than 25 years on managing enterprise developments and transformation processes to improve economic and human performance at organisations. She is an accredited partner of ISEOR and cooperates on the development of SEAM® in Belgium.



## **PARTNER**

### Ludo Goethals

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Ludo has been managing business evolution and transformation processes for more than 25 years. His focus area is to help improve the human performance to strengthen the economic performance of organisations. He is also currently developing SEAM® as an accredited partner of ISEOR in Belgium, and is the author of the book 'Persuasive Communication', published by the International Labour Organisation to train the leadership of employers' organisations worldwide.



# CASE 01

The restructuring of  
a European  
pharmaceutical group

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*From unprepared and inexperienced,  
to a tight plan and lasting knowledge*

## CASE 01

### What was going on?

In one sentence: a European pharmaceutical group of 3,500 people had to merge. The European headquarters in Belgium had to move to Switzerland, and there were restructurings, double positions, reorganisations ... there was a lot to be done. But working sessions with the team showed that the company had no experience with such an integration exercise, let alone with all the legal and social aspects involved.

Then, there were those 1001 rules, different from country to country, they had to follow strictly.

Since the restructuring involved 12 countries, the management had to make sure that the announcement of the merger would happen everywhere at the same time, which was a critical success factor.

The group had appointed Square Circle as the driving force behind the entire European integration plan regarding social relations, communication and people, change and crisis management.



## CASE 01

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### Our human approach

Everything starts with a plan. That is why we drew up a transparent roadmap based on our Road-Map tool for restructuring. This enabled us to prepare and monitor all aspects of the integration exercise.

We organised around 80 working sessions to prepare the whole plan in detail and conducted around 30 training sessions across Europe on change management, crisis communication and persuasive communication. And not just at the highest level. Because every company runs on people. From the CEO at the top to the employee who just started. Everyone had to be on board with what the company was doing. This is why Square Circle fully integrated the project team.

We gathered the twelve top people of the company to draw up a charter with them, so that everyone could be on the same page. To make them stronger. In terms of knowledge and communication but also emotionally. Because it was important that these people shared the same vision for the whole company in order to carry out the changes in their respective areas, in consultation with their colleagues.

Then, we held our Social Crisis Masterclass in three potentially critical countries. In this exercise, we taught the participants how to react to possible crisis situations. Because that is how we work: we share our expertise to make your company stronger. But not by executing something and then leaving. Then how? By constantly passing on our knowledge to the people, and teaching them how to apply it themselves.



## CASE 01

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### What about the results?

Doordat we in de voorbereiding van deze herstructurering veel zorg besteedden aan proactiviteit, transparantie en vertrouwen:

- We did **not damage** social relations.
- **Consultations** with trade unions went **smoothly** in all countries.
- We **reduced** employees' **uncertainty to a minimum**.
- The management **came out stronger**, both emotionally and knowledge-wise.
- Both the integration team and the company's management described our approach as "the key **success factor** for the integration".
- The **announcement** of the merger went **perfectly** according to plan. And it happened everywhere at once.



# CASE 02

Modernisation and social  
dialogue in a French  
production company

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## CASE 02

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*From a near-closure to one of the most performing companies in the sector*

### What was going on?

This French manufacturing company of 1,400 people was in constant conflict with the trade union. Management did consider the trade union an “unnecessary evil”. There was no trust, dialogue was impossible and discussions ended in court.

It is not always necessary to agree 100%, but it is important to move forward. Under these conditions, progress was impossible despite the urgency of the situation. The employees spoke – openly – of a lack of vision. A survey showed a satisfaction of less than 40%. Moreover, the management was exhausted and thought of closing or selling the business. They even feared bankruptcy.

When Square Circle first arrived, the company was on strike. The reason: the union was making too many demands and management was refusing to negotiate “with a gun to its head”. It was time for a productive and constructive approach instead of the negative and destructive one that was causing major losses and frustration for employees and managers.



## CASE 02

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### Our human approach

The starting point is to learn to talk to each other again in a constructive way and through clear communication. To be open to dialogue, not just to discussion. It is not a question of “who is right or wrong”, but of looking for solutions together. And for this society to remain active, it was urgent that people behave differently towards each other. Also for productivity reasons.

For example, after analysis, it appeared that employees were only working for 3.8 hours out of the 7.5 hours per day paid. If we had not listened to them, we might have thought that they were lazy workers. However, through discussion with the employees, we learned why. For example, they often had to wait for materials. This situation could easily be corrected with a better supply of components and accessories. After a lot of listening, talking and searching, the productivity and motivation of the workers increased – and so did the success of the company.

We also attended one of their works council sessions. It lasted six hours and in the end nothing was decided. What was the solution? We offered a training course in which the management learned how to face the employees and really communicate. Long formal meetings turned into shorter, informal and constructive conversations.

We looked at the causes of the problems instead of just treating the symptoms. As the saying goes: prevention is better than cure. This was the case here, where the number of accidents was 50% higher than in other companies of the group. Here too, we listened to all – we want to emphasise: all – of the people affected. We did not directly point fingers, but we listened to the reasons why they did not wear safety glasses. Did they feel comfortable? Did they fit properly? We really got to the root of the problem.

## CASE 02

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### What about the results?

Leadership training, a tight communication plan, intensive listening and choosing dialogue over discussion. Facts and data instead of unfounded emotional opinions. These are all the improvements that have led to :

- an **increased productivity** from 3.8 to 6 hours per day, Resulting in a very positive operating result already in the first year.
- the works council sessions becoming **two-hour constructive dialogues**.
- the company turning into one of the **best performing in the sector**.
- a **decreased accident rate to the same level** as for the rest of the group.
- the management and the union agreeing to **stop taking internal discussions to court**.
- the **announcement** of the merger turning out **perfectly** according to plan. And everywhere at once.



# CASE 03


Performance improvement  
for an interim company in  
Belgium

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## CASE 03

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*How hidden energy losses  
were changed into a renewed  
organisational structure and  
€4.9 million in freed-up funds  
to build the digital future.*

### What was going on?

Who's going to get fired first in the event of a crisis? Usually the people on temporary contracts. For this interim agency employing 600 people, this was very noticeable in a declining market or during an economic crisis. Moreover, this Belgian company had to be able to prove to the group that it was capable of evolving, even in such a difficult market. This was the only way to ensure that the group's future investments would go to Belgium.

Square Circle's mission was clear: to maintain profitability by making the best use of employees' potential. In other words: improve human performance in order to increase economic performance.

## CASE 03

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### Our human approach

The common thread in this case was to involve employees as the driving force behind creativity and added value. Because – and we like to stress this – people make the difference. The CEO of this company also knew this, because he was already familiar with our SEAM approach: the Socio Economic Approach to Management. In this approach we look at how we can improve economic performance through people.

After an in-depth analysis, interviews and listening sessions, many issues came to light: crippling collaborations between teams, low employee engagement, a management that does not care about employees, tools and software that were not used efficiently, a lot of energy and human resources that could have been put to better use.

So we used our tool to calculate the energy and resources lost. That way we could not only tell the company what was not working and where, but also how much it was costing them and, take it from us, money is always a very convincing argument. We quickly noticed that the company had a lot of potential in terms of hidden economic performance.

We analysed working conditions and the organisation, how working times were being managed, training efficiency, communication, consultation, coordination between teams, but also looked into the way the strategy was actually implemented on site. Piece by piece, we found areas for improvement in order to free up resources to build a better future.

Here is a concrete example about time. This company was trying to find new customers and for every ten prospects they contacted, only one became a customer. But they had so little time that they could only contact 3 people a week. So we looked for the cause of this lack of time. And we found ways to contact 15 or even more prospects per week, which immediately increased the turnover.

We also let the people involved think about all these issues. Teamed up into project groups, we had them find creative, sustainable and realistic solutions. Because the best consultants are already in your company. Based on these results, we have developed action plans to tackle energy loss, step by step, and at all levels.

## CASE 03

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### What about the results?

These show that people are indeed the driving force of every company.

- One year after the approach, the company is doing **6% better** than the competition. Thanks to **better cooperation** between teams and employees, they achieve a greater turnover.
- The hidden energy loss was converted into an **economic added value** of 4.9 million euros over 18 months.
- The company now has a management approach that can **constantly adapt** to market developments. Without the assistance of Square Circle.
- They decided to **continue using SEAM** to develop their future.



# CASE 04

Listening session in  
an international  
production unit

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## *How to save a business simply by listening*

### **CASE 04**

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#### **What was going on?**

This production company with 1,500 employees had been taken over the previous year. The new management was to bring in fresh air. Costs were too high and flexibility too low. In short, there was a great need for efficiency.

But the company was facing increasing quality problems. And these were affecting productivity and delivery agreements. It became difficult to mobilise employees to do anything and the union kept clinging to principles and acquired rights. The status quo was definitely not an option for the company. If nothing changed, if the production process did not become more efficient, the future of the company was at stake. And with it, the jobs of the workers.



## CASE 04

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### Our human approach

To put this into concrete terms, let's take a sandwich company as an example. In this company, there is someone who kneads the dough, someone who bakes and someone who cuts, spreads and packs. However, if a consumer receives a bad sandwich, who is responsible? According to the kneader, it was the baker's fault. The baker blamed the packer, who accused the kneader. This lack of responsibility was one of the critical issues that came out of our listening sessions with over 250 people. We had to solve this silo-like issue – “I just do my job” – by making everyone responsible for the final product.

One of the other 9 problems we identified was lost production due to poor vacation arrangements. Employees could plan their vacation up to two hours in advance. As a result, a truck could arrive to be loaded, only to find out that the loader was on leave. This was very costly in terms of time and money. So how could we adjust this work schedule, that had to go through the union when, as you've already read, they refused to change anything?

By talking and listening, a lot. Through all the listening sessions we organised, we were able to gather valuable information which we gathered into a final report explaining what was wrong and how to fix it. The company was then able to discuss our analysis with the social partners, and use it as a lever for change.

Other elements of our approach were to coach the management team into implementing a new 3-year business strategy. This was done at all levels. We also took steps to tackle growing problems, not only from the top down but also from the bottom up. How? By involving supervisors and employees. Because a company can only improve its efficiency if everyone pitches in.



## CASE 04

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### What about the results?

Only by – just once more – listening did we manage to improve things. Because publishing the final report of the listening sessions worked as a revelation:

- The **10 most important and fundamental** points for improvement were tackled with a realistic 3-year action plan.
- The **quality** of the business improved, and this trend continues **to rise**.
- The open communication created a **better environment** in the company.
- And the relationship with the trade unions? Believe us, it is significantly **less tense**.



# Afterword

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## 5 more tips we would like to share with you

# 01

Reorganising and negotiating is not done in a week. It is like a marathon. Remember that it is tough: mentally and physically. It is about being constructive, persevering and preparing thoroughly. Step by step. Even if it means lots of steps.

# 02

Tackling costs can be done by saving through cutting, but also by tackling energy losses and making better use of existing resources. Our approach works on both levers. It is an appropriate way to work more efficiently, improve your business, adjust your processes, but also to engage your staff and give them job satisfaction. Because people like to do their work well. So listen to them when they can't, however the circumstances.

# 03

Working with Square Circle is often self-financing. When we improve the economic performance of a company, the investment in Square Circle and the time invested by employees in implementing changes is regained in 2 to 3 months. So it doesn't cost your company anything, it only brings in money.

## Afterword

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### 04

Sometimes you are so used to a problem that it no longer seems a problem. But that can cost you a lot of money. For example, we were on the work floor of a factory and heard a constant buzzing. The management and the workers didn't hear it, only unconsciously. The problem? This noise unconsciously reduced concentration and productivity. After analysis, it turned out to be a very expensive buzz.

### 05

Imagine: team A and B don't work well together, or don't communicate well. Then putting a team leader above them is no solution. What is? Look at the underlying factors that hamper communication. And resolve them. Afterwards, you can provide appropriate training. Do not adapt your company to problems, but help your employees to solve them at the source.

# Are you interested?

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## Convinced by our human and practical approach?

Send us an email at **[info@squarecircle.be](mailto:info@squarecircle.be)**. We will contact you within a working day, and you will receive a confirmation mail as soon as your message reaches us.

