

## Go for improvement!

### 20 years of working for a more competitive Switzerland

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Interview von Christian Doepgen mit Dr. Peter Acél, CEO

**It all started at Zurich's Federal Institute of Technology, where a spin-off saw four departments become independent 20 years ago. Peter Acél took over the logistics and production management consultancy. Dr Acél & Partner is celebrating its anniversary in 2016.**

### **Congratulations, Mr Acél, on your anniversary! What circumstances led to Dr Acél & Partner's founding as a spin-off of the Federal Institute of Technology?**

**Dr. Peter Acél:** As a member of the management of the BWI trust at said university I seized an opportunity that arose as a result of the trust of the management centre deciding to sell its consultancy activities. Thus we've now been working in the national and international consultancy field from our Zurich headquarters since 1996.

### **How big is your company today?**

Our team is made up of ten full-time employees, eight of whom are consultants. On top of this we have numerous freelance collaborators who work with us on a project-to-project basis. One of the parameters of our corporate development is my personal aim of working one and a half days a week in the operational side of the business. We generate a few million francs annually. Around 40% of our projects took place abroad in 2014 – to give you a rough idea of the mix.

**«All the nuts and bolts that interact in a entity have to be brought into balance.»**

### **You've frequently perceived a lack of imagination in Swiss enterprises. How great is the unrealised potential?**

Very great – because optimisation is frequently carried out one-dimensionally. But all of the nuts and bolts that interact in a entity have to be brought into balance together. The process is often hampered by anxiety, however.

### **Is this a fear of change?**

**«Up to 70% improvement is possible.»**

Many people are alarmed by the potential for improvement. Usually the business of consulting us starts with an optimisation potential of 20%. But if we, having completed our analysis, ascertain that there is the potential to speed up manufacturing or cut costs or the like by say 30% or even 50%, then our customers frequently don't really believe us.



### **Can that effectively be realised?**

Our projects show that a 70% improvement is possible. The watchmaker Mondaine is one of our reference projects. We were able to increase production in the Swiss watchmaker's factories in Biberist and Solothurn eightfold in a few years. We reshaped the organisation, the workplaces, the flow and the rhythm. Today the firm manufactures a watch in just a few minutes.

### **What about logistics?**

The same is possible there. Our largest project was one for the Swiss post office. Between 2000 and 2009 we developed and implemented a new concept for its letters activities. The measures included pooling the corporation's letter-sorting centres, improving its flow automation, introducing a unified packaging system as well as new sorting shelving and organising railway transportation in accordance with a rapid-transit railway concept. We were able to save the company around CHF 170 million annually – without any job losses.

### **Have you also advised companies working in pharmaceuticals logistics?**

Yes, we worked for the Swiss online chemist Zur Rose. We used a simulation programme to increase capacities and improve picking and packing activities on the basis of existing materials handling processes.

### **We're currently facing the most extensive global economic challenges of the last 50 years. How do you think Switzerland is faring as a place to do business?**

I believe that the prevailing pessimism is exaggerated. The time needed to carry out the relocation processes that are sometimes cited these days is two to five years – so they can't be realised ad hoc any way. Also, companies shouldn't only compare wage costs, but rather focus on total expenditure. There is too much illconsidered relocation these days, instead of optimising existing entities properly.

### **Are you working on people's approaches?**

You can bet on it! Every year we hold our logistics colloquium in Zurich, with examples from the industry. In 2016 it is scheduled for 24 May.

### **How many projects has Dr Acél & Partner overseen over the years?**

Around 800 to date, and perhaps one and a half of them went down the drain.