



Continental Automotive is one of the first Belgian Factories of the Future

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Continental, Dentsply Implants, Newtec and Provan are the first factories of the future in this country. For a number of years now, these technology companies have been investing in state-of-the-art production technology, digitisation, social innovation and ecology, and are now among the top manufacturers in this area. There is no doubt that they deserved to be presented with the Factory of the Future award on 3 February this year. One by one, we now put these remarkable companies under the spotlight.

Four companies obtained the status of 'Factory of the Future' in the assessment process. One of them is Continental Automotive, who produces ABS system components and full braking systems for passenger cars at its production facilities in Mechelen.

Future-oriented production machinery

Over the last four years, Continental in Mechelen has been working hard to become a Factory of the Future. Substantial investments have been made in the intensive automation of its production facilities. The existing ecological footprint was also examined and smart productions systems were introduced.

Despite rigorous automation and digitisation of the production process, Continental Automotive currently employs 540 people. In the meantime staffing levels have remained stable. The operators who worked on the production lines were retained after automation up to a higher technician level, which meant that they could work elsewhere in the factory.

Competence Centre

Continental in Mechelen transformed itself into becoming a 'Factory of the Future' and became the Competence Centre for the entire group. It has become the role model for other factories in the group. The reason for this has been the 2-part focus. First of all the company aims at efficiency: some of the production lines are now working between 30% and 35% more efficiently than other production lines within the Continental group. Furthermore, a lot of attention is paid to quality and the endeavour is to be absolutely fault-free, and even better. This leads to increasingly better results being achieved in comparison with sister companies.

Health and teamwork trumps

In addition to technology and processes, Continental also attaches much importance to its employees and to teamwork. They are the keystone for success. With its personal development policy for employees, the company aims at retaining its human capital. This policy extends outside the normal manufacturing activities and with specific programmes such as healthy eating, stopping smoking, yoga, mindfulness, participation in 'Dwars door Mechelen', etc., it helps to influence better well-being. By getting involved in this, it has helped to get everybody reading off the same hymn sheet. Moreover, the rate of absenteeism has fallen to less than 3%.

Collaboration between R&D and production

Management strongly believes in the future of manufacturing in Belgium. Continental Automotive has proven that it can deal with foreign competition and sees opportunities in further diversification of its activities. This is partly due to the R&D department working very closely with the production department, which together help promote the development of new products.

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Within the scope of [Made Different](#), both Sirris and Agoria are currently providing support for another 140 companies in their transformation towards becoming Factories of the Future. These companies are currently undergoing one or more actual transformations. The companies operate in a wide range of sectors: technology, foodstuffs, textiles, paper, pharmaceuticals, transport, chemicals, leather, furniture, medical, construction, etc. In total they encompass both SMEs (66%) and large companies (34%) spread over the Flemish provinces. Sirris and Agoria have estimated that by 2018 approximately 50 companies will have acquired 'Factory of the Future' status. Over the long-term they are looking at around 500 companies.

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