

# MARS

## Andy Owings

Director of Operational Excellence  
at Mars Chocolate<sup>1</sup>

**Mars is a global company with more than 70,000 associates (how Mars refers to its employees) operating in 73 countries. The business is guided by five principles – Quality, Responsibility, Mutuality, Efficiency and Freedom – which have been at the heart of Mars since its inception.**

As part of its Quality and Efficiency principles Mars strives to make continuous improvements in manufacturing practices, learning from other markets and making operations and ways of working standardised at a global level. Andy Owings is Global Director of Operational Excellence at Mars Chocolate and is responsible for driving global manufacturing excellence through Mars's Ideal Plant Programme (IPP). We caught up with Andy to discuss his role as well as the 'people and relationship' improvements that have been taking place across the Mars business.

*Tell us a bit about your current role and how you got involved in the global operational excellence programme at Mars Chocolate.*

My role encompasses the Ideal Plant Programme, a series of lean transformations covering our 28 chocolate manufacturing sites around the world. The global aspect is fairly new as traditionally operational excellence had a regional focus at Mars. Since we achieved the initial targets of the Ideal Plant Programme, the role has broadened to include more holistic operational excellence.

To this end, I work with the regions to set and achieve their continuous improvement targets each year and lead a group of senior manufacturing directors from each region to standardise our operating system globally and share best practices. I also take responsibility for representing operational excellence across Mars from a cross-segment perspective, sharing knowledge and expertise, standardising our cross-segment operating principles and developing training initiatives for Mars University.

*What are the objectives of the Ideal Plant Programme (IPP) and how sustainable is it?*

The overall objective, led by our principles, is to make our plants and systems more efficient with high quality. Although year on year cost savings are of course important - this has never been just about that. To keep the programme sustainable, we've been very intentional about ensuring we engage associates and build organisational capabilities. We are seeing a change in ways of working as evidenced by the fact that there is a greater understanding and commitment to increased standardisation, more rigorous use of lean and problem solving as well as a change in leadership behaviours. It's a great sign that we're also seeing the methodology and tools being implemented in new ways and to different areas of the business!

*Can you describe some of the IPP's key achievements and what role you and your team have played in ensuring success?*

Operational excellence improvements and cost efficiencies are core elements of the programme and we've had some phenomenal success on this including large increases in productivity, overall equipment effectiveness (OEE) and quality; waste reductions and new, streamlined function processes. For us though, great people are at the very heart of Mars, and from the very beginning, we focus on creating a team vision of 'leveraging our global scale by driving operational excellence, connecting associates, and developing talent'. We're really proud of our achievements in this realm.

<sup>1</sup>Since this article was written, Andy Owings is now Factory Director for The Wrigley Company Limited in Plymouth.





*Tell us about some of those achievements?*

The programme has touched nearly every manufacturing associate, with over 500 of those being involved full-time in the programme: attending training sessions, making improvements, communicating new ways of working to their fellow associates. We've seen a disproportionate number of associates involved in the programme being promoted and given increased responsibility – this is core to our Freedom and Responsibility principles which encourage personal and professional development.

We've always had a challenge in ensuring that best practices are shared across sites to leverage all the great work happening in our different regions. Through this programme, we have really institutionalised the broader sharing of knowledge and practices and accelerated our standardisation of our operating system.

I'm also particularly proud of the capabilities our global team has built to deploy transformational change programmes on several sites simultaneously, completely independently.

*Prior to joining Mars two years ago, you spent five years with McKinsey & Company. How have you found the transition from working as a management consultant to having an in-house strategic role?*

In terms of work there were many similarities, for example focus on change management, day-to-day interactions with shop floor operators, frequent travel between sites, etc. However the perspective is vastly different. Mars is a people business; it is genuinely collaborative environment where we look to bring people on board at an early stage in the process. As a result, I've developed some great relationships with many remarkable people within Mars!

*You're a relatively young leader who has ascended very quickly into a senior role at a major brand; what aspects of your career to date have helped you to climb the ladder? What advice would you pass on to other young aspiring leaders?*

The advice that has helped me, and that I would pass on to others, is to keep challenging yourself and look for opportunities to stretch

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your role and learn. Autonomy in my career has also been key and something that is encouraged in all associates at Mars. Also something that I would always encourage my teams to keep in mind is family and personal priorities, which ultimately come before work. If you forget this it can lead to not feeling fulfilled in either. Mars, perhaps because it is a family-owned business, is a company focused on associates as individuals with personal priorities. Mars encourages all associates to embrace these values and enjoy a work-life balance.

*You have specialised in lean manufacturing for seven years - first with McKinsey and now with Mars Chocolate - how has lean manufacturing evolved during that time? What are the latest trends internationally?*

Lean has always been about reducing waste, variability and inflexibility; however in consumer packaged goods, waste has typically been the focus because it's easiest to understand and the benefits flow through quickly. In recent years, we have been seeing a greater focus on variability and inflexibility. For example, through Six Sigma for the development of robust, quality processes; levelled or pull scheduling; flexible manpower systems, etc. Previously, manufacturing was viewed in isolation, with the 'voice of the customer' referring to the warehouse or distribution centre, rather than the actual customer. Now there's much more



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integration with the rest of the supply chain. There has also been increased understanding that lean is more than just a collection of powerful tools - it's about harnessing the power of great people by empowering them and giving them appropriate tools.

*Is there a global 'Mars' culture? How would you describe it?*

I think it's amazing how global Mars's culture really is. Regardless of the local culture, Mars is a people and relationship driven business. It's also entrepreneurial, encouraging associates to discover solutions and take pride in developing themselves. The company has an amazing history and heritage which is reflected in the culture. The five principles run through the core of the business and everyone who works within it.

*What attracted you to the opportunity at Mars Chocolate? Why should other people consider joining the organisation?*

There's a real focus on collaborative working, the power of relationships and ensuring that there are mutual benefits. I also liked the idea of working for a private company, where it really allows a long-term focus on associate engagement, capability building, and talent development. I have been in several principle-driven organisations, but Mars consistently impresses me with the way it truly lives its principles day-to-day.

*At McKinsey, you worked across a broad range of industries including consumer packaged goods, telecoms and pulp & paper. Why did move into the food industry?*

It's almost a certainty that the world will continue to need more food! Some of the biggest challenges of the 21st century will revolve around how we handle this demand for food in a responsible way. Mars has already taken significant steps to address some of the big issues, from a 15% saturated fat reduction and reformulation of its core chocolate brands in the UK, to committing to 100% sustainable cocoa by 2020, and its partnerships with Rainforest Alliance and the Fairtrade Foundation.

On a personal level, I think that food is very easy to relate to. Mars makes some of the most well known and best loved brands whether in chocolate with the likes of M&M's, Snickers, Dove/Galaxy, Twix, Maltesers, Mars, and Bounty; in food with Uncle Ben's, Dolmio and Seeds of Change; or for our pets including Whiskas, Pedigree, Cesar and Sheba. The brands are relevant to what you eat for dinner, how you snack, celebrate and gift, to what you feed your pet, and even the coffee or tea that you drink.

*What are the ambitions for Mars Chocolate's global operational excellence programme over the next 12 months?*

When we look at how we are developing our supply chain, five years ago we were more inward focused. Now we are accelerating our journey to become more responsive to our customers, providing value that they individually want. Within manufacturing specifically, our strong growth has necessitated a focus on streamlining our processes and ensuring efficiency to build new capacity quicker and more effectively. We've also focused on building capabilities around the world to really drive continuous improvement day-to-day and developing the next generation of leaders. Of course we're also working hard to become more socially and environmentally sustainable, in line with our pledge to become Sustainable in a Generation.