

Inspiral: A Contrast in Operations Strategies

Inspiral, a Chilean screw cap manufacturer, faces a potential threat from Zakrętka, a Polish competitor known for running one of the most efficient plants in the world. Zakrętka is considering building a facility in Chile, which could challenge Inspiral's strong position in the local market. The case raises the question of whether Inspiral should change its operations strategy to defend itself, or instead double down on its current strengths.

The screw cap industry is experiencing rapid growth, particularly in the wine sector. Large vineyards tend to prefer standardized, low-cost closures, while smaller and mid-sized producers often value custom designs and responsive service. Both companies have succeeded, but through very different approaches.

Zakrętka Group (Poland)

Zakrętka was founded in Poland and became an international leader in aluminum closures for wine and spirits. Its operations are centered on a single, highly automated facility in Warsaw. This plant was designed for mass production, operating 24/7 with minimal scrap, achieving long production runs, and achieving very high equipment utilization. Because the plant focuses on standardized designs and utilizes value engineering to minimize material costs, Zakrętka can achieve extremely low costs.

The Warsaw plant produces approximately 700 million screw caps annually, with a gross margin of 50%. With only 25 employees, the company achieves remarkable productivity, averaging 28 million screw caps per employee. The company has built strong relationships with aluminum suppliers, gaining cheaper raw materials and more reliable supply. However, its focus on efficiency and scale comes at the cost of flexibility: Zakrętka generally does not adapt its schedules for urgent customer requests, and its product range is relatively narrow. Customers receive reliable, low-cost closures, but at the expense of less customization and service.

Inspiral (Chile)

Inspiral originated from one of Chile's earliest screw cap manufacturers and was rebranded in 2018 as part of the RMD Group. Its leading production site is in Maipú, near Santiago. Unlike Zakrętka's standardized model, Inspiral's strategy emphasizes flexibility, customization, and responsiveness to customer needs. The Maipú plant can produce over 500 product variants in various colors, designs, and finishes. Around 40% of its production is custom-made for specific clients.

The plant produces about 420 million screw caps last year, with a gross margin of 43%. It employs over 100 workers, and although productivity per employee is much lower than Zakrętka, Inspiral compensates with strong customer service. The company maintains a safety capacity for rush orders, provides on-site technical support teams, and collaborates closely with vineyards to design closures tailored to each customer's specific needs. While this customer-centric approach has won Inspiral loyalty and market share, it also creates higher costs, longer changeover times, and greater scheduling complexity.

The Strategic Question

If Zakrętka builds a Warsaw-style plant in Chile, Inspiral could be undercut on cost. Should Inspiral attempt to copy Zakrętka's efficiency model, or should it continue to differentiate itself through service, customization, and responsiveness?

Use the following table to guide your breakout discussion:

Dimension	Inspiral	Zakrętki
What value proposition does each company offer its customers?		
Identify 1-2 core operational capabilities for each company.		
Which production process type does each company follow (make-to-stock or make-to-order)?		
Describe the layout of each company's production facility.		
What is the approximate utilization level of each company's operations?		
Compare the inventory management practices and inventory levels at each company.		
How does each company maintain and ensure high quality standards?		