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Employees transform Vale's industrial area in Maranhão, Brazil

Project was accompanied by an increase in team engagement

Research shows that teams involved in the action have a strong connection with the company and a willingness to give the best of themselves

Where before there was a grassland, now there is an overlook with a carp lake. Where there was a long-distance carrier disabled, there is a place for honey production. Where there were two rooms with work tables arranged in a traditional way, today there is a large room with decoration made by the team and without reserved places, nor for the managers. Vale's employees at the Maritime Terminal of Ponta Madeira in São Luís (MA) have transformed the industrial area into a more pleasant work environment and, meanwhile, have raised their level of engagement, according to the company survey.

"The purpose was to direct the hierarchy horizontally, which was a demand made by the team. Doing this in an industrial operation is much more complex than in a corporate environment, as a technology company", explained the executive manager of Port Operations, Roberto Di Biase. "In addition, an important differential is that all the work was done by the employees, who lowers the cost and increases the team's sense of purpose".

Since April 2016, a forest has been inaugurated where every employee who stands out in health and safety initiatives wins a tree with his/her name; an apiary for Melipona colonies, space for honey production; an orchid nursery; and an overlook from where you can see the ore yards. The power substation has been revitalized with the support of a local graffiti artist and a community garden will soon be built. The employees at a cost 60% lower than if companies were hired to do the projects and the civil works developed all the work.

Changes are not limited to external areas. Four months ago a co-working, space was inaugurated for 162 employees, where before there were two traditional work rooms, with two totally separate teams - Operation and Maintenance. The manager of each area used to work at a table isolated from the rest of the employees.

Now there is no more fixed workstation. The two teams are in the same space, a large room of 850 square meters. The employees created furniture and light fixtures with discarded material. There are also two innovation laboratories, spaces made for the discussion of ideas. The new room was designed based on suggestions from the team, who wanted a greater integration.

The figures reveal that the project was accompanied by an increase in team engagement, that is, there was an increase in the employees' connection with the company and their willingness to give the best of themselves. Vale held the third edition of its Global Employee Survey in September 2016, which measured the level of engagement of more than 57 thousand employees worldwide. In 92% of the answers, the Port Operations executive management presented a level above the benchmarking of the mining, oil and gas sector. In addition, in 85% of the answers, the engagement was higher than in the previous edition of the survey in 2013.

"The high level of engagement is directly related to the better performance of employees, higher withholding taxes and good health and safety levels", explained Vera Martins, Human Resources manager of the North System.

Vale, through statistical correlation analysis with internal indicators, has proven that areas with more engaged employees also have a 33% higher number of high performance employees, 52% fewer employees at high risk of loss to another company and accident rates four times lower than the average.

Design thinking to shape the project

The project began in 2015, when the strategic framework of the Maritime Terminal of Ponta da Madeira was developed, which is undergoing an expansion process. In 2018, this port will become one of the largest ports in the world in

transportation volume, with a shipment capacity of 230 million tons of iron ore per year. One of the pillars of the strategic framework was to transform the port into a better place to work.

Last year a panel of 60 employees was set up using the design thinking methodology to identify what changes employees would like to see in the area. "This panel revealed the employees' desire to have a lighter working environment", explained Raimundo Junior, manager of Unloading Operations. "They concluded that the port did not have to look like an industrial area. We decided to create symbols for change. We took advantage of unused areas to implement the project".

The first space, the forest, was inaugurated in April last year. No external suppliers were used. The employees performed the services, donating their time, organizing mutual-aid groups and using reuse material, such as discarded parts of wood and iron. There is a project committee and a responsible supervisor. Anyone who is assigned to a construction work will be exempt from work on that day.

Beyond the issue of the lowest cost, there is an advantage of the sense of purpose stimulated by the project. "The employees appropriated so much of the project that nobody complained of being housed in smaller rooms during the execution of the reform, which lasted five months", said Junior.

The new spaces also approached the port of the local community. Vale will soon establish a partnership with the State University of Maranhão to certify the production of the Melipona apiary, which was inaugurated in June. In the orchid nursery, created in August, the university intends to implement a study to develop a species of orchid genuinely from Maranhão.

Indicators of environmental balance

The choice of the Melipona apiary, orchid nursery and carp tank was not done randomly. The presence of bees, orchids and this species of fish is an indicator of environmental balance in the industrial area.

The bees are of the *tiúba* species, responsible for the pollination of up to 90% of the flora of Maranhão, and move up to 2km from the place where they are installed to collect nectar and pollen. These bees have no sting, which facilitates the inspection work of the hives. The honey produced is extracted and packaged in a handmade way and delivered to visitors who are familiar with Vale's operations. The Melipona apiary is formed by ten boxes, each with 3 to 5 thousand bees. This species produces up to five to 12 liters of honey in six months.

The carps were placed in a tank with reused water coming from the industrial process and have been developing normally. This water comes from operational processes and goes through a small filter. It is often reused in activities such as the washing and cleaning of machines or in the watering of access roads and ore piles.

More information



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