

Case Study on:



Country Representative

European Business Awards 2011

Country Representative - Portugal
SMAS Oeiras e Amadora



SMAS Oeiras e Amadora

Investing in its People

Words from the Judges

“Fresh HR strategy takes company forward with renewed vigour.”

SMAS Oeiras e Amadora is a public water company that supplies sanitation services and water to the residents of Amadora and Oeiras in the central region of Portugal.

It is the company's focus on Human Resources and its investment in improving employee welfare that led the European Business Awards 2011 to select SMAS Oeiras e Amadora as one of only 10 Country Representatives from Portugal.

Five years ago, the current Board of Directors assumed SMAS management with the target of becoming an organisation of excellence. The Board set itself some ambitious targets to bring added value to the business and its customers. In order to achieve these goals, the company realised that it needed to invest time and resources in its staff.

“It is our employees that drive our business and make it the success it is today. We realised back in 2005 that the employees had not received the support they required and we made a commitment to change that. We have introduced ways to help individuals develop both personally and professionally. They have repaid our investment with renewed productivity and increased loyalty.” Dr. Nuno Campilho, Director, SMAS Oeiras e Amadora

Back in 2005, employees were stuck with inflexible working conditions and very few benefits. Many had not completed their school education, ill health was an issue and there were high levels of absenteeism.

“As a new Board, we had big ideas for the business. The demotivated and dispirited workforce did not fit in with our plan – rather than become disheartened, we chose to implement a strategy that would reinvigorate the business and inspire our staff.”

The HR Department was tasked with creating a new Corporate Development Plan with the primary aim of bettering the use of available human resources and streamlining work processes. Now five years on, the plan has yielded positive results with improved employee skill levels, reduced absenteeism and rising employee satisfaction levels.



“Each department has its own operational objectives which are in complete synchronisation with the overall corporate strategic objectives set by the Senior Management. Central to this is the HR strategy which covers professional and social development for all staff.” Dr. José Augusto Silva Santos, Human Resources Manager, SMAS Oeiras e Amadora

The HR strategy creates a tailored plan for each individual employee based on their specific social, family and professional requirements. A number of selection and assessment tools have been created to evaluate training requirements as well as measuring their impact on performance through regular appraisals.

On a more personal level, staff are encouraged to adopt a healthy lifestyle and undertake regular exercise. Health and Safety policies have been introduced to combat absenteeism and reduce workplace risk.

Improving the education levels of its staff has been fundamental to SMAS's HR strategy. The company has introduced a large-scale project, the PPANC Programme – “Passo a Passo, Adquirir Novas Competências” or “Step by Step, Acquire New Skills” in order to help its employees gain academic qualifications up to 9th grade (UK GCSE level). Since introducing this programme, the number of employees with 9th grade education has risen from 53% in 2005 to over 88% in 2010. The number of employees with 12th grade (UK A level) qualifications has risen from 70 staff in 2005 to 148 in 2010.

“Almost half of all our employees have been involved in the PPANC Programme – initially we thought it would only be adopted by the minority but we are very pleased to be proved wrong. The impact of the programme has had far-reaching benefits for all areas of SMAS.”

The project is offered free of charge and there is no loss of family time as all courses are attended during office hours. The project is supported by the Portuguese Secretary of State for Education.

“After taking over the state water company, SMAS completed a major strategic review of its HR assets to ensure that its people had the right education, skills and profiles to be able to take the company forward in a more competitive market. Today all employees have the opportunity to avail themselves of a wide range of programmes to help them achieve greater satisfaction in their working and social environments.”

Phil Forrest, Chairman of Judges, European Business Awards 2011

Looking to the Future...

In 2012, SMAS will implement its first ever International Internship Programme, offering young people from PALOP (African Countries of Portuguese Official Language) countries the opportunity to gain valuable work experience with a view to them either continuing to work at SMAS if openings are available or returning to their own countries with relevant business experience that can then be shared.

The company will also continue to support young people in the municipalities of Amadora and Oeiras with its Inter-municipal Traineeship Programme.

SMAS will look to further enhance its links with leading universities in Portugal, in particular the Technical University of Lisbon where the company has a partnership with the Faculty of Human Kinetics. Since 2008, SMAS has been working with students from the university who are working in the field of Ergonomics. The students will continue to provide guidelines on how to improve occupational health and safety conditions in the workplace. These guidelines will help define strategies to prevent illness and promote health as part of the SMAS Activities Plan for 2012 and beyond.

In 2012, the project “Zero Accidents” will be implemented. The objective of this project is to reduce the number of workplace accidents. It will run as a competition between departments with a prize being awarded to the division showing the most dramatic improvement in workplace safety.

Looking to the future, SMAS aims to build on the positive results already achieved for its workforce including:

- Implementation of a collaborative e-learning and knowledge management programme
- Increasing the level of academic qualifications
- Improving technical and behavioural skills levels
- Promotion of internal job rotation
- Building up the Performance Evaluation system based on merit and competence
- Restructuring of medical services for employees and their families
- Implementation of health programmes and screening services





"We are proud to be chosen as a Country Representative for Portugal in the European Business Awards 2011. It provides recognition of our highly successful Human Resources programme and also positions us as an example to follow. We wouldn't be in this position now if it wasn't for the dedication and enthusiasm of our staff and we would like to take this time to say how much we appreciate their support."



Dr. Isaltino Morais,
CEO, SMAS Oeiras e Amadora

About SMAS Oeiras e Amadora

SMAS Oeiras e Amadora is a Portuguese public water company that supplies sanitation services and water to the residents of Amadora and Oeiras. It develops its activity in compliance with the highest standards of environmental, financial and social responsibility. The company uses the latest advances in technology to ensure its customers receive the very best service.

SMAS provides its customers with clear and concise information to reassure them that their water supply is of the highest quality.

In 2011, SMAS was distinguished as the best Public Administration Services Entity in the "Great Place to Work" rankings. It was also awarded with an Excellence Award in the Management of Human Resources. In addition to human resources awards, the company has also won awards for corporate communications, CSR, intranet, website and consumer literature.

The company is always looking for ways to improve its service and challenges its staff to make suggestions on how it takes the business forward and improves quality of service. 'Good Ideas' boxes are available in all SMAS buildings.

Taking its corporate social responsibility seriously, the company has implemented a number of different projects to support the environment, through its efficient use of water campaign; the local community, with its trainee programmes; and young people further afield, with its International Internship programme.

About the European Business Awards

Since 2007, the European Business Awards programme has been shining a light on the most pioneering businesses on the continent by promoting excellence, best practice and innovation in the European business community. The awards programme recognises excellence in all disciplines of business including individual business functions. Last year entrants ranged from fish farming organisations to renewable energy firms. Together they had a combined turnover greater than €1 trillion Euros (8.23% of EU GDP) and employed over 2.7 million people between them.

Businesses from over 30 European territories entered the Awards. The competition for is fierce with many of the Europe's most established brands being represented. Entrants are judged by a panel of experts in their fields who bring experience, business acumen and understanding to the board.

Country Representatives are deemed by the judges to represent the very best companies in each territory. In 2011, the standard was particularly high, with the programme engaging with over 15,000 companies in the initial stages.

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