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Beyond Fun: Creating A Unique Work/Play Environment To Spark Innovation

PARALLEL 3

Making STPs liveable and lovable

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INTRODUCTION

The Quebec Metro High Tech Park (QMHTP) isn't strictly speaking an urban setting like some of the emerging innovation areas. However, it has constantly evolved and adapted to new realities and the needs of its clientele -- high tech companies and research centres -- providing a highly sought-after environment.

Management-wise, the QMHTP strives to have the same innovative spirit in providing a support environment to its clientele as its clientele has in the business of science and technology. The goal is simple—attracting, retaining and keeping the best employees happy.

At the QMHTP, innovation is what drives the high-tech companies day in and day out. They need to show vision to develop innovative products and demonstrate distinctive business intelligence if they are to stand out in the international markets. The QMHTP team feeds off this innovative spirit and is inspired to be a pioneer in everything it does, both in the development of its projects and in the process to achieve results.

Among the flagship projects the QMHTP has implemented in recent years, the "Milieu de vie " approach developed by the team is among the most distinctive. The idea of " liveable and lovable" would be a close translation of this vision. It gives us a great deal of pride to be pioneers in economic development as well as provide a highly desired and desirable environment for technology companies and their employees.

In a survey conducted in the fall of 2012, 90% of QMHTP 100 companies' employees confirmed that we are on the right path with 85% indicating that they were proud to work in the Park. The result of different management strategies that have led the QMHTP team to create a unique " work/play environment" seems to indicate that we are indeed on the road to making the Québec Metro High Tech Park " liveable and lovable" .

The following document aims to demonstrate how, based on a close collaboration with its clients and a detailed knowledge of trends and a willingness to innovate constantly, the QMHTP has established a highly desirable living environment for technology companies and skilled workers.

1. THE QMHTP of METROPOLITAN QUEBEC CITY

1.1. A beacon for the regional economy

On the eve of the 25th anniversary of Québec Metro High Tech Park (QMHTP) it is clear that the vision imagined in the late 1980s by regional leaders is alive and well today. Proud bearers of the knowledge economy orientation given to the Quebec City region economy, the QMHTP represents a major economic force for the region, with its hundreds of technology organizations and its 5,200 skilled workers.

Between 2002 and 2012, the knowledge economy has grown faster in the region of Quebec City than in the Canadian economy in general. Indeed, employment in what is known as "high" knowledge based has increased by 35% over the decade compared to 24% nationally . This situation is due to the expansion of such fields as optics-photonics, geospatial, multimedia creation and life sciences, all highly represented in the QMHTP.

Between 2002 and 2012, the QMHTP was able to add 3,000 new workers because of \$500 million invested in the development of new structures and the improvement of existing facilities. Recognized as a pillar of the regional economy, the QMHTP has even been labelled as the "brains of the smart city" by the local media when Quebec City was declared among the top 7 smart cities in world by the Intelligent Community Forum in 2012.

1.2. A Vibrant Business Community

A hundred high-tech companies and research centers rub shoulders in the QMHTP. Not only active in the business community in the region of Quebec City, these organizations are also very active in international markets. They stand out for their dynamism and their ability to constantly innovate.

As a privileged interface between the research community and industry, the QMHTP also stands out for its unique mix of organizations: start-ups, SMEs, subsidiaries of foreign companies, research centers and government facilities.

Whether they evolve in photonics, electronics or life sciences, small or large, these companies are all leaders in their respective fields and share a passion for innovation and the spread of their products internationally.

1.3. Young Skilled Workers

The average age of the 5200 QMHTP workers is 30 years. They are young, connected and vibrant. They are technical and university graduates. They are young professionals with an average annual income of \$50,000.

Workers are what are most important for our client businesses, but not all of them have the resources to create their own inter-employee events to bring real value to their work/life environment. Having created a "Park" community, the QMHTP team offers the opportunity for all businesses to enjoy and share in order to jointly create a unique environment that meets the needs of all workers.

In terms of geographic location and the proximity of its client businesses, the QMHTP is in an advantageous position to create a real community. Starting from a single physical environment combining city and green spaces, facilities (bike path, etc.) and the establishment of essential services over the years, such as the CPE Wee

Butterflies (day care center), the Park team has responded quickly to real needs of the community. This proximity allows us to use the "environment" for activities such as snowshoe classes, company visits and our "Park Events ". It also facilitates the rapid organization of projects.

The generation that is the critical mass of workers for companies, Generation Y, influences the actions of the QMHTP through their vision of work where professional fulfillment outweighs deliverables. This vision extends throughout the work environment. In addition, these young workers, more than their predecessors, favor a more work-life balanced career. A 2012 Study by the Mazar Group well summarizes the GenY aspirations: " When asked about their life objectives, Yers mostly place personal aspirations at the top of their list. Consequently, the priority of 28.5% of Yers is to achieve a balance between personal and professional lives, whereas 27.3% of them feel that their priority is enjoying life to the fullest."

It is in this context and taking into account the current realities of its clients--technology companies and workers--that the QMHTP team chose to set up and maintain a unique, distinctive and made to measure work environment.

2. INNOVATIVE SERVICES FOR WORKERS

2.1. First, made to measure services for businesses

As of 2006, through its commitment to offer innovative made to measure services to businesses the QMHTP team noted, together with management, a central concern for the attraction, retention, development and the mobilization of a skilled workforce essential to the growth of high-technology companies.

At that time, a HR Club (then RH Conseils) was established, bringing together human resources managers of QMHTP companies. Identifying various common needs, activities were put forward. Unifying collective initiatives, such as a Job Fair held at the QMHTP, joint training, a job posting platform, as well as the continuous exchange of best practices in human resources was established.

Moreover, in 2008, the festivities surrounding the 20th anniversary of the QMHTP, bringing together nearly 3,000 Park workers, highlighted a desire for the park community to share and somehow live a "neighbourhood like environment ".

2.2. A successful pilot program

Even though there had been activities organized from time to time to animate " Milieu de vie" such as the 1st edition " Du talent plein le sapin" (a competition for the best Christmas Tree decoration) in December 2008, it was in the spring of 2010 that the first pilot program for activities began. This program' s purpose was to formalize and structure activities for park workers and to test the interest of the Park community for these activities.

The first program of activities for QMHTP workers was held in May and June 2010. Over a period of five weeks, ten activities were held, allowing workers TO ENERGIZE (sports) to ENRICH their talents (conferences) and RELAX (social activities) in the Park.

In total, about 150 workers from more than twenty different companies then participated in one or more of the organized activities.

The comments expressed by participants during the activities, collected through questionnaires for the evaluation of activities "ENRICH talents" and verbally or by email for the others proved very positive. Indeed, when it was measured, the satisfaction rate was between 90 and 100%, and, equally for the quality of content and for logistics.

Noon activities also were a time-saver appreciated by many, as was having established an email address monmilieudevie@parctechno.com, acting as a true "gateway" for workers to contact the Park team and convey their ideas and comments.

The pilot program having proven to be a success, real teamwork began to further boost QMHTP life by even better organized activities, aligned to the needs of workers and recurrent.

3. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A REAL "MILIEU DE VIE"

3.1. Concrete goals

Companies are the first target clientele since "Milieu de vie" was created for the attraction, retention and development of the workforce. The Park supports them in various spheres of their actions (innovation, sustainable development, etc.) to propel their growth and retain what they value most--highly qualified human resources.

Also, once their employees hired, companies face the daily challenge of retaining and mobilizing their human resources as "the turnover of the workforce represents substantial costs that affect the productivity and financial performance of organizations". Again, a stimulating "Milieu de vie" creates a sense of motivation, while providing "how-to" training, sports activities, initiatives promoting work-life balance and personal and professional development activities. A unique approach in that it is collaborative and fun. Therefore, a lively and distinctive Park life supports the QMHTP business community by providing made to measure tools. In this way, the QMHTP also works to retain its businesses.

The QMHTP team is continually looking for innovative solutions to support businesses in the attraction and retention of workers and employee engagement--solutions that "fit" to the reality of young workers in the park; to the cutting edge of technology, and are socially and environmentally responsible.

3.2. A team mobilized

From vision to implementation, it is a real team effort that enabled the development of this unique and innovative approach. Whether at the level of senior management, or communications and business services, all converge to make strategic talent focus unique and distinctive in the Park. The activities developed for the QMHTP park life are well anchored in customer needs and meet strategic orientations pursued by the QMHTP.

In the summer of 2010, a project manager assigned to "Milieu de vie" and internal communications joined the team. It was in hiring a resource whose principal tasks are devoted to the organization of activities and services to workers that helped to channel the efforts made in this direction by the Park team.

Today, the person who holds this position is responsible not only to create and implement programs and handle communication with workers through the internal newsletter, the Techno-Flash, but is also the major contact between workers and the team. She works with a QMHTP community of 5200 workers to build a unique environment that meets the real needs of the employees of the new generation. Whether by friendly inter-company competitions, conferences, varied training or by balanced work / family services or social activities, there is something for everyone.

Now, the QMHTP " Milieu de vie" approach is ingrained within the team, and all derive great pride.

3.3. Committed Partners

In order to develop its Park life, the QMHTP team works with several partners. First, social clubs of different companies that meet several times a year, and exchange many email throughout the year to share their experiences and guide the QMHTP team on the needs. The program of activities objectives is truly designed by and for the workers. Besides the collaborative work and efforts of social clubs, and constant feedback obtained through evaluations completed during activities, the most popular activities are provided by workers themselves; such as company visits and "explorers of the Park." This series of activities delight workers each time--colleagues working in other Park firms come to share their travel experiences around the world.

The company managers and owners are the greatest allies of the team in relation to the " Milieu de vie" . They are the best spokespeople for the work environment in companies. Many of them will even cover the costs of certain activities for their employees.

The QMHTP also has " Milieu de vie" service partners that financially support or contribute in materials and in price to the various activities of the Park. In addition to some financial partners and some fee-based activities, a budget is allocated by the QMHTP for programming.

3.4. Programming activities

Essentially, the services that are offered to QMHTP workers under the "Milieu de vie" are divided into two parts, the program of activities on the one hand, which offers sports, training, personal and social development returns every fall, winter and spring. On the other hand, larger scale events highlighted at certain times of the year.

Among the activities of the program that generate the most interest from the workers, the following activities are most popular, indicated by the comments attached thereto.

Sports: The QMHTP offers a range of physical activities and sports for beginners and for the more experienced. Jogging courses, Fit camp, Ultimate Frisbee initiations and the significant participation of our companies in Défi Entreprises, a race organized for organizations in the Quebec City region in order to encourage workers to run, are some examples. Last year 12 companies in the Technology Park participated in this challenge. The streets of the QMHTP and surrounding areas now full of cyclists at the lunch hour! Physical activities are the type of activities that interest most QMHTP workers. 51% of workers make it their priority to participate in the activities offered.

The "Park Explorers": This series of activities allow workers to present their business, culture and wilderness trips to other Park workers. This sharing of stories and pictures from around the world delight our community. "It is very interesting to invite park workers to share their travel experiences with other workers. Comments: "Great idea! I love the fact that it is of trips made in the "real world" and told by the 'real world' "(Unknown) and " Very interesting! I was very curious to see this conference and it gave me the desire to see more! "Geoffrey Allard, SIQ

Company visits: These visits are highly valued by workers. At each programmed visit, a company invites workers from other QMHTP companies to visit its premises. These visits allow the community to get to know each other and to create business linkages and even initiate collaborations. Comment: "Always interesting to see and visit companies in the Park. It generates greater understanding and is an opening to the world of work in technology. "(Unknown)

Lunch hour talent shows: This new concept gives workers the opportunity to show off a talent to other QMHTP companies. These presentations take place in a relaxed atmosphere during lunch time. Comments: "Fantastic and original! It allows us to get to discover artists and even make friends with people from other companies. "(Unknown)

In order to connect more closely the program activities to the needs expressed by human resource managers in skills development, "Pro Series" was established by the team in the winter of 2012. It is part of a process of building a culture of lifelong learning. This series of conferences and training aims to equip workers in their professional life. In order to reach the largest number of workers, these courses focus on topics that can be rewarding for everyone, whether they are engineers, laboratory technicians or in IT. Agenda management or social media (LinkedIn) are examples of conferences aimed at the development of "transversal" skills useful for all in a professional setting.

3.5. Special Events

Special yearly events at the QMHTP help reach even more workers and generate more exchanges.

"Du talent plein le sapin" : This friendly Christmas tree competition, in addition to embellishing the Park, is a unique opportunity to bring together colleagues around a common project. Last year, 800 votes were cast by workers of the Park for the 22 Christmas trees decorated by the 17 participating companies, a tradition PTQM if there is one, since the competition is now in its fifth year of existence.

Inter-Company Street Hockey Tournament "Tech-Hockey": More than 280 players comprising 38 teams representing 23 companies competed in a friendly hockey competition in May 2013. After a successful second edition, the hockey tournament is becoming a tradition! The enthusiasm of the park community for the event reflects the strong sense of belonging the players and supporters have for their companies. Comments: "We all had a great week and we appreciate this tournament especially for the enthusiasm it generates and business linkages it creates. The park is a happening place, and thank you for making it so! "Daniel Deschenes, Myca

Season Opening Party: Presented as an " extended Happy Hour" in a large tent mounted in the enchanting setting of a wooded part of the QMHTP, the event allows workers to get to know each other better, to network and unwind in a relaxed

atmosphere! This event attracts about 500 workers each year, representing about forty companies. Comments: "This kind of activity helps to create a sense of belonging and pride in being part of this community. Thank you for organizing it! "Marie-Andrée St-Pierre, CRIQ

3.6. Constant Feedback

If the activities put forward by the team PTQM in the "Milieu de vie " has a strong membership and a growing success, this is largely due to a process of evaluation, feedback and continuous co-creation that enables the team to always be on the same wavelength as the workers.

"Explorers" which had started with a around 20 spectators are now among the most appreciated by workers. In the last presentation, a hundred participants attended. The general assessment usually has a perfect score of 5/5.

For the Season Opening Party, more than 85% of workers say that the Party is a networking relevant to them. For the tournament "Tech-hockey," 99% of respondents are satisfied with their experience!

In general, a survey conducted in the fall of 2012 with nearly 1,500 QMHTP workers indicates that 68% of them have participated in at least one activity organized by the Park and 68% of respondents also feel that the QMHTP offers a good quality of life for workers.

Thus, in 2012, the QMHTP team held forty activities reaching nearly 1,500 workers, an increase of 45% from 2010 to 2011 in terms of participation. The beginning of a love story, if there ever was one!

4. DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS

By participating in the creation of a true QMHTP community, companies offer a unique value that few others can claim to offer. For recruiting companies, this is a unique career and advantage "package" which makes them even more attractive to potential candidates. Recruiting qualified talent is often a key element in the growth of technology companies, and the QMHTP wants to continue in this direction and to promote a " Milieu de vie " that is distinctive, stimulating and supports workers in learning and continuous development, so crucial to the younger generation of workers.

Among the avenues of development that will propel activities for workers in the Park, the upcoming construction of a multi- service building, which will become a true "nerve center" of the business community with a health center, a restaurant and training rooms. It will certainly become a rallying point for workers who will be able to interact more... daily if they wish!

Moreover, the QMHTP wants to leverage its relationships with other technology parks around the world via the IASP, inserting in its program of activities an "international" component by, for example, video conferencing on some essential best practices for technology companies that can mutually benefit from sharing ideas across borders.

CONCLUSION: “ MILIEU DE VIE” THE SPARK THAT IGNITES INNOVATION

Our approach “ Milieu de Vie” and the concept “ Liveable and Lovable” are perfectly compatible. Creation, innovation, and focus on the goals all require an environment that motivates, supports and is enjoyable. Our approach is making the Park not only lovable but it is creating unique and winning conditions to help companies better concentrate on their core business and to foster innovation.

The innovative practices implemented have not only provided Park employees with great activities to enrich their work life it has also set the tone for a lot of formal and informal networking opportunities.

Our motivation for “ Milieu de Vie” is to provide the environment for better ideas, better business, being more competitive and in the final analysis having more prosperity and a better life for our region. This is what has motivated the Parks team to go forward with creating the work/play environment for its companies and their employees. Not only is it stimulating and fun, but as a management strategy it helps our companies to meet their challenges fostering a great deal of new ideas and relationships that bring new innovation to light.

The ever growing support the QMHTP team gets from Park company leaders who acknowledge the value-added of a well thought-out work/play environment is proof that it has been fruitful for the QMHTP, as proven by this quote from the CEO of one of the Parks most dynamic SMEs: “ The more the work/play environment will be good, the more we can attract and retain our most valuable resource – our employees” . And that is indeed...the beginning of a love story!