

People and safety

Transforming working conditions and culture in remote locations

Improving working conditions for our employees has always been a priority, particularly at our remote Russian forestry operations. When Mondi first began transforming the logging camps in Russia, their safety standards, living conditions and working culture required decisive and urgent action.



Axel Bender, Forestry Director at Mondi Syktyvkar, describes the outcomes we've achieved and how it's built trust and shaped our working culture beyond recognition.



“The rapid pace of socio-economic change presents great opportunities for our business. But it also challenges our ability to attract and retain talent, especially in more remote locations. What we've done in Russia is a clear example of how building a strong working culture can add value, no matter how challenging the circumstances.”

Peter Orisich
Chief executive officer, Uncoated Fine Paper,
Mondi Europe & International

A harsh and challenging environment

Employees at our eight logging operations in Russia spend 15 days a month living in camps far from home, under extreme conditions. Winter temperatures drop to -45°C and they soar to above 32°C in summer, with heavy rains and swarms of mosquitoes.

When Mondi first began to restructure the individual logging operations into a single company in 2009, conditions were harsh and equipment and working practices were inadequate and outdated. There was no electricity or running water at the logging camps and accommodation was mainly self-built wooden huts and mobile units, lacking adequate insulation, heating, cooking and washing facilities. As a result, employee morale was low and trust in the company was even lower.

Engaging hearts and minds

Modernisation of the logging operations followed in 2010, replacing manual harvesting with modern and safe equipment. This transformed productivity and safety, but left a sharp contrast between the improved operations and the standard of the living conditions. We soon recognised that simply investing in new infrastructure and imposing world-class working standards wasn't enough.

We set ourselves an ambitious goal: to fully transform the logging camp environment into a 'second home' where our approximately 650 employees would feel valued, safe and cared for, and where they could believe in Mondi's values. To achieve this, we had to engage hearts and minds to build trust and transform the culture as well as the physical environment. So we immersed ourselves in the local environment – engaging with employees to shape expectations and design new safety standards and camp layouts.

Total transformation

To date, we've delivered more than 120 new mobile units with modern and comfortable facilities. These included separate clothes drying units, canteens where people can enjoy a hot meal and leisure facilities where they can unwind and relax. We also appointed a permanent safety manager on site, facilitated emergency helicopter support, provided recreational facilities, and enhanced internal communication channels. Investment in training to strengthen the skills of our forestry employees in logging technology, operational excellence, timber quality and sorting, and sustainability underpinned the transformation.

All this has helped our employees become 'change agents' in the shift towards a more modern, safe and inspiring workplace. We've learned some important lessons along the way. Firstly, we've come to understand how critical the physical environment is in shaping people's feelings and behaviours. We've also seen that trust between employees and managers plays an important role in motivating high performance and responsibility. And we've experienced the power of ongoing engagement in embedding shared responsibility, ownership and continuous excellence.

“The logging camps are now so comfortable, clean and tidy that conditions and facilities are even better than at our homes.”

Nadezhda Starceva
Assistant cook

In 2016, employee productivity¹ was 80% higher than it was in 2008. We experienced no fatalities in our logging operations in Russia during the year and employee survey results have progressively improved since 2011. Open channels of communication between managers and employees continue to promote mutual respect and trust. Regular inter-camp competitions and reward and recognition programmes are also helping to maintain continuous excellence by incentivising teams and building pride and motivation.

What comes next?

Building on our progress, we'll continue to focus our investments in the coming years on road and transport improvements, increasingly efficient communication networks and community infrastructure. This will contribute to ongoing improvements in the safety, culture and productivity of our forestry operations, and further strengthen our relationships with local communities.

“I noticed a big change in people's attitudes. There is now an incredible, shared sense of responsibility for safety and health.”

Alexander Bole
Internal auditor

Growing Responsibly

Action areas:

- Employee and contractor safety
- A skilled and committed workforce
- Fairness and diversity in the workplace



Read more in our online Sustainable development report 2016
www.mondigroup.com/sd16