



Activity Report: Internal Renovation of Project Space

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Introduction

The renovation work scheduled for May was eventually postponed until June due to the need to ensure maximum Project member presence on the renovation weekend. In addition, the problems surrounding Zito's motorbike accident meant that we had to postpone to the second week of June.

Objectives

The objectives of the renovation work were simple:

- To have all Project members contribute to improving our working environment in a fun and constructive way.
- To give us all a 'fresh start' in terms of drawing a line under some old Project practices and embracing the new rules (I.T., Study Group, Teaching Rules etc)
- To provide a fresh new environment more conducive to studying
- To show the results of working hard as a team. Minimum expenditure + considerable effort = great effects.
- To guide the students to a collective sense of pride in Project Oceano's space. Having experienced the hard work of turning the classrooms from functional but unattractive into inspiring and attractive, the students will hopefully take more pride in keeping the space clean, and in looking after materials properly.
- Once standards start to slip in terms of Project and materials maintenance, it is hard to pull them back if the best you will ever have is a shabby working space. Now that we have a new and clean space, the onus is on Projecto Oceano as a collective to keep the our standards high.
- In terms of the Project's appearance, reputation and ethos, creating spacious and well-organised classrooms is a key part of our wider 'professionalisation' process. It is important that this professional ethos that we are trying to impress on the students is matched by the surroundings in which we work every day.

Process

Without a doubt we achieved all of the above objectives. Whilst it would have been nice to have the whole Project team working at the same time, it was impractical given the number of jobs that could

be performed simultaneously. Therefore I arranged for members to come in over the renovation weekend and work in groups of 2 / 3 for a couple of hours. It was grueling for me (Saturday morning until Monday evening, 7am until 7pm all 3 days!), as I was keen to ensure that our project plan was followed so made sure to be there at all times to both work and supervise.

The different student 'shifts' worked on various tasks, including the following:

- Clearing the rooms to allow painting
- Dusting, polishing and cleaning all tables, chairs and bookshelves
- Cleaning books, computers and miscellaneous project materials of the accumulation of a few years of dust
- Cleaning the blackboard properly for the first time in a long time
- Scraping the old 'cal' from the walls
- Cleaning floors properly
- Painting the walls (the most time-consuming job!) several times, to ensure that our new white paint covers the old murky yellow stuff

In terms of our core member involvement, I was generally happy with their contributions. The only member who did not contribute over the 3 days was Firoza; she will be the first on our new cleaning roster, and will have to arrange new capulanas for tablecloths and curtains as some form of contributing to the work that everyone else did.

In general the students were not at their most enthusiastic when doing the dirty work at the start, although they impressively rolled their sleeves up and got on with it with smiles on their faces. All the students came on Sunday afternoon after their various working shifts to find a spotless new space, and were extremely enthusiastic when it came to putting the furniture back and seeing the final results. That was when the penny dropped for them that this was an activity very much worth doing. Notable contributions include Shany, who was there for almost the full 12 hour shift on Saturday, and Jaime, who did some sterling work throughout. Gito was very enthusiastic and grateful for the renovation and did a lot of the physical work, as were Minguinho and Rauf in putting the final touches to the paint work and computer re-installation. Shany's self-importance was slightly piqued when I suggested re-arranging slightly the arrangement of the computer tables, but came round to it in the end and stopped being 'bolshy'! Coman and Tino were at the forefront of the cleaning team for a while on Saturday morning, and also returned on Sunday to help. There was definitely a moment of 'over-excitement' from some of the guys when they came back after a day or so and saw the changes...suddenly everyone wanted to be given a paintbrush, and my job became one of reining in the enthusiasm and trying to manage an excited bunch of guys. Some fun moments! We also had a couple of ex-Project students (attendees of our IT and language classes) offer to help over the weekend. They were very welcome, and I made a point to thank them for their help.

Zito, unfortunately, was in hospital so was unable to help, and Firoza did not pitch in. As always she had an OK excuse, but I explained to her that we all can make excuses as much as we want, but the activity was about sacrificing a little personal time for the good of the Project. We will be having a little 'jantar' in the Project when I am back from Malawi. A general impression was that most of the students were happy to do the hard work for a while, but perhaps don't have the sticking power to really do something they don't want particularly to do. It is a sentiment that you occasionally see in individual Project members' conduct; Shany, for example, enjoys participating in debates, but digs his heels in when asked to write an article for Voz Jovem. I guess we are all guilty of this sometimes!

Despite the general good effort put in by the Project members, the renovation would not have worked so well had I not killed myself for 3 days! Thankfully the painter was very good, and we also had the help of Tito on Sunday afternoon (a Portuguese volunteer from WAY). I think the students were genuinely quite shocked at the effects of 3 days of hard works on our space; Gito in particular made a point of thanking me publicly for everyone on Monday evening. As dodgy as this may sound, much like Mozambique in general, there isn't the same work ethic among Mozambicans that you find in many Westerners. This is in no way an effort to 'blow my own trumpet', but it's better to be frank with you guys than paint a rosy but dishonest picture! Overall I was happy with the work that the core group put in, but would have liked to see a little more sustained effort from most of the group...

Given that we had enough 'cal' left over, we also re-painted the ping pong room.

Future & Conclusions

There is not much I would change from the way we did things, as to make students' participation mandatory would have risked taking a lot of the fun out of it. The work turned out well in the end, and in terms of the slight disappointments of the way the guys worked at times...I was half expecting some of that. There is a different attitude here to cleanliness and what constitutes a 'finished job' (just have a wonder past Frelimo HQ's building on the island) – you have to step carefully so as not to impose 'your' 'better' version of things.

The key for me now lies in how the guys look after the space. Coman will now be in charge of a cleaning roster to try to keep our standards high. He is a very conscientious, neat and proud student, as well as having a natural air of authority, so I think will fit the 'job description' very well.

If during my time here the Project returns to a similar state of disarray I will be surprised and upset. The Renovation work showed the kids what can be done with some collective hard work, and it is now their job to maintain it in such a way that we can walk in and be proud of the place. I think it's really important that the Project space reflects our attitude, and despite me doing the bulk of the work, I know it was worth every drop of effort! Even though the members could have done a little more, I am happy that they contributed, and I think it was important for them to see the effort that Projecto Ocean volunteers are prepared to put in for their benefit. The important thing is that we now have a space that they are happy in, and that we can be proud of...

To conclude, we completed all of the objectives set out earlier in this report, and we completed them within budget. There were a couple of minor, but not wholly unexpected, disappointments but we can learn as a group from them. The Project now has a fantastic space that is already helping the work we do, and we achieved much of it as a team. Hopefully the renovation heralds the gradual coming of a new era of professionalism for on-site operations here. If a tone of frustration comes across in this report, it is natural given the fact that one of my jobs is to patiently change working practices. When things don't go 100% smoothly you just have to grit your teeth, hide the frustration and put up with it! All in all, a job well worth doing, and some well-invested budget!

Pictures

Hopefully you have already seen some of the 'action shots' taken throughout the renovation work. Here are a few of the finished article. We still have to buy some capulanas as tablecloths, and in these photos the new boards on the walls have not got Project Rules, photos and Voz Jovem recent publications in them. I'll send periodically some updated ones.



