Benefitting from Standards

Local enterprises stand to gain as Singapore strengthens its position as a regional leader in standards development.

TURNING ECO-FRIENDLY INTO BIG SAVINGS
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STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD
ISO 22301 provides Pantropic Online with added credibility and helps differentiate it from its competitors as it gears up for growth.
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SPRING Singapore is an agency under the Ministry of Trade and Industry responsible for helping Singapore enterprises grow and building trust in Singapore products and services. As the enterprise development agency, SPRING works with partners to help enterprises in financing, capability and management development, technology and innovation, and access to markets. As the national standards and accreditation body, SPRING develops and promotes an internationally-recognised standards and quality assurance infrastructure. SPRING also oversees the safety of general consumer goods in Singapore.

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Launch of New SME Energy Efficiency Initiative and Opening of ISO Regional Office

At the opening of the Standards eXchange on Resource Efficiency on 10 July, Mr S Iswaran, Minister, Prime Minister’s Office and Second Minister for Home Affairs and Trade & Industry, announced the launch of a $17 million initiative for SMEs to assess, monitor and improve their energy performance. Developed by SPRING, this initiative will be led by the Sustainable Energy Association of Singapore (SEAS) and supported by SPRING, the National Environment Agency (NEA) and the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA). The goal is to help some 300 SMEs achieve at least 10 per cent savings in energy costs over the next three years.

Minister Iswaran also announced that the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) will be setting up its first regional office outside of Geneva, in Singapore, in September for an initial two year pilot. By anchoring itself in Singapore, the ISO will be able to strengthen support for its members and increase its outreach to industry players, government officials and other key stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific region.

SME Centre@SouthWest Launched for Better Access to Business Advice

On 10 July, the satellite SME Centre@SouthWest was launched by Dr Amy Khor, Chairman of Mayors’ Committee and Mayor of South West District, and Mr George Huang, President, Singapore Manufacturing Federation. This new SME Centre, located at the South West Community Development Council (CDC)’s Service Centre at JTC Summit, will allow SMEs in the heartlands to seek free business advice and gain greater access to government schemes. SMEs may also access value-added services such as employment placement and training assistance to meet their manpower needs through the CDC’s career centre.

The satellite SME centres are a result of a multi-agency collaboration between SPRING, the People’s Association (PA), the five CDCs, and the five Trade Associations and Chambers1 (TACs), and are dedicated to SMEs in the heartlands seeking to upgrade their capabilities and raise productivity.

This collaboration was sealed at the same event, with a signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between SPRING and PA, witnessed by Dr Khor and Mr Teo Ser Luck, Minister of State for Trade and Industry.

1 - The five TACs are the Chinese, Indian and Malay Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises and the Singapore Manufacturing Federation.
4 newsclips

**Entrepreneurship Review Committee Kick Starts Series of Dialogue Sessions**

The Entrepreneurship Review Committee (EnRC) kick-started its series of dialogue sessions with stakeholders on 23 July by engaging a group of 30 entrepreneurs. Participants shared their candid views on a wide range of entrepreneurship-related issues, such as the attraction of talent. Mr Teo Ser Luck, Minister of State for Trade & Industry, who led the session, said he felt encouraged that the participants did not focus on getting more government grants but instead wanted assistance to become more resourceful and for access to more market opportunities.

The formation of the EnRC was first announced by Mr Teo, who’s also Chairman of the Action Community for Entrepreneurship (ACE) at ACE’s 10th anniversary in May. The EnRC comprises entrepreneurs like Dr Finian Tan of Vickers Financial Group, Mr Loh Yu-Chie of Biosensors International, and Mr Tan Min-Liang of Razer and other members of the entrepreneurship community – venture capitalists, angel investors, and institutes of higher learning (IHLs). The next dialogue session will be held with venture capitalists and angel investors on 13 August, and the public may write in to enrc@ace.org.sg with their views on how to enhance entrepreneurship in Singapore. The feedback gathered will be in time to be considered for Budget 2014.

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**Service Excellence Learning Journey to BreadTalk Group Limited**

Mr Lim Swee Say, Minister, Prime Minister’s Office and NTUC Secretary-General graced the Service Excellence Learning Journey organised by BreadTalk Group Limited to showcase its service excellence achievements. Din Tai Fung, one of the Group’s restaurant concepts, demonstrated how it continuously delivered high service quality across its 17 outlets despite the manpower crunch through initiatives like streamlining and re-designing workflow processes, leveraging technology, and increasing the appeal of service jobs.

At the event, Minister Lim also announced the findings of the Customer-Centric Initiative (CCI) Impact Study commissioned by SPRING in 2012, involving more than 100 companies within the F&B and retail sectors. The study found that F&B companies which embarked on CCI projects have reported a 23 per cent average increase in customer satisfaction levels and a 35 per cent average increase in revenue growth. The better business performance further translated into a 17 per cent average increase in remuneration per employee. The same CCI study also found that leadership and an employee-centric culture were key success factors to a company and technology investment impacted a company’s productivity positively.

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**Bronx Creative & Design Centre a First in Southeast Asia**

The Bronx Creative & Design Centre was officially opened by Mr Teo Ser Luck, Minister of State for Trade and Industry on 16 July, at the Natural Cool Lifestyle Hub on Tai Seng Avenue. The centre is Singapore’s first footwear design, prototyping and education centre, and also the first of its kind in Southeast Asia. Capable of supporting the design and prototyping of different kinds of footwear under one roof, the centre plugs an industry gap and is an important initiative in the fashion industry’s developmental blueprint. Bronx is also collaborating with a local education group, Raffles Education Corporation, to develop a comprehensive footwear design curriculum. Designers and professionals who are keen to upgrade their skills and craftsmanship in footwear design can receive hands-on training.
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BENEFITTING FROM STANDARDS

Local enterprises stand to gain as Singapore strengthens its position as a regional leader in standards development.

Whether you are a precision engineering company, a food manufacturer or fashion retailer, standards can play an important role in your company’s growth and success.

ISO 9001 certification, for example, not only ensures robust quality assurance processes, but also demonstrates to customers that you are a capable and reliable supplier. Other standards help to define common technical specifications and safety properties for goods – a critical factor in facilitating international trade.

As Singapore’s lead agency for standards, SPRING Singapore is responsible for developing and promoting an internationally-recognised quality and standards infrastructure. Its efforts help to build trust in Singapore’s products and services across a wide spectrum of industries – there are more than 600 Singapore Standards that have an impact on many products, services, systems and processes.

SPRING regularly reviews its quality and standards programmes to identify new areas to enable Singapore enterprises to keep pace with global trends and the demands of international markets. This allows our enterprises to improve productivity and efficiency, stay competitive and enter new markets.

Achievements in 2012

Last year was a busy one for SPRING in the area of standards development. With a network of more than 1,000 volunteers participating in 186 committees and working groups, SPRING developed and reviewed nearly 160 Singapore Standards, of which 20 are new standards.

New accreditation programmes were also launched, providing access to third-party assurance of the competency of testing and certification bodies. One example is the Accreditation Programme for Energy Management System Certification. The scheme helps to increase industry confidence in ISO 50001 certifications by accredited certification bodies.

Another development in 2012 was the Singapore Accreditation Council’s (SAC) signing of the inaugural global Mutual Recognition Arrangement for Inspection with ILAC, the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation. The SAC Accreditation Programme is managed by SPRING. The arrangement expands the scope of SAC’s accreditation recognition, which now covers testing, calibration, certification and inspection. As a result, Singapore is now one of only 50 accreditation bodies worldwide to include inspection in its portfolio.

Supporting adoption

In addition to supporting the development of standards, SPRING also takes an active role in supporting their adoption amongst enterprises in Singapore and SMEs in particular. Funding support is available for SMEs to implement relevant standards under the Capability Development Grant (CDG).

Last year, SPRING supported some 120 enterprises in their efforts to adopt standards. These enterprises came from a wide range of sectors, including food manufacturing, oil and gas, precision engineering and furniture.

Working together with its partners such as the Standards Development Organisations at the Singapore Chemical Industry Council and the Singapore Manufacturing Federation, SPRING also reached out to over 2,800 enterprises through some 60 events. These events were used as an opportunity to highlight the value of standards and the importance of not just implementing standards, but also becoming involved in their development.

International involvement

Besides the many developments in strengthening local Singapore Standards and supporting the awareness and adoption of standards amongst local enterprises, SPRING is also an active player on the international standards scene. This is of particular importance for a small, trade-driven economy such as Singapore, where international standards play a critical role in local enterprises’ ability to access overseas markets and hold their own against global competition.
Two recent developments are set to greatly increase Singapore’s standing in the international standards community, and provide local enterprises with unparalleled opportunities to participate in standards development on a global scale.

First, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the world’s largest developer and publisher of international standards, will be setting up a regional office in Singapore in September 2013 for an initial two-year pilot. The office will be ISO’s first outside its Geneva headquarters, and will be tasked with increasing ISO’s support for the Asia-Pacific region, as well as deepening ISO’s engagement with member states.

“Singapore’s excellent infrastructure and connectivity to the rest of the region, its economic and political stability, as well as its ready pool of talents, were strong pull factors. The presence of multinational corporations, other international organisations and relevant regional organisations also contributed to the ISO’s decision to set up a regional office here for an initial two-year pilot,” explained Mr Rob Steele, Secretary-General of the ISO.

The second development is SPRING’s appointment as the Secretariat for the Pacific Area Standards Congress (PASC) from 2014 to 2016. PASC brings together standards bodies in the Pacific Rim region to strengthen international standardisation programmes of the ISO and the IEC, and to improve the abilities of these Pacific Rim standards organisations to participate in these programmes effectively.

These two developments leave Singapore in a unique position to lead standards development in the Asia-Pacific region. This will strengthen the voice of Asian and Singaporean enterprises in the standards development process. Local enterprises will be able to capitalise on these opportunities to get involved in standards development, upgrade their capabilities and grow their business.
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City Square Mall opened in September 2009 as “Singapore’s First Eco-mall”. More than just a tagline, the “Eco-mall” label truly is a fitting one – from its 49,110-square-foot rooftop urban park to its use of natural light and a range of innovative energy and water efficient features.

When City Developments Limited (CDL) started the planning process for City Square Mall, it decided to ensure that the design and operation of the building would meet the highest energy efficiency standards.

“We envisioned City Square Mall to be a shopping mall for families to congregate, play and shop while allowing them to enjoy an eco-friendly experience and learn more about the environment,” says Mr Lionel Chua, Centre Director for City Square Mall. “We invested approximately five per cent of the total construction cost into the development of the Mall’s numerous green innovations.”

Guided by standards

To ensure City Square Mall delivered on this vision, CDL implemented the Singapore Standard, SS 530, which stipulates minimum energy efficiency requirements for new installations and replacements of systems and equipment in buildings. It also covers the criteria for determining compliance with these requirements, and applies to air-conditioning and heat rejection equipment, water heaters, motor drives and high-efficiency lighting used in buildings.

Beyond SS 530, CDL also adopted a wide range of local and international standards that allow it to operate efficiently, from both an environmental and business perspective. Indeed, all core divisions and supporting operations, including City Square Mall’s facilities management arm, conform to the ISO 14001 Environmental Management System standard. CDL’s Property & Facilities Management Division was also certified to the ISO 9001 Quality Management System standard, which ensures that organisations have the systems and processes in place to meet customer needs.

In recognition of CDL’s leadership in the development of Singapore’s built environment, CDL is the first Platinum winner of the Building and Construction Authority’s (BCA) Built Environment Leadership Awards. City Square Mall also became the first eco-mall to be awarded the Green Mark Platinum Award by BCA.

“We need to keep abreast of the times and leverage technology and standards to operate more efficiently both from a business and environmental perspective. The adoption of SS 530 has enabled us to achieve energy efficiency and significant cost savings.”

Mr Lionel Chua, Centre Director for City Square Mall

Return on investment

To understand the costs and benefits associated with adopting SS 530, a study was conducted in May 2012. The results were impressive. It found that City Square Mall reduced its electricity bill by 14.64 per cent.

The study also considered the additional costs involved in designing the air-conditioning system to meet these higher standards. It found that despite a four per cent increase in the cost of installing the air-conditioning system due to SS 530, it took only two and a half months to achieve a return on the investment. These figures paint a clear picture of the benefits of implementing SS 530 and reinforce the business case for investing in standards. Within a short period, CDL has been able to achieve returns on investment and quickly see an impact on the bottom-line, reaping significant annual savings.

Adopting energy efficiency standards has led to huge savings for City Square Mall

City Square Mall is the first eco-mall to be awarded the Green Mark Platinum Award by the Building and Construction Authority

We need to keep abreast of the times and leverage technology and standards to operate more efficiently both from a business and environmental perspective. The adoption of SS 530 has enabled us to achieve energy efficiency and significant cost savings.”

Mr Lionel Chua, Centre Director for City Square Mall

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• While adopting standards may require an upfront investment to transform processes or meet technical requirements, the return on this investment can be impressive and deliver good business results.
• To find out how SPRING Singapore can help you to adopt standards for your business, please visit www.spring.gov.sg/CDG.
STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

Pantropic Online is coming into a sweet spot in the evolution of its business, says Mr Clifford Lew (above), the company’s Director of Professional Services.

As a leading provider of data protection and disaster recovery services, with a strong focus on cloud-based solutions, Pantropic is benefitting from the skyrocketing awareness of cloud-based services and the importance of business continuity management (BCM).

To strengthen its position in the market and capitalise on increasing opportunities, Pantropic turned to standards as one way of differentiating itself from the competition. “When considering certification, we knew we wanted something to make us stand out. We are a small company, so we need an edge,” explains Mr Lew.

The case for standards

As a provider of disaster recovery services, a subset of BCM, it made good business sense to pursue a standard in this area, so Pantropic decided to go for ISO 22301 certification – a standard that sets out requirements for BCM systems.

Pantropic achieved ISO 22301 certification in April 2013, with funding support from SPRING Singapore that covered 70 per cent of the qualifying project costs.

Achieving ISO 22301 has had a positive impact – not just on Pantropic’s image and standing in the market, but also on its internal processes and capabilities.

“The process of certification improved the operations of the company. Job roles became more formalised, people started taking on specific BCM responsibilities, and the disaster recovery processes became much better defined and documented,” notes Mr Lew. “We are now much better able to recover from a business interruption than we would have been a year ago.”

Customers also benefitted from this, by receiving a higher quality of service as a result of increased resiliency in the company’s processes and infrastructure. The chance of a service interruption is reduced, as well as the likely duration of any possible service disruption.

Fortunately, the company has not had the chance to put its new disaster recovery procedures into practice, although it was a close call with the recent haze issues in Singapore.

“We started thinking about how we would deal with haze if it stayed at the hazardous level for a prolonged period. How could processes be changed, enabled by technology, to allow some staff to work from home to avoid exposure during their commute? Given that haze had not been a big issue in recent years, we had not included it in our risk analysis of potential threats to business operations, but that is something we will be looking into at our next review,” says Mr Lew.

Supporting growth

Beyond the improvement in service quality and stronger internal processes, Pantropic has also seen some direct benefits to its business.

“A number of companies have told us they feel reassured when they see that we have ISO certification. It also helps us to develop partnerships with larger players, giving us access to new customers and projects that we may otherwise not have been part of,” explains Mr Lew.

Furthermore, in the course of getting the company ISO certified, two of Pantropic’s directors were also certified as ISO 22301 Lead Auditors, which gave them the expertise to audit BCM systems to ISO requirements. This increased domain knowledge has proven valuable in discussions with customers and enhanced the company’s ability to advise them.

These advantages will be critical as Pantropic enters a high-growth phase, says Mr Lew.

“We are now linking up with larger infrastructure and consulting service providers to provide end-to-end solutions for larger customers who may not normally approach a small business such as ours. Our ISO certification has helped make this possible by giving us instant credibility with our partners and customers.”

ISO 22301 provides Pantropic Online with added credibility and helps differentiate it from its competitors as it gears up for growth.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Adopting a standard not only improves your company’s image to customers and partners, it also helps to enhance business operations.
- Visit www.spring.gov.sg/CDG to find out how SPRING can support the adoption of standards in your company.
GROWING WITH STANDARDS

Adopting international standards has helped HISAKA to improve its operations and expand its business.

For HISAKA, a leading automation solutions provider in the Asia-Pacific region, standards have always played an important role in the company’s development.

Mr Jackie Cheng, HISAKA’s CEO, sees standards as an important way for smaller companies to establish themselves in the market and expand their operations.

“In Asia, adopting international standards and quality management systems is an accepted prerequisite for most established businesses. The ability and willingness to conform to international quality criteria gives a business instant credibility, especially for SMEs,” he explains.

HISAKA is a testament to this view, having grown significantly in the past decade. From a headcount of around 20 and revenues of less than $10 million in 1999, the company now employs more than 130 people and boasts an annual turnover of close to $70 million.

Using international standards as a marketing tool, SMEs can overcome resource and capability limitations to promote themselves to wider markets regionally or globally. The instant recognition of an ISO standard can raise the standing of a company in the eyes of potential customers, as it has done for HISAKA.

“In 1999, we decided to obtain ISO 9001 certification to gain recognition from customers and suppliers that we have a quality management system in place to ensure quality products and services,” Mr Cheng explains.

HISAKA’s Digital Stereo Microscope (DSM) system provides a 3D real-time imagery on a large bright display panel, streamed from a pair of high-resolution cameras.

Laying the foundation for growth

Mr Cheng notes that standards have helped HISAKA to deliver sustainable quality and growth, and played an important role in the company’s ongoing success and bright future prospects.

“International standards provide us with critical guidance as we formulate business procedures, controls and improvements,” he says.

By clearly communicating the importance of standards to all staff, the management was able to get their buy-in for the need for a more structured approach to quality assurance.

Standards as a competitive advantage

Most importantly, HISAKA’s staff have also come to realise that standards are prized by the industry and thus a solid competitive advantage for the company.

For HISAKA, its ISO 9001 certification has facilitated regional expansion into markets such as China and India.

ISO 13485 certification has also helped HISAKA to commercialise its first medical device – the Portable Blood Bag Warmer (below).

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Apparently, this message translates well in virtually any market around the world, notes Mr Cheng. Indeed, HISAKA’s ISO 9001 certification has facilitated regional expansion into markets such as China and India. The company now has offices in Shanghai, Suzhou and Chennai.

However, it was another ISO standard that led to one of the company’s most exciting developments in recent years – its expansion into the medical devices sector. As part of HISAKA’s efforts to capitalise on new growth opportunities and create new streams of revenue, it collaborated with the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STARI), to commercialise its first medical device, the Portable Blood Bag Warmer system.

A key milestone was attaining ISO 13485 certification for quality assurance in medical device design and manufacturing in 2011. “Besides developing and improving our quality management system, we trained and equipped our staff with new and improved knowledge and skills,” explains Mr Cheng.

HISAKA emerged from the certification exercise with a stronger and more versatile quality system and workforce. This has paved the way for the development of new medical devices, as the company continues to fuel growth with its new capabilities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In addition to strengthening a company’s processes, standards help to project an image of credibility to customers.
- To find out how SPRING can support the adoption of standards for your business, visit www.spring.gov.sg/cdg.

Mr Jackie Cheng, CEO, HISAKA

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BUILDING CUSTOMER CONFIDENCE

When you sit down to work in your office, the last thing you want to be concerned about is your health. Yet recent studies suggest that this may be a valid concern. They show that indoor air pollution can contribute to the development of chronic respiratory diseases, and that one source of indoor air pollutants is furniture.

As a designer and producer of office furniture, Wilsin Office Furniture has made it a priority to address these concerns, and has done so by attaining the GREENGUARD certification. This industry standard assures consumers that the certified products adhere to the strictest chemical emissions limits, thereby minimising pollutants and contributing to healthier interiors.

"Wilsin has a strong commitment to environmental sustainability and attaining the GREENGUARD certification came naturally to us in line with our green direction," says Ms Cindee Sim, Wilsin’s Managing Director. "We also want to send the message to our customers that by using our GREENGUARD-certified furniture, customers are doing their part to achieve a more sustainable world."

A universal approach
This is not the first time that Wilsin has adopted standards to improve its offerings to customers and enhance its capabilities. In addition to the GREENGUARD certification, the company is also certified to ISO 9001 (quality management), ISO 18001 and bizSAFE Level 5 (occupational health and safety), and ISO 14001 (environmental management).

"Standards provide a holistic approach to our business," notes Mr James Pang, Wilsin’s Executive Director. "They play a critical role in R&D, product development, and marketing initiatives, which in turn help us meet our business objectives."

"Buyers’ expectations have leaped. The importance of product and service quality is now magnified. Implementing these standards helps to improve our company's service standards and equips our workforce with relevant skills and knowledge," he adds.

ISO 9001 certification, for example, has led to the introduction of standard operating procedures that increase the efficiency of Wilsin’s operations, help reduce costs and improve service quality.

The ISO 18001 and bizSAFE certifications have had a similarly positive effect. Mr Pang notes that with closer attention paid to safety requirements, work-related injuries can be avoided and operations can run more efficiently.

"ISO 18001 and bizSAFE compliance ensures that our company protects the health and well-being of staff and responds to adverse trends, leading to reduced sickness absence, better morale and lower staff turnover," he explains.

"Many companies have made bizSAFE a tendering requirement, so having the certification gives us a competitive advantage," he adds.

With its green credentials a key selling point, Wilsin’s adoption of ISO 14001 for environment management was another important step for the company. Not only has it reduced operational costs through waste reduction – for example, by using recycled paper for internal printing and switching off main switches of electrical appliances at the end of every workday – it also sends a clear message to customers and partners that Wilsin is committed to green principles.

"Standards help us gain the confidence of our customers. As we focus on building our range of in-house furniture, and expanding internationally, we are looking to establish a strong brand position through credible sustainability messaging," says Mr Pang.

Expanding opportunities
This message, combined with the other standards that the company has adopted, is having a real impact on Wilsin’s business.

"Customers will choose to work with a partner who has undergone the certification process, as it provides assurance of quality work,” notes Ms Sim. ”Our certifications have opened up new opportunities – for example, we are receiving more invitations to quote, especially from the Government and MNC sectors."

She also points out that with the recognition of Wilsin’s quality, it has been able to command better pricing as customers recognise the value of what they are purchasing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS
• Adopting standards can improve processes, reduce costs and contribute to consumer confidence in your brand.
• To find out how SPRING supports standards adoption, please visit www.spring.gov.sg/CDG.
Any company, no matter how small, can put in place good HR processes and policies and benefit from doing so,” says Mr Sam Chee Wah, General Manager of Feinmetall Singapore, a company that designs and manufactures probe cards for the semiconductor industry.

He speaks from experience, having recently transformed Feinmetall’s HR function from a purely administrative one to a strategic part of the business. This was an important development for the company, which has close to 30 staff in Singapore, and relies heavily on manual production techniques, making human capital a key asset.

While the company has always treated its staff like family, these good intentions received a big boost when Feinmetall looked to SPRING Singapore to enhance its human resource management capabilities.

Getting support
Feinmetall embarked on a project to improve its HR capability by engaging HR consultants, who assessed its existing systems and processes, drew up plans for improvements, and guided the implementation of these plans.

“As we are a small company, the consultants played a big role in helping us bring our human capital development to the next level,” explains Mr Sam. “I would strongly recommend SMEs to embark on this HR capability upgrading project.”

HR capability upgrading covers a spectrum of modules, and Feinmetall decided to take up the ones focusing on performance appraisal, compensation and benefits, and recruitment. This resulted in a number of new developments, including establishing a programme called “Employee 1-2-1”, which provides staff with a dedicated, individual feedback session with management every six months.

One example of feedback received was a staff member who said that the workstation setup was not conducive to working efficiently. After investigating this further, Feinmetall installed a new shelving system at all workstations so that they are less cluttered. This has resulted in staff being more organised and productive.

Another new HR initiative is the implementation of 360-degree appraisals, where staff are appraised by their boss, peers, and subordinates. “This gives staff a fuller understanding of their performance,” says Mr Sam.

A detailed job grade system was also established, something that Mr Sam says would normally only be found in larger companies. He believes, however, that having clearly defined job grades is important to allow each staff to understand their job grade, job scope and salary cap.

“They can then understand that if they want to increase their salary, they need to continue upgrading themselves,” he explains. “A good human resource management system gives staff the assurance that there is a plan in place for developing their career,” says Mr Sam.

Planning for the future
Training is also an important part of Feinmetall’s HR efforts. Existing staff are frequently sent for in-house and external training courses, not just to ensure that they are up to date on the latest techniques and technologies, but also to help them progress in their careers.

Feinmetall has also looked to new hires to add to its talent pool. It recently hired three fresh polytechnic graduates as management associates with support from SPRING. Under the initiative, Feinmetall committed to training the management associates for 12 to 18 months. There is a structured programme in place that rotates them through various departments to gain experience in the entire business.

“We are very happy with the associates and their work, and how the programme operates. They are committed, smart and very motivated,” says Mr Sam. “The programme is also good for the associates, as it exposes them to many parts of the business, and lets them see that an SME can also be structured and offer good career prospects.”

This investment in developing staff, combined with the improvements in Feinmetall’s human resource management system, has contributed to a very low staff turnover rate, with only two staff leaving in the past year, notes Mr Sam.

He adds, “Our improved processes, focus on transparency and communication, and the resulting staff loyalty put us in a better position to handle growth in the business and future expansion of the workforce.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Companies of any size, including small ones, can develop and benefit from a structured human resource management system.
- To find out how SPRING can help to strengthen your human resource management and development capability, please visit www.spring.gov.sg/CD6.
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PRODUCTIVITY DONE RIGHT

The right mindset and a little help from others can go a long way toward maximising productivity gains, as TranZplus Engineering found out.

For Mr Nelson Lim, Managing Director of TranZplus Engineering, his first attempt at improving productivity in his company turned out to be a frustrating one. 

“We visited customers and would often see how clean, efficient and professional their operations looked, while ours were quite disorganised,” explains Mr Lim. “We wanted to model ourselves after them, but didn’t know where to get started. We tried doing things ourselves, but quite honestly, it just didn’t work.”

With a growing list of blue-chip customers, and the vision to develop TranZplus into the preferred mechanical power transmission specialist in the industry, Mr Lim knew that the company’s operations had to become more efficient and productive. To achieve this, Mr Lim and his team needed more than past experience and gut instincts, and had to improve productivity in a more organised manner.

So in early 2013, Mr Lim approached the SME Centre at the Singapore Manufacturing Federation (SME Centre@SMF) for assistance.

A helping hand
The advisors at the SME Centre@SMF assessed the company’s operations and suggested how TranZplus could improve productivity. One of the concepts they introduced was 5S, a Japanese method for organising the workplace based on the principles of Sort, Straighten, Shine, Standardise and Sustain.

The advisors not only explained what 5S was, but also how to implement it successfully. They stressed the need to get staff buy-in to the 5S way of doing things, which proved to be an important step toward achieving success.

“Our team became enthusiastic about the adoption of 5S when they saw the real difference it made to the company’s operations,” says Mr Lim. “It was also important to give our staff a stake in the planning and execution of 5S, and in the results. This helped to sustain the effort.”

Reaping the benefits of 5S
By focusing first on improvements at the main office and the assembly and distribution workshop, TranZplus was able to identify and address some significant productivity gaps to greatly improve efficiency. For instance, improving the filing and colour coding of parts catalogues...
START SMALL. Pick some simple, “quick win” areas to test out 5S. Learn how it works and how best to implement and manage it. Then roll it out to other areas of your business.

ENGAGE YOUR TEAM. Get them involved in the planning for 5S and the identification of areas for improvement. This encourages ownership of the initiative and staff will be more willing to put in the effort to make it a success.

REWARD GOOD IDEAS. Provide incentives for staff to contribute ideas and effort to the 5S initiative. A simple token of recognition will encourage staff to generate new ideas for improvement.

NEVER STOP. 5S is not just a one-off project. It is a culture that continues to grow with your business. Keep looking for improvement opportunities after you achieve initial success – there is always more to be done!

PRODUCTIVITY TOOLS: 5 TIPS FOR 5S

LEAD BY EXAMPLE. The senior management team must champion and practise 5S in everything they do. If the boss’ desk is a mess, it would be difficult to persuade staff to keep their desks tidy.

NEVER STOP. 5S is not just a one-off project. It is a culture that continues to grow with your business. Keep looking for improvement opportunities after you achieve initial success – there is always more to be done!

A significant productivity gain was also realised by using foam inserts in the trays to keep all the items for assembly kits in place. Rather than having screws, nuts and bolts rattling around in the tray, the foam keeps everything in place, and also makes it easier to identify missing parts. This change has cut assembly time from 5-6 hours to 2-3 hours.

These improvements have led to a significant change in staff attitude and the work atmosphere, says Mr Lim. “We were working in a disorganised and untidy office, and everyone was frustrated. After implementing 5S, the change has been amazing – staff are much happier and more efficient now.”

ONGOING JOURNEY

Tranzplus is eager to keep the momentum going. “I keep telling my staff to never stop improving. They must continue to look for new ways to improve productivity and our operations. This is the only way to stay ahead of the competition,” says Mr Lim.

The company is encouraging continuous improvement with the Tranzplus Improvement Programme (TIP), which rewards staff for good suggestions. This includes displaying the best suggestions on a board outside the main office.

“It is important to recognise those with good suggestions,” notes Mr Lim. “Besides giving them a small monetary reward, we also make sure that the rest of the team knows who came up with the new ideas. This is probably a more effective way of promoting buy-in than the financial incentive, as it creates a sense of ownership and pushes staff to execute and implement the ideas for improvement.”

Now that 5S has been successfully adopted in the office and assembly area, Tranzplus is preparing to implement it in one of its factory units. “With the learning from the first phase, we are confident that we can make some strong improvements in the next step of our productivity journey,” says Mr Lim.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Remember, what works for others may not work for you. So make use of self-help productivity tools to improve productivity effectively and systematically.
- For additional help, get assistance from trained productivity advisors at the SME Centres to maximise the impact of your productivity initiatives.
- To find out how SPRING can further support your productivity efforts, visit www.spring.gov.sg/CDG.
Respecting your employees’ rights makes good business sense.

Respecting your staff’s rights motivates them to be valuable assets of the company.

Ms Rita Chiew (above right), a branch manager who has been with Yamaha Music (Asia) Pte Ltd for 35 years, ensures that her staff are given their dues, such as rest days, compensation for work done on public holidays and annual leave provisions. These, together with team-bonding activities, have helped Ms Chiew to build a tightly-knit and highly-driven team.

“Taking care of my staff’s rights has not only built a positive and family spirit in my team, but also contributed towards a strong company culture at Yamaha,” says Ms Chiew.

Ms Aileen Tan (above), who is in Ms Chiew’s team, shares, “My colleagues and I work five-day weeks, and no more than eight to nine hours each day. However, we are happy to chip in when the company needs additional manpower during peak sales periods. In addition, whenever we are away on urgent leave or medical leave, our work buddy will cover our duties to ensure smooth sales operations.”

Taking care of my staff’s rights has not only built a positive and family spirit in my team, but also contributed towards a strong company culture.”

Ms Rita Chiew, Branch Manager, Yamaha Music (Asia) Pte Ltd

The CPF Act stipulates that CPF contributions are payable to Singapore Citizen and Permanent Resident employees, while the EA sets out basic employment terms and conditions for workers (including foreign workers) in Singapore. It also regulates employment relations by establishing the basic duties of employers and workers, and providing mechanisms to settle employment disputes.

It is important that workers are paid their CPF contributions as many rely on their CPF savings for their retirement, healthcare and housing needs. CPF contributions are important vehicles through which eligible low-wage workers gain access to government assistance such as Workfare Income Supplement and top-ups to the CPF Medisave account. Provisions under the EA help ensure that employees’ welfare is protected.

It is an offence for employers to default on their obligations under the CPF Act and the EA. Regular audits on employers, including onsite inspections, are conducted to ensure that they provide their employees with the rights stipulated under employment law.

Most employers do it right, so don’t be the minority! Ultimately, you as an employer will benefit when your staff are motivated to give their best to your business.

For more information on WorkRight and/or the provisions under the CPF Act and the EA, visit www.mom.gov.sg/workright.

Article contributed by the Ministry of Manpower
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100 Victoria Street
Lee Kong Chian Reference Library
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