

Quality Of Life Key To Singaporean Manufacturing

Susan Mucha, Powell-Mucha Consulting, Inc.

How does workplace life differ in Asia from the U.S.? I discussed this question with four Singapore-headquartered companies and found that there were a surprising number of similarities as well as a few differences.



CEI SMT Caption: CEI Contract Manufacturing Limited's SMT area in Bantam, Indonesia.

CEI Contract Manufacturing Limited

CEI Contract Manufacturing Limited, an EMS provider with facilities in Indonesia, Vietnam, and China, sees generational as well as cultural diversity in its workplace.

“We have employees ranging from baby boomers to the Gen I (for iPod) generation and we see the same challenges that companies around the world encounter in dealing with a workforce that has generationally different values. I manage differently today because of this. Where 20 years ago, I would have given specific instructions when I wanted something done, today I coach and brainstorm more with the team. I joke that I use a bigger carrot and a smaller cane,” said Ka Huat Tan, CEI's managing director.

CEI has a Work-Life Balance Committee in each facility charged with suggesting and evaluating programs for employees. Company activities and benefits include parties, yoga and exercise programs, wellness checks, and an in-house gym. Opinion surveys are conducted to make sure the programs stay relevant with employee interests. Based on some of this feedback, the Work-Life Balance

Quality Of Life Key To Singaporean Manufacturing

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

Committees are looking to expand the programs to support employee pursuit of hobbies such as music or photography. For example, at a recent company dinner music was provided by a rock band composed of CEI engineers.

“Longer term we want to provide company space and even an equipment budget for the hobbies that have the highest levels of employee interest. Right now we are trying to determine if there are enough employees who are interested in making a commitment to pursue these activities on a sustained basis. It is a unique benefit that isn’t offered at most companies, but we need to apply common sense as we implement it,” Ka Huat Tan said.

During the downturn, Tan encouraged his managers to watch employees for signs of stress. He also had HR communicate informally that the company planned no layoffs. He also tapped resources provided by the Singapore Development Board, a government agency responsible for planning and executing strategies to enhance Singapore’s position as a global business center.



(L-R) Audy, Avan and Cho are engineers at CEI Contract Manufacturing Limited by day and a rock band by night. They are shown here performing at CEI’s dinner/dance.

“When times are difficult, employees are nervous. It becomes very important to make sure employees feel they are valued. During the worst part of the downturn we were able to enhance our staff’s skills with additional training, funded in part by Singapore Development Board incentives. We continued to invest in facility expansion and new technology which sent employees a positive signal about our commitment to the business. If an employee encountered personal financial difficulties our team offered encouragement and suggested possible resources that could help. Our formula is simple: treat our people decently with respect in a supportive environment, while maintaining good work attitude and practices,” Ka Huat Tan said.

However, Tan also recognizes the need to carefully apply the “cane” on occasion.

“We have employees who give 110 percent every day and a few employees who

Quality Of Life Key To Singaporean Manufacturing

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

aren't quite as dedicated. One area we watch closely is sick leave usage. Our HR staff uses a daily report to track trends in this area. If an employee appears to be using an unusual amount of sick leave, HR follows up to find out if there is a new health situation that needs to be accommodated or potential sick leave abuse. In the latter situation, the employee is counseled that sick leave abuse will impact his or her annual bonus. Fortunately these cases are very rare. Workplace internet use and social networking activity are also getting management scrutiny and counseling, where needed. We try to encourage the best in our employees, but maintain checks and balances to address performance issues as they arise," Ka Huat Tan added.

Meiban Group Limited

When you walk into Meiban Group Limited's headquarters in Singapore it feels like a cross between a product showroom and movie set. The one thing it doesn't look like is a factory, in spite of the fact that Meiban is a contract manufacturer with facilities in Singapore, Malaysia, and China.

"We made a conscious decision to avoid an industrial look because we wanted our company to stand out to prospective customers as something different. We wanted to send a visual signal that we were innovative and focused on new ideas," said Basil Sim, Meiban's general manager.

Those new ideas translate to workspace design as well. Meiban's product engineering team works in a space called Designer Hive. The inspiration for the name came from nature. Their premise is that good design is soothing like honey, and like bees, Meiban's staff works as a team to build up the capability of the Company.

"Our Designer Hive was designed with the goal of creating an optimum work space that would enable team members to engage effectively in a stimulating environment. We also wanted to visually signal that our design process was different. Product conceptualization is done by teams not individuals and this enables the best of ideas to be incorporated," Sim said.

Beyonics Technology Limited

Beyonics Technology Limited — a contract manufacturer with facilities in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and China — also rewards innovation. The company initiated an Employee Quality Enhancement program four years ago. Once a quarter, managers submit ideas from their teams for improvements or cost savings.

"We've seen some positive results in our P&L. One recent machine efficiency enhancement saved over S\$150,000 (\$110,000 USD) in its initial implementation and ultimately will contribute to continue reductions in capital equipment investment, direct labor requirements and facility floorspace," said C.P. Goh, Beyonics' chief executive officer.

Quality Of Life Key To Singaporean Manufacturing

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)



Improvements to CNC machine jigs driven by Beyonics Technology Limited Employee Quality Enhancement program have saved over S\$150,000.

Productivity improvement training is another area of focus. Beyonics is participating in a new program offered through the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA). The Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) is a national credentialing system. Based on national standards developed by WDA in collaboration with various industries, WSQ comprises industry sectoral frameworks which serve to establish recognized continuing education and training qualifications, and enhance labor market flexibility and skills portability as demand shifts between industries. Beyonics is sending seven trainees from five different business units to the Certified Productivity and Innovative Management (CPIM) program. This program consists of four modules covering operational management, business process re-engineering, Six Sigma and practical application of business process re-engineering techniques. Participants are required to sit for the individual exams after the first three modules.

“Beyonics was one of only two companies in Singapore selected for this program. Approximately 90 percent of the funding is provided by the Singapore government. This is one of the benefits of doing business in Singapore,” said Goh.

One area where Asia differs somewhat from the U.S. is the degree of cultural diversity in the workplace. While U.S. companies may have diverse workforces, the degree of accommodation of religious or regional customs tends to be greater in most Asian countries.

“We need to be culturally sensitive to the needs of all employees. In Malaysia, Friday is a day of prayer for Muslim employees, and it is important to properly accommodate their praying and eating customs with appropriate facilities and timing of breaks. Our Thai employees may pray to a four-faced Buddha, whereas a Buddha has one face in other countries. Our goal is to make sure we treat all our employees with respect,” Goh said.

That respect also extends to an aging workforce. Singapore has extended its retirement from 55 to 62. At Beyonics, there is no mandatory retirement age. According to Goh, older workers are valued for their skills and dedication. The

Quality Of Life Key To Singaporean Manufacturing

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

company is also willing to transfer an older worker to a less demanding job if he or she requests it.



A production line at OSI Electronics Pte. Ltd.

OSI Electronics Pte. Ltd.

OSI Electronics Pte. Ltd., a diversified manufacturer with EMS facilities in Singapore and Indonesia, shared resources in Malaysia, and a U.S. operation, puts strong focus on fostering team spirit. Management and engineers get together monthly for a soccer game followed by dinner.

“We find social activities helps build stronger relationships and better understanding among different areas of the organization,” said Michael Tan, OSI’s Singapore general manager.

The same cross pollination teambuilding focus is applied in OSI’s training initiatives. The company sends its Asia-based staff to the US for Demand Flow Technology (DFT) training. Program management also trains globally. OSI’s President Bruce MacDonald credits this practice with creating stronger bonds among facilities.

This year, MacDonald has seen a need to expand training budgets.

“We are increasing our tuition refund program from up to US\$1,500 to US\$5,000 for job-related degree pursuits. While this is a global program, it has been traditionally most heavily used by our US employees. One of our goals for the coming year is

Quality Of Life Key To Singaporean Manufacturing

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

increasing participation in other facilities. We've also increased our overall training budget by 5 percent for the next fiscal year to better support internal training initiatives," said MacDonald.

OSI is also a company with great cultural diversity; however, they've found a way to harness regional pride in their quality program. Indonesians have a reputation for being excellent craftsmen. The Quality Steering Committee in the Indonesia facility chose to emphasize this point in their quality improvement initiatives by linking the positive reputation of Indonesia for craftsmanship to product quality.

In terms of future initiatives, MacDonald indicated that OSI was looking at expanding volunteer community service activities. The Company has actively provided disaster relief support when natural disasters struck areas near their plants. At a corporate level, MacDonald would like to see ongoing volunteer community service become a standard activity in all communities.

The Common Thread

Workplace quality of life is as important in Asia as it is in the U.S. However, the multinational nature of many businesses drives greater variation in program offerings and a need to understand the specialized needs of each workplace. The common thread in all these companies' approaches appears to be a combination of respect for individual workers and cultivation of strong team spirit.

Source URL (retrieved on 11/24/2014 - 11:37am):

http://www.impomag.com/articles/2010/08/quality-life-key-singaporean-manufacturing?qt-most_popular=0