

CONVERSATIONS

A DRIVING FORCE FOR HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

On 21 January, about 100 business leaders and human resource professionals from across Singapore convened at the Human Capital Partnership – Singapore Press Holdings (HCP-SPH) Forum to find out more about ways to engage and invest in employees.

Human Capital Partnership - Singapore Press Holdings Forum

Employee engagement in today's landscape: Strategies to **Attract** and **Retain Talent**

21 January 2019



Organisations of today are becoming more aware of the importance of the energy, commitment and engagement of its people to thrive in the ever-evolving business landscape. To help companies in Singapore better understand the importance of employee engagement and the impact it has on business strategies, the Human Capital Partnership Programme (HCP) Office, together with Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), organised the HCP-SPH Forum with the theme "Employee Engagement in Today's Landscape: Strategies to Attract and Retain Talent". Led by Minister of State for National Development and Manpower, Mr Zaqy Mohamad, the four panellists were:

- **Ms Audrey Cheong**, Managing Director at Federal Express Singapore;
- **Ms Rebecca Chew**, Deputy Managing Partner at Rajah & Tann;
- **Mr Chia Yoong Hui**, Chairman and Chief Executive at Ascenz Solutions;
- **Mr Sean Tan**, Principal and Consulting Services Leader at Mercer Singapore.

(Federal Express Singapore, Rajah & Tann and Ascenz Solutions are HCPartners.)

The panellists shared the importance of employee engagement, as well as reasons to invest in human capital and how such investments affect employee engagement and talent retention. They also discussed recent challenges in employee engagement and shed light on ways to build a more engaged workforce.

Setting the stage for the discussion, Mr Sean Tan shared three areas that companies can focus on to enhance their employee engagement practices, namely:

- strong organisational cultures and core values;
- active leadership participation in employee engagement; and

• robust talent development practices.

Embarking on the topic of engaging employees through cultures and values, Ms Rebecca Chew recounted a personal experience from how she witnessed Rajah & Tann's growth from a small law firm to one of Southeast Asia's largest law firms today. She also shared about how she was drawn to the company's corporate philosophy of "Our People" when she came on board over two decades ago.

"I used to tell people that Rajah & Tann was a kampong firm. I joined the company because I was subscribed to its values - that kampong atmosphere. Even back then, the then-Managing Partner had always emphasised that Rajah & Tann was a family firm that prioritised taking care of its people."

The company's efforts in upholding its people-centric philosophy have paid off. Earlier this year, it achieved a 100% employment engagement rate, and its efforts to further improve employee engagement are still going strong.

Mr Chia Yoong Hui also used the kampong analogy to describe the culture in his organisation.

"I started a kampong, and I am now the kampong head," he quipped, as he shared how he built Ascenz Solutions from a two-man team 11 years ago into a 40-man strong company today. To him, engagement with and amongst employees is key in keeping the "kampong spirit" at Ascenz strong.

"Engagement has been in our DNA from Day 1. I started the company by encouraging family and friends to come on board. Since then, my core value has always been centred around building a family environment," he added.

Mr Chia also believes that his employees are his organisation's key assets, and at the end of the day, they are the ones who run the business.

“Employers need to step up in order to attract and retain talent. It is about putting people the centre of everything that we do.”

- Mr Zaqy Mohamad, Minister of State for National Development and Manpower

Ms Audrey Cheong concurred that employees are the key to an organisation's success, and she shared how FedEx's strong talent development practices have contributed to its global success.

"FedEx thrives on its "People-Service-Profit" philosophy. This means that people are our greatest assets. We invest in them so that they will provide the best service to our customers and that, in turn, generates profits. And these profits go back into investing in the company and into our people," she explained.

Hear From Our Participant
"Talent retention and employee engagement have been and will continue to be challenges to the business. One takeaway I brought home from the forum is that there is no one-size-fits-all secret formula and no short-cut to success in these aspects; companies need to consistently invest in talent retention and employee engagement."

- Ms Christina Lee, Vice President, Human Resources, Singapore Aero Engine Services Pte Ltd

HAPPY WORKERS, HIGH RETURNS

Federal Express Singapore thrives on a people-first philosophy - one that has delivered excellent returns for the company and its people. See how this courier services giant is building an engaged and high-performing workforce.

Mr Mohamed Feroz Kassim, a courier at Federal Express Singapore (FedEx), has an aspiration. **"I want to work at a supervisory level one day, so that I can have a higher pay and provide a better life for my family,"** he says.

At FedEx, this is a highly achievable goal, thanks to the organisation's corporate philosophy - one that has led to its win at the Tripartite Alliance Award 2018.

"All of us at FedEx follow a 'People-Service-Profit (P-S-P) philosophy'. We believe in taking care of our people so that they will, in turn, deliver impeccable service to our customers, who will reward us with the profits necessary to secure our future," explains Ms Audrey Cheong, Managing Director of Federal Express Singapore.

One of the ways FedEx takes care of its people is through fostering the spirit of continuous learning. For example, employees who wish to pursue higher formal education can benefit from the Tuition Assistance Programme, with FedEx covering some of the learning expenses. As a result, Mr Kassim is currently one step closer to his goal as he pursues a company-subsidised Diploma in Logistics & Supply Chain Management Programme at the Singapore Institute of Materials Management.

Upon graduation, Mr Kassim will be better able to benefit from FedEx career progression pathways, specifically the Job Change Application (JCA) Process. Explaining the JCA Process, Ms Cheong says, **"We are committed to filling open positions, whenever possible, with qualified internal candidates. Our employees from any department can apply for any job in the company, as long as they have the requisite skills."**



Mr Mohamed Feroz Kassim with his supervisor Mr Shannon Choo at their workplace

The organisation has in place another form of promotion - from a non-management to management role - through its Advance into Management (AIM) Programme. This programme is designed to develop and prepare interested employees to enter and succeed in management roles. Mr Kassim's supervisor, Mr Shannon Choo, is one employee who has benefited from the AIM programme. Mr Choo, who joined the organisation as an Account Executive in 2015, was promoted to an Operations Manager in 2017.

AN ORGANISATION THAT LISTENS
Besides its extensive development opportunities, another FedEx practice that stands out for Mr Kassim is its open-door policy.

"At FedEx, I feel appreciated and important, and I am happy to come to work every day. It's like working with family. If I encounter any problems, I can approach my manager or even senior manager - they are always open to listening to me and taking action," he says.

This open-door culture is evident across FedEx. The organisation holds a series of regular engagement sessions with its employees. There are monthly feedback sessions, regular supervisor-to-employee one-on-one sessions, as well as an annual employment engagement survey that has seen high participation rates over the years.

FedEx has a wide range of schemes to recognise and reward exemplary employees. These rewards, usually in the forms of awards, cash incentives or letters of appreciation, are given at both regional and local levels. Mr Kassim is an example of a proud recipient of the organisation's Bravo Zulu Award which recognises employees who exhibit exemplary performance above and beyond their regular job scopes.

"Our reward systems are a significant part of our culture at FedEx, and attest to the importance we attach to recognising our people for going above and beyond to deliver an outstanding customer experience," explains Ms Cheong.

CHANGES TO THE EMPLOYMENT ACT

The Employment Act (EA) has been amended in consideration of the changing workforce profile, employment and dispute resolution landscape. Effective from 1 April 2019, the changes seek to balance the interest of both employers and employees in three key areas - better protection for more employees, greater business flexibility and enhanced dispute resolution.

	CURRENT EMPLOYMENT ACT	ENHANCED EMPLOYMENT ACT (FROM 1 APRIL 2019)
 Protection for Managers and Executives (M&Es) earning >\$4,500 per month	Core provisions of the EA cover all employees except M&Es earning over \$4,500 per month.	All employees, including M&Es earning over \$4,500/month, will be covered for core provisions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum periods of paid annual leave • Paid public holidays • Paid sick leave • Timely payment of salary • Protection against wrongful dismissal
 Work Hours Overtime Pay and Rest Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional protection on hours for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workmen earning up to \$4,500 per month - Non-workmen earning up to \$2,500 per month • Salary cap for overtime payable to non-workmen: \$2,250. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional protection on hours for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workmen earning up to \$4,500 per month - Non-workmen earning up to \$2,600 per month • Salary cap for overtime to non-workmen: \$2,600.
 Sick Leave	Employers are only required to recognise medical certificates issued by Government or company-approved doctors.	All medical certificates issued by any registered doctor and dentist must be recognised.
 Salary Deduction	Employees can make salary deductions only under certain conditions stipulated in the EA.	Salary deductions can take place if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is written consent from the employee; and • Employee is allowed to withdraw consent at any time without penalty
 Work on Public Holidays	Employers can offer time-off to M&Es earning up to \$4,500/month.	Employers can offer time-off to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All M&Es • Workmen earning above \$4,500/month • Non-workmen earning above \$2,600/month
 Dispute Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two avenues for dispute resolution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wrongful dismissal claims: Minister for Manpower - Salary-related claims: Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management/ Employment Claims Tribunals • Appeals against wrongful dismissal: M&Es can seek help if they have served the employers for at least 12 months. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-stop service for dispute resolution: Both wrongful dismissal and salary-related claims will be heard at the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management/ Employment Claims Tribunals. • Appeals against wrongful dismissal: M&Es can seek help if they have served the employers for at least six months.

For more information, please visit the **Ministry of Manpower's** website.