

Strategies for sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs

"SMEs continuously support economic development and stabilize society," stated Director Guann-Jyh Lee, Small and Medium Enterprise Administration, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Republic of China (ROC), the host country of the APO workshop on the SME Management Model: Strategies for Sustainable Growth and Competitiveness, 2–6 November 2009. In his presentation, Dr. Lee, a workshop resource speaker, emphasized the importance of governmental support for SME development in the context of national economic development. Dr. Lee's assertion was echoed by Managing Director and Principal Consultant George Wong, Hoclink Systems and Service Pte. Ltd., Singapore, who focused on the role of SMEs in the economic development of Singapore. However, they stressed that SMEs should also help themselves. "SMEs must upgrade their operations and broaden their customer base and market reach," noted Wong.

During the workshop, SME owners, entrepreneurs, government officials, and NPO consultants involved in SME development examined global and regional best practices of SME management. Senior Advisor for Ford Japan Limited Katsuhiko Satoh, a Japanese expert, introduced the unique management policies of Sony, including its "no degree required" hiring policy. Sony started out in 1946 as an SME and in its early years one policy was to remain small and flexible, advance technologically, and grow in areas too small for large enterprises to enter. Satoh encouraged SMEs to use their small size to their advantage.

Participants also learned of the efforts that Ingress Corporate Berhad, a Malaysian automobile component manufacturer, had made to achieve quality improvement, continuous improvement, human resources development, and adoption of best practices for excellence. In his presentation, Senior General Manager Jamaludin Bin Maarof explained that, "Attaining excellence is a journey. We should focus more on people, value, and communication."



At a local SME bakery, White-Wood-House Foods, Co., Ltd.

Each session promoted the exchange of ideas on how to identify and formulate effective sustainable development strategies for SMEs. Those interactions among resource speakers and participants resulted in a list of recommendations in the four most important areas for SMEs: human resources management; marketing; finance; and operations (R&D and production). They identified critical success factors within each area and established strategies for developing those factors. "Here we can see the key issues in each topic clearly listed and how to put in place a strategy to overcome these issues. It is very useful for me, because these are based on the real-life situations experienced by the participants," commented President Ong Tee Gee, Zamria Sdn. Bhd., a Malaysian manufacturer of metal components. 