

Competitiveness building of ASEAN SMEs through productivity and quality improvement

The training course on Productivity and Quality Management for ASEAN SME Competitiveness Building was organized with the sponsorship of the ASEAN Foundation in Singapore, 25 September–14 October. The Singapore Productivity Association (SPA), a spin-off of SPRING, implemented the course. Twenty-one participants from nine ASEAN member countries (excluding Singapore) attended.

The objectives were to: 1) train participants in the use of specific productivity and quality tools and methodologies to enhance operational productivity and quality; 2) increase the competitiveness of SMEs by identifying operational deficiencies, taking remedial actions, and improving profitability; and 3) understand the conditions and competencies needed to drive organizational excellence.

The course was based on the Productivity and Quality Management course in the Management Competencies for SMEs series offered to managers of private enterprises by the SPA. It consisted of presentations by four resource persons from Singapore and one from Japan and three company visits. The topics covered by the resource persons were: Understanding productivity and quality; Total quality management I and II; Cost improvement through 5S and 7W; Benchmarking; Quality control techniques I and II; Work study I, II, and III; Quality circles: sustenance; Total productive maintenance; and Corporate performance assessment—balanced scorecard. The resource persons had worked together before, and thus coordination among them was excellent. They kept the sessions lively by using videos, case studies, exercises, guided short discussions, games, and other facilitation methods.

The participants visited the National Library, Housing and Development Board (HDB), and Jason Electronics, all winners of the Singapore Quality Award. The new National Library building opened in 2005 and features a unique design. One wing is modern but maintains the conventional function of a library. The other wing provides spaces to create new knowledge through less conventional learning activities such as team-building workshops. The main theme of the National Library is “innovation” and the participants were able to feel and experience it during the visit.

The HDB has been providing public housing at affordable prices since 1960. The presentation given at the site visit described how it manages productivity and quality



Jason Electronics demonstrated its 5S procedures to participants

strategically. The participants had also a chance to visit the HDB Gallery exhibiting how life in Singapore has changed and the evolving role of the HDB. It has undergone a transformation from a simple shelter provider to a type of community development organizer.

Jason Electronics is a small company with about 110 staff located in the Pantech Industrial Complex, and its main business is the repair and maintenance of telecommunications equipment of ships anchored in Singapore's port. Since the company is a niche-market venture with an expanding business, staff motivation is high. A presentation was given on Jason Electronics' kaizen project developed after staff had visited a Toyota Motor plant in Aichi prefecture, Japan.

The three-week training course was attended by participants from government, private enterprises, NPOs, and academia from ASEAN. This mixture was appreciated by some since it provided an opportunity to understand the varying realities of different positions. Some participants, on the other hand, commented that more focused training contents should have been provided for a more homogeneous group. It is a challenge for the APO to devise courses that provide sufficient knowledge and information without undermining the experience-sharing format of its projects. 