



In their own words: APO success stories


Academic reports on how to improve productivity, quality, and competitiveness are valuable resources. However, it can be time-consuming to stay abreast of the numerous scholarly publications and difficult and/or expensive to gain access to them in a timely manner. Such reports also generally do not convey the drama, doubts, and difficulties involved in starting and sustaining productivity initiatives. The APO is happy to announce a new quarterly series debuting on its website called Success Stories (apo-tokyo.org/people/success_stories/). This feature is another result of the Demonstration Companies Program conducted since 1996 and benefiting some 70 SMEs so far. While the multiplier effects from demonstration companies have been considerable at the national level, Success Stories on the website will reach a much wider audience.

A professional team is assigned to document the outcomes of productivity and quality campaigns undertaken in demonstration companies, but care is taken to ensure that the stories are told in the words and from the perspective of those involved. They are related with wit and warmth, accompanied by numerous before-and-after photos and a wealth of information on market share, sales, costs, and savings. These are honest accounts of productivity journeys, with frank descriptions of problems overcome, sometimes in surprising ways. Some SMEs utilized familiar productivity tools in unusual situations; others gained insights into culture-bound thinking that hindered productivity increases.

The first success story focuses on PT. Sarandi Karya Nugraha (PTSKN), a leading manufacturer of hospital furnishings in Indonesia. Founder Isep Gojali recognized that 5S could turn the company around after a sales dip of 10% between 2012 and 2013. PTSKN employees initially thought that he was “trying to fix something that wasn’t broken.” “There was a high level of disagreement and resistance among them,” he recalled. “The first stage of 5S was extremely difficult as the employees had no idea what 5S was about.” How that resistance was overcome and improvements achieved makes compelling reading.



PTSKN employees in their safe, clean, light, uncluttered work environment. Note the color coordination of the uniforms and factory furnishings.

While the focus of the Success Stories series is on results achieved in SMEs, many lessons are applicable to larger enterprises, especially in the areas of negotiating resistance to change, the need for employee involvement, and fair sharing of the gains achieved. No success story will be specifically applicable to all enterprises in APO members given their differing stages of development and rich cultural diversity. Each story, however, paints a true-life picture of grappling with productivity issues, which can serve as an inspiration to all. 

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