Spearheading transformation in the semiconductor industry

Fermlincall Singapore has established itself as one of the leading companies in the industry, enjoying year-on-year growth of 29 per cent over the past five years, by Fabiana Png on The Business Times, 23 October 2018

The journey of Fermlincall Singapore began when general manager Sam Chew Wah set sights on Singapore’s rising institutional support for SMEs. Recognising that he could tap into a strong talent pool in Singapore’s growing knowledge economy, he took a leap of faith and left his stable job as a wafer testing engineer. The result was a German-Singaporean joint-venture that provides semiconductor parts to various companies in the Asia-Pacific semiconductor industry, which he said had potential for significant growth.

Since then, Fermlincall Singapore has established itself as one of the leading companies in the industry, enjoying year-on-year growth of 29 per cent over the past five years. In 2017, it marked a milestone when it opened its Digital Manufacturing Facility in Manufac—turing—a project set to transform its production capacity and introduce integrated business processes through productivity improvements by up to 15 per cent.

Daring to change
Fermlincall Singapore’s success can largely be attributed to its vision of changing traditional practices in the industry.

While Fermlincall Singapore had embarked on several large projects such as its Manufac—turing facility, several leadership projects had seen a reduction in growth of 29 per cent over the past five years. It developing a reputation as an industry leader in the semiconductor transformation.

As Sam says: “Transformation does not happen overnight. It must be planned, implemented, and sustained.” He says that the industry was initially human. “We saw that automation could help significantly improve lead times.”

To work in collaboration with research facilities such as SMITech, a research institute under A*STAR, Fermlincall Singapore introduced a machine-planning system known as Manufacturing Control Tower (MCT) to improve customer satisfaction. Utilising the flexibility of a dedicated workforce to use their time to perfection, the company has created a smart and skilled workforce rather than using the traditional model of using machines to perform their tasks.

The automated systems give employees time to update the status of orders via a visual and intuitive interface, helping to boost efficiency as employees are able to focus on more pressing orders. This enables employees to prioritise tasks better and enhance customer-service levels through better communication.

In the meantime, Fermlincall Singapore has implemented the automated Application and Maintenance of Processes (AMP) solution provided by Autonomics, an AI tool that offers step-by-step, video- and text-based training on the most frequent maintenance procedures.

Bringing people on board
These immense conveniences and efficiency due customer requests are immediately noticed in the system, reducing human errors due to lag time in saving the information. It also allows staff to task staff when contacting onsite customers for issues.

Human capital is one of the most important contributors to a company’s success. In order to be a change agent, said Sam, “there has to be a culture of change. One of the most important challenges was the mindset of the employees to embrace the change.”

One of the major challenges is the initial phase of automation was met with resistance from its employees. To ease the transition, employees were encouraged to enroll in training, sending their technicians for skills development courses to better work manual with automation.

The company also set up an on-the-job coaching system to help them become supervisors and share their expertise with newcomers.

“We communicated our direction and goals clearly to the employees and showed them the benefits of transitioning into automation,” says Sam. “Once they saw the benefits clearly, everyone was on board.”

General manager Sam Chew Wah

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Another aspect that Fermlincall Singapore is taking into its culture is promoting the well-being of the employees. Providing employees with the opportunity to improve their health and wellness is a focus of the company. "We believe in investing in our employees, and it shows in their results and performance. For example, an in-house wellness program has been rolled out to improve overall health and well-being. Employees are encouraged to take breaks at the office pantry which affords recreational activities such as table football and refreshments for employees to mingle and exchange ideas.

Fermlincall Singapore’s strategy is to be agile in response to the ever-changing market conditions. "We have set up an internal delivery group that focuses on delivering products and services faster than competitors. This has helped us in providing better service to our customers and keeping our competitive edge in the market."

Fermlincall Singapore has also expanded its footprint in the US and Europe, providing services to customers in those regions. "We are constantly looking for opportunities to expand further and make our mark in the global semiconductor industry."