

# Intac banks on collaborative culture

Its collegial environment and focus on staff welfare have seen remarkable growth

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**S**TEP into Intac Systems Solution Pte Ltd and you will be greeted with a lively and informal atmosphere. The open concept allows employees to communicate and interact while seated at their desks. Tan Kooi Jin, executive chairman and founder of Intac, can sometimes be heard asking for updates on certain issues from across the room. The conversation is casual, polite and professional. This is the very culture that Mr Tan wishes to create in Intac – a collaborative, interactive and transparent culture that revolves around the three core values of Intac – respect, honesty and hard work.

Established in 2006, Intac Systems Solution Pte Ltd has grown from a small sole proprietorship providing air-conditioning services into a one-stop integrated building service solutions provider with a current order book of over S\$200 million. Its remarkable growth has earned it numerous awards including the Singapore SME 500 Company Award in 2010, Singapore SME 1000 Company Award in 2012, 2014 and 2015, the Fastest Growing 50 Award in 2014 and the Enterprise 50 Award in 2014 and 2015.

The success of creating the “Intac” culture is supported by a rather flat organisation structure. Its choice of structure can be attributed to three factors.

Firstly, Mr Tan’s belief in banding employees to work hard together to improve Intac’s bottom line thereby maximising their take-home pay transcends job titles. He wishes for his employees to see past their job titles to accord the same level of respect to

one another and to actively discuss and communicate effectively within and across departments. In addition, the views and opinions of every employee are valued in the company’s decision-making process. This serves to empower them to increase their participation rate.

Secondly, the nature of the industry. The acceptance of a construction project requires employees to work as a team to meet the tight schedule rather than competing among one another like salesmen often do. As such, a collaborative culture is often preferred over a competitive one in the interest of maintaining a strong team spirit.

Lastly, Mr Tan has firmly stated Intac’s preference for a large project over a few small ones to better manage its manpower and earn higher profit margins. These large projects often involve cross departments’ collaboration where efficient communication and coordination among departments become critical for successful project completion. “I do not wish to see my department heads just reporting to me. I want them to communicate with each other to facilitate better coordination especially during a joint department project,” he said.

In order to foster a culture of open communication to facilitate collaboration and active discussion, employees must first be respectful towards one another. This includes being respectful of the differing views and opinions of others regardless of their position within the company. He believes that trust is built upon the respect people have for another. This allows for effective teams to be built over time.

However, respect alone is not

enough. Effective teams can only be built when all of its three values are held in high regard. Apart from Mr Tan’s expectation for his employees to be respectful, he also expects his employees to be honest when voicing their opinions and to be hardworking. Intac manages this expectation through establishing a mutual understanding that their hard work and dedication would be duly rewarded.

According to Mr Tan, up to 50 per cent of Intac’s profits are given out in the form of bonuses, payments for social events and other benefits in recognition of the employees’ efforts.

“I believe that this is a cycle. Only by feeding your people well, will you be able to retain the best in order for Intac to prosper,” said Mr Tan.

Apart from ensuring his employees are adequately compensated, Mr Tan emphasises the need for a friendly and non-competitive environment that is conducive to creating a collaborative culture.

The company organises annual company retreats for all its employees to foster stronger bonds amongst them. Mr Tan is also constantly thinking of ways to improve his employees’ welfare. This prompted him to work with a group of NUS Business students to assess his employees’ satisfaction and to look into areas of improvements. Some of the suggestions made have been implemented, for example hosting more frequent company social events.

Another key element to maintaining a committed and hardworking workforce is to provide opportunities for them to grow. A prime example of how these courses have availed promotional opportunities for its employee is Henry Khong, who started



**Tan Kooi Jin, executive chairman and founder of Intac Systems Solution, emphasises team building over individuals competing against one another in the workplace.**

out as a project executive but is now Project Director. Mr Tan noted that his employees are self-motivated and are often on the lookout for new courses that they believe to be beneficial to their work.

Despite the various measures in place, Mr Tan noted that the culture can be easily broken if the “wrong” people are recruited. Consequently, he pays close attention to the recruitment process. In addition, he personally monitors and observes new employees’ behaviour at work for the first few months. “I will not hesitate to fire employees who are destructive to Intac’s culture after several warnings,” he adds.

The building of a strong, committed and dedicated workforce has allowed Mr Tan to afford his department heads greater autonomy. He would set the goals and schedule for each department heads after much discussion with them before giving them the freedom to coordinate with their teams and collaboratively decide on the best way to achieve the target. “If you use a man, you need to trust the man to be able to do his job,” Mr Tan said. However, he is quick to make the distinction between trusting and blindly trusting an employee. He continues to actively monitor staff progress in order to keep them accountable for their work.

The choice of a flat organisation structure is perhaps a good fit for Intac given its needs. However, an unavoidable pitfall of this structure is accountability. Intac tackles this by practising transparency and maintaining open and timely communication. All company emails, with the exception of finance-related emails, are sent and received through a common email account. This allows for mutual

accountability as all employees are kept in the loop of the progress and have access to the same information.

In addition, Intac has tapped on the use of smartphone technologies, specifically WhatsApp for effective communication. Each WhatsApp chat group is set up for each project and is accessible by only Mr Tan and the employees involved. The update on daily work progress in the chat group substitutes for the need for face-to-face meetings at the head office which is often inefficient – given that the employees are mainly at the work site.

While there is no written policy on how this communication system would work, it has nonetheless worked beautifully for Intac due to two key factors.

Firstly, Intac has managed to successfully create a culture where employees are dedicated and responsible. Secondly, Mr Tan goes down to the construction sites frequently to ensure that what is reported in the chatgroup coincides with the actual progress. This communication system resolves both the problem of accountability and allows for efficient communication which is crucial for its success as last-minute changes to project requirement is a common challenge in this industry.

Going forward, Mr Tan is exploring the possibility of expanding into other South-east Asia countries. One of the countries on his list is the Philippines, as most of his employees are Filipinos. “I want them to have the chance to work closer to home and be with their families,” he explained.

The effort he has put forth for his people may very well explain why the vast majority of his employees continue to work with Intac since its founding and remain dedicated and committed to taking Intac to greater heights.

■ The writers are students from NUS Business School.



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