

ENTERPRISE 50

Offering total solutions

Total Facility Engineering builds up capabilities to be a one-stop shop for clients. **BY EVANGELINE LIM, KAMALPREET KAUR D/O ARWINDERJIT SINGH AND SITO WYNICE**

WHEN Ng Cheng Chuan set up Total Facility Engineering Pte Ltd (TFE) in 2013, he knew he wanted the company to neither be the biggest dog in the yard nor the smallest.

Rather, the facility engineering solutions provider would find its niche in between—offering services that small local contractors do not, while representing a more competitive option than large multinational companies (MNCs).

Now, TFE provides precisely what its name suggests: total facility engineering solutions, which smaller contractors might not have the necessary capability or capacity to undertake.

With this strategic direction, and the continual seizing of opportunities, TFE has grown from its origins as a specialised sub-contractor to a main contractor today.

Just 2 years after incorporation, it achieved ISO and Occupational Health and Safety Series certifications.

And in both 2019 and 2020, TFE received the Enterprise 50 (E50) award.

Says Ng, who is also the company's director: "Together with a diligent and committed team, we have been very fortunate to have the enduring support of our network of contacts and clients and management's foresight that have helped to open up opportunities for us to grow exponentially in the last 8 years."

Growth and challenges

TFE started off as a sub-contractor providing piping solutions in the semiconductor industry, with projects that were mainly small scale.

But it built up its engineering capabilities until it was capable of delivering not just specific solutions, but complete ones.

TFE's staff strength has grown from just 6 employees to 33 today.

It now offers a wide range of high value-added services, including clean room solutions; small to middle-sized mechanical, electrical and process turnkey systems; air

conditioning and mechanical ventilation systems; and energy management systems.

This suite of capabilities allows TFE to fulfil multi-disciplinary projects, securing a competitive edge over its competitors.

Asked how he feels about the firm's achievements, Ng replies: "I am quite happy and blessed. I didn't expect it to grow at this rate."

Emphasising the importance of persisting in the face of adversity, he sees a never-give-up attitude as crucial for a business' survival and growth.

TFE itself has faced stiff competition and numerous challenges, including that of finding the right talent. As a small and medium-sized enterprise, it often finds itself competing with larger corporations to attract talent.

More recently, TFE's resilience was put to the test in the Covid-19 pandemic, on various fronts,

The uncertainty and constantly-changing landscape made it difficult to strategise and commit to new projects.

The large outflow of migrant workers caused a manpower shortage and a rise in labour costs.

Pandemic-fuelled supply chain disruptions resulted in higher material prices.

As most of TFE's work involves employees performing installation works on-site for customers, work-from-home was almost impossible.

Furthermore, a significant portion of TFE's employees are migrant workers living in dormitories. With the Covid-19 outbreak in migrant worker dormitories, as well as the "circuit breaker" restrictions imposed in April 2020, TFE had to endure 6 months in 2020 with no operations.

In these unprecedented times, TFE has opted to be conservative in its business operations and choice of projects.

Though the situation slowly improved in 2021, TFE remains prudent and cautious as it adapts to operations in the new normal.

Ng attributes much of the firm's success to loyal customers who have supported and remained with the company despite the pan-

demia, and with whom the firm has built strong relationships.

The firm remains focused on delivering value to customers, striving to meet their constantly-changing needs by continuously improving its capabilities.

It also aims to do well by its employees. Apart from being "outcome-oriented", says Ng, "we also try to inculcate a learning culture by providing our employees with a conducive learning environment and empower them to take on more leadership roles and make decisions independently".

In project teams, employees are empowered to take on leadership roles and are given opportunities to make decisions independently.

And the firm has a clear succession plan: potential leaders have been identified among current employees and are rotated through various roles and functions.

New directions

In its operations, too, TFE is planning for the future. The firm is in the middle of digitising its work processes under Singapore's Smart Nation initiative.

It is working with Singapore Polytechnic on converting 3D scans to Building Information Modelling models: digital visualisations of projects which also contain detailed data.

As part of its Design for Manufacturing and Assembly drive, TFE is adopting modularisation on a larger scale. This building method allows for a shorter construction period and improved workmanship, with less need for manpower.

Meanwhile, the acquisition of capabilities continues. Ng hopes to further enlarge TFE's offerings to truly fulfil its role as a one-stop total solution provider.

"We are always looking at the trend and improving ourselves: listening to what customers want, and staying on trend," he says.

Prior to Covid-19, TFE's strategy was focused on expanding its already successful businesses and broadening its client base.

The pandemic disrupted its plans. But TFE quickly adapted, scrutinising other sectors for op-



portunities. With such active exploration, it has wasted no time in venturing into new industries.

One such area is food sustainability. Land scarcity has pushed Singapore to become a global leader in urban agriculture, with rooftop gardens and vertical farms, and TFE is keen to be part of this story.

"We want to be part of the Singapore Food Agency's '30 by 30' plan by getting involved in projects to expand Singapore's food self-production level to buffer us from food supply disruptions," says Ng, referring to Singapore's goal of producing 30 per cent of its nutritional needs locally by 2030.

TFE is thus working on potential projects that involve constructing

facilities for vertical farming. It also hopes to get involved in another of Singapore's latest food-tech endeavours: to become a hub for alternative protein.

As new industries emerge, with new demands for plants and equipment, the scope of what it means to offer total facility engineering solutions will expand. True to its name, TFE will keep growing its capabilities, so it can continue to deliver.

PHOTO: TOTAL FACILITY ENGINEERING

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