

Building on its flexibility

Builders Alliance stands out among its competitors with its willingness to challenge tradition

By Bryant Chan

Perhaps ironically for an industry associated with solidity and rigidity, the key to Builders Alliance's success is in its flexibility.

Not in terms of the solidity of its construction projects, of course – a slew of client testimonials and positively-rated projects by the company speak for its dedication to quality and safety – but rather in terms of its workplace culture.

The industry's fixation on rigid working hours negatively affects quality of life, explains Mr Lim Meng Teck, managing director of Builders Alliance.

For nine years, Builders Alliance was much the same. But in 2013, Mr Lim noticed staff morale was at an all-time low – employees merely showed up to work to clock their requisite hours. Unnecessary paperwork slowed progress to a crawl.

"Nobody could show their full potential because they were being controlled too regimentally," Mr Lim recalls. "So no one wanted to do anything beyond their assigned work."

So he and his management team decided to build a new work culture from the ground-up. An emphasis was placed on performance

incentives, as well as the need to upskill and diversify skill sets for both executive and management personnel.

Staff presence in the office was no longer mandated – so long as goals were met, staff were allowed to work from anywhere.

To facilitate this, all employees were made to undergo training in the use of mobile computing systems and familiarise them with cloud-based file-sharing processes.

This cloud-based storage system keeps physical paperwork to an absolute minimum, something unthinkable to most industry stalwarts.

To drive the point home, a quick look around Builders Alliance's Sungei Kadut premises reveals a lack of the filing cabinets that are a common sight in most offices.

"Paperwork is inefficient," Mr Lim says simply. "It takes up lots of space and is hard for elderly staff and clients to read."

So while more traditional construction companies struggled to reorient business practices in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Builders Alliance's decentralised approach meant business as usual, with management staff simply shifting operations to their homes.

As a result, Builders Alliance has managed to not only weather



Embracing unconventional working cultures in a conventional industry has helped Builders Alliance thrive. (From left: Operation director Peter Tay, managing director Lim Meng Teck and project director Kung Teck Ling). PHOTO: TED CHEN

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Mr Lim Meng Teck, managing director of Builders Alliance

the impact of the pandemic, but even flourish. It was able to resume construction activities almost immediately post-circuit breaker, thanks to the necessary documentation being completed entirely off-site.

Furthermore, while employees in other companies may face the threat of retrenchment, Builders Alliance continues to comfortably employ over 100 staff. Its revenue also jumped 100 per cent from 2017 to 2019.

Not only did the company manage to avoid retrenchment during the circuit breaker period, but it also continued to pay all its employees a full salary for two months by digging into its cash reserves.

"We have been operating for 16 years, and 90 per cent of those years have been profitable," says Mr Lim.

"A good company is judged not only by how it rewards its staff during good times, but by how it shows support during bad times," he concludes.

Towards new horizons

Builders Alliance now has its sights set on overseas markets. It has two residential development projects in the pipeline in Perth, Australia.

It is true that a major factor behind Builders Alliance's success is its adaptability, Mr Lim says. But he adds that its commitment to quality is equally important.

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