

Cultivators of Thinkers, Learners and Achievers: BlueTree Education Learning Centre LLP



BlueTree Education Learning Centre is an education centre with the mission to nurture and develop a child in the most conducive environment by stimulating critical thinking. Founded by two experienced teachers who aim to redefine learning, thinking and creativity, the centre's differentiated curriculum caters to the diverse learning styles and needs of its students.

The centre has four branches, located in the Kovan, Bukit Timah and Bedok areas. BlueTree is looking to extend its footprint both locally and overseas, bringing its proprietary brand of teaching to benefit more children. The centre's philosophy, as shown on its website, is, "We want to grow a child to be a thinker, a learner, an achiever", and the curriculum is designed to enable every child to "acquire the core thinking skills of thinking critically, inventively, and reflectively as their foundation for learning".

BlueTree's unique approach to help each student reach his/her potential has not gone unappreciated. In 2015, a year after it began operations, it was conferred the Best Education Centre (Special Needs) Award by Actualise, a one-stop school directory portal.

BlueTree currently employs about 20 staff. Given the nature of its business, people are a key asset and, as the SME maintains its growth trajectory, human resource management (HRM) has become a crucial aspect of its operations. "We needed to strengthen our current HR practices," said co-Founder and Director Jolene Ang and, with this objective in mind, the SME approached the UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute (UOB-SMU AEI) to explore its HRM consultancy services.

A team of student-consultants, supervised by an industry veteran and supported by an Institute manager, undertook the project. The team analysed BlueTree's current HRM practices and provided recommendations to improve them. Under the Institute's enhanced SME Consulting Programme (SCP+), the team went one step further to implement the approved recommendations. This additional service brings even more real and tangible value to the SME, which, like many SMEs, tend towards a lean operation with limited resources.

A critical assessment

"The company's HR structure and framework should be aligned with the speed of expansion," revealed a student-consultant. Through the project, the team aimed to "assist the company in laying a good foundation for its HR functions".

Tapping on their combined knowledge and experience, the student-consultants embarked on an HR maturity diagnosis of BlueTree to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control framework that supports its HRM. Primary research comprised interviews with the two founders, Ms Ang and fellow co-Founder Faith Tan, as well as the administration manager; a review of the centre's HR-related forms, and an examination of its HR documentation and structure. For secondary research, the team sought to better understand Singapore's manpower regulations and industry best practices in critical areas spanning



employment, compensation and benefits, performance management and other associated areas.

The HR maturity diagnosis indicated to the student-consultants the areas they could focus on, to strengthen the SME's HRM. Some of these centred around manpower planning and talent management, compensation and benefits, and succession planning; a few other areas were also marked as areas where they could add the most value. After analysing their findings, the student-consultants proposed an Employee Handbook, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and formalised forms.

Redefining people management

A comprehensive Employee Handbook helps to consolidate and communicate a consistent set of corporate information to all the staff. Developed in consultation with the two founders, and incorporating the most relevant best practices and manpower regulations, the Employee Handbook spells out the things an employee needs to know about the company and its operating procedures. Details pertaining to employment, salaries and allowances, leave benefits and insurance are included, as well as what is expected of the employees and employers in terms of conduct and behaviour. There is also guidance on issues specific to BlueTree, such as security, area cleanliness and grievance resolution.

As the SME grows in size, it will require a more corporate way of doing things. The student-consultants thus developed SOPs and corporate forms in critical areas of concern, drawn from industry best practices and tailored to BlueTree's needs, in consultation with the founders. For example, a "New Employee Onboarding Checklist (for Admin Use)" ensures that new employees receive consistent information regarding the company's resources, policies and processes. A new employee will receive a corresponding "Your Onboarding Programme Checklist" that spells out the information that Admin would share with him/her.

To formalise internal processes are forms such as "Changes in Personal Particulars", "Expenses Claim Form", "Employee Exit Clearance Form", as well as SOPs to perform different tasks. Together, they provide the protocol for the company's various HRM activities, establishing a professional, standardised system that is necessary for better controls and service quality, and which promotes ongoing value, efficiency and compliance.

Achievement unlocked!

According to BlueTree Ms Ang, prior to the SCP+, the SME itself was already exploring ways to formalise its people and corporate practices. The new Employee Handbook, and SOPs and corporate forms will add to, the "foundation for our human resource management". After all, a good Employee Handbook can reinforce the company's vision and mission, and emphasise its corporate culture. As the policies are clearly stated within, it will serve to minimise any potential miscommunication.

Ms Ang complimented the student-consultants for their excellent research skills. She noted that they were "very deliberate about how the handbook should be" and were efficient and professional – "they always did their fact finding first, before presenting the options to us".

On their part, the student-consultants were grateful for the opportunity to work with an SME to solve real-world problems. "This project widened our perspectives and abilities to communicate industry best practices," said a student-consultant. Through the guidance of their Project Advisor Sally Sim, they "learnt frameworks and tactics that can be applied when managing similar projects in the future".

In her role as Project Advisor, Ms Sim said she had placed emphasis on the learning objectives of the students to ensure that they were practising the "right" skills" and gaining appropriate competences and knowledge that they can "flexibly and appropriately use in a variety of contexts in their future working life". Their existing and newfound skills were successfully applied on this project, as evidenced by the positive feedback from the satisfied SME client.



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