

ISSUE 2



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# CONTRACTOR

COVER STORY

## MULTI-GENERATIONAL CONTRACTORS

Setting The Bar

WITH SCAL'S CPAS AND SABS  
ACCREDITATIONS

Cultivating  
Rooted Talent

IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Mind the Mental Health Gap:

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO TO SUPPORT  
EMPLOYEES' MENTAL WELL-BEING

THE



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# Message From the President

**MR NG YEK MENG**  
**PRESIDENT**  
**THE SINGAPORE CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION LTD**

Dear members,

Since the border control measures have been lifted, many migrant workers have gradually returned to Singapore, helping to alleviate the acute labour shortage issue that we faced last year. According to MOM's records, the total number of construction workers in Singapore has already returned to pre-Covid levels. Construction activities continue to gather pace this quarter, but unfortunately, this increase in activity has also seen a rise in the number of worksite fatalities and other safety related incidents. SCAL would like to strongly urge member companies to recognise workplace safety as being of the highest priority even while carrying out work to keep up with project timelines.

In this quarterly newsletter, we highlight one of the major challenges the construction industry is facing – a shortage of young construction professionals. Due to the existing public perception of construction work as dirty, dangerous, and demanding, the industry is unable to attract and retain enough young professionals to keep up with our rate of growth. This has resulted in the construction industry relying on the many foreign engineers to fill in the manpower gaps. This is not sustainable. We need to create a more resilient system by ensuring that the core development of engineers is developed in Singapore for local Singaporeans.

Many of the multi-generational family-owned construction firms are also facing significant challenges in attracting and retaining talent. More and more firms have found that younger generations prefer to work in other industries such as banking and finance, information and technology and other fields that pay better and provide comfortable, air-conditioned office environments. Even for the second or third generations that do join their family-owned construction firms, many of them plan to eventually exit the construction industry and diversify into other sectors. The easiest pathway is often regarded as moving “upstream” to the more lucrative real estate development or asset management businesses.

To reverse the effects of the talent-depleted situation that we currently face in the Built Environment sector, all stakeholders must put in a more concerted effort to improve the working environments and increase the remuneration of their professionals. It is only through competing with other industries on this front that the construction industry will be able to develop a competitive edge and not miss out on hiring talented individuals for the long term.

SCAL is rolling out the Construction Professional Accreditation Scheme (CPAS) and Young Leader Program with the aim of raising the professional standards in the construction industry. We hope that this accreditation scheme validates the professional skillsets of construction professionals and helps to improve their remuneration packages to a level that is comparable to other industries.

**MR NG YEK MENG**  
**PRESIDENT**  
**THE SINGAPORE CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION LTD**

# The Relay Race of Multi-Generational Contractors



Our common conception of a relay race is as follows: the first runner makes the lap and passes the baton to the second runner, who then begins their own lap, and so on. But time wasted in the passing of the baton, even a few seconds, could scupper odds of victory. So, a common strategy in sprint relays is for the second runner to begin to run just as the first approaches: their hands meet in the exchange zone with both of them running, and the baton is passed. Running even as you must pass and receive a baton—the continuity of work, momentum, and inheritance—is something that finds a parallel track in a surprising place: Singapore’s multi-generational contractors. And theirs too is a long and demanding race.

By its history, contracting is an old Singaporean profession ennobled by its contributions to both the old colonial city and the young republic after independence. Many fortunes and many family businesses have risen and fallen in Singaporean contracting—buoyed and sunk by the many tides of building, rebuilding, reclamation, renovation, and repurposing that have followed Singapore’s own circuitous path through different eras, industries, and policies.

Yee Sern Wei, Project Manager at Gin Chia Pte Ltd, was only recently passed the baton of his family’s business. Gin Chia, which started off with Sern Wei’s grandfather and two workers, grew over time to several hundred workers and a specialisation in wet trades. Sern Wei, himself now at the helm, remembers how his upbringing shaped him: “I have to thank my dad for the strict upbringing. From young, dad have asked me to earn things myself and be independent. I have learned the value of money by earning for the items that I wanted. You will learn to manage your time and money this way,” he said, adding, “My dad was a man of few words, but he always said, ‘Raising a son in poverty is an investment in a boy’s life.’”

Seah Kah Howe, Director at Seah Kim Cheok Construction Co. (Pte) Ltd, also recalled his early youth in another Singaporean family-driven contractor. Founded in 1981 by Kah Howe’s grandfather, SKCC began with landed properties before moving onto condos. Growing up in a Buddhist family, Kah Howe remembered how his father emphasised fairness in one’s dealings. “My father spoke about treating people fairly but also being fair and reasonable with subcontractors. He believed in talking things out and negotiating.” And to tie these ideas together, there was always a hallowed place given to discipline.



**MY DAD WAS A MAN OF FEW WORDS, BUT HE ALWAYS SAID, ‘RAISING A SON IN POVERTY IS AN INVESTMENT IN A BOY’S LIFE.’**



**MR YEE SERN WEI**  
PROJECT MANAGER  
GIN CHIA PTE LTD





Both Kah Howe and Sern Wei, born and raised in Singapore, received their higher education in Australia. Both had different experiences there but took an important lesson with them which would be a common cultural shock upon their return. “Australia has a very good work-life balance,” Kah How said, “maybe too good.” Sern Wei seconded this: “Every job is respected there. Construction workers are respected for building homes the way doctors are for medical care.” This was opposed to the long hours and stigma that met them when they returned. As younger professionals in the field, they had seen some of the world and could sense the difficulties of returning but did so for family anyway.

**“YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE INDUSTRY HAVE TO LEARN TO BE HUMBLE, KEEP LEARNING, AND NOT GIVE UP. YOU HAVE TO LEARN FROM SENIORS AND EXPERIENCED PEOPLE. THEY MAY NOT HAVE DEGREES, BUT THEY KNOW HOW TO GET THINGS DONE.”**



**MR SEAH KAH HOWE**  
**DIRECTOR**  
**SEAH KIM CHEOK CONSTRUCTION CO.**  
**(PTE) LTD**  
**(SCAL YOUNG LEADER)**

Coming back was only the first trial they faced, however. There was then the matter of becoming a builder.

“I had to start from the bottom to understand the work,” Sern Wei said, mentioning how his father underlined the importance of mastering the technical, frontline work. Beginning among the workers and supervisors who worked most closely with the actual wet works, and aided by mentors, Sern Wei eventually mastered the labour-intensive trade of his family. “Starting as a worker was tough. It is just like the army.” He recalled with a smile, “You swear, you curse, but then you think back and see that it was quite fun or good.” Kah Howe was similarly placed on a construction site under different mentors and supervisors to learn the ropes.

Having witnessed the ins, outs, ups, and downs of contracting for themselves has granted next generation family business leaders such as Sern Wei and Kah Howe the perspective to view the high tolls young people must pay to enter the industry today. “As a company owner’s son, I had to think and consider hard before deciding to join this business,” Sern Wei shared, “So I can’t imagine how hard it must be for an outsider to enter this sector.” The ever-present age gap, due to the industry’s shortage of younger people, can also be exacting. But like Sern Wei would as well, Kah Howe expressed that these difficulties can be overcome.

“Young people in the industry have to learn to be humble, keep learning, and not give up” Kah Howe believes, “You have to learn from seniors and experienced people. They may not have degrees, but they know how to get things done.” And learning from senior professionals can’t be “instant, like getting an answer from a professor.” It requires building trust through conversation and gradually absorbing the intuition of veterans. This skill with empathetic conversation endowed both Sern Wei and Kah Howe with a knack for harmonising the different trades and stakeholders in their projects and calming crises. These hard lessons—learned from fathers, mentors, brothers, and colleagues—helped Sern Wei and Kah Howe dart forward as they received their baton.

“

**THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MY GENERATION AND MY SON'S," MR. LEE SAID, "I LEARNED JUST BY SEEING MY FATHER DOING THINGS. WHEN HE WOULD COME LATE TO OUR KAMPUNG HOUSE, HE'D SOMETIMES BRING CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS OR EVEN EQUIPMENT SUCH AS CONCRETE MIXERS.**

”

Mr. Lee Kay Chai, an Executive Director at Lian Soon Construction Pte Ltd, is a veteran of the industry, and—having held his baton for over thirty years— knows that some things have changed dramatically for next generation leaders like Sern Wei and Kah Howe and some things have remained the same. For one, Mr. Lee started younger, working general labour with his father during school holidays. “There’s a big difference between my generation and my son’s,” Mr. Lee said, “I learned just by seeing my father doing things. When he would come late to our kampung house, he’d sometimes bring construction materials or even equipment such as concrete mixers.” Seeing construction around him all the time made it a reality more than simply an oddity and sparked a curiosity and eagerness about the industry in the younger Mr. Lee which would buttress his long career. “Unfortunately for youngsters today, they are exposed to so much that construction becomes unattractive.”



**MR LEE KAY CHAI**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**LIAN SOON CONSTRUCTION PTE LTD**  
**(SCAL COUNCIL MEMBER)**

Mr. Lee also knows what it’s like to join at the bottom and work one’s way up through a family business, like Kah Howe or Sern Wei did. “I did the long way.” And what counted in the long way was always grit and passion, which Mr. Lee believes makes all the difference in being a contractor. “Construction has become my hobby. Of course, we feel tired when we have to manage tough decisions, but then there’s satisfaction after doing it.” Mr. Lee often reminds his colleagues to never give up before considering how a problem might be solved. Sern Wei’s father would have agreed, having advised his son that “No matter how difficult, life goes on and nobody waits for you.”



**Grow Studio:** A free application created by Mr Seah Kah Howe and his team to help migrant workers learn English in their native language.

Where the baton has both old and new meet is in technology and improvement—an heirloom that contractors pass to the next generation. Sern Wei, who led a digitalisation initiative when working within the oil and gas sector in Australia, brought that to bear at Gin Chia and closed chronic productivity and information gaps with data-driven performance measurement. Kah Howe recognised a major issue involving communicating with migrant workers, who often haven’t learned English. Many contractors wrongly decide to communicate at a lower level of English and, as a result, communication efficiency for complex tasks suffers. Responding to this, he and his team built a free app (Grow Studio) that helps migrant workers learn English in their native language, whether it be Bengali or Chinese or Sinhala. “Communication across different backgrounds and education levels is needed to get work done and you still have to communicate with foreign workers,” Mr. Lee had said, “They are our hands and legs.”

Mr. Lee retains that building, no matter how much you digitalise or computerise it, will still remain a solidly physical affair and building any structure from scratch will always be the challenging task it has always been. But he is excited for the future of technology because he sees its link with recognition and respect, and so wishes younger members of the industry well in their shaping of that future. “I believe that in the next ten years, this industry should be even better in terms of technology adoption, in terms of how we work, in terms of work-life balance.”

Is there a finish line to the relay race run by Singapore’s multi-generational contractors? What keeps them at it? For Sern Wei, Kah Howe, and Mr. Lee, it was family, a passion for building, and something like a hereditary hardiness. The race will go on, even as fewer and fewer batons are passed within families today, because it is run for its own sake. With every lap, Singapore is built higher and finer by men and women to whom building is not simply trade, profession, and calling—it is an act of love, remembrance, and heritage.

# Setting the Bar with SCAL's Accreditations

This is a tale of two accreditations, set in both the best of times and the worst of times for the construction industry: the best in terms of new advances in technologies, processes, and materials; the worst in terms of challenges from supply chain fragility, economic instability, and environmental degradation.

Recent developments in the industry—from labour tightness and greater scrutiny of quality to sustainable development and the need for continuous improvement—have made the gaps within the industry abundantly clear. These gaps exist at two levels: the micro level with individual professionals and the macro level with individual firms.

With the industry's interests and in alignment with the Construction Industry Transformation Map, the Singapore Contractors Association Limited (SCAL) has rolled out two flagship accreditations specifically: addressing micro level standards with the Construction Professional Accreditation Scheme (CPAS) and macro level ones with the SCAL Accredited Builder Scheme (SABS).

## THE MICRO: CONSTRUCTION PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION SCHEME

Dr. Ho Nyok Yong has had a ringside seat to the last three decades of progress within the Singaporean built environment. Presently Chief Operating Officer at Samwoh Group, Dr. Ho is a former President for three key industry associations: SCAL, the Singapore Concrete Institute, and the Singapore Green Building Council. "I've worked with so many committees that I can't remember," Dr. Ho joked. But from his veteran vantage point, Dr. Ho noticed several deficiencies in the industry just as conversations about technology were picking up.

"There were three main reasons we wanted to look at better professional accreditation," Dr. Ho began to explain. The first reason is the seemingly inexorable talent drain that has sapped the industry for several years. "Normally a lot of graduates will go find greener pastures within five years. We had to find some way of retaining them through recognition and progression in the industry." The second reason is the important task of upskilling. "We needed to find ways to improve skills and have professionals upgrade themselves." Improved productivity from improved skills could also favour talent retention, Dr. Ho added. And finally, the third reason was to standardise accreditation in the industry. "All project stakeholders in the value chain have accreditations except the contractors."

To rise to these three key gaps, SCAL with Dr. Ho's leadership developed the Construction Professional Accreditation Scheme (CPAS) in partnership with Building Construction Authority (BCA) Singapore. CPAS's key features include a seven-point competency framework that balances technical and interpersonal elements of contracting work,

“

WE WANTED A MORE HOMEGROWN ACCREDITED SYSTEM  
SO THAT PROJECTS WILL BE RUN MORE SUCCESSFULLY

”

DR HO NYOK YONG  
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER  
SAMWOH CORPORATION PTE LTD  
SCAL COUNCIL MEMBER



a holistic tiering system for different levels of experience and project size, and a progression system across tiers and competencies with CPD courses. “Singapore has a lot of construction professionals and foreign talents but no unifying standard benchmark for the various professions and trades,” Dr. Ho said, adding that the dominant accreditation systems are either British charters or American certifications. “We wanted a more homegrown accredited system so that projects will be run more successfully.”

A homegrown system is an important point for Singapore, where there are several unique construction industry features. For one, the vast majority of Singaporeans live in dense and high-rise public housing, the demand for which must be met while keeping costs in check and maintenance reliable. For another, the signature projects of the island city state are large-scale public works: airport extensions, highways, retaining wall infrastructure, and the like. “The scale is different and the market needs are different as well so a good standard must match.”

CPAS’s seven core competency framework aims to capture something that is often elusive: the formula of a good constructor. Some may disagree such a formula exists at all, but CPAS succeeds in balancing several tangible and intangible aspects of the building profession.



*Applicants are required to attend a professional interview conducted by the panel of assessors.*

## CPAS’s Seven Core Competencies



The first competency—which carries the greatest weight at 30%—is **Project Planning and Execution**. “This is of utmost importance to any project. A good Project Director or Manager must know how to plan.” This involves budgeting, work sequencing, cross-stakeholder communication, and the perpetual balancing act between costs, quality, and time.



The second competency is **Technical Proficiency**: the know-how behind the planning. This is essential not only to improve safety and productivity outcomes proportionally with project scale but also key for leadership in technological adoption. Per Dr. Ho: “You must know your stuff. You must know digitisation. So that you can troubleshoot and think on your feet.”



The third competency, crucial in light of recent workplace safety concerns across the industry, is **Environmental, Health, and Safety (EHS) Management**. Apart from ensuring projects are as sustainable as possible, ESH involves planning and measures to protect bystanders or residents near projects from noise and dust pollution with adequate communication. EHS also involves risk assessments and contingencies for worker safety.



The fourth competency has to do with **Problem Solving**. “From my experience,” said Dr. Ho, “you go down to the site and there’s always problems from day one. But you have to understand that different projects have different problems, and you must have the ability to analyse and understand while also solving them amicably.”



Competencies five (**Contractual And Legal Management**), six (**People Management And Leadership**), and seven (**Stakeholder Engagement And Communication**) have more to do with the adroit management of people, processes, and information with a human side beyond the fine prints of specifications, drawings, and tenders. “Human relationships are important,” Dr. Ho explained, “The right words at the right time can ensure the success of the project.” These words could be in the heated discussion for a project extension with a client or communicating with residents facing inconveniences from the project.



LEARN MORE ABOUT CPAS AT [WWW.SCAL.COM.SG/ACCREDITATION/CPAS](http://WWW.SCAL.COM.SG/ACCREDITATION/CPAS)

All of these competencies come together and interweave with a multi-tier system to provide a foothold to diverse members of the industry with varying education or experience backgrounds. Ranging from A-Star for the very finest builders to C for beginning professionals, CPAS constructs a ladder that seeks to allow every construction professional to find a rung and have a rung to look forward to—from ambitious project managers just starting out to seasoned builders. This ladder aims to stem the outflow of construction talent while encouraging greater inflow.

The consequence of this is the emergence of a new kind of builder in Singapore: one that is skilled in the management of both people and material, of both the fine print and the big picture, of both the plans and the crises that make plans obsolete. And this new kind of builder stands to profit from increased recognition by both peers and prospects in the industry while continuously improving their capacities and competencies.

## THE MACRO: SCAL ACCREDITED BUILDER SCHEME

Change in the industry, however, must occur at both the individual level and the level of the firm. In a bid to raise and mould performance standards among relatively smaller builders—General Builder License Class 1 & 2 and below as well as specialist builders—to map recent advancements to these important and rising businesses as well, SCAL has established the SCAL Accredited Builder Scheme (SABS) to recognise excellence in construction and provide a benchmark for firms to rise to and a lodestar to guide stakeholders on matters of quality.



**THE BIGGEST APPEAL [OF SABS] IS THE IMPROVEMENT IN ON-SITE QUALITY. WE CAN SOMETIMES BE BLINDED BY QUALITY ON SITE SO IT'S GOOD TO HAVE SOMEONE LIKE THE SABS AUDITOR TO CHECK AND GUIDE YOU.**



Brickford Construction Pte Ltd was recently awarded its own 2-year SABS accreditation and is listed as a SCAL Accredited Builder. Kenneth Chew, Operations Manager at Brickford, mentioned the vital need for firm-level in the construction industry: “There are many contractors out there but not many are qualified to handle proper, serious building. Sometimes we are called in to clean up the mess left behind contractors without know-how or experience.”

Without adequate accreditation, several non-negotiable standards are at risk of becoming dangerously fluid or even optional. These might include lax safety measures around scaffolding or ledge and facade installation or even hazardously messy installation of wiring and piping. Apart from the obvious ill effects of such lower quality work, there is the reputation damage: bad contractors contribute to a bad perception of the construction industry's competence. “SABS is a good move to clean up some of the black sheep,” Kenneth noted.

Brickford transitioned from origins in maintenance and fittings to a GB2 builder focusing on steel structures and wet works with landed houses. It sought to keep its growth momentum going by aiming for a SABS accreditation as well. And in SABS it found a smooth experience with real benefits to its operations. “The whole administrative process was rather quick, and the auditor came down to walk through all the paperwork and regulations,” Kenneth said, “He also recommended additional measures before conducting a quality check on site.”

Having an auditor that could supply valuable prescriptions for improvement was a key expectation of Kenneth before venturing into the SABS process, and he says this expectation was fulfilled. “The biggest appeal [of SABS] is the



**MR KENNETH CHEW**  
**OPERATIONS MANAGER**  
**BRICKFORD CONSTRUCTION PTE LTD**  
**(SABS CERTIFIED BUILDER)**

improvement in on-site quality. We can sometimes be blinded by quality on site so it's good to have someone like the SABS auditor to check and guide you."

One of the most important recommendations from the SABS auditing process was the need for improved documentation at Brickford, which the firm accepted and put in place. "During the audit, the auditor did mention that we can have a write-up on all materials and their usage to share with people on the ground," Kenneth shared, "We now look into material documentation much more." This has positively affected Brickford's detail-oriented QC processes, which involve detailed identification of items, materials, components, and so on. As part of continuous improvement plans, Brickford will also be developing detailed work scopes for every individual to ensure that all workers are extremely familiar with the exact work, materials, and tools involved within their particular scope or trade to ensure consistency in delivery.

The practices that contributed to Brickford's successful SABS accreditation both directly and indirectly affected the firm's ability to successfully attract and retain business even in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. "When all these practices are in place, it gives our clients some sort of confidence," Kenneth said, "Despite the down time of COVID, ex-clients keep referring us to friends and family and projects keep coming in. In 2022 so far, our participation in tenders has doubled compared to last year."

Assessment and auditing, more than simply rewarding or punishing practices, is a collaborative process involving both SCAL and aspiring builders—it is as much about scoring as it is about helping builders build themselves into better organisations at every level. As Kenneth mentioned: "There's a lot of skills and knowledge needed to pull off a construction project. Without the right systems and people in place, it's very tough. And it doesn't matter if the project is small or large, this is still true. A single project milestone can involve thousands of tasks and builders must know every single step and sub step very well."

## IN CONCLUSION....

Taken together, CPAS and SABS move the industry forward by focusing on the trees as well as the forest. Together they bend two key headwinds—sustainability and technology—into tailwinds. For the former, better professionals (with CPAS) and better firms (with SABS) can improve site efficiency, lower material and energy wastage, and better integrate sustainable practices and materials. For the latter, effective professionals (with CPAS) and continuously improving firms (with SABS) will keep Singaporean construction at the frontier of technology with both better technical sophistication and more sensitive professionals who can motivate their team members to successfully adopt newer technologies.



*Auditor understanding the documentation process as part of SABS auditing process (image as reference).*

**Learn more about SABS at**  
[www.scal.com.sg/accreditation/sabs](http://www.scal.com.sg/accreditation/sabs)

# Cultivating Rooted Talent in the Construction Industry

What does talent mean in the construction industry, and what is its worth? This is a question central to one of the most stubborn problems gripping the industry today: the loss of younger talent to other industries either through failures in attraction or retention. The problem is vast and embedded in several aspects of the industry—from education to accreditation—but it is instructive to speak to younger talents themselves to best understand what it is like to break into the industry today, develop, and what lessons firms and professionals can learn.



**MR LINCOLN LIM**  
SENIOR TECHNICAL MANAGER  
KIMLY CONSTRUCTION PTE LTD  
(SCAL YOUNG LEADER)



**MR CHIN KHEE HOO**  
ASSISTANT PROJECT MANAGER  
LOW KENG HUAT SINGAPORE LTD.  
(SCAL YOUNG LEADER)

With this in mind, SCAL had conversations with two members of its Young Leaders program: Lincoln Lim and Chin Khee Hoo. The SCAL Young Leaders program aims to foster and nurture the next generation of leaders within the construction industry.

Both have approached the industry differently and are a generation apart but measure the pulse of talent in their own way. The key, it seems, is to emphasise rootedness of talent within firms instead of simply productivity or experience. And rootedness is not as straightforward as it appears.

## EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

The construction industry in Singapore, unlike other industries, carries a baggage of stigma with it which is somewhat paradoxical: Singapore is, and will always be, a city. Its urban character is existentially important to how it is defined—and if one follows this to its logical conclusion, those who help design, build, and maintain that urban character should be held in high esteem. But this is not true. “There is still a general stigma against the construction industry,” Lincoln said. And Khee Hoo agreed, half-chuckling: “The three Ds: dirty, demanding, and dangerous.”

This perception problem is not universal in construction: many societies, with stronger labour unions and better dimensions of social empathy, hold their builders in high esteem, and the profession is seen as noble or essential if not lucrative. In Singapore, the high costs of building combined with immense influx of lower wage foreign labour complicates such a perception. Building is what it does and shows to the public at large: and Singaporeans have seen an industry of tired—often foreign—lower cost workers.

According to Khee Hoo, who has been with Low Keng Huat since graduating almost ten years ago, “40 - 50% of my peers from university are no longer in this industry. They’ve moved to IT or banking and the attrition is mainly due to the perception problem as well as the culture problem of long hours and tight deadlines.” Lincoln also mentioned that there is a differential of esteem within the construction industry as well: “There is even more stigma for contractors compared to architects or consultants. For the amount of work, they aren’t appreciated within the broader industry as well.”

Perception is not a problem that can easily be resolved without a multilateral partnership between Singaporean government, education, and even art or culture. But there are ways that firms and fresh starting professionals can overcome the issues posed by perception.

Lincoln, who has been a part of the industry for over fifteen years believes in possessing a conviction of inner worth and propagating the self-esteem that flows from that to younger professionals. “I’d like to consider contractors as being as important to the table as architects and designers since builders bring the construction know-how and actually create the project. I want to pass on this self-esteem to the next batch of professionals.”

Another approach is to suspend expectations altogether and immerse oneself in the industry. Khee Hoo was already familiar with the 3Ds stigma levelled against the industry but chose to focus instead on his own enthusiasm for construction work and building things. “The good thing is that I didn’t have pre-formed expectations before graduation and was honest about what I was suited to do within the industry.”

The first step to developing rooted talent within the industry, it seems, is to seek individuals who are rooted within themselves first: whose enthusiastic outlook and self-esteem comes despite their knowledge of the difficulties of construction, and not because of clever marketing from firms that seeks to hide these realities. Such individuals are admittedly rare but finding and developing them can help create professionals who emit the conviction needed to inspire others to follow them into the industry. It is possible, perhaps, that similar to artists or politicians, a society in general produces a small number of individuals qualitatively capable of succeeding in building. If this is true, the undervaluation of such individuals in Singapore represents a glaring and large-scale market failure for such a construction-centric nation.

## PATIENCE AND MENTORSHIP

Individuals who are rooted within themselves aren’t guaranteed to succeed within construction, however. They are simply the rare but right seeds. They still need two key things to flower: one, the right attitude and patience (both from them and the firm) and two, mentorship.

“The important thing was that I had the patience to be in this industry,” Khee Hoo shared. This sentiment was seconded by Lincoln: “One large part of it is the kind of attitude one has when they step into the industry. I wanted to get down to the ground and see how buildings were built from the ground up.”

“One must be able to enjoy the challenges in construction,” Khee Hoo added, “Patience and the right attitude must come from the inner self of a person, but they must also realise that challenges can be overcome by cracking our brains to solve them with all the parties.” It’s quite common for fresh graduates to instead be overwhelmed by these challenges instead. “The biggest challenge is moving away from being a student to being a working adult.”

And for that transition, mentorship is crucial. “Last time, it was quite a different environment—not only in terms of physical environment but also the industry’s culture. It was harsher and people didn’t interact with each other as much beyond their jobs,” Lincoln recalled, “But now there are opportunities to mentor better and various templates to onboard people. What has changed is that, on a personal level, people who went through the harsher environment wanted to help younger colleagues succeed.” Khee Hoo agreed: “Guidance helped. Management and mentors helped give me confidence in myself, guided me through the process, and kept reminding me about patience in this industry.”

Mentorship is not without its attendant friction though. “I did experience clashes,” Khee Hoo said, “There’s a major shortage of younger people in the industry and so there are more senior people who have their own way of working.” This is a key factor explaining retention failures in the industry: even if the industry attracts passionate young people,



*Khee Hoo presenting the best performance award to his worker.*



*Khee Hoo with his colleagues and mentor at Low Keng Huat (Singapore) Limited.*



*'Work Hard, Play Hard' Picture taken after a Korean baseball game. Lincoln had the opportunity to attend a field inspection in South Korea with his colleagues at Kimly Construction Pte Ltd.*

## BRINGING EXCITEMENT BACK INTO BUILDING

Levelling up with technology is part of the broader theme of bringing excitement back into the industry, as Lincoln put it. "We need to bring excitement back into the construction industry. You see hugely exciting mega projects like Burj Khalifa which creates interest in the infrastructure industry, but you don't have such excitement in Singapore although we have mega projects such as the world's largest container terminal and floating solar farm."

Lincoln elaborated the connection between a lack of excitement and a lack of progress: "If nothing is broken, the industry sometimes keeps doing the same things but what is important is continuous improvement and finding new ways of doing things. But not necessarily always things that are extravagant or outrageous. Innovation can still be grounded."

Collaborative contracting, if executed better, is one way for contractors to bite the bullet of additional costs and risks and build more exciting projects as opposed to cost-optimised but architecturally or culturally bland projects that are a consequence of the cut-throat race-to-the-bottom pricing dynamics of the currently fragmented industry.

"If I could go back to school, I would like to suggest that there be more activities to expose students to what construction is like earlier in their academic career," Khee Hoo said. His internships and first serious exposure to the industry only came two and a half years into a four-year degree. "The industrial experience should go hand in hand with the theoretical aspects of the studies."

Most companies also under-utilise internships and treat interns as part-time employees instead of potential seeds which are hard to find. What is needed is better design of internships. Said Khee Hoo: "Better design of internships will help them know what they'll learn and also prime them to be more confident and have a good preview of the future. It's not happening in most of the companies."

The talent shortage is nothing new, something both Lincoln and Khee Hoo agree with, but its resolution can come about by having a whole-of-industry and a whole-of-person approach to attracting and retaining talent. Ultimately, as well as they construct buildings, contractors must also master the art of constructing the people who construct buildings. And this starts, like with firm foundations in buildings, with rootedness for people.

that passion is often chipped away over time as younger professionals develop loneliness and clashes with their much older superiors. Mentors must be adept at connecting with younger workers and ensuring that their input is valued while helping them form professional bonds with older workers.

Having better technology and digitalisation is another way to retain younger workers. "This is in line with what youngsters are more interested in and comfortable with," Khee Hoo said. "Since the industry has not evolved much in terms of technology, the perception is 'why get yourself into such an unrewarding career,'" Lincoln mentioned.

"My strength and advantage from school can benefit the company with a technological mindset to think outside the box more and try to blend market-ready digital platforms with the company's existing platforms," noted Khee Hoo, "I believe this is what youngsters can offer to the industry."



Lincoln's greatest pleasure is spending time with his wife, Yingxian, and their 2 adorable sons.

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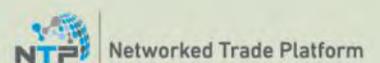
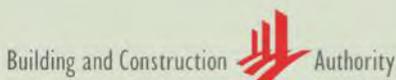


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## Partnerships



Find out how we complete your digitalisation — <https://link.doxa-holdings.com/scal>

# Scaling Your Business Through End-to-End Digitalisation

Article contributed by Doxa Holdings



Pre-Digital



Digitised

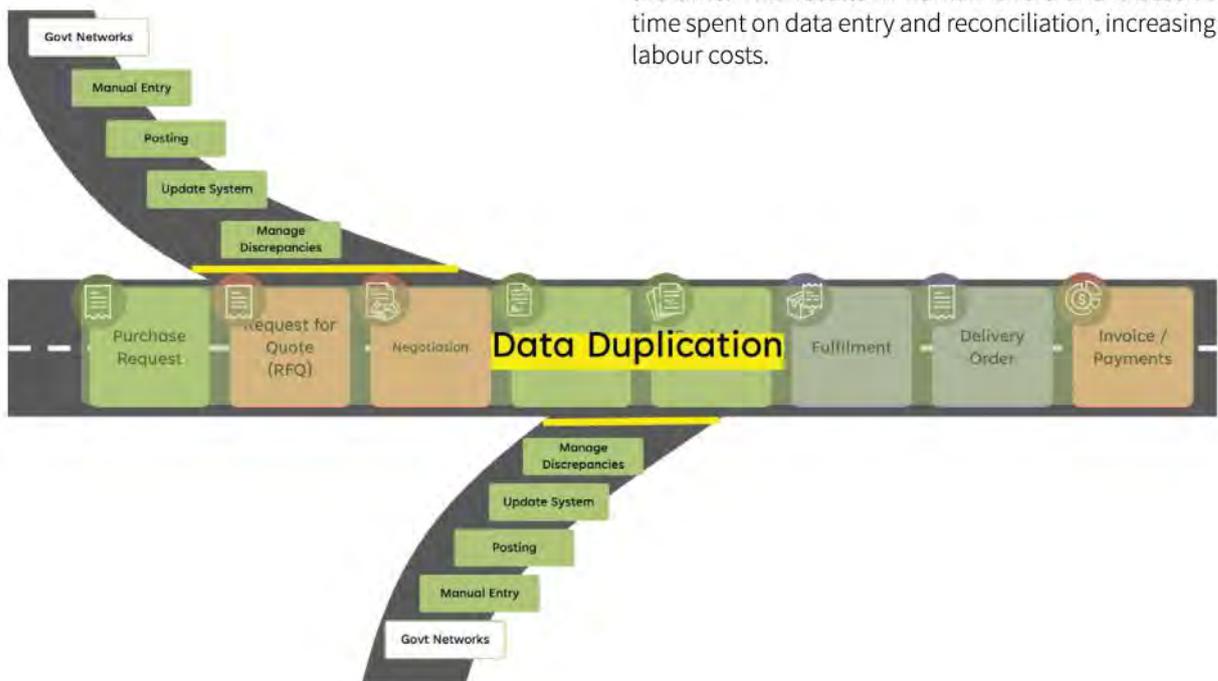


Digitalised

In the Singaporean Built Environment landscape today, companies have largely successfully transitioned from a pre-digital state to a fully 'digital' stage. Currently however—from SMEs to enterprise-sized companies—most systems still operate independently, but are required to continue to exchange data with each other.

## DATA DUPLICATION

Since each buyer is also a supplier of materials or services, they continue to trade with each other in an ecosystem. The key problem faced by companies in this ecosystem is that there are persistent gaps in their workflow as each system is not connected to the other. Data Duplication happens because they are required to manually enter external data into their systems all the time. This results in human errors and excessive time spent on data entry and reconciliation, increasing labour costs.

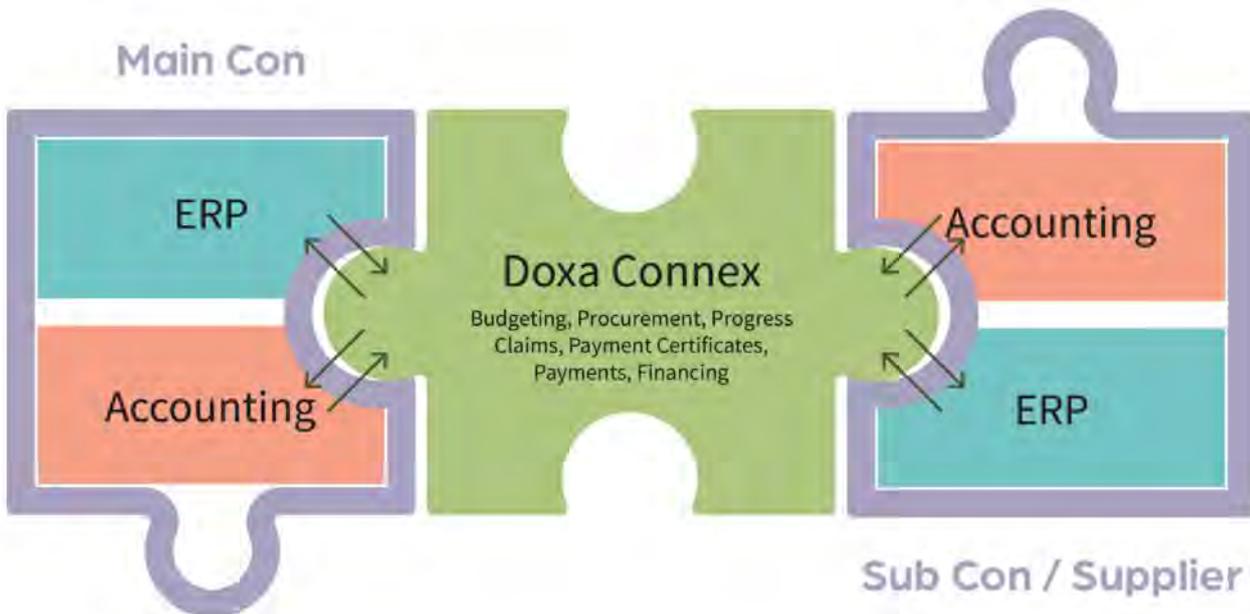


## DISTANT RELATIONSHIP WITH FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Additionally, due to this independent closed-door approach, Financial Institutions (FIs) find it difficult to evaluate a company with only a single, one-sided data source provided to them. Thus, they tend to be more reserved when assessing credit ratings and providing financial support.

## BUILDING A NEW ECOSYSTEM

To tackle these problems, especially in the Built Environment sector, a new ecosystem has to be built that does not interfere with the existing one, but plugs into and complements it in order to achieve true digitalisation.



## DOXA CONNEX — COLLABORATIVE TRADE PLATFORM

Doxa Connex is a SaaS platform that seeks to bridge the gap in procurement-to-payment and financing. This platform is not intended to replace any of your existing enterprise systems like the ERP and accounting systems, but seeks to connect all of your stakeholders in the Built Environment through one single system.

### PROCUREMENT TO PAYMENT

The first step to achieve true digitalisation is bringing all parties together on a common 'data highway', where information can be securely exchanged while retaining the efficiency of collaboration. From project budgeting, Purchase Requests, RFQs, Purchase or Work Orders, to Goods Receipts or Payment Certificates, we created a common workspace where main cons, sub cons, and suppliers can work on the same procurement document throughout the lifecycle of the project.

RFQs from suppliers and Progress Claims from subcons data all flow into the system directly, allowing you to push that data into the next step of the process without any

data duplication. Because of a well-documented audit trail, management also has 100% visibility into the whole process and can see the stages and approvals of each document.

Because of our technology and partnerships with local banks, we are also able to provide direct payments from one company to another without leaving the system and update your accounting systems automatically when payment is successfully made.

### SCALE YOUR BUSINESS WITH DIGITALISATION TODAY

With over 700 users on board Doxa Connex, there has never been a better time to digitalise. Join other main contractors for increased business productivity, cost savings, and experience end-to-end digitalisation today.

For more information or to schedule a call with us, please email [enquiries@doxa-holdings.com](mailto:enquiries@doxa-holdings.com) or visit DOXA website [doxa-holdings.com/demo](https://doxa-holdings.com/demo)

# Mind the Mental Health Gap

Article contributed by WSH Council



Poor mental well-being can be caused by various factors, both non-work and work-related, including: relationships with family, friends or co-workers, concerns about loved ones (who may be in another country), financial difficulties, tight timelines and heavy workload, over a long period

Regardless of whether mental stress is caused by work- or non-work factors, employers should certainly do more to support their workers' mental well-being, as adversely impacted mental health affects motivation, productivity and attention on the job. This can lead to lapses in health and safety standards if left unchecked.

**Employers should consider the following:**

## ENCOURAGING SUPPORT SYSTEMS AT WORK

Setting up a buddy or group support system in your workplace encourages workers to look out for one another through the formation of stronger social networks. This is especially helpful for those new to Singapore or to your company; more experienced workers can share tips about working and living in Singapore and help newer workers overcome personal uncertainties and anxieties.

Employers can form support systems based on the following dimensions: Where workers reside, by interest/work groups, or among those from same country/hometown.

## ENCOURAGING YOUR WORKERS TO BECOME PEER SUPPORT LEADERS

Peer Support Leaders are trained in para-counselling to support their peers in distress, under MOM's Project DAWN Peer Support Leader initiative. Do encourage your workers to sign up for the training when offered to them at their dormitories.

## CREATING AN OPEN AND PROGRESSIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE; PRACTICE THE 3LS

Line managers and supervisors should practise basic psychological first aid such as the 3Ls – Look, Listen, Link.

- **Look** – Scan the issue, assess the situation
- **Listen** – Stay calm, enquire for details, reassure the worker
- **Link** – Connect the worker to appropriate resources, follow up on his well-being and support him in issue resolution or his recovery



2022 Workplace Safety & Health Innovation Awards Winners



2022 Culture Of Acceptance, Respect and Empathy (CARE) Awards Winners

We also encourage employers to include information and tips on positive mental health and well-being in your regular communications or during daily toolbox meetings. Some of these translated mental health materials that could be shared with your workers can be found on the MOM health resources webpage.

WSH Council has programmes and resources to help companies detect and improve their workers' mental well-being. We encourage companies to try the mental well-being module of our Total WSH programme. It is free for

workers who are first-time participants. The module will help companies:

- detect what the level of mental well-being in their workforce is, including what % of the workforce could be suffering from burnout
- identify if there are work-related factors causing major stress
- suggest ways to improve mental well-being, such as workshops to manage stress, getting enough rest, and looking out for colleagues who may need help.

If you know of migrant workers who wish to speak to someone and could benefit from speaking to a counsellor, please encourage them to call the helplines below. Helpline operators are able to communicate in the common native languages of migrant workers.

**HEALTHSERVE  
(24 HOURS DAILY)**

**+65 3129 5000**

**MIGRANT WORKERS' CENTRE  
(24 HOURS DAILY)**

**+65 6536 2692**



# Upcoming Events, Webinars & Workshops



SCAL ACADEMY PTE LTD



## CONTRACTING CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

6 – 7 Oct 2022 | 9.00am – 5.00pm

Construction Projects are complex undertakings from the point of procurement, to contracting, execution and managing the works and often avoiding conflicts and resolving disputes that may arise. Attend the webinar to learn how best to negotiate, administer, and manage such projects.



## ENGINEERING SAFETY CONCEPTS IN CONSTRUCTION

12 Oct 2022 | 1.00pm – 5.00pm

Engineering Safety issues in buildings are complex and challenging to deal. It is therefore critical to reduce the risks involved in buildings during the design and construction stages one of which is through technology adoption. Join this session to learn and understand engineering safety in buildings & structures through design and technology adoption.



## BEST PRACTICES FOR GREEN AND GRACIOUS BUILDER – GREEN, FRIENDLIER AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE

14 Oct 2022 | 9.00am – 1.00pm

Learn how to implement and improve the green and gracious practices based on the latest requirements of GGBS version 2.1 and gain information regarding the successful implementation of best green and gracious practices.



## CRITICAL SAFETY ASPECTS IN CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

23 Nov 2022 | 1.00pm – 5.00pm

Find out the hazards in the construction workplace and learn how to implement appropriate risk control measures to minimize the risk through proper planning and execution of work activities.





### **ADOPTING APPROPRIATE HR STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE A FIRM'S COMPETITIVENESS (MANDARIN)**

2 Dec 2022 | 2.00pm – 5.00pm

每个成功组织的基石是利用适当的人力资源战略来提高公司的竞争力，并利用这些战略发展有利于其竞争对手的明显优势。对于这些公司来说，管理层真正意识到其员工是从业务运营开始就要实现增长的最大资产。再次，大多数中小企业将人力资源的功能职视为成本中心，如何将运营成本控制在最低水平似乎是最终目标。在大多数情况下，高级管理层及未能充分利用其人力资源，以达到人力资源举措，而且往往不是这样，管理层的普遍观点是组织中的每个人都是可有可无的。



### **DATA ANALYTICS – DATA MINING FOR INSIGHTS**

16 Dec 2022 | 9.00am – 5.00pm

This workshop aims to provide a broad but practical overview of the entire analytics value chain, with a specific focus on the methods required to glean objective insights from data. Attendees will get a practical introduction to the analytical process, including an overview to statistical concepts and relevant analytical tools with which to apply the concepts.



### **BIM COORDINATION**

28 – 30 Dec 2022 | 6.30pm – 9.30pm

The BIM Coordination process is the key enabler of virtual collaboration of BIM models and building data across disciplines. Trainees will learn hands-on conducting BIM coordination using Navisworks and how to combine interdisciplinary BIM models, conduct clash detection, and document their findings for reports. The course will also highlight good practices and common issues experienced in coordinating BIM projects at the design and construction stages.



# Welcome

## New Members (JUN to AUG 2022)

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SG UNITED CONSTRUCTION PTE LTD  
SING YIET CIVIL ENGINEERING CONTRACTOR PTE LTD

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WUI HONG M&E ENGINEERING PTE LTD

### TRADE

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THE PREFABRICATION ASSOCIATION OF  
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### SLOTS REGISTERED CONTRACTORS

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# SCAL ACADEMY



Due to popular demand, SCAL Academy is introducing two brand new courses!

## Supervise Safe Lifting Operations



The "Supervise Safe Lifting Operations" course is aimed at providing individuals with the knowledge and skills to supervise the crane operator in the manoeuvre of a load safely to its destination. Undertaking this course will allow trainees to supervise safe lifting operations, carry out supervision of safe lifting operations and supervise reinstatement of safe lifting operations.

## Perform Rigger and Signalman Task



The "Perform Rigger and Signalman Task" course is aimed at providing individuals with the knowledge and skills to give correct and clear signals to guide the crane operator in the manoeuvre of a load safely to its destination. Completing this course will allow trainees to perform rigger and signalman tasks and Reinstatement rigger and signalman work area.

Interested individuals can email [enquiry@scal-academy.com.sg](mailto:enquiry@scal-academy.com.sg) to register interest and save a slot for the first class!

## Join us as a CCP-BIM Employer today!

The Career Conversion Programme (CCP) for BIM Professionals aims to equip mid-career individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to embark on a new career in the built environment industry.

SCAL Academy is looking for companies that want to participate in the CCP-BIM Programme. Leverage on the programme to have a wider pool of locals to consider, allowing us to match you with the right candidate.



Register as a CCP-BIM Employer today!





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