

TRANSFORMATION FROM 'HEADCOUNT' TO 'PERFORMANCE BASED': THE WAY FORWARD TO RESOLVE THE WORKFORCE PROBLEMS IN THE CLEANING INDUSTRY

Malaysian Association of Cleaning Contractors (MACC) wants the industry to do away with the practice of 'headcount'; cleaning contractors penalised for failure to supply the required numbers of workers rather than the service rendered.

Manpower problems in the cleaning sector would be aggravated further if the customers are too concern about the number of manpower supplied and lost sight of the fact that the cleaning contractors' responsibility is the cleanliness of the building. For failure to provide the numbers of workers as stated in the contract, cleaning contractors are sometimes slapped with penalty of up to RM200 per worker per day / shift.

The justifications given by the customers for the use of 'headcount' is the absence of a cleaning standard to determine 'how clean is clean'. What is considered as clean by the cleaning contractors may not be so to the customers. In the absence of a proper method of assessment, 'headcount' is used to get value for money that are paid to the cleaning contractors. On the assumption that when the number of manpower supplied is according to the contract, cleaning would run smoothly and meet the standard required.

Indirectly this has contributed to the phenomenal growth of cleaning contractors who have no or very little knowledge on cleaning, offering cleaning services. Cleaning services which should be treated as professional services has been turned into a service of providing manpower.

In view of these, Department of Standards Malaysia (Standards Malaysia) has developed MS 2550:2014 Cleaning Performance – Commercial and Public Buildings. However, its application in both public and private buildings are not widespread. In fact, many cleaning contractors, building and facility managers who are not aware of its existence. As such the practice of 'headcount' cleaning contract is still being applied in assessing the performance of the cleaning contractors.

As a result, cleaning contractors are still tied to the practice of supplying manpower so much so that they simply ignored other factors such as the use of technology and latest innovation in cleaning, which can directly reduce the number of manpower needed. It is no wonder that cleaning contractors in Malaysia tend to be left behind in terms of adaptation of the latest technologies and innovations in cleaning. Singapore International Airport had started to use Robotic Scrubber machine, which does not require worker to operate. On the other hand, at the Penang International Airport the cleaning contractor is still using the traditional mopping system and manual floor squeegee to clear the main public traffic area of excess water on the floor.

A paradigm shift is greatly needed in the cleaning industry, a shift from 'headcount' to 'performance based' cleaning, to release the cleaning industry from being saddled with the workers recruitment issues particularly on the foreign workers and its' related problems. For this purpose, MS 2550 should be implemented in both public and private buildings so that cleaning contractors will be assessed not on their ability to supply the required number of workers but on their cleaning performance or cleaning standard achieved.

For the owners and building and facility managers, the implementation of MS 2550 will not only enhance the cleaning quality of their buildings, but will also facilitate the assessment management of the performance of their appointed cleaning contractors. The performance of the cleaning contractors will be based on percentage of cleaning tasks which meet the required standard as being prescribed in the MS2550. This would mean that in the event the contractor failed to achieve the required percentage, not only the payment of the contract price can be deducted but the contract can also be terminated if the percentage of performance achieved is consistently too low. In term of selection of the capable contractor, the building owner or the building/facility manager would only need to look at the percentage of performance achieved over a certain period

On the other hand, for the cleaning contractors, the implementation of MS 2550 would mean that they have the freedom to choose the best methodology and innovation for achieving the best quality of work without having to be bound with the required number of workers that they have to supply. It would motivate them to use the latest technologies and innovations in cleaning. Further it would encourage the

contractors to train their workers on cleaning as with the enhancement of the skills and productivity of their workers the number of workers to be deployed for cleaning can be reduced.