

SHELL BUSINESS OPERATIONS KUALA LUMPUR: A STRONGHOLD FOR HIGHER VALUE ACTIVITIES

- SBO-KL's success in Malaysia was attributed to three key aspects – talent quality & availability, world class infrastructure, and govt support.
- Expansion plans are based on skills, not scale – hiring from different sectors and industries allows for new markets to be tapped into when it comes to creative solutions.
- High Performance Culture creates employees that are holistic in thinking and have a desire to improve the bottom-line of the organisation.
- Malaysia's sweet spots according to SBO-KL are a multilingual and forward thinking talent pool, data analytics in both upstream and downstream processes, and the government's commitment to grow businesses.

Setting up their operations nearly two decades ago, The Shell Business Operations Kuala Lumpur (SBO-KL) which is located in Cyberjaya, has come a long way. Initially known as Shell IT International (SITI), the company has reinvented itself into the multifunctional shared services company it is today.

Malaysia, Meeting All Requirements

The centre's setup in Malaysia was attributed to three key aspects – government support, talent availability and infrastructure. Having been granted MSC status, support, and policies that was favourable, this was a clear indication of the government's commitment to helping them grow and develop their business. With world class IT infrastructure, diverse talent pool and government initiatives to support the ecosystem, it boomed within five to ten years of their setup.

Shell also had a vision for the centre and its ecosystem in Cyberjaya to become a place that was inclusive and vibrant, modelled after a campus setting. The space in Cyberjaya allowed them to realise their vision and thus, the building housing SBO-KL was designed, increasing its attractiveness to local talents.

Leveraging on the synergy and ecosystem they have developed here in Malaysia, the centre serves as another achievement – not just for SBO-KL, but Shell Malaysia as a whole – in showcasing the country as a prime location that is both conducive and sustainable for businesses and investments.

Malaysia's strategic location has also contributed towards SBO-KL strength in terms of business continuity. Safe from natural disasters or political instability, the Malaysian centre is able to run its operations smoothly, preventing business disruptions. This in turn, leads the centre to command a larger percentage of activities as clients are ensured higher levels of trust and a sense of security.

With a rich legacy and 127 year footprint from its parent company, SBO-KL's 20 year journey is a testament to their commitment in utilising the benefits of Malaysia to its full poten-

tial. It sends a strong statement that SBO-KL does not offer a typical GBS location, but offers an entire ecosystem that is constantly growing and developing.

Frontrunner In The Field

Currently, SBO-KL is one of seven global business operations serving clients worldwide, with the current focus of being a hub of expertise and centre of excellence.

Amongst the shared services in Malaysia, SBO-KL has the widest portfolio, comprising of business partners and services in the areas of IT, Finance, HR, Operations, Contracting and Procurement, Downstream Business (Order-to-delivery, Customer Operation, Retail Centre of Excellence), Upstream Business Excellence, Global Legal Operation and Brands' Centre of Excellence.

In their early days, SBO-KL focused on providing support and delivering outcome, with an emphasis on increasing volume. This gradually changed as the centre evolved to become more multidimensional, positioning themselves as the pioneer for IT and Finance in the region. Currently, the centre has ventured into bringing in a range of higher value activities that would allow them to tap into new markets. As such, they now provide creative solutions and hiring people from various fields beyond their previous scope of activities, to move beyond its core functions.

Some examples cited include hiring talent from advertising agencies to develop creative minds in Asia Pacific in order to run events in the region, as well as hiring those in the legal field, in order to tackle complex legal issues globally. They also intend on focusing in the technical space to cater to the upstream spectrum of the supply chain. This can be seen through the setup of their data centre and the hiring of data analysts.

The journey to this point, however, was no easy feat. SBO-KL's story is one of constant innovation, reinvention and the ability to harness the full potential of Malaysia's dynamic ecosystem.

Harnessing The Power Of Language

As their operations span multiple regions, language has always been a focus point from the very beginning. Over the years, SBO-KL has built up this area to cater to 15 different languages and continually expands to new countries in the process. Now, the centre is utilising this solid groundwork in language capabilities to drive higher-value activities across its operations.

This comes at a time where multilingual capabilities are being challenged. Languages are no longer just attributed to transactional activities, but have become a key component in facilitating higher value tasks in areas such as sales and marketing, finance, credit and global compliance.

The speed and progress of SBO-KL's language capabilities is largely attributed



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to the advantage of Malaysia having a multilingual and multicultural talent pool. Having been exposed to multiple languages from young, the locals are able to pick up languages faster and more efficiently compared to other regions.

With the Asian languages under their belt, they are working to establish European languages here as well. Recently, they have even included Arabic to their language offerings, allowing them to serve joint ventures in that region. By diversifying this language component, they are able to stay ahead of the game, and cover both transactional and higher value activities simultaneously.

Reinventing The Talent Strategy

Besides harnessing language capabilities of the locals, SBO-KL has also reinvented their hiring strategy to bring in talent from other industries besides the ones currently under their banner, further strengthening the centre's blend of skills and value in the process. The reason for this is that the line between industries is starting to blur, and core functions may require expertise from other fields in order to continue to provide innovative solutions and services for their evolving customer needs.

As such, the centre has set its sights on those from professional markets who have been in the industry for some time, be it lawyers, account managers or advertisers, to name a few. This collection of different mindsets tackling new ventures have opened up new avenues in SBO-KL's current business model as well.

Looking beyond just the scope of skill sets, the company believes that the local talent possess a certain hunger and drive for success, with the goal of developing themselves. They are also comparatively better at making connections and conceptualising solutions, compared to talent of other regions. Another positive aspect of the Malaysian talent comes from their worldview, where many of the younger workforce is culturally diverse and have exposure abroad.

Driving A High Performance Culture

With the right roles and hiring spectrum in place, SBO-KL then needed to create a unique culture that not only differentiated themselves from their competitors but was one that attracted and retained talent.

At its core, SBO-KL follows the three values of the Shell, which are Openness, Integrity and Honesty. On top of that, priority is also on safety and ethical business principles which include anti-harassment, data privacy protection and anti-bribery practices.

The differentiating factor comes into play through a high-performance culture, whereby the company instills four aspects into their employees. Firstly, they must possess a business mindset which includes knowing the impact and bottom line of the business and understanding how their contributions will affect these two areas. Secondly, employees need to continuously improve on tasks to raise the bar on their outputs. Thirdly, they must have the capability and courage to speak up, have an intelligent dialogue and ask questions. Lastly, their performance must be supported with sustainability and resilience to avoid employee burnout.

Looking at the company's dashboard, they no longer have a service level agreement which is very transactional – it must be linked back to the market or business that they serve. The culture is such that it's not about personal KPI, but more of the value being added to the business.

With the understanding in place, employees feel a strong sense of achievement and inclusiveness every time they complete a task. Productivity comes naturally as they have the desire to drive meaning and purpose in all that they do. It's evident SBO-KL recognised this drive and in turn, went about implementing many of the measures mentioned above in ensuring every employee feel a sense of belonging and pride.

The implementation of a high performance culture has led them to reduce their attrition rate to only 9%. Significantly lower than the market average, this is a positive indication of the ecosystem that SBO-KL has been trying to build here in Malaysia.

Forefront Of Technology

As the centre continued to innovate, the need to ride the wave of emerging technologies and discover new ways of utilising the vast data network Shell had built up across its global operations became even more crucial.

Malaysia's sweet spot is its upstream area as it is a robust hub for oil and gas in Asia, with 950 stations in the country alone and over 5 million customers. Hence, SBO-KL made the move to grow their big data analytics space, with the mission of gaining insights into financial data, HR data, customer data and legal data to name a few. Their aim was to move past the typical processing and transaction works, and instead look into ways of higher return of value.

Furthermore, by leveraging on data in

the upstream business, Shell was able to improve the outcomes – be it higher success rate or greater speed of completion. With the addition of SBO-KL's language capabilities, the process can be replicated across Asia. Data is also being used to build a strong integration across Shell's operations, and to connect each of their standalone functions in order to increase profitability.

The biggest challenge that needed to be overcome was getting existing staff upskilled and providing the right technology, tools, platform and ecosystem in order for them to embark on this Big Data journey, both in the long run and holistically. This led to the birth of the Big Data Upskilling Programme which was well-received by the current staff.

As of today, SBO-KL has also developed a Customer Innovation Hub which functions to improve customer experience by leveraging on Big Data and innovation. The hub is able to operate at a faster and more efficient pace, cementing strong relationships with the existing customer base and potential ones.

SBO-KL has also implemented Workday, a cloud-based software to manage their HR solutions and policies. Even in their Order-to-delivery services, they rely on this technology to manage scheduling and logistics. Innovation is a big part of Shell and the X factor that it holds comes from the ability, space, freedom and culture to innovate new methods of delivery and experience for their customers.

With their Cyberjaya centre growing in strength year by year – having built up a synergistic blend comprising of high performance culture, multifaceted and multilingual talent pool, an innovative workspace, and higher value activities via data analytics – SBO-KL's branch in Malaysia is definitely a stronghold for their GBS operations.



Ngon, representing Shell Malaysia, won the Best International Organisation at the Life At Work 2018 Awards; flanking him are: (L-R) YB Dato' Mahfuz Omar, Deputy Minister of Human Resources; Yang Berhormat Hannah Yeoh, Deputy Minister of Women, Family and Community Development; YB M Kula Segaran, Minister of Human Resources; Shareen Shariza Dato' Abdul Ghani, TalentCorp CEO.