

Surbana Jurong to work with union to boost digital skills of staff as construction goes high-tech



Surbana Jurong group chief executive Wong Heang Fine said that clients have increasingly complex challenges in urban and infrastructure developments, so the latest and most advanced digital technologies are needed to better serve them.

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SINGAPORE - As the construction industry moves to embrace technology, infrastructure consultancy Surbana Jurong will work with a union to help its employees boost their digital skills.

A total of 630 of its 3,900 consultancy staff in Singapore will be trained over the next year in technology tools relevant to their jobs such as drones, advanced building information modelling (BIM) and Audiance, which is a tool that facilitates data collection and site inspections.

Surbana Jurong signed an agreement on Tuesday (Aug 20) with the Building Construction and Timber Industries Employees' Union (Batu) to form a company training committee to drive several initiatives.

National Trades Union Congress secretary-general Ng Chee Meng witnessed the signing.

The new initiatives include identifying the relevant adaptive and technological skill sets for workers, developing mentorship programmes to help mentors learn how to guide employees, and ensuring all new and existing relevant technical staff are trained in 3D BIM.

The company and union said in a joint statement that employees will be equipped with advanced industry-specific technology skills for design, construction and site inspection. The skills are in line with key focus areas set out in the construction industry transformation map.

They also want more employees to use new digital tools so that their work environments will be more productive and safe.

Surbana Jurong group chief executive Wong Heang Fine said that clients have increasingly complex challenges in urban and infrastructure developments, so the latest and most advanced digital technologies are needed to better serve them.

He added that input from the union will inform the pace and nature of the training the company conducts, among other things.

"The union will be able to work with us to tailor our training to the needs of the workers, rather than just to satisfy the needs of the company in terms of their skill set in delivering the work," he said.

Batu will gather feedback from employees during and after their training so that what they learn and the way training is conducted can be continually fine-tuned. It will also work with company management to ensure the skills learnt are useful for current or upcoming projects.

Batu executive secretary Zainal Sapari said the union wants to help workers understand the potential of the digital transformation sweeping across the construction sector and equip them with adaptive skills, especially in change management so that they can be "agents of change" within the company.

He added that the aim is to "ultimately enable them to move up the value chain and seize better wages, welfare and work prospects".

The new company training committee builds on the work of the digital management office set up by Surbana Jurong in 2016 to drive the company's digitalisation efforts.

Surbana Jurong is also developing a new campus for its global headquarters in the Jurong Innovation District, which will serve as a testbed for new technologies in partnership with the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*Star), small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups.

Mechanical and electrical designer Jerine Tay hopes to learn programming for BIM to expand her use of the software to design electrical systems for building plans.

The 57-year-old, who has been working in this line for 37 years, has gone from doing drawings on tracing paper to using 2D software and now 3D visualisation software.

Two years ago, she completed a half-year specialist diploma in BIM.

"At my age to go for this type of training is really tough, but we have to go ahead and cannot turn back. I'm glad my bosses believe in me and support me in upgrading my skills," she said.

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