Hari Poologasundram, CEO, SMEC & CEO International, Surbana Jurong Group is featured in CEO Magazine

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Hari Poologasundram, CEO, SMEC & CEO International, Surbana Jurong Group is featured in CEO Magazine talking about optimising the ANZ business model to continue transforming SMEC from a A$125 million business into a growing global consultancy.

The article reflects on Hari’s career path and aspirations to drive growth and how SMEC’s past, coupled with our values and innovative mindset will help shape our future success.

Read the full article on the next page:
Starting out as a bridge engineer, Hari Poologasundram worked his way to the top of engineering and consulting firm SMEC – taking its Australian business from A$125 million to an expected A$400 million in revenue in four years.

Words Molly Johnson • Images Scott Ehler

Hari Poologasundram is passionate about building bridges in the workplace as well as the outside world. Since joining SMEC in 1994, Hari has played an integral part in the success of some of the world’s largest infrastructure projects.

From a traditional engineering firm, with origins in the iconic Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, SMEC has become a global player in the consultancy world. “I joined SMEC Australia as a bridge engineer when we only had about 20 employees, but were wanting to expand our operations throughout Australia and New Zealand,” recalls Hari.

With resilience, determination and a willingness to branch outside his field, Hari quickly worked his way up the leadership ladder. As Regional Director Central and then as Chief Operating Officer, ANZ – with 30 years’ experience in planning, design and management of infrastructure, and 18 years’ operational management experience – Hari led SMEC Australia through a business-wide transformation. “In around four years, we grew our Australian business from a moderately sized A$125 million operation into an A$350 million business – expected to hit A$400 million by the end of 2018. This proved to me that if you think big, there is no limit to what can be achieved and our next ambitious target is A$750 million by 2022.”

In March this year, Hari was promoted to CEO of the SMEC Group and CEO International of its parent company, Surbana Jurong (SJ). Now responsible for growth in Australia, New Zealand, South Asia, Middle East, the UK, Africa, and the Americas, Hari says that while there’s a lot on his plate, he’s ready to take on the challenge.

Within Australia, Hari has continued reinventing the business to drive growth. “Earlier this year, we optimised our business model to enhance our focus on being a truly client-centric organisation. In addition, our parent company SJ Group acquired PDR Engineers and the Robert Bird Group, to diversify our portfolio and drive growth across urban development and management services sectors.”

As Asia’s consultancy powerhouse for urbanisation, and industrial and infrastructure developments, SJ is renowned for shaping Singapore’s landscape over the past 50 years. SMEC’s history in major infrastructure projects, coupled with SJ’s expertise in urban planning and industrial development, enables the delivery of critical services to all clients. “Since joining SJ, we have continued to grow our urban development business thanks to SJ’s expertise and connections in the sector. We’ve undertaken urban projects across the UK, Middle East, Africa, Australia and India, as well as tall building projects in Australia, Asia and the UK.”

“Almost 50 years on, last year, Snowy Hydro once again engaged SMEC to carry out Snowy 2.0 — the pumped-hydro expansion that will supercharge existing generation and large-scale storage capabilities, helping to address power shortages and stabilise electricity supply in the future. Hari is focused on continuing SMECs transformation into a global consultancy company, as well as embracing new technologies and innovations. “Innovation is part of our history and DNA. We stay one step ahead to provide innovative digital solutions. For example, in Melbourne, SMEC partnered with Stobul to develop a virtual reality model of the Point Road and Swan Street intersection. This significantly improved stakeholder engagement to help better understand the final design solutions and conduct one of Australia’s first virtual reality safety audits.”

As part of the SJ Group, SMEC has grown from having 6,000 people to more than 13,500 people working across a network of over 120 offices in 40 countries. Diversity, gender in particular, remains a key business priority, and SMEC continues to invest in the implementation of a broad range of initiatives. While the company expands multi-nationally, it promises to always remain true to its people, values and heritage. “We have ambitious plans to expand our business — our people will play a key role in this. At the core of our business is what we call ‘The SMEC spirit’. We pride ourselves on our values which include Integrity and the 4P’s: people, professionalism, partnerships and purpose,” he explains. “This includes acting with integrity and in the best interests of our clients, creating an inclusive and supportive environment where our people can thrive, and providing innovative high-end solutions to a high standard of excellence. We’re lucky to have been given the opportunity to improve lives and shape cities and communities around the world.”

SMEC’s origins date back to the iconic Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, launched in 1949 and completed in 1974. As one of the most complex integrated water and hydro-electric power schemes in the world, it consists of 16 dams, seven power stations, two pumping stations, and 225 kilometres of tunnels, pipelines and aqueducts. Such is its reputation that the American Society of Civil Engineers rated it as one of the seven civil engineering wonders of the modern world.

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