Putting corporate talent to work

At PwC, the focus is on encouraging its staff to show how they can use their professional skills to help society By Chiratas Nivatpumin

You understand that companies should have a greater responsibility to society than profits alone. You have accepted the importance of sustainability in setting your long-term business strategy. Your own staff are enthusiastic and eager to not only do well, but to do good.

So what's next?

Plenty of companies nowadays have embedded corporate social responsibility initiatives into their operations. But how can a company ensure that resources and time are used for the greatest good, not only from the perspective of recipients, but also relative to the company's own values and goals?

"It's critical that CSR programmes utilise our own skills," says Paiboon Tunkoon, a partner at Pricewaterhouse-Coopers (PwC).

Mr Paiboon, a certified public accountant and member of PwC's Assurance practice, also oversees the firm's internal CSR and sustainability programmes with a direct report to the chief executive officer.
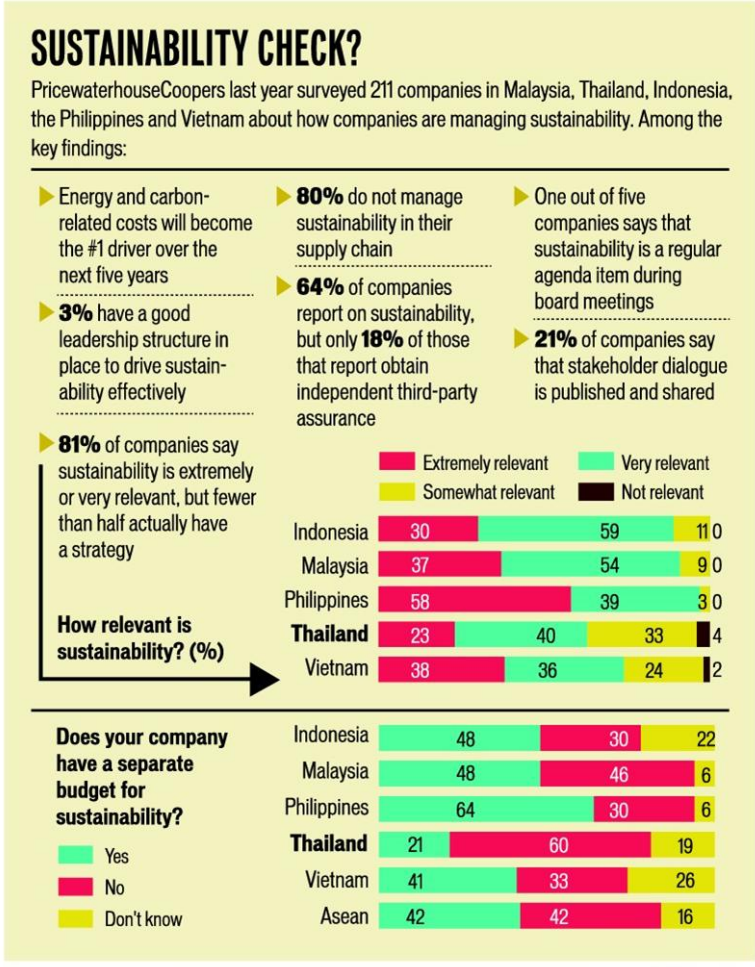
The global trend, he said, is a move beyond corporate philanthropy into "skill-based volunteerism" in designing and carrying out CSR programmes.

For PwC, that might come in the form of career planning for university students in Khon Kaen, accounting and personal financial management training for automobile factory workers or temple monks under an agreement with the Bodhigayavijalaya 980 Institute, or workshops on how to use technology and the internet for students in Samut Sakhon and Samut Songkhram provinces.

A CSR committee, representing all key departments of the company, meets regularly to brainstorm ideas. Proposals and programmes may be initiated either by PwC itself or by staff.

"The first criterion in evaluating proposals is whether it fits in with our global framework: responsible business, diversity and inclusion, community engagement and environmental stewardship," said Mr Paiboon.

"At PwC, we define the meaning of sustainability as 'development which meets the need of current generations

SUSTAINABILITY CHECK?

PricewaterhouseCoopers last year surveyed 211 companies in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam about how companies are managing sustainability. Among the key findings:

▶ Energy and carbon-related costs will become the #1 driver over the next five years

▶ 3% have a good leadership structure in place to drive sustainability effectively

▶ 81% of companies say sustainability is extremely or very relevant, but fewer than half actually have a strategy

▶ 80% do not manage sustainability in their supply chain

▶ 64% of companies report on sustainability, but only 18% of those that report obtain independent third-party assurance

▶ One out of five companies says that sustainability is a regular agenda item during board meetings

▶ 21% of companies say that stakeholder dialogue is published and shared

How relevant is sustainability? (%)

	Extremely relevant	Very relevant	Somewhat relevant	Not relevant
Indonesia	30	59	11	0
Malaysia	37	54	9	0
Philippines	58	39	3	0
Thailand	23	40	33	4
Vietnam	38	36	24	2

Does your company have a separate budget for sustainability?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Indonesia	48	30	22
Malaysia	48	46	6
Philippines	64	30	6
Thailand	21	60	19
Vietnam	41	33	26
Asean	42	42	16

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without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

"Sustainability is not a stand-alone issue — it affects all aspects of a company and can be the key differentiator between good and great organisations."

Initiatives are reviewed based on how they meet the firm's ambitions in the four core areas.

"Take diversity and inclusion. We have a very varied workforce, with 72% female and 80% Generation Y," said Mr Paiboon. "How do we enable people with different backgrounds to work together?"

If a project fits with the corporate framework and taps into PwC's skill sets, the next step is to gain feedback from potential recipients, liaise with external partners and establish resources to run the projects.

Mr Paiboon said networking with both government and non-government agencies is important to maximise success when working in areas outside the remit of the company.

"We are still new to CSR and we want to learn and know the real issues deeper and better, and thus we can find ways to help them in a more effective way."

Last year, 25 projects were proposed to the company's CSR committee and

12 were approved. Some 300 staff, or one-quarter of the workforce, currently participate in CSR programmes.

For a professional services company such as PwC, whose core assets are people skills, CSR initiatives play a key role in supporting internal morale and making the company an attractive employer.

"We are a large organisation, and activities such as this help in building up moral leadership and pride among staff," Mr Paiboon said.

"The younger generation wants to work with companies that are both good and talented. And for the company, you not only want talent, but also good people. So it's all about creating good leaders."

The company backs CSR initiatives

Paiboon: "Sustainability is not a stand-alone issue."

with financial support, time and coaching for participating staff.

PwC also has both internal and external programmes to help meet its environmental stewardship goals.

Within the office, tracking is done for greenhouse gas emissions, energy, paper and waste. While the company has yet to tie this with key performance indicators, Mr Paiboon said the move toward clear targets and reduction goals is inevitable.

Among external initiatives, PwC worked with the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry to launch a "Save the Rangers, Save the Forest" programme to help outfit forest rangers with uniforms, flashlights and other essentials at Pang Sida national park. Staff have also had opportunities to build dams, salt licks and plant trees.

"Our younger staff in the team learn about the country's national parks and conservation issues. It's knowledge-sharing as well as awareness-building among staff," Mr Paiboon said.

He suggested that companies initiating CSR programmes should first consider their core strengths and goals.

Strong leadership is essential for success. "Not just moral support, but financial support as well. It has to be top-down."

Another key success factor is communications and awareness, where staff are educated about the consequences of their actions and the key issues faced by society.

Empowerment is also critical, said Mr Paiboon. Companies need to encourage and nurture enthusiasm and passion shown among staff, rather than simply dictate what must be done.

"The activities also need to be fun. And you can't be too focused on the end result — you need to dare to fail."