Boosting productivity can help SMEs address many of the issues they face in today’s challenging business environment.

**TAking the wait out of doctor visits**

Funding support and consultancy advice from SPRING have helped Acumed Medical Group to improve its operational efficiency.

**Bridging gaps, building lives**

Implementing an early intervention web portal has given a boost to Bridge Learning’s productivity and helped it to serve customers more efficiently.
The Power of Productivity

Boosting productivity can help SMEs address many of the issues they face in today's challenging business environment.

**Feature Story**

A Perfect Fit

A More Productive Scoop

**SME Showcase 1**

Taking the Wait Out of Doctor Visits

**SME Showcase 2**

Bridging Gaps, Building Lives

**Special supplement**

Coaching for Higher Performance

Bringing Together Service Quality and Productivity

Driving Business Excellence

Developing Leaders for Sustainable Growth

Harnessing Social Collaboration

Delivering Sustainable Success

---

SPRING Singapore is an agency under the Ministry of Trade and Industry responsible for helping Singapore enterprises grow and building trust in Singapore products and services. As the enterprise development agency, SPRING works with partners to help enterprises in financing, capability and management development, technology and innovation, and access to markets. SPRING also oversees the safety of general consumer goods in Singapore.
**SPRING Recalls Unsafe Ride-on Animal Toy**

SPRING, as the authority for consumer safety, issued a media release on 13 December to warn consumers of an inflatable ride-on animal toy that contained unsafe amounts of phthalates, which are commonly used as a plasticiser in toys.

Samples of the ride-on animal toy had been sent for testing in response to a consumer’s complaint about the toy, which comes in the shape of cows, deer and ponies. SPRING then requested the retailer to immediately stop distributing the product. The retailer also contacted customers who were given the toys to stop using them and dispose of them immediately, or return them to the company.

**Opening of Yang Kee’s Chemical Logistics Hub**

Yang Kee opened its S$120 million chemical logistics facility on 12 Dec, with Senior Minister of State for Trade & Industry Mr Lee Yi Shyan as the Guest-of-Honour. At the event, Mr Lee gave an update of the S$42 million productivity roadmap for the logistics and transportation industry.

He also said Yang Kee had transformed itself from being a general logistics company into one that offers specialised services to serve the oil & gas sector. With the new chemical logistics hub, Yang Kee will be able to complement the facilities on Jurong Island, which houses many leading oil & gas companies.

**Scanteak Launches New Prologue Collection**

Homegrown furniture company, Scanteak, launched its first modern luxury collection, Prologue, on 7 Dec. SPRING’s Deputy Chief Executive, Mr Ted Tan, said Scanteak had carved out a niche for itself by embracing innovation and design as a growth strategy and had tapped overseas opportunities to remain competitive. Also at the launch were Mr Yoichi Suzuki, Ambassador of Japan to Singapore and Mr Jeffery Ho, Executive Director of the DesignSingapore Council.
Faced with rising business costs and a tight labour market, Singapore companies must find innovative ways to improve their productivity and achieve sustainable growth. Yet, it isn’t always a breeze to get started or obtain funds to support such changes.

Recognising the challenges that many SMEs face, government agencies such as SPRING offers a range of schemes to support companies in their efforts to enhance operations and raise productivity.

Cashing in on productivity
One such scheme is the Productivity and Innovation Credit (PIC), which provides businesses with a 400 per cent tax deduction for productivity and innovation-related investments. One in two SMEs with an annual turnover of $10 million or less has used the scheme since it was introduced two years ago.

Incentives for smaller SMEs that may not be able to implement productivity improvements due to resource constraints have also been beefed up. The PIC scheme, for example, was enhanced in 2012 to allow companies to convert their qualifying expenditure into a non-taxable cash payout.

Grants such as SPRING Singapore’s Innovation and Capability Voucher (ICV) scheme have been well received by SMEs because they are easy to apply for and simple to use. The ICV provides SMEs with a $5,000 voucher to upgrade their capabilities in technology innovation, productivity, human resources and financial management. More than 1,000 vouchers have been given out since the scheme was launched in June last year, with 9 in 10 vouchers given to SMEs with annual revenues of $10 million or less.

Investing in training
Besides broad-based programmes to boost productivity, the government has also introduced industry-specific initiatives to support manpower-intensive sectors that may be feeling the labour crunch more.

New programmes to train consultants to implement productivity improvements in the retail and food services industries over the next three years will be rolled out by SPRING Singapore and the Workforce Development Agency (WDA).

Developed by the Japan Productivity Centre, the Productivity Consultancy Training Programme will equip consultants with skills such as consultancy ethics and productivity implementation.

Overcoming labour shortage
SPRING has also helped retail and F&B businesses to cope with the labour shortfall through its Part-Time Pool Programme. Under this scheme, retail and F&B businesses can hire from a common pool of trained part-timers formed by SPRING, the WDA and the National Trades Union Congress. This provides businesses with another option to cope with seasonal traffic increases without having to hire more full-time staff.

Mindset change
To achieve sustainable productivity growth, SMEs must focus on long-term initiatives, which include upgrading the skill of their employees; redesigning and automating their operations; and innovating to offer a differentiated customer experience.

An example of a company that has invested in workforce development is Han’s, a café and confectionery chain. Besides recording a 20 per cent increase in sales per employee over the past five years, the group also shared its profits with its staff and increased their salaries by 28 per cent.

Meanwhile, technology innovation has enabled Jumbo Restaurant to improve productivity and create a unique customer experience. Besides its self-help queue management system, which cut waiting time by 85 per cent, the restaurant also has a wireless system which allows customers to place their orders, thus saving around eight man-hours per day in order taking.

Speaking at the Food Services Productivity Conference held in November 2012, SPRING’s Chief Executive, Mr Png Cheong Boon, noted, “In today’s economic environment, companies can no longer operate the way they used to. They must be willing to make that mindset change and SPRING will stand ready to help facilitate that transformation.”

Boosting productivity
Read on to find out how two Singapore companies – Udders Ice Cream and bespoke tailor Rossi – have tapped SPRING’s schemes not only to cope with the labour shortage, but also to improve their operations and raise productivity.
All the tools your SME needs to measure up to Service Excellence. Now online!

With interactive scenarios and case studies accompanied by guided worksheets, tools and templates. Raise the bar of your service standards and turn complaints into compliments at apps.enterpriseone.gov.sg/servicetoolkit
A Perfect Fit

Home-grown menswear label Rossi combines quality craftsmanship with modern technology to provide a unique customer experience.
Whether you are frustrated with off-the-rack shirts because of the poor fit, or just want to inject your own personality into your wardrobe, Rossi Apparel has what you are looking for.

Set up by Mr Daniel Lum and Mr Timothy Tham in 2004, menswear label Rossi allows customers to customise their shirts, trousers and suits according to their preferences. While tailoring remains a craft that requires skill, patience and attention to detail, Mr Lum believes that technology can help improve efficiency.

**Streamlining work processes**

The company developed an iPad work order interface, with funding support from SPRING Singapore’s Technology Innovation Programme (TIP), to manage work order execution, track inventory and reduce paperwork.

Now, instead of having to write the customer’s measurements on paper and faxing them to the off-site workshop, work orders are sent electronically. Customers can also place their orders without having their measurements taken again as information such as their preferences, measurements and order history are all stored in the company’s database. The platform has enabled the company to expand its customer base, as Mr Lum notes, “Now, I can send work orders from anywhere in the world with internet access,” says Mr Lum. “It is a fully integrated system that combines customer relationship management, inventory control and work order management.”

**Become your own designer**

Besides catering to an upmarket clientele through the Rossi label, the company has started Nero, a semi-custom retail concept, to target a younger customer base.

Using part of the funding from SPRING, the company developed an iPad interface that allows customers to design their own shirt by choosing from an array of fabrics, collar types, cuffs and buttons.

As part of its strategy to reach out to a younger audience, Nero started an EZ-order platform where customers can send in their orders through its website anytime. All they need to do, says Mr Lum, is make one visit to the store to create their user profile and have their measurements taken.

“We realised that our younger customers sometimes prefer using an iPad or the internet, instead of approaching a salesperson for help. With the interface and EZ-order platform, customers can send their orders directly, which reduces the paperwork for our staff,” explains Mr Lum.

Nero’s ‘brick-and-click’ concept has not only allowed customers to interact with the company, but has also helped to improve its productivity and capabilities.

“Besides tapping technology to improve productivity, we seek to enhance the overall customer experience by providing expert advice. Therefore, we train our staff and equip them with skills to address customers’ needs and interact with them more effectively,” notes Mr Lum.

• Technology can help businesses to redesign their workflow processes to deliver fast and better service to customers.
• For more information on how to upgrade your company’s capabilities through the streamlining of work processes and productivity improvement measures, please visit www.spring.gov.sg.
A More Productive Scoop

Udders Ice Cream is driving greater productivity and growth through automation and product diversification.
When Mr David Yim, Ms Wong Peck Lin and a third partner decided to start Udders Ice Cream in 2007, they saw an opening in the market for high-quality, locally-made ice cream. Since then, the market has become saturated, says Mr Yim, Udders’ Chief Milkman.

Despite heated competition, Udders has made a name for itself with its range of unique local flavours such as Mao Shan Wang Durian, Botak Coconut and Gila Melaka, as well as several rich alcoholic flavours including Rum Rum Raisin, Orange Choc Bitters and Tira-miss-u. From its first shop at Novena, Udders has expanded to seven shops around Singapore. It has also bagged several successes such as entering into an exclusive partnership with Gardens by the Bay to supply customised, floral-inspired ice cream flavours.

While serving up delicious ice cream is clearly a key element of Udders’ success, there is also a lot going on behind the scenes to ensure the sustainable growth of the company.

A customised kitchen

One of the challenges Udders has faced is managing the production capacity at its central kitchen. With an automation grant from SPRING, Udders purchased custom-made ice cream making equipment for its new central kitchen. As a result, the kitchen has become much more comfortable for production workers, which helps them work more productively. It has also reduced Udders’ reliance on manpower. In the old kitchen six to seven employees were required to produce ice cream for five outlets, while the new kitchen requires the same number to supply seven outlets. “If not for the new kitchen, we would need 10 to 11 staff to do this,” says Mr Yim.

The machines can also be programmed to work overnight, and the new water-cooled system has helped to reduce electricity bills. Udders recently received HACCP food safety certification, which was also supported through a SPRING grant. Together with the new kitchen, these initiatives have opened up opportunities in the wholesale market. “With our new facilities and increased capacity, we are in a good position to go into the wholesale market,” says Ms Wong, a Director at Udders.

Beyond ice cream

In response to increasing competition, Udders’ management has put much thought into what needs to be done to remain ahead of the curve. One of its strategies is to expand its menu.

In late 2012, the company introduced sundaes and savoury pancake meals to encourage higher spend per customer and to reach out to a wider audience.

“We see this as a big boost for our productivity. We are introducing a whole new revenue stream with the same premises and operating hours, and almost the same number of staff,” explains Ms Wong.

• A focus on productivity can improve efficiency and drive growth by increasing capacity and opening up new markets.
• To find out more about boosting your company’s productivity and ensuring sustainable growth, visit www.spring.gov.sg.
NEW & IMPROVED

HR Capability Toolkit designed for SMEs

The ONE toolkit to help you systematically manage your human resources through eight simple modules.

Download the Toolkit today at www.hrcapability.sg/tool-kit
TAKING THE WAIT OUT OF DOCTOR VISITS

Funding support and consultancy advice from SPRING have helped Acumed Medical Group to improve its operational efficiency.
or some people, the worst part of a visit to the doctor is not the needles or tedious physical examinations, but the long wait in a crowded room with other sick patients.

This is an experience that Mr Jeffrey Yam hopes to change. The Chief Executive Officer of Acumed Medical Group, which manages a network of 12 medical centres across Singapore, believes that time and care must be dedicated to every patient. “This is only possible with efficient systems that free up the staff’s time to provide better care for our patients.”

Hence, to raise its service standards, Acumed implemented a clinic management system (CMS) developed with support from SPRING Singapore’s Technology Innovation Programme (tIP). The CMS platform helps Acumed to keep track of patients’ medical information, improve workflow management and reduce waiting time.

**Improved operational efficiency**

Instead of keeping paper-based records, patient information is now stored in a centralised system that is integrated across Acumed’s medical centres. This reduces administrative errors and duplicate data entries. For example, a returning patient does not have to tell the staff about their allergies or remember the type of medication that was previously prescribed to them.

“The CMS has enabled us to increase productivity, which is important in today’s tight labour market,” says Mr Yam.

In addition, the availability of real-time patient information allows Acumed to analyse patient trends, manage its drug inventory effectively and provide value-added services to its corporate clients.

“We are able to provide our corporate clients with information on medical usage trends and the requirements of their staff. This information helps them to understand the medical needs of their staff and plan their budgets accordingly,” he adds.

**The SMART way forward**

The CMS platform is just one of the changes implemented by Acumed after it embarked on SPRING’s SME Management Action for Results (SMART) initiative, which provides small and medium-sized enterprises with consultancy advice and funding support to develop their management capabilities.

With help from a consultant, a review of the company’s processes revealed several areas that Acumed could improve upon in order to enhance its competitiveness, including its processes and human resource management.

Besides investing in the development of its staff through training and education programmes, Acumed also prioritises employee engagement. In addition to setting performance goals to track productivity, the company is encouraging more proactive communication between different levels and departments to develop a better understanding of their staff.

“We believe a multi-pronged approach has to be adopted to improve productivity. Apart from technology improvements, we must keep in close communication with our patients, corporate clients, staff, external service providers and suppliers. This helps us to understand the various challenges and one another better, which results in a more nurturing work environment as well as better care and service for our patients and corporate clients,” says Mr Yam.
$5,000 INNOVATION & CAPABILITY VOUCHER TO BUILD YOUR BUSINESS

APPLY ONLINE TODAY!

IN JUST 3 STEPS, apply online for the $5,000 Innovation & Capability Voucher to build your business in Innovation, Productivity, Human Resources and Financial Management*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP 1</th>
<th>Select a service that you need at <a href="http://www.spring.gov.sg/icv">www.spring.gov.sg/icv</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEP 2</td>
<td>Discuss your project with a participating service provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 3</td>
<td>Submit your application online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visit www.spring.gov.sg/icv or call EnterpriseOne at 6898 1800 today.

* Terms and conditions apply.
While it may be difficult to identify learning disabilities because the symptoms vary according to the individual, being aware of developmental milestones can help parents to detect their child’s special needs and get the right support as soon as possible.

The Bridge Early Intervention E-Portal (BEE) is one tool that parents can use to identify and manage their child’s developmental needs. Developed by Bridge Learning with support from the Technology Innovation Programme (TIP), BEE offers early intervention resources for parents of children with mild to moderate learning difficulties.

**D.I.Y early intervention**
Parents can complete a free Online Learning Assessment on the portal to identify their child’s learning needs and receive customised, step-by-step intervention once every three weeks. They can also watch video demonstrations to get a better idea of how to carry out these activities for their children at home or view graphical reports of their child’s learning progress.

“This portal was created for parents who may not have access to early intervention programmes because they might be too expensive,” says Ms Areena Loo, Executive Director of Bridge Learning, a centre that

**BRIDGING GAPS, BUILDING LIVES**
Implementing an early intervention web portal has given a boost to Bridge Learning’s productivity and helped it to serve customers more efficiently.
runs early intervention programmes for children aged 7 months to 12 years old.

“For a small subscription fee, parents can use the portal to intervene in their child’s weak learning capabilities at their own convenience.”

The portal, which will be launched in January 2013, will help Bridge Learning to reduce the time needed to create individualised developmental plans from 7,000 to 2,500 hours annually. In addition, the portal will include video demonstrations which function as a training aid for the staff to carry out intervention activities.

“Technology has enabled us to put our programmes on an online platform so they are more accessible, and has also helped us make our processes more efficient, so that we can focus on providing quality service to our customers,” says Ms Loo.

Looking ahead, Bridge Learning plans to automate part of its diagnostic assessment process to reduce the need for its staff to type out performance reports.

**Reaching out to more children**

Bridge Learning has also started a Professional E-Portal for professionals working with children with learning difficulties. The portal offers a full suite of end-to-end services, from screening to planning, generation and execution of individualised intervention plans.

“We will target professionals such as therapists and educators who may not be trained in carrying out activities for effective intervention. They can access and use our intellectual property to develop customised programmes,” says Ms Loo.

She adds: “As a social enterprise, one of our aims is to reach out to more children and demystify learning disabilities. We believe that as we equip and empower educators and parents, it is the children who will benefit.”

• Technology is a catalyst for higher productivity and improvements in processes and service.
• Find out how you can build up your capabilities in automation and technology adoption with SPRING’s Capability Development Scheme at www.spring.gov.sg
Our sales were increasing but our operations had a hard time meeting the increased demand. The Productivity Management Programme (PMP) highlighted areas for improvement and allowed us to optimise our operations. Since implementing the changes, staff efficiency has increased by 15%, and profit margin by 8%.

Mr Jonathan Phoon Siew Boon Executive Director Freshening Industries Pte Ltd

Productivity Management Programme (PMP). Get expert advice on how to raise your company’s productivity. Offered at any of the five Enterprise Development Centres (EDCs), the Productivity Management Programme (PMP) will connect you to Productivity Advisers who can help identify your business’ strengths, highlight areas for improvement and even guide you to schemes that can assist your company’s productivity journey.

Contact these EDCs today!

EDC@ASME
Association of Small and Medium Enterprises
T: 6513 0388
E: enquiries@edc-asme.sg
W: edc-asme.sg

EDC@SCCCI
Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry
T: 6337 8381
E: edc@edc-sccci.sg
W: edc-sccci.sg

EDC@SICCI
Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
T: 6508 0147
E: edc@edc-sicci.sg
W: edc-sicci.sg

EDC@SMCCI
Singapore Malay Chamber of Commerce and Industry
T: 6293 3822
E: gadvisory@edc-smcci.sg
W: edc-smcci.sg

EDC@SMF
Singapore Manufacturing Federation
T: 6826 3020
E: edc@edc-smf.sg
W: edc-smf.sg
In Pursuit of Excellence

Learning from global perspectives and approaches to business excellence.

SPRING Singapore’s Business Excellence (BE) initiative aims to help organisations strengthen their management systems and processes for high performance through adopting the business excellence framework. The BE framework helps organisations to understand where they are on their excellence journey and what they need to do to achieve a higher level of performance.

In this special feature, we bring you the highlights of the fourth BE Global Conference, held on 19 and 20 November 2012 at Resorts World Sentosa. The event brought together over 200 business leaders to share their experiences and learn from the insights of local and global experts.
COACHING FOR HIGHER PERFORMANCE

Through a process of self-discovery, coaching can help people to reach their full potential and contribute to business excellence.

Most people are used to being told what to do: Here’s your job, and this is how you should do it. While this approach has its place in specific circumstances, it is generally not a recipe for business excellence. To achieve optimal performance in today’s fast-paced global business environment requires a motivated workforce, with employees who will take the initiative to make improvements and drive change.

Coaching can play an important role in developing such a workforce, says Dr Lee Tsao Yuen, Coach Practice Leader at Capelle Consulting. “One of the essences of coaching is ‘drawing out’. Instead of just telling you what to do, a coach helps you to learn from within yourself what to do, by asking you questions.”

In many cases, people know what they need to do, and have the skills to do it, but they are just afraid of doing it. “They have no confidence,” explains Dr Lee. “Coaching can build up confidence, remove inner obstacles, and allow an employee to reach their full potential.”

This, in turn, can lead to a change in management style, where a supervisor may say: “This is the deadline, this is what we need, tell me how you’re going to do it.” Once this kind of approach is adopted, companies will start to see employees taking ownership of their actions and projects – an important step on the road to staff empowerment and higher performance.

The keys to coaching

Coaching can be used in almost any situation and in any company, big or small. The success of any attempt at coaching comes down to three key factors: motivation, chemistry and commitment. There has to be a desire to change and improve; a good connection between the coach and the person being coached; and buy-in, both from the person being coached and from the organisation, to support the coaching effort and give the person time to discover, learn and change.

If these three factors are present, then coaching can become a powerful tool to drive the performance of individuals and teams, explains Dr Lee. “Coaching is about helping people achieve their goals faster and better, and inspiring them to maximise and achieve their potential.”

She points to three situations where coaching can have a particularly strong effect: when a person is entering a new role, when a person is in transition, or when behavioural change or improvement is required. “In these situations, coaching can help to provide clarity of purpose. With clear goals, it becomes easier to discover what is required to achieve them,” says Dr Lee.

Coaching can also play an important role in nurturing high-potential employees and in helping senior managers to become better leaders. “Coaching can help leaders understand the impact of their management style and be aware of possible adjustments to improve it. It helps leaders to look in the mirror and see how others view them,” explains Dr Lee.
Running a hotel in Singapore is challenging. Growing competition, rising labour costs, and increasing customer expectations are just some of the obstacles to success, according to Brian Tan, Director of Quality at Fairmont Singapore and Swissotel the Stamford. Yet success is achievable, as the two hotels he works for demonstrate.

Indeed, both the Fairmont and Swissotel rank highly across a range of service quality metrics. The challenge, as Mr Tan explains, is to do so in a productive manner. “Productivity is often associated with cutting costs while quality is seen as benefiting from increases in manpower and investment in service infrastructure. The question is: Can quality and productivity co-exist? The answer is yes, but it is not easy,” he adds.

Tackling service productivity

Mr Tan and his team have a number of productivity initiatives in place, including two that focus on managing manpower. First is to make the hotels’ employees more flexible in the roles they can perform. “Staff are cross-deployed to departments and jobs where more people are needed at a given time. This flexibility allows us to manage the number of employees while deploying them more effectively,” explains Mr Tan.

As a result of such cross-deployment, the hotels’ employees have the chance to perform different work, which gives them greater job satisfaction. They are also compensated for the additional hours they put in for different roles. For the hotels, it has meant a reduction in overtime and the need for external service providers, as they are able to use existing resources more effectively.

The Fairmont and Swissotel also use the Watson Labour Management System, which helps them forecast business volumes two or three weeks ahead. Available manpower is matched to these forecasts to optimise utilisation. This has reduced man-hour wastage during slow periods and achieved savings of 15 per cent on labour costs. Hours worked per occupied room – a key productivity metric in the hotel industry – has dropped from 2.5 to 2.25, says Mr Tan.

Another productivity initiative is the Fairmont Improvement and Innovation (Fii) Programme, which aims to drive both productivity and quality. “Fii incorporates elements of Lean Management and Six Sigma. One of the key areas of focus is cutting wastage, as opposed to just cutting costs. Merely cutting costs across the board is usually not productive. We believe in identifying wastage and eliminating it,” says Mr Tan.

To drive a culture of improvement, employees are engaged through the Ideas Count programme, which encourages and rewards them for coming up with ways to improve operations. One such suggestion was a new method for removing the wrinkles from bed sheets that reduced the time required from 25 minutes down to two minutes.

Making time for productivity

While an SME may not be able to hire a dedicated person or team to look into productivity initiatives, there still needs to be someone to champion these efforts. “The key is to set aside time to step away from the day-to-day operations and analyse the company’s productivity. It’s not easy, but it’s an important thing to do,” notes Mr Tan.
Developing Leaders For Sustainable Growth
General Electric is strengthening its commitment to leadership development as it pursues growth in emerging markets.

“Think global, act local” is a simple principle which has shaped the business operations of General Electric (GE), a 130-year-old company with a presence in over 100 countries and businesses ranging from aviation to healthcare.

With emerging economies such as China and India becoming major players in the global economy, GE aims to expand its overseas presence by relocating its top executives closer to these markets.

“Globalisation is driving growth in more markets and GE must become more responsive to local needs. It was not sustainable to have the bulk of GE’s senior leadership residing in the United States. GE needed to show leadership commitment in these growth markets,” says Mr Sidat Senanayake, Market Development Director of GE Singapore.

Moving closer to the ground
GE’s Vice Chairman, John Rice, relocated from the United States to Hong Kong last year as part of the company’s move to transform from a US-centric company into a global company. He now heads the Global Growth and Operations (GGO) business unit in Hong Kong, which aims to accelerate the company’s global expansion.

Mr Senanayake notes that this move would strengthen GE’s “company to country” growth strategy, where GE works directly with governments to deliver solutions that meet local needs.

“Being an infrastructure and technology company, it is important that we understand our customers and align ourselves to grow in these markets.”

Developing leaders the GE way
In line with the shifting emphasis of the group’s operations, GE also embarked on an initiative to develop the leadership of its international workforce, while instilling a common culture and purpose.

As such, the company reworked its “growth values” or leadership traits necessary for expanding into new markets – external focus, clear thinking, imagination and courage, inclusiveness and expertise. “Externally focused” leaders, for instance, are now trained not just to cultivate customer relationships, but also analyse global trends and spot opportunities.

“At GE, we believe that 80 per cent of the learning gets done on the job, and 20 per cent is through formal learning platforms. We actively invest in both,” says Mr Senanayake.

The company, which has more than 300,000 employees worldwide, spends more than US$1 billion annually in staff development. GE offers a range of learning platforms, from its leadership development institute at Crotonville, New York, to technology- and business-specific courses. All employees are also provided with extensive on-the-job development opportunities through challenging “stretch” assignments, coaching and performance management.

While SMEs may not have the resources to set up an in-house learning programme, they are able to adopt the principles that GE follows. By providing employees and potential leaders with learning and development opportunities, any company, regardless of size, can improve its prospects for sustainable growth.

“Our culture drives our longevity and our leaders drive our culture. Our commitment to developing leaders throughout the organisation provides the talent to sustain our growth,” notes Mr Senanayake.
Driving Business Excellence

By maintaining a continued focus on achieving business excellence, companies are better-positioned for higher productivity and enhanced performance.

How do business excellence and productivity relate to each other? More importantly, how can companies drive business excellence to achieve their desired results? In a panel discussion at the 4th Business Excellence Global Conference, panellists from different industries explored this timely topic and shared their unique perspectives.

Several broad themes related to business excellence emerged throughout the discussion, including the importance of a holistic approach. Ms Teng Soon Lang, Executive Vice President and Group Head, Quality & Service Excellence Division of OCBC Bank noted that when a company makes improvements to processes that add value for customers, it is important to ensure that related support processes in the organisation are also updated to ensure alignment.

Effective employee engagement and using incentives were also identified as key factors to achieve business excellence. The panellists highlighted several best practices in this area, such as empowering employees through positive influence rather than command and control tactics, and maintaining transparent communications so employees know what the company is doing and why, as well as aligning employee incentives with corporate objectives.

Achieving productivity breakthroughs

The panellists all agreed on the importance of companies taking a step back to put their business “under a microscope” and assessing it objectively before they can achieve productivity breakthroughs.

Ms Teng commented that initiatives aimed at boosting productivity should be assessed from different perspectives, taking into account the needs of customers, the welfare of employees and the impact on the bottom line. “It is important that whatever we do, it is aligned with our business goals.”

Heiko Rauscher, Principal at Porsche Consulting, stressed the need to look beyond obvious areas such as automation. To boost productivity, companies should seek out and eliminate waste in processes throughout every facet of an organisation. This, he noted, would allow a company “to reduce or eliminate everything that does not add value to customers.”

Building on this idea, retired CEO of Premier, Inc., Mr Richard Norling, shared how his former company mapped out its entire business into 180 unique processes. This allowed him and his colleagues to better understand their organisation by measuring which processes had the most influence on individual corporate strategies.

Mr Norling said it empowered them to boost productivity in a targeted manner because “we focused on and prioritised those processes that were most associated with the results that we were seeking.”

Noting that initiatives aimed at boosting productivity can be disruptive, Mr Naris Cheyklin, Senior Executive Vice President and CFO of Central Pattana Public Co. Ltd, added that these changes need to be managed with care and consideration. “We need to focus on the management team that has been put in charge of this change management because there will be some resistance from the people, as sometimes they may have to work harder in the early stage of change.”

Climbing ever-higher

Regardless of the industry or the type of changes being implemented, the panellists all felt that the quest for business excellence must be an ongoing endeavour, not a one-off event. Although implementing major changes can provide a big one-time boost to productivity, the key to business excellence lies in working towards continual, incremental improvement, which will stand any company in good stead.
The rise of technology and social media has enhanced companies’ ability to drive greater collaboration and communication, and in turn made them indispensable tools for innovation and enhancing productivity.

“Working ‘smart’ is a business imperative, and not just something that is nice to have,” says Ms Janet Ang, Managing Director of IBM Singapore. “As businesses, as leaders, there must be a strategy to harness technology to drive innovation and co-creation.”

Ms Ang suggests that by empowering employees with the right tools, a company can develop into a social business – one that leverages social media technology to innovate its processes and the way it interacts with its employees, customers and partners.

Sparking new ideas
Social media technologies can range from something as simple as a blog to more complex systems that allow for sophisticated collaboration. An internal blog, for example, can be a valuable tool to encourage sharing of ideas and develop new ideas among employees.

“These sorts of tools give SMEs a way to drive ideation without having to turn to the ‘traditional’ experts, which they may not be able to access given their limited resources,” notes Ms Ang.

Taking this technology a step further, real-time community collaboration can bring people together to contribute ideas on topics such as product development. Most importantly, this does not have to be confined to internal stakeholders but can also include partners and customers.

“By bringing many parties together on a common platform, ideas take shape and grow more quickly, driving innovation and co-creation,” says Ms Ang.

Indonesian restaurant chain Bumbu Desa is a good example. Using IBM’s SmartCloud Engage platform, the company has been able to drive internal collaboration as well as reach out to customers for feedback. Suggestions from customers are quickly and easily shared among the chain’s restaurants across Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. The new insights and ideas are also refined through online discussions.

Improved processes and efficiency
Social media technology plays a key role in boosting productivity. “By delivering information through a common platform, less time is needed to locate it,” says Ms Ang.

For Bumbu Desa, the introduction of technology enabled its restaurants’ managers to share menus, new recipes and best practices. It also helps in the dissemination of corporate materials and the sharing of the company’s strategy and vision.

The new system has also improved the reporting process, by replacing faxes and phone calls with online updates. Better communication has also helped Bumbu Desa to reduce travelling expenses by 25 per cent.

Going social
The technology for companies to become social businesses exists, and it is now a question of how they will adopt it to empower employees and drive innovation and growth.

“Strong support and direction from the leaders are required to drive change in an organisation’s culture,” says Ms Ang. “While this can be a transformative tool, there must be a clear strategy driving the adoption of social media technology so as to bring about the desired changes.”
Delivering Sustainable Success

A flexible, entrepreneurial culture and constant self-evaluation help BMW’s Regensburg plant to achieve business excellence.
“It’s not a question of knowing what excellence is; it’s about whether you are able to introduce it into your company and bring it to life,” says Dr Andreas Wendt, Managing Director of BMW’s plant in Regensburg, Germany.

While BMW has focused on excellence throughout its almost 100 year history, it was only four years ago that the Regensburg plant turned its attention to business excellence, with the aim of going from being merely good to being excellent.

Dealing with volatility
In an uncertain world with ever-changing conditions, flexibility has been a key element of BMW’s success. It allows the plant to adjust capacities and shift workloads to maintain optimal operations. As Dr Wendt notes, “Flexibility is one of the most important elements of business excellence. Whether a company is big or small, it must be able to adapt.”

At the Regensburg plant, there are 50 different shift models to balance workloads for optimal performance. Employees work on a model where their annual hours can vary by plus or minus 300 hours, which gives the plant flexibility in ramping up or slowing down production.

Besides such policies, technology also contributes to the plant’s flexibility, with the same assembly line capable of handling nine different car types. At the same time, the plant’s highly capable and well trained workforce plays an important role in reconfiguring this assembly line and adjusting production processes to the type of car being produced. This allows the plant to produce some 1,200 cars per day – an impressive rate of one every 57 seconds.

Entrepreneurs everywhere
While flexibility ensures that the plant can adjust to external changes, it is Regensburg’s entrepreneurial culture that allows change to be driven from within. “It is important to foster entrepreneurial thinking within the workforce, and support this with the appropriate management,” says Dr Wendt. “This will give you an intelligent workforce that looks for opportunities to make the improvements that lead to business excellence.”

Acknowledging that an entrepreneurial approach can lead to some issues of risk-taking, he adds, “We would rather have to say ‘stop’ once because someone is taking the wrong action, than ‘go’ ten times because nobody is taking any action at all.”

Looking within
Having a clear understanding of the company’s purpose and goals is important to channelling the entrepreneurial spirit in the right direction. With this in mind, when the Regensburg plant started on its business excellence initiative four years ago, a lot of time was invested in discussing, and even disputing, the nature of its work and what it stood for.

The discussions distilled the company’s purpose and goals down to seven or eight sentences, replacing the many pages of text that had been distributed as posters throughout the plant.

The process of self-discovery also led to a realignment of purpose. While the previous focus was on producing error-free cars, the company now embraces a broader purpose: to ensure driving pleasure and inspire the customer.

Dr Wendt explains, “The key was to have the workers and managers contribute to the process and have the end result written in their own words, so that they could understand, explain, and then act on it.”
The EnterpriseOne portal (www.enterpriseone.gov.sg) is a Government-to-Business (G2B) website customised to help enterprises find answers they need to start, sustain and grow their businesses. The EnterpriseOne iPhone app brings you the web portal’s most popular features and enhanced accessibility to the content.

Download the Enterprise iPhone app today!

HOW TO DOWNLOAD?
1. Tap on the ‘App Store’ icon on your iPhone.
2. Search for ‘enterpriseone’.
3. Download the application.
Useful Contacts

EnterpriseOne
Tel: (65) 6898 1800
Email: enterpriseone@spring.gov.sg
Website: www.enterpriseone.gov.sg

Enterprise Development Centres (EDCs)

EDC@ASME
Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (ASME)
167 Jalan Bukit Merah
Tower 4, #03-13
Singapore 150167
Tel: (65) 6513 0388
Email: enquiries@edc-asme.sg
Website: www.edc-asme.sg

EDC@NorthEast
(Managed by EDC@ASME)
Tampines Ave 5, #06-01
NTUC Income Tampines Junction
Singapore 529653
Tel: (65) 6424 4000
Email: northeast@edc-asme.sg

EDC@SSCCI
Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SSCCI)
47 Hill Street, #09-00
Singapore 179365
Tel: (65) 6337 8381
Fax: (65) 6339 0605
Email: edc@edc-ssccci.sg
Website: www.edc-ssccci.sg

EDC@SICCI
Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI)
SICCI Building
31 Stanley Street
Singapore 068740
Tel: (65) 6508 0147
Email: edc@edc-sicci.sg
Website: www.edc-sicci.sg

EDC@SMCCI
Singapore Malay Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SMCCI)
15 Jalan Pinang
Singapore 199147
Tel: (65) 6293 3822
Fax: (65) 6293 3905
Email: gadvisory@edc-smcci.sg
Website: www.edc-smcci.sg

EDC@SMF
Singapore Manufacturing Federation (SMF)
2985 Jalan Bukit Merah
Singapore 159457
Tel: (65) 6826 3020
Fax: (65) 6826 3021
Email: edc@edc-smf.sg
Website: www.edc-smf.sg

Standards Development Organisations

Singapore Manufacturing Federation
Standards Development Organisation
2985 Jalan Bukit Merah
Singapore 159457
Tel: (65) 6826 3000
Fax: (65) 6826 3113
Web: www.smfederation.org.sg

Singapore Chemical Industry Council
Standards Development Organisation
8 Jurong Town Hall Road
#25-04, The JTC Summit
Singapore 609434
Tel: (65) 6287 8930
Fax: (65) 6287 8893
Email: terencekoh@scic.sg
Website: www.scic.sg

Singapore Accreditation Council
1 Fusionopolis Walk, #01-02
South Tower, Solaris
Singapore 138628
Tel: (65) 6279 1855
Fax: (65) 6659 0640
Email: sac@spring.gov.sg
Website: www.sac-accreditation.gov.sg

Sales of Standards
Toppan Leefung Pte. Ltd.
1 Kim Seng Promenade, #18-01
Great World City East Tower
Singapore 237994
Tel: (65) 6826 9691
Fax: (65) 6820 3341
Email: singaporestandardseshop@toppanleefung.com
Website: www.singaporestandardseshop.sg

Standards Collection
National Library Board
100 Victoria Street
Lee Kong Chian Reference Library
Level 7
Singapore 188064
Hotline: (65) 6332 3255
Email: ref@nlb.gov.sg
Website: libguides.nl.sg/standards