Faced with increasing global competition, organisations need to strive for world-class standards of excellence. SPRING Singapore’s Business Excellence framework helps them to achieve this by developing strong internal processes and a robust organisational DNA.
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New $7 million Facility for Food Testing

The new $7 million facility at the Food Innovation and Resource Centre at Singapore Polytechnic (SP) was unveiled on 2 November. The facility would enable local food products to be tested on a smaller scale before they are produced commercially. The centre is a joint initiative between SPRING and SP and is expected to help more SMEs to create value-added products and services to compete in the global market.

Global Entrepreneurship Week

At the launch of the Global Entrepreneurship Week at The Cathay on 8 November Minister of State for Trade and Industry, Mr Teo Ser Luck (above), urged students to try their hand at developing and marketing products while still in school. He also said that enterprising students should identify what society needs and try to provide for that. Schools, in turn, would also need to change the way they think of entrepreneurship so that it would be treated as more than just a project ‘to be given marks’.

World Entrepreneurship Forum 2011

At the World Entrepreneurship Forum held on 3 November, Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean (above) encouraged entrepreneurs and innovators to seize opportunities amid global challenges such as rapid urbanisation, to develop new technologies, ideas and solutions. Nearly 130 members of the think-thank and foreign delegates from some 60 countries attended the event. Minister of State for Trade and Industry, Mr Teo Ser Luck highlighted the importance of helping entrepreneurship flourish at lower income levels ‘to alleviate poverty and create new markets’. He also said that Singapore has worked hard to ‘build an entrepreneurial nation’, with the Action Community for Entrepreneurship having ‘effected close to 1,000 changes to government rules’.

Pushing Growth Boundaries: SMEs to Tap Collaborative Innovation and Cross-Sector Partnerships

SME leaders from 70 enterprises in the education, healthcare, biomedical, logistics, food services and retail sectors attended the SME CEO Forum held on 4 November. Mr Lee Yi Shyan, Minister of State for Trade & Industry and National Development engaged industry experts in a panel discussion on the topic of Cross Sector Partnerships – The Next Wave of Growth. He also encouraged Singapore SMEs to think strategically about collaborations and make investments to develop collaborative capabilities with partners. He also reiterated the importance for SMEs to have the right mindset to effectively harness collaborative innovation as a transformational business strategy. He said companies could become globally competitive by creating new value, accessing new knowledge, reaping productivity improvements and breaking into the overseas markets.

$45 million for Food Firms to Boost Productivity

Minister of State for Trade & Industry and National Development, Mr Lee Yi Shyan announced the $45 million food manufacturing productivity plan at the opening of the Asia Pacific Food Expo 2011. The plan is expected to lift each worker’s value-added to the economy by about 20% by 2016. Mr Lee said Singapore’s food industry enjoys a good reputation that is built upon high quality and safety. To grow, Singapore companies must continue to create value through innovation and higher productivity.
Faced with increasing global competition, organisations need to strive for world-class standards of excellence. SPRING Singapore’s Business Excellence framework helps them to achieve this by developing strong internal processes and a robust organisational DNA.

In Pursuit of Business Excellence

Succeeding in today’s competitive environment requires businesses to drive more efficient processes and find new ways of delivering services to create more value for their customers. To help organisations achieve this, the Business Excellence (BE) initiative was launched by SPRING Singapore in 1994.

The BE initiative provides a framework in which organisations can strengthen their management systems and processes to achieve higher productivity and competitiveness. This is done by encouraging a systems-based approach to management and the adoption of a measurement system that allows organisations to benchmark their performance against the best-in-class in their industry.

The BE framework enables organisations to assess where they are on their excellence journey, identify gaps and take actions to improve performance. Three niche standards in the areas of people, innovation and service also support the framework, which cover seven key areas: leadership, planning, information, people, processes, customers and results.

Business Excellence Awards

The BE framework provides milestones of achievement for organisations as they progress on their excellence journey. Organisations receive certificates for attaining the various standards of excellence, while a select group that have demonstrated superior performance receive the respective Business Excellence Awards.

To date, a total of 850 organisations employing about 550,000 workers, or 20% of Singapore’s workforce, have been certified in accordance with the BE framework.

This year, nine organisations were recognised with Business Excellence Awards for their significant achievements. They are the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS), Maybank Singapore, National Library Board (NLB), Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), Raffles Institute (RI), Subordinate Courts of Singapore, Teckwah Industrial Corporation Ltd and Yokogawa Electric Asia Pte Ltd.

Learning from the best

Adopting the BE framework, however, is more than just winning awards. Certified organisations are provided with development opportunities to learn from the best practices of leading organisations through seminars and workshops.

In addition, they also have access to the Business Performance Improvement Resource (BPIR.com), which is developed by the Centre of Organisational Excellence Research at Massey University in New Zealand. This valuable resource provides insights into how global organisations measure, manage and improve their performance and includes information on management tools and best practice reports.

Invitations are also extended to certified organisations to nominate key staff to serve as BE assessors, who will get the opportunity to participate in the assessments of other organisations.

Raising productivity

While learning from the best practices of other organisations is essential to achieving long-term growth, raising enterprise productivity is also a critical aspect of business excellence.

Enhancing productivity requires significant transformations in the way companies manage their business and streamline work processes. The BE framework is built around the belief that every employee in the organisation is involved in these improvements – from the top executives to the junior workers. Leaders must, therefore, lead by example, set clear visions and take action to drive change.

To help companies rally and motivate their employees, SPRING Singapore has collaborated with the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) and National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) to publish the Guide for Productivity Gainsharing. A detailed manual on designing and implementing a productivity gainsharing scheme in an organisation, it complements SPRING’s Guide to Productivity Measurement and fosters a culture of continuous improvements. Both guides are available on the Productivity@Work portal (www.enterpriseone.gov.sg).

Developing future business leaders

Besides equipping companies to achieve higher productivity, the concepts and key elements of the BE framework are also being incorporated in the business curriculum of three tertiary institutions.
The National University of Singapore, SIM University and Nanyang Polytechnic will introduce business excellence courses in their curriculum from next year. This will be extended to other tertiary institutions after the pilot phase. The courses will provide graduates with a firm foundation in business excellence and better prepare them for their careers, whether they choose to start their own business or work in an organisation.

Read on to learn how the nine winners of this year’s Business Excellence Awards have distinguished themselves and used the BE framework to strengthen their businesses.

Starting your journey
Organisations interested to adopt the BE framework can engage with experienced practitioners or assessors through SPRING’s Business Excellence Clinics. Customised briefings and presentations are available to help organisations get a clearer understanding of BE standards. More information can be found on www.spring.gov.sg/be.

TOP ROW FROM LEFT:
- Mr Thomas Chua, Chairman and Managing Director Teckwah Group
- Mr Chan Lee Mun, Principal and Chief Executive Nanyang Polytechnic
- Mr Bruce Poh, Director and Chief Executive Officer Institute of Technical Education
- Mr Tan Siong Thye, Chief District Judge Subordinate Courts of Singapore
- Mr Moses Lee, Commissioner Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore
- Mr Lai Ah Keow, Managing Director Yokogawa Electric Asia Pte Ltd

BOTTOM ROW FROM LEFT:
- Mrs Elaine Ng, Chief Executive Officer, National Library Board
- Ms Pollie Sim, Chief Executive Officer, Maybank Singapore
- Mrs Lim Lai Cheng, Principal, Raffles Institution
What sets the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) apart from other educational institutions is not just its provision of quality technical education, but the creation of a culture of care.

‘Heartware’, says Mr Bruce Poh (above), Director and Chief Executive Officer at the ITE, is a key component in ITE’s education delivery. “If you talk to any of our students, they will say without fail, that our staff are very caring. As most of our students come from disadvantaged families and sometimes have issues with self-esteem, it is even more important that we have caring and nurturing staff to bring out the best in our students, to engage and develop them holistically,” notes Mr Poh.

He adds: “At the end of the day, a caring teacher makes a difference. This is a very important area, more than just developing skills and knowledge. That can only happen when our lecturers connect with the students.”

**Constantly evolving**

While the creation of a supportive learning environment is crucial, enhancing the quality and relevance of technical education is also an aim that is deeply rooted in ITE. Since its formation in 1992 as the principal provider of technical education in Singapore, ITE has undergone four Waves of Transformation guided by its four five-year strategic roadmaps. As a result, ITE has successfully revamped its courses, learning environment and approaches to produce “work-ready, world-ready graduates” valued by the industry.

“Besides heartware, we also need good software. We offer new courses and rejuvenate old ones to make them market relevant, and provide innovative pedagogies to suit our students’ learning styles,” says Mr Poh. Between 2005 and 2011, ITE has introduced 65 new and non-traditional courses, as well as three new niche Diplomas that are offered in collaboration with renowned institutions in Germany and France.

Education in ITE has also evolved over the years to provide authentic learning experiences that simulate the real world. For instance, students in the paramedic course get to try their hands at an ambulance simulator, which can also simulate weather conditions, including rain. ITE also has a “hangar” which houses military or commercial aircrafts and laboratories with aircraft engines and a flight simulator that serve as training facilities for students taking aerospace courses.

“We want to cater to kinaesthetic learners, so we changed our pedagogic approach to provide hands-on education for our students. This helps them to assimilate knowledge through practice to become thinking practitioners,” explains Mr Poh.

**Building a foundation for excellence**

Apart from developing a culture of care and industry-relevant courses, the third component in providing an excellent ITE education is the hardware, or its infrastructure.

Under the ITE Master Plan (2003-2013), a “One ITE System, Three Colleges” Governance and Education Model was introduced. Under this Plan, three comprehensive Colleges of the Future were developed, with the first and second comprehensive colleges – ITE College East and ITE College West – opened in 2005 and 2010 respectively. The third college, ITE College Central, is due to open in January 2013.

“The hardware component refers to good infrastructure. We want to consolidate all our campuses, so that better facilities can be housed under one roof. Students not only develop deep skills but grow holistically through sports, music and the arts, which give them a richer campus life. We don’t want to spare any effort in giving the best education to our students,” says Mr Poh.

ITE’s commitment to excellence has paid off. In a UNESCO 2010 Report, ITE was cited as the “Jewel of the Singapore Education System” and in a 2011 OECD Report, ITE’s Vocational and Technical Education System was lauded as “perhaps the best in the world”. This year, ITE won the Singapore Quality Award (SQA) with Special Commendation, the highest national award in business excellence. It first won the SQA in 2005.

“It’s always good to benchmark ourselves, learn from industry and the best institutions in the world, and see how we can provide the best education for our students Going forward, excellence is a journey, and the process of learning is very important. We want to continue to be innovative in our approach and delivery of ITE education,” says Mr Poh.
While the administration of law is fair and just, a first-class judiciary is more than just a cold and hard court system. An important aspect of delivering justice efficiently is to do so with heart and compassion.

The switch from a court-centric culture to a service-centric one at the Subordinate Courts of Singapore (Sub Courts) is not a misnomer, says Chief District Judge (CDJ) Tan Siong Thye (seated left). He believes that the courts can be firm and yet display judicial courtesy and kindness.

“It is easy for the Subordinate Courts, a monopoly in the ‘business’ of delivering justice, to rest on our laurels. We cannot use yesterday’s methodologies for today’s operations. We would be doing a great disservice to our court users and our country. If we were to become complacent, the standards we have set will eventually but surely slide, which is not an option,” explains CDJ Tan.

It is this mindset of continuous improvement that enabled the Sub Courts to win the Singapore Quality Award with Special Commendation in 2011, the highest honour for organisations that have achieved the business excellence standard. True to its philosophy of improvement, the award is a sign that the Sub Courts have continued to set their sights higher since winning the Singapore Quality Award in 2006.

The passion to serve
The provision of excellent service boils down to passion, stresses CDJ Tan. “We must have the passion and desire to serve the people of Singapore. People who come to the Sub Courts are often anxious or worried. We must be able to empathise with these people and allay their fears. For instance, people do not have to wait unnecessarily or be troubled by the legal processes and proceedings.”

Discussing the importance of recent initiatives, CDJ Tan explains, “The services we were rendering to our court users had to be enhanced to reach a gold standard of service excellence. It required a seismic change in the mindset of our people. This generated rapid changes that transformed the entire operations of the Sub Courts.”

A key to enhancing service standards was the establishment of a dedicated Service Relations Unit to improve the level of service provided by the Sub Courts. Two HELP (Helping to Empower Litigants-in-Person) Centres were also set up in 2010 to guide litigants-in-person to through the court processes and procedures, so that they are able to make informed decisions about their own cases. More than 5,580 users have benefitted from the use of the HELP Centres since they opened in February 2010.

Harnessing technology and lean processes
The Sub Courts also launched several key initiatives by leveraging technology and adopting lean management to provide better services and improve the efficiency and quality of the administration of justice.

For instance, the Regulatory Offences Case Management System (ROMS) allows offenders to register their attendance for court hearings and obtain more information about their cases at self-service kiosks located outside the courts. The electronic case management system has streamlined the otherwise paper-intensive processes and helped to cut down time-consuming manual work.

Judicial officers and court administrators are also trained in ‘Kaizen’, a methodology that focuses on continuous improvement, to cut red tape and unnecessary work processes for the convenience of court users. As a result, people do not have to wait unnecessarily.

A cohesive team
Culture change can be a long journey, and one that requires constant communication. Successful cultural change begins with a cohesive team, where individuals with a shared vision are able to grasp the big picture and see the organisation as a whole.

“People are our most valuable assets. An organisation without staff is just brick and mortar. The staff must embrace a culture of change and innovation. For the changes to be sustainable, it is important to engage with and seek buy-in from the staff,” notes CDJ Tan.
Raising Productivity: Help for SMEs

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Taxpaying made easy

Technology has enabled IRAS to improve efficiency for taxpayers and reduce the need for assisted service.

While nobody looks forward to paying taxes, making the experience an efficient and hassle-free one is one of the key priorities of the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS).

“There are only two things that are certain in life: death and taxes. Everyone needs to pay tax. We are here to help you meet your tax obligations in the most effective and cost efficient manner,” says Mr Moses Lee (right), Commissioner of Inland Revenue.

Innovative processes
IRAS constantly explores innovative ways to simplify systems where possible, through the use of technology. For example, IRAS has come a long way since the days of filling out paper forms, phone filing and e-filing – it has even done away with filing tax returns altogether with its No-Filing Service.

For the Year of Assessment 2011, the No-Filing Service was offered to 790,000 individual taxpayers, 660,000 of whom ultimately did not have to file any tax return. The e-filing rate also hit a record of 96%, up from 94% in 2010.

IRAS’ foray into technology-driven innovation was fuelled by a desire to replace labour-intensive procedures with computerised processes to reduce the costs of compliance and to enhance the taxpayer experience.

“We cannot afford to stand still. There’s nothing like consulting and engaging taxpayers and our people. We do so through regular surveys to find out how they feel about us and the areas that we need to pay more attention to. We do a lot of internal reviews on our rules and procedures. Listening to them means paying attention to their needs and doing something on our end,” says Mr Lee.

Besides developing the award-winning Inland Revenue Interactive Network, the first tax system in the world to offer integrated end-to-end services covering all major tax types, IRAS also enhanced its stamp duty system, allowing taxpayers to e-stamp their documents directly from their offices or homes via the internet. IRAS also actively partners businesses, industries and intermediaries in the review of tax policies and rules to foster a pro-business environment conducive to economic growth.

“We are prepared to implement bold ideas for change. All these improvements don’t just happen like that. They are well thought out and executed. We continually challenge the status quo – as soon as we complete an initiative we start thinking of other ways of improving the overall taxpaying experience,” notes Mr Lee.

Developing expertise
To Mr Lee, business excellence goes beyond simply meeting numerical targets; it also encompasses the quality of delivery.

A two-time winner of the Singapore Quality Award (2003 and 2011), IRAS also places an emphasis on raising the technical competency and professional standards of its people. The Master Tax Specialist (MTS) programme, which is an extension of the existing Accredited Tax Specialist Scheme, was launched in October 2010 to equip its people with specialised knowledge in specific areas of taxation to better serve businesses that are operating in a complex and globalised environment.

To develop capabilities for partnering taxpayers, IRAS established the Tax Academy of Singapore in 2006 to raise the overall competency of tax professionals in Singapore and the region. Several programmes are organised in collaboration with a number of foreign universities to provide IRAS staff and tax professionals with the opportunity to learn and exchange views and ideas on international tax issues. Besides continual on-the-job training and development, staff are also rotated to different jobs within IRAS to widen their work experience.

“If we want our people to suggest new ideas, we have to ensure that they have the skill sets to do so. Our training programmes are comprehensive and we provide them with the opportunity to acquire skills,” explains Mr Lee.

The strength and capabilities of IRAS depend on the commitment and satisfaction of its people, says Mr Lee. “We can’t deliver excellence with just systems. In IRAS, our people are competent and committed. They are also very happy and engaged people who work as a team to do their best for taxpayers and Singapore. We have a service culture that extends to everything we do. Even our tax enforcement officers receive compliments from those they go after,” he quips.
At Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), new ideas are a way of life. A culture of innovation permeates every aspect of its operations, including the way education is delivered and staff capabilities are developed.

“A key focus of our mission is to provide quality education and training to prepare our students and adult learners for work and life, equipping them to be lifelong learners to contribute to the technological, economic and social development of Singapore,” says Mr Chan Lee Mun (right), Principal and Chief Executive at NYP.

Guided by its “Innovation Everywhere” framework, NYP aims to provide industry-relevant education by developing a stimulating and engaging learning environment. Training approaches such as the ‘Teaching Factory’ concept were pioneered by NYP to bring the real-world environment into the polytechnic. The concept rests on a borderless organisation, where diverse expertise and resources from different schools within the polytechnic are seamlessly integrated.

“The implementation of this concept has engendered a culture of teamwork and collaboration, innovation, strong linkages with industry and an intense focus on capability development,” adds Mr Chan.

Specialist centres and laboratories, such as the NYP-Cisco Connected Solutions Centre and Cloud Innovation Centre with Microsoft, have been set up to emulate industry standards and best practices. In addition, NYP has forged strategic alliances with industry leaders to promote the exchange of knowledge and to enhance the quality of innovation outcomes.

These best practices have reaped positive results. As one of the pioneering institutes of higher learning in creating and commercialising intellectual property, NYP currently holds 180 patents and is one of the top filers of patents in Singapore.

NYP has forged strategic alliances with industry leaders to promote the exchange of knowledge and to enhance the quality of innovation outcomes. NYP has been recognised for its progressive human resource and organisational excellence practices. The school won SPRING Singapore’s People Excellence Award in 2005 and the Innovation Excellence Award in 2009. This year, it clinched the Singapore Quality Award.

Despite these achievements, Mr Chan says this journey of business excellence is not over yet. “We see the pursuit of organisational excellence as an ongoing journey where we consistently strive to improve our teaching and learning systems, organisation management and processes. We will continue to learn from the best-in-class organisations and adopt best practices as we move forward towards fulfilling our vision to be a premier polytechnic of global distinction.”
Listen, learn and act

A concerted effort to understand and then act upon the needs of its customers and employees is at the heart of the National Library Board’s success.

With an annual visitorship of more than 36.5 million, the National Library Board (NLB) is operating in an environment where creating the toughest assessor of all – the public,” says Mrs Elaine Ng (right), Chief Executive Officer of the NLB.

Amidst changing lifestyles and the availability of large amounts of information on the internet, the NLB is faced with the challenge to remain relevant and to develop innovative products and services to meet the needs of users.

A listening organisation

Customer satisfaction ranks high at NLB, and it regularly seeks feedback and input from users through focus groups and surveys. This has resulted in innovative programmes such as NewspaperSG, Quest and Mystery Brown Bag.

For example, NLB’s NewspaperSG database makes local content more accessible through its digital archive of English, Chinese and Malay language newspapers. Users can now browse older newspaper issues from as early as 1831 from the comfort of their homes instead of searching through reels of microfilm manually.

In addition, Mystery Brown Bag, which was launched at the Clementi Public Library in April 2011, targets the lunchtime crowd with books pre-packed by librarians according to popular subjects such as information technology, romance and movie tie-ins.

In response to customer feedback, NLB also refurbished its staff lifts at the Geylang East Public Library and Tampines regional library and made them accessible to customers. “One way to win the trust of the people is to implement their feedback. We don’t just listen without taking any action,” notes Mrs Ng.

As a result of these efforts, NLB boasts a compliments-to-complaints ratio of 73:1. A customer satisfaction survey done by NLB also indicates that 95.3% of customers are satisfied with the level of service provided.

Every employee matters

Besides putting the customer first, employee satisfaction and development are also key priorities at NLB. Training programmes are put in place to equip staff with the required skill sets and attitudes to be open and creative to meet customer needs. The staff are also given the opportunity to participate in learning journeys or study tours to learn about the best practices of other companies.

“We actively promote a culture of excellence amongst our staff. Since we are in the business of learning, all NLB staff must be passionate about learning so we can share that same passion with our customers,” says Mrs Ng.

Work-life balance issues are also taken seriously at NLB, which has recently implemented flexible work arrangements for its staff. NLB also holds regular town hall meetings, communication sessions and focus groups to get regular feedback on the concerns and challenges of its staff.

“Our staff are key to our success. Many of them have a love and passion for the job. They understand that they have to constantly adapt to customers’ changing lifestyles and are open to change and new ideas that help NLB advance its mission,” explains Mrs Ng.

A two-time winner of the Singapore Quality Award (2004 and 2011), NLB is the only SQA winner to have won all four business excellence awards – the Innovation Excellence Award in 2001, the Service Excellence Award in 2009 and the People Excellence Award in 2010.

Mrs Ng attributes this success to the culture of continuous improvement in NLB: “We constantly review our processes and look for best practices around the world to see if we can improve the way we do things, whether it’s sourcing for books or managing operations.”

“The commitment to excellence at the individual level stretches quite far down. Although the demands of the public have risen, I think our staff have responded well because the message of learning resonates within them,” says Mrs Ng.
Start at EnterpriseOne, not from square one

The EnterpriseOne portal connects start-ups and SMEs with the resources they need to succeed. It’s where you find guides on a variety of business topics, useful links, case studies, frequently asked questions and quick-find interactive tools.

It also connects you to five Enterprise Development Centres, where you can get further business advice. Everything you need to start and grow your business is just a click away.

If you think students at Raffles Institution (RI) bury themselves in books and are only concerned about academic achievements, think again. Through RI’s rigorous six-year Raffles Programme, students from the age of 13 to 18 are exposed to a holistic education that nurtures them to become thinking leaders.

Guided by its mission to serve by leading, the school has a robust corporate social responsibility framework, which incorporates philanthropy, community engagement and green initiatives.

“We are committed to doing things differently. We have become more than what a typical school is,” says Mrs Lim Lai Cheng (right), Principal at RI.

Holistic education
Besides a significant emphasis on traditional subjects, the key features of the Raffles Programme include philosophy, ethics, and character and leadership education, as well as research education. The Raffles Academy was also established in 2007 to accelerate the learning of gifted students in specific subjects such as Mathematics, Physics and Literature. In addition, the E W Barker Institute of Sports was also set up in 2011 to offer electives in sports science and sports management, and attachments to sports institutes.

These are just some initiatives that have enabled RI to achieve significant milestones. It is a key feeder school for Oxford, Cambridge and Ivy League universities, as well as the law and medical schools in Singapore. Apart from academic distinction, RI students have also excelled in co-curricular areas, winning medals at the 2010 Youth Olympic Games and Asian Games.

“Our mission is to nurture thinkers, leaders and pioneers. We want to produce leaders for the world and bring the world into the school, to enable our students to have cross-cultural awareness and the ability to deal with different environments,” says Mrs Lim.

An environment that empowers
The success of the school would not be possible without the commitment and passion of its teachers. To enhance staff welfare, the school has introduced flexi-benefits so that the staff can use a portion of their employee benefits for specific needs, such as health club or travel privileges.

Besides offering opportunities for recreation and interaction through activities such as regular staff dinners and yoga classes, the Raffles Teachers’ Academy was also established in 2010 to address the professional development and career enhancement needs of staff. Teachers are also able to work towards postgraduate degrees through courses offered by the academy.

To support the school’s extensive plans, the annual planning cycle starts with resource planning, where consideration is given to the training and development plans of staff for the year, and adjustments are made to accommodate their professional development.

“When it comes to improving performance gaps, it is important to engage people so that they will want to be part of this whole process of moving forward,” explains Mrs Lim. “As we are progressing as an integrated institution, we believe it is important to bring people together to think of the processes that we want to keep, the areas where we can do better in, and how we can reach our goals.”

Winning the Singapore Quality Award (SQA) this year was a bonus for Mrs Lim. While the school is not a business, she believes in the value of pursuing excellence and to benchmark RI against the best educational institutions in the world.

“Winning the SQA reaffirms and tells us that our processes and systems are strong, and that we’ve got a worthy vision and ways to achieve it. With that assurance, we get on with the day-to-day educating of our students by nurturing and spending time with them,” says Mrs Lim.
Winner of 2011 Singapore Quality Award
Teckwah Industrial Corporation Ltd

The road to excellence

Teckwah’s evolution from a box maker to an integrated solutions provider is part of its continuous journey to achieve excellence.

“...you make changes when you are doing well, because not every change will deliver a positive result, and it’s better to absorb failures when things are going well than when you’re in a desperate situation,” says Mr Thomas Chua (right), Chairman and Managing Director of Teckwah Group.

Teckwah has taken this philosophy to heart and proactively made significant changes to its business model over the years. From its beginnings in 1968 as a paper box printer mainly serving the textile industry, the Group has evolved to meet the needs of new industries today.

“If it’s not changing your technology or your products or services, then you have to look at changing your business model,” explains Mr Chua. “That is how we have evolved from a packaging printer to a turnkey software manufacturer. We are not like the ordinary printing companies, because we bundle together a range of services to offer a complete solution. We replicate software, bundle it with accessories, package it, and then fulfill the orders to the end-users on behalf of our customers.”

Mr Chua notes that this evolution has not been without its challenges. “Every time there was change, there was a little ‘crisis’ – you have to buy machines, add and train workers, incur expenses – but it also presents an opportunity.”

One of the keys to seizing those opportunities has been the internal processes and capabilities that Teckwah has built up over the years. And it is these qualities that were recognised when Teckwah was awarded the Singapore Quality Award 2011.

Mr Chua is quick to point out that Teckwah’s corporate philosophy and core values align well with the SQA framework and its focus on sustained excellence across all aspects of a business. “We are very focused on balance and flexibility, grounded in our core values of Teamwork, Initiative, Commitment and Continued Improvement.”

The SQA challenge
Indeed, Teckwah is no stranger to the SQA framework. It was in the first batch of local companies participating in the SQC programme in 1997, and although the company adopted the SQA assessment tool, it never thought to apply for the SQA. “We thought of SQA as a game for the big boys,” explains Mr Chua. “So we thought if we just apply the same tool, we’ll be happy with that, without getting the SQA recognition.”

Then in 2002, Teckwah decided to apply for the SQA, although not with the intention of attaining the award. “By applying, we would gain the benefit of a third-party perspective, rather than relying on self-assessment,” says Mr Chua. “When we first applied, our aim was not to get the award. It was to see what our score would be. Then on our second try in 2004, we also knew the chances of getting the SQA were very small, so our target was to improve on our score from the first time.”

The third try, in 2006, was when Teckwah became serious about getting the SQA. “We went all-out to achieve it, hiring a full-time staff for two years to oversee our efforts,” Mr Chua recalls. The efforts were rewarded, and Teckwah became only the second local company to receive the SQA.

The benefits of SQA
“Winning the SQA brings benefits of strengthening our brand name. The process of gearing the company towards achieving the award also allows a company to improve its processes, structures and strategies,” says Mr Thomas Chua, Chairman and Managing Director, Teckwah Group.

Mr Chua believes that Teckwah’s adoption of the SQA framework has helped its performance, particularly over the past few years. Despite the financial crisis and relatively stable revenues, the company posted record profits in the last two years, pointing to an improvement in productivity and efficiency in line with Teckwah’s SQA efforts.
A flexible approach to excellence

For Yokogawa, the SQA is more than just an award – it is an opportunity to assess its operations and build on its flexible production processes.

“It is a great honour for Yokogawa to win the Singapore Quality Award in 2011,” says Mr Lai Ah Keow (below), the company’s Managing Director. “But more than the recognition that comes with the award, the SQA provides an excellent platform for Yokogawa to conduct a self assessment of our operations.”

As a manufacturer and supplier of distributed control system products and measurement instrumentation operating in a highly competitive and challenging global business environment, this opportunity to take stock of the company’s operations and hold them up to a demanding benchmark is invaluable.

“Through the application of the SQA’s framework and criteria for business excellence, which is internationally benchmarked, our people were able to identify various opportunities for improvement in our internal systems and processes,” explains Mr Lai. “The application of the framework helps us to focus our group activities for cost innovation management and process improvements in a more systematic and structured way, that leads to higher cost savings and increased productivity.”

Flexible processes

One of the keys to Yokogawa’s success over the years has been its approach to the production process. “We believe in multi-skilling and multi-tasking,” explains Mr Lai. “If staff are able to move seamlessly between different areas of the production process, it allows for greater flexibility and also creates a more harmonious working environment, since everyone understands what everyone else is doing, and they can move between different roles in the production process.”

This flexibility also extends to meeting customers’ needs. Here, Yokogawa’s no-stock “cell production” system, which focuses on just-in-time production, shows its strength. Mr Lai notes: “Customers are not under pressure to place orders earlier than what they need, because our lead times are very short and we are very flexible in meeting their needs, including last-minute orders.”

“Staff at Yokogawa have a positive attitude when it comes to being flexible. They are willing and able to accept changes in their role within the production process, as well as adjustments to their working hours to meet customer demand. The development of this mindset within the company comes down to communication,” says Mr Lai.

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Communication is key

“We’re very focused on face-to-face communication,” he explains. “Since our first day of operation in 1975, there have been daily morning meetings where department heads and supervisors share market information and customer feedback, as well as discussing plans and any new instructions.”

In addition, on the first day of every month, Yokogawa holds a company-wide general meeting to address issues and talk to staff. Senior management provides an update on the global business and economic environment, as well as the operational performance and financial results of the company for the month and on a year-to-date basis.

Corporate information (orders, inventory, operating profits) are broadcast in real-time on a screen outside the production area for all staff to see, so that they are kept updated on the situation. Sharing this information helps them to understand what is going on, and gives them greater ownership of the whole process.

Management walk-throughs also play an important part in Yokogawa’s corporate culture. “All senior management have regularly scheduled walk-throughs of the production floor, so that we can have discussions with production staff and see first-hand the issues that they are facing,” says Mr Lai. “We are able to ask them on the spot for their ideas on solutions and ways to improve our processes.”

The close interaction between management and staff has resulted in a workforce that is very loyal not just to Yokogawa, but also to its customers. Mr Lai proudly notes, “Our employees are the ones who make it happen by tirelessly expending their efforts to pursue process improvements, re-engineering and innovations for higher productivity and cost reductions, in order to be more efficient and effective.”
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• Information and Communication Technology

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And you can too, anytime
Embracing people power

Maybank encourages staff to take the reins on the journey to business excellence and work towards embedding it in everything they do.

For Maybank, receiving the People Excellence Award is an affirmation of its longstanding commitment to a team approach that promotes collaboration, engagement and responsibility. Maybank is about people. And this is not something that we just started recently. It’s been ingrained in our culture from day one,” says Ms Pollie Sim (right), CEO of Maybank Singapore.

A family affair

Part of Maybank’s philosophy is to demonstrate genuine care for staff. “We believe in promoting a culture of family. This flows through into how Maybank manages our human capital – in everything we do, we show respect and trust,” explains Ms Sim.

One particularly telling example comes from Maybank’s bonus distribution during the last recession. The management distributed job credits from the government to the lower-level staff, and even topped up their variable bonuses beyond what was stipulated in their bonus formula with the unions. “We are very focused on being equitable,” says Ms Sim. “All this was done in recognition of the tough times in the economy and rising prices. We were simply looking after our family.”

This approach has delivered strong results on a number of fronts. Despite its 1,400 staff accounting for only 3.5% of total employees within Maybank, Maybank Singapore contributes two-thirds of the bank’s overseas profits. “When people know that you have their interests at heart, when you are sincere and authentic with them, very naturally, they will run for you and work hard for you,” says Ms Sim.

Maybank also enjoys an employee attrition rate significantly lower than the national average. This helps to build stronger bonds between staff and contributes to the sense of belonging that staff feel. Furthermore, the company’s Employee Engagement Index – a measure of the extent to which employees contribute through their effort and enthusiasm to the success and performance of their organisation – is higher than the national benchmark and the global high-performance benchmark.

Engaging stakeholders

“To progress and succeed, we need to have a strong relationship with our stakeholders, which include our staff and our union. If we engage and take care of our staff, then they can take care of our customers,” explains Ms Sim.

And there is no shortage of initiatives at Maybank to get staff at all levels involved. iTalk is a programme that gives junior staff the unique opportunity to present ideas directly to senior management, bypassing middle management. “It’s a great way to have junior staff take initiative and generate new ideas. They feel engaged and come up with some unique and interesting suggestions,” Ms Sim points out.

Another programme is the NOBEL award, which stands for the award’s criteria: Newsworthy, Original, Benefits, Economies and Leadership. It looks for game-changing ideas from staff, and has a $10,000 prize. High standards are applied for this award – Ms Sim notes that no one has won the top prize yet, although some good ideas have come out of it. For example, staff suggested that online ordering and appointment scheduling for new notes for the Chinese New Year season would help to ease long queues and improve the customer experience. They also introduced Fortune Bundles, which are pre-packaged sets of new currency notes and ang pao packets, making it easier and more efficient for customers to exchange for new notes.

Empowering for performance

In addition to building a strong sense of team and promoting staff engagement, another key to Maybank’s human capital management is empowering its employees to drive performance. There is a strong focus on training, with a large budget set aside for human capital development at all levels of the organisation. “Everyone is given the opportunity to upgrade their skills and move up the ladder,” explains Ms Sim. “We make sure they have the tools to succeed and, in turn, help Maybank to succeed.”
Entrepreneurship and innovation are key success factors for countries that have few raw materials, except for their people and their ideas. For this reason, public debates often circle around these two topics when countries want to position themselves “on top” of global value chains. But, who actually drives a country’s entrepreneurship and innovation power?

Looking at Europe and the German “Mittelstand” in particular, we can find that it’s not necessarily the large, publicly held companies which constitute the entrepreneurial backbone of a successful economy. Instead, the owners of highly entrepreneurial private / family-controlled firms are very important drivers of a solid economy, in Germany or any other nation. For them and the “Dynamic Dynasties” which they control, innovation is a well cultivated tradition. This “Routine of Renewal” also allowed the German “Mittelstand” to quickly adapt to the economic woes of the past years and leverage their entrepreneurial drive and knowledge about innovation to succeed in rapidly changing market and technology environments. Today, they are reaping the resulting profits.

To become such a “Dynamic Dynasty”, which only approx 5% of all family firms achieve, three prerequisites have to be fulfilled: Long-range planning. Sustainable diversification. And dynamic, rigorous execution.

These three factors explain a great share about why the German “Mittelstand” often outperforms publicly held companies.

First of all, “Dynamic Dynasties” think in generations. The continuous, pan-generational progress of their firms into new technologies, international markets and new areas of business, assures the long-term existence and growth of their wealth. These capabilities to turn long-term visions into tangible products have, for example, led to the introduction of the Eurocheque-, payment-, telephone- and mobile SIM-cards (Giesecke & Devrient), or the commercialization of the chemicals that promote flat screen displays today (Merck). And, it helped these conglomerates to grow over 150+ years, even if
market and technology environments changed drastically. In “Dynamic Dynasties” owning families perceive expenditures for research and development as investments into the future competitiveness of their firms, and they work with the best external partners for advice on growth markets and emerging technologies. Further, “Dynamic Dynasties” leverage the freedom to create and incubate radically new concepts, without the pressure to report to the financial markets on a quarterly basis. Often, they even fund their ideas for years, and very consciously, to reach a breakthrough stage.

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Secondly, managing succession in the owning families of “Dynamic Dynasties” plays an important role. On the one hand, the incremental improvement of existing products and technologies is often left to external managers, which are highly technology literate. On the other hand, however, radical innovation projects are often linked directly to the owners and the capabilities of the next generation. Here, the interests and knowledge of the next generation can promote the unlocking of new markets and technologies through their direct involvement and decisions: Together, the “Senior and Junior Generations” adjust corporate structures where needed, and establish incubator entities to create new businesses outside the firm’s dominant logic. As patrons of growth, the owning families fuel collaborations with research entities and universities to assure direct access to future technologies and entrepreneurial talent. Hence, they bring about a diversification in their portfolio of company holdings and actively manage long-term risks across numerous technologies and business fields.

Thirdly, “Dynamic Dynasties” do not treat entrepreneurship and innovation as side topics. In fact, they perceive continuous growth as the very core of their family identity. Entrepreneurship and innovation are the essential raison d’être of their firms: The German, family-owned beer brand Warsteiner, for example, calls it “Innovation as Tradition”. Germany’s eldest family firm Prym (established in 1530) advertises its “Tradition and Innovation”. In the execution of entrepreneurship and innovation, important decisions are taken very quickly, within the owning families and with the managers involved, and executed rigorously. As a result, “Dynamic Dynasties” develop a routine of constant corporate renewal and outpace their competition.

In essence, pan-generational entrepreneurship and innovation is mainly a question of the entrepreneurial power and innovation capabilities of the owning families themselves and the management of companies they control. Selected foundations and advisory boutiques have identified this topic as important and provide tailored services. In addition, governments can be important promoters of entrepreneurship and innovation in the family firms that call the respective nation, be it German or Singapore, their home.

ABOUT PROF. DR. MARC-MICHAEL BERGFELD and COURAGE PARTNERS:
Prof. Dr. Marc-M. Bergfeld is Professor of Global Entrepreneurship & Family Firms at Munich Business School. He heads Courage Partners, an international collaborative of innovation and internationalization experts. The firm supports families and their firms in genuine growth initiatives – into new markets and fields of technology. As co-entrepreneur, Courage shares the risks and rewards of such innovation and internationalization missions with its clients and assures impact – from the initial idea all the way to eventual value creation. www.courage-partners.com.
Engaging staff to grow your business

Two organisations on the business excellence (BE) journey demonstrate that effective employee engagement can help businesses perform better.

One is a recreation club; the other, a customer service provider for utility supplies; but the Singapore Recreation Club (SRC) and SP Services Ltd (SPS) have one thing in common: motivated and engaged staff who play active roles in growing their organisations.

SPS, a member of the Singapore Power Group of companies, has been providing meter reading, billing and customer services on behalf of utility service providers since 1995. It also supplies electricity to small businesses and households.

The organisation sees service excellence as critical to the success of its business and works closely with its staff to enhance customer satisfaction by harnessing the BE framework.

"The framework provides a structured approach to people management in areas such as recruitment, employee involvement and commitment, training and development, and performance and recognition," explained Mrs Jeanne Cheng, Managing Director for SPS.

The SPS management team believes in leading by example when it comes to service excellence. Every year on Service Quality Day, senior management serve customers at SPS counters and Call Centre to demonstrate their commitment to providing good service. The management team also involves SPS staff when planning new service initiatives. Training in customer service is customised and extends beyond the frontliners.

"Before we launched the ‘Exceptional Customer Service for Meter Readers’ course, we sought feedback from our meter readers, who shared with us the issues they faced on-the-job. This allowed us to include actual case studies for discussion and ensure that the course meets their needs," said Mrs Cheng.

Like SPS, the SRC believes in engaging staff to achieve organisational goals. Established in 1883, SRC aims to provide excellent service for its 5,500 members, their families and guests. The Club has been on the BE journey since 2004.

"Being on the BE journey gave us the opportunity to learn from other successful organisations and enabled us to link our people development needs to organisational key performance indicators (KPIs), such as customer satisfaction and service quality," noted Dr Abdul Rashid, General Manager/Secretary for SRC.

SRC encourages its staff to contribute actively to service improvements through initiatives such as the Staff Suggestion Scheme and Work Improvement Teams.

Dr Rashid highlighted SRC’s new initiative, The Residence, as a key staff achievement. Thanks to the hard work of its staff, the Club managed to transform the third floor of its Club House into 26 guest rooms in just six months. Launched in September 2009, The Residence has been enjoying average occupancy rates of about 90%.

"Everyone chipped in. The maintenance department supervised the renovation; the PR staff did the branding and publicity; and the security officers doubled up as porters for the guests for no extra pay. They knew that if The Residence is a success, everyone would be rewarded at the end of the day."

Both organisations also go the extra mile to retrain and retain older employees who are valued for their vast experience. Some 40% of SPS staff and about 50% of SRC staff are 41 or older.

SPS helps its older staff stay ahead by enrolling them for Employability Skills System (ESS) courses such as Communication and Relationship Management, Problem Solving and Decision Making, as well as IT-related courses; while SRC ensures that older staff are not left out of core training courses.

About BUSINESS EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE

Regardless of industry, size, structure or stage of development, organisations need to enhance their business management capabilities to be successful.

The Business Excellence initiative helps organisations to assess and improve their performance based on the requirements of an internationally-benchmarked Business Excellence framework.

For more information, visit www.spring.gov.sg/be
Safer Goods for Our Homes

We come into contact with many consumer goods every day.

Toys, clothing, furniture and many more. We use them daily.

The Consumer Goods Safety Requirements Regulations help make our homes safer for our family.

Find out more at www.spring.gov.sg/productsafety
**DESIGN ENGAGE PROGRAMME**

**WHAT IS IT?**
This programme is for companies that understand the value of design and are ready to invest effort and resources to build up the company’s design capabilities. They learn how to integrate strategic design thinking into every step of their business process.

The programme consists of two phases.

In Phase 1, a design facilitator will help the company understand the role of design in business and how it can create value for competitive advantage. The company will also learn key design principles and tools to develop an actionable design strategy, critical in unlocking new business-building opportunities.

In Phase 2, companies will create new or improved products, processes and services with the design capabilities acquired in Phase 1 and use design as a strategic differentiator to produce tangible, sustainable output and solutions.

**WHAT LEVEL OF SUPPORT?**
For Phase 1, companies can receive funding support of up to 50% of the design facilitator’s fees.

For Phase 2, companies can receive funding support of up to 50% of the qualifying costs, which include manpower, equipment, materials, consultancy and acquisition of intellectual property rights.

**HOW TO QUALIFY?**
All Singapore-based companies may apply.

**HOW TO APPLY?**
Contact Design for Enterprises Centre
Hotline: +65 6333 3737
E-mail: info@designforenterprises.sg
Website: www.designforenterprises.sg

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**PRODUCTIVITY@WORK**

**WWW.ENTERPRISEONE.GOV.SG**

**ABOUT THE PORTAL**
The Productivity@Work portal is a dedicated online portal to provide SMEs with information and resources that can help them to improve productivity. The portal helps SMEs to:

- Understand the basics of productivity
- Learn about tools that they can apply to increase productivity
- Select productivity seminars or courses to attend
- Find a productivity consultant
- Access case studies and relevant government assistance programmes
- Assess their productivity using the IMPACT Assessment Tool. The tool helps SMEs to compare their productivity performance against the industry average, and obtain recommendations on areas they should focus on to improve productivity.

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**CUSTOMER-CENTRIC INITIATIVE (CCI)**

**ABOUT THE PROGRAMME**
This initiative aims to encourage companies to be committed to service excellence and to take the lead in raising service standards in their industry. It offers an assistance package to help Singapore-based companies upgrade their service standards.

Service improvement plans under the CCI may include service strategies and service blueprints, redesigning of service processes, customer service training, customer satisfaction measurement and service audits.

**WHAT LEVEL OF SUPPORT?**
Eligible companies will receive funding support of up to 50% of qualifying costs for SMEs and 30% for non-SMEs.

**HOW TO QUALIFY?**
The project should involve improvement in service leadership, service agility, customer experience and introduction of new service standards.

**HOW TO APPLY?**
Contact EnterpriseOne
Tel: +65 6898 1800
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Website: www.enterpriseone.gov.sg
Useful Contacts

Enterprise Development Centres [EDCs]

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South Tower, Solaris
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Email: ref@nlb.gov.sg
Website: http://libguides.nl.sg/standards

**Standards Development Organisations**

**Singapore Manufacturers’ Federation Standards Development Organisation**
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