

SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR FINANCE  
MR HON SUI SEN AT THE CIVIL SERVICE PRODUCTIVITY MONTH  
CEREMONY AT THE MANDARIN BALLROOM, MANDARIN HOTEL ON  
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In the organisation of government campaigns, the traditional role of the Treasury' Budget Division is the provider of funds. For the productivity campaign, the Budget Division, besides providing funds, is also the chief organiser in the public sector. This underscores the importance which the Treasury attaches to productivity in the public sector.

For several years now, ministries and departments and those statutory boards which are not financially self-sufficient have had to show the Budget Division each year when they come for funds, how they propose to save manpower and thus increase productivity. Schemes and proposals of greater merit have been readily and generously supported by the Division.

Manpower costs have been increasing rapidly owing to the effects of economic restructuring and the salaries revision this financial year. The actual per capita expenditure on manpower taking the financial years, increased by 11.3% to \$11,490 in 1980, by 18.7% to \$13,640 in 1981 and by an estimated 32.4% to \$18,060 in 1982. However, as a result of the tight rein on manpower,

the expenditure on manpower as a percentage of total recurrent expenditure, after isolating defence expenditure, public debt and transfers to the Development and Contingency Funds, has been declining slightly: 54.8% of total recurrent expenditure in Financial Year 1980, 51.8% in Financial Year 1981 and an estimated 51.2% for the current financial year.

We must not slacken our efforts to keep pace with technological advances and to keep manning levels down. If we do not respond to changes and seize new opportunities fast enough we will be left further and further behind. For example, nowadays, word processors can communicate with each other and with computers through the telephone system and this makes the messenger increasingly redundant. If we had failed to invest in word processors, we would have failed to save not only numerous typist posts but also many messenger posts too. And we quite definitely would not be able then to benefit from future improvements in word processing and communications technology.

Fortunately, we have not been slow to exploit the potential of modern technology. Over the last two years, some 200 word processing systems have been installed in the civil service. It is estimated that the manpower

savings over the life span of these machines has a present value of some \$7 million. Recently, the Management Services Department (MSD) contracted to purchase 116 word processors for various ministries and departments. I am told that by the end of this month, seventy of these machines will be able to send texts among themselves instantaneously. MSD is currently looking into the introduction of equipment which could integrate voice, image, data and text processing systems.

We are also giving top priority to computerisation in the civil service. This is one of the most effective ways to achieve work improvement and productivity increase. The total amount approved for computerisation projects in the civil service is \$106.4 million. Of this amount, \$51 million is for projects managed by the National Computer Board for ten ministries. The remainder is for dedicated systems of other ministries and departments.

These measures are initiated by management and are sometimes referred to as top-down measures. Such measures can be frustrated if the rank and file do not understand them, do not appreciate the need for improvement, or are unwilling to be involved in the improvement effort. For example, if urgent messages take a long time to reach the word processor operator, then

the facility of instantaneous transmission of the message to another word processor is not of much help. Conversely, if text is indiscriminately sent through communicating word processors, there will soon be overloading and jamming up of all messages. Therefore, the call for work improvement and higher productivity must reach every public employee. Every public employee must be convinced that he can contribute towards higher productivity and that unless he contributes his share, team-work will not be at its best and productivity of his team and his organisation will not be maximised.

One effective way of tapping contributions from as many public employees as possible is the formation of Work Improvement Teams or WITs. Team after team has shown through their projects that given the opportunity and encouragement, they have been able to work together to identify real problems, analyse major causes and recommend sensible solutions. The variety of problems and the multitude of solutions examined show clearly that WITs do not have a narrow or bookish idea of productivity. They show general appreciation by WITs that any form of work improvement ultimately leads to higher productivity.

The WITs programme has taken off strongly. The targets for the first year of the programme were (1) the training of 60 chief facilitators/facilitators and (2) the formation of 120 WITs. To-date, at the end of that first year, the WITs Development Unit has trained 142 chief facilitators and <sup>608</sup> ~~566~~ facilitators. They in turn have helped their ministries, departments and statutory boards to set up <sup>773</sup> ~~700~~ WITs. Many WITs have given presentations of their projects and some have started on their second or subsequent projects. All these could only have come about because of the unstinting efforts of the WITs Development Unit, chief facilitators and facilitators, the remarkable enthusiasm of WITs' members and the indubitable support and encouragement of management.

The challenge to everyone now is to sustain the momentum of the WITs programme that has been built up so rapidly. I do not think that we need worry about WITs running short of problems to solve. Improvements are changes and changes create new opportunities for further improvements. However, there is one danger of which WITs and management should both be mindful of. It is the danger of over-emphasizing the competitive aspects of WITs' work. There is, of course, nothing wrong with competition which is a hall-mark of Singaporeans.

However, pre-occupation with competition at WITs presentations may well discourage the vast majority of WITs which have made real contributions but did not win prizes. Also, it might detract from the importance of implementing WITs' recommendations. If the recommendations are not implemented they would do little to reinforce the WITs. However, if management consider the recommendations seriously and allow WITs to implement all sensible and practical recommendations, WITs in general would find satisfaction in their work and would be encourage to undertake further projects.

Another challenge, perhaps more difficult, is to bring within the ambit of WITs, those employees in the public sector who do not have the basic skills in the English Language and Mathematics. In the civil service, the percentage of monthly-rated employees with these deficiencies is 18.5%. However, for the daily-rated employees it is estimated that as much as 65% do not have these basic skills. So long as employees suffer from these deficiencies, it would be extremely difficult to involve them in WITs discussions, let alone WITs presentations. It would be also be increasingly difficult for them to maintain their productivity as more and more sophisticated methods, tools, machines, and aids

are introduced in their areas of work. The Budget Division has asked all ministries to work with the Vocational and Industrial Training Board to provide basic training in the English Language and Mathematics to their staff who need it. They must give this matter their urgent attention.

Finally, I wish to congratulate all those who have won prizes in the poster and slogan competitions and in the first Civil Service WITs Presentation. I believe that where other things are equal, a broader base of participants always leads to a more successful event. Therefore, I wish also to congratulate those who participated in the various activities organised by the Civil Service Productivity Month Working Committee or by the various ministries, departments and statutory boards.