SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE PRODUCTIVITY MONTH '83 AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL ON 1 NOV 83

Productivity: Time For Action

Habits that make for high productivity in workers are the result of the values implanted in them at home, in school and at the workplace. These values must be reinforced by the attitudes of society. Once established, like a language a society speaks, the habits tend to become a self-reproducing, self-perpetuating cycle. Once started like dialect speaking, they are not easy to change. The problem is how to get it started, when we have not got the cycle going. It is the chicken and egg situation.

In the last two years, the Government has taken the lead in the Productivity Movement. The Government can help to reshape attitudes through education, through our example as employers, and through incentives and disincentives. In the past two years, the National Productivity Council has succeeded in arousing widespread awareness of productivity. They have begun to convince Singaporeans that productivity is in their interests. This is an important first step. If Singaporeans do not understand and accept that productivity is important to them, and not only to their employers, there will be little productivity improvement.

National Archives of Singapore

We have made progress. There is now widespread awareness of productivity. Accordingly to a survey conducted by the Times Organisation in August this year, 78% of Singaporeans either felt that they were doing their best in their jobs or that they were willing to do better (Chart 1). They were keen to attend training courses to acquire knowledge and skills (Chart 2). This year's survey, compared to last year's showed more Singaporeans willing to offer suggestions for improvement, to attend training courses and to work overtime(Chart 3*, Chart 4 and Chart 5).

We have achieved awareness of the need for productivity. Now it is for managers, supervisors and workers to convert this awareness into practice at the workplace, like setting up QC circles, to increase participation, and to develop team spirit. Productivity habits must become a part of the Singaporean work ethos. In factories, offices or shops, managers and grassroots union leaders must set the example. Then there can be widespread emulation and acceptance of good productivity attitudes and habits by workers generally.

National Archives of Singapore

Unfortunately, the Survey showed that 69% of Singaporeans were reluctant to put productivity concepts to work (Chart 6). We must infer that action on productivity is not yet widespread at the workplace. Seventy-two per

cent felt that poor labour management relations hindered productivity in their company. They also believed that managers were not good at motivating workers. Fifty-eight per cent felt that workers were not encouraged to offer suggestions.

To move from "awareness" to "action", senior management must plan and organise productivity programmes for their middle and junior managers and their supervisors. If chief executives take a personal and direct interest in their companies' productivity drive, success is more assured. It is top management that inspires and sustains high productivity. Top management should use the training programmes of the National Productivity Board to get managers and supervisors trained in leadership, motivation, communication and other man-management skills. Workers who lack basic education should be encouraged to attend BEST classes conducted at NTUC and at PAP centres. Senior managers should organise Work Excellence Committees and other forms of cooperation between their managers and union leaders. They should encourage their workers to improve their performance through participation in QC circles.

National Archives of Singapore

Singapore is fortunate. Our union leaders have accepted that productivity is of mutual benefit to management and to workers. NTUC leaders have set out to enthuse their branch and grassroots representatives. Active involvement of

grassroots leaders and the examples they set will encourage workers who work closely with them to respond likewise. The NTUC HQ has worked with NPB to conduct training for grassroots union leaders on productivity. This training will give grassroots union leaders a better understanding of productivity and will equip them with the skills to influence their fellow workers to increase productivity. Teamwork, good human relations and the striving for improvements are values which they can best inculcate by example.

The climate for productivity has improved. Workers and union leaders are more responsive and receptive to ideas and schemes for productivity.

All the same, I am astonished to find from the Survey that 55% of our workers still admit to the fear of being disliked by fellow workers for doing their job well (Chart 6). As long as this attitude persists, higher performance will be discouraged by the prevailing standards of mediocre workers. Better workers will refrain from becoming pacesetters. This attitude is negative. Singaporeans must understand that their group interests will be advanced if each worker strives to achieve his best, and thus encourages his peers to do better, by his example. There is no better way than the personal example of managers and grassroots leaders to bring about this change of attitudes and values.

National Archives of Singapore

Old-fashioned notions that managers are out to exploit workers are irrelevant in today's industrial climate. Equally outmoded also are management views that trade unionists are troublemakers. These are mindsets of the past. They are stereotypes to be banished if we are to build up relationships of confidence and cooperation between management, unionists and workers. We have gradually built up a climate of industrial peace and cooperation in the last 15 years. The tedious ritual of wage increases and fringe benefits only after employer-worker confrontation has been shown to be an absurd caricature. The progress we have made in the last 15 years was not through strikes and go-slows but through reasonableness, cooperation, compromise and consensus, as in the NWC.

A younger generation of Singaporeans is ready to be trained for their roles as more productive partners with management. Productivity is another name for a culture of partnership in an organisation. When this partnership culture is present and felt by all within that organisation, the setting is right for constantly improving results through higher productivity.

National Archives of Singapore

The next step is to translate this awareness of the importance of productivity into action. We must raise our mind's eye above our immediate level of intra-company frictions and see the wider picture. Then, we can perceive

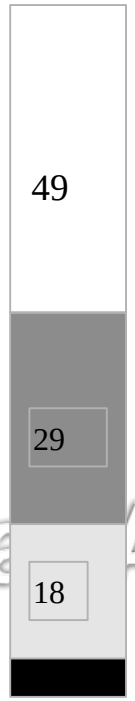
how we, in fact, have to make our living through good teamwork in competition against other teams in the international markets. Other teams of workers and managers in other countries, in factories, or offices, or shops, better endowed with natural resources, are making or selling the same or similar goods and services. We must not lose sight that in this one interdependent world, there is both cooperation and competition between countries. Companies in different countries compete to sell their products in the same world markets. In spite of increasing wage costs, we must stay competitive against competition from societies less developed than we are. We have to stay ahead of competitors. To do this, we must be totally committed to productivity.

National Archives of Singapore

CHART 1
EFFORTS SPENT ON PRESENT JOB

QUESTION: Thinking of your present job, which of the following statements best describe your job situation?

	TOTAL	SEX		AGE GROUP				OCCUPATION	
		MALE	FEMALE	12-19	20-29	30-39	40+	White Collar	Blue Collar
I do all that I can	49	49	50	43	43	47	53	51	49
I can do better than what I am presently doing	29	31	27	31	35	30	18	37	23
I do only what I am told	18	16	20	20	15	13	24	8	24
I work only when I feel like it	4	4	3	6	2	3	5	3	4
Base: All working persons ('000)	(1170)	(768)	(402)	(145)	(471)	(260)	(294)	(496)	(638)



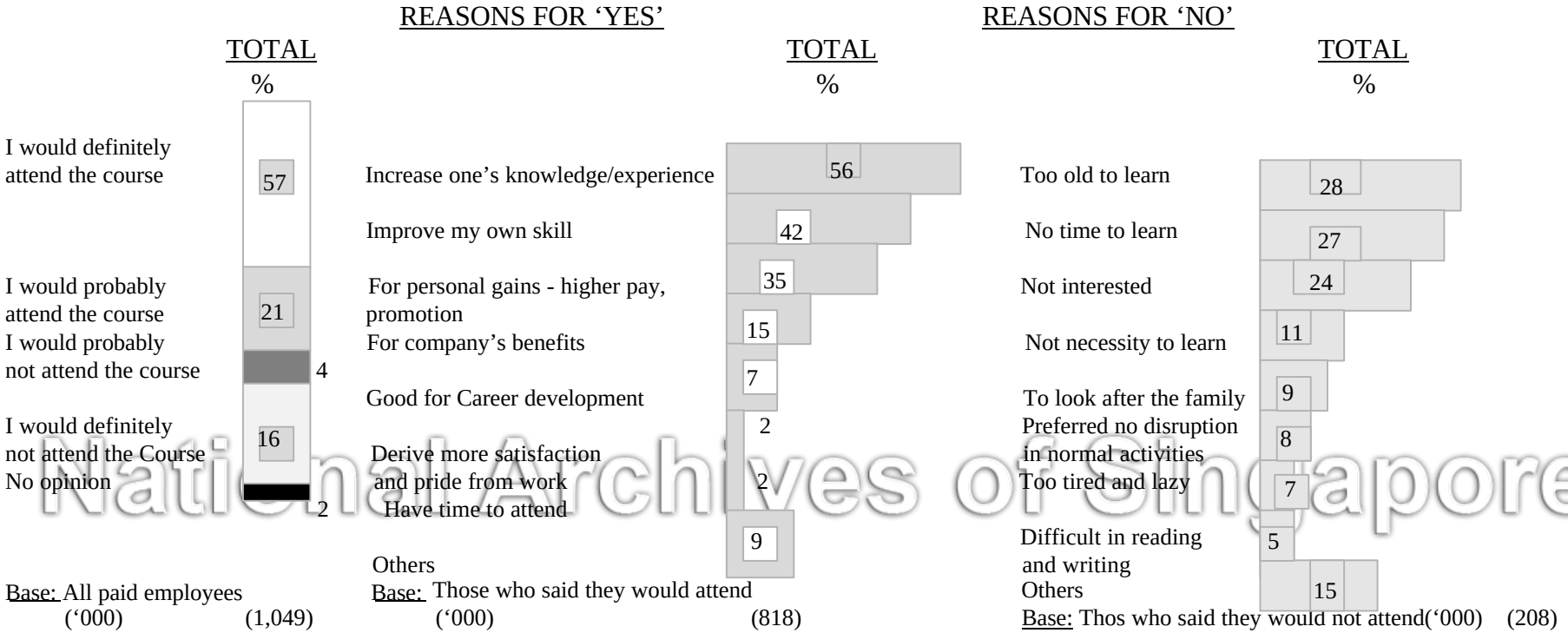
National Archives of Singapore

CHART 2
WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE IN TRAINING

QUESTION: a. If your company is thinking of sending you for a training course to improve your skills, and it is to be conducted after office hours, what would be your response?

b. (IF DEFINITELY/PROBABLY ATTEND) What are your reasons for saying so? (PROBE: Any other reasons?)

c. (IF DEFINITELY/PROBABLY NOT ATTEND) What are yours reasons for saying so? (PROBE: Any other reasons?)



National Archives of Singapore

CHART 3
(From 1982 Survey)
WORKERS' INTEREST IN PRODUCTIVITY MEASURES

QUESTION : Would you say that workers in Singapore, whom you know of, are interested in – (READ OUT)?
(PROBE: VERY/SOMEWHAT)

	VERY INTERESTED (%)	VERY/SOMEWHAT INTERESTED (%)
Working as a team	48	91
Attending training courses	42	90
Working overtime	30	79
Loyalty to the company	25	83
Giving suggestions for improvements	17	76
Participating in group discussions within the company on productivity	17	70
Job enlargement	12	67

National Archives of Singapore

Base: Persons aged 15+ (1,836,000)

CHART 4
DISSEMINATION OF WORK IDEAS

QUESTION: If you have ideas to improve the existing work method, what would you do?

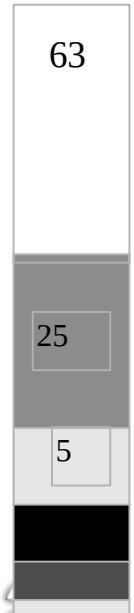
		SEX		AGE GROUP				OCCUPATION	
	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	12-19	20-29	30-39	40+	White Collar	Blue Collar
I would convey them to my boss because the company might benefit from it	47	47	47	38	54	46	41	59	39
I would talk about them with my team members only	26	26	25	38	27	22	19	22	28
I would keep them to myself	15	15	14	15	9	15	26	9	19
I would convey them to my boss in order to show my initiative	12	11	13	9	10	16	14	11	13
Base: All working persons ('000)	(1049)	(668)	(382)	(140)	(451)	(228)	(231)	(456)	(557)

National Archives of Singapore

CHART 5

RESPONSE TO OVER-TIME CALL

QUESTION: Suppose your company is unable to meet its production deadline and has to introduce temporary over-time work to meet the delivery date. You have been requested to work over-time. What would you do?



	TOTAL	SEX		AGE GROUP				OCCUPATION	
		MALE	FEMALE	12-19	20-29	30-39	40+	White Collar	Blue Collar
I would work over-time without hesitation in order to help my company	63	64	63	50	66	69	60	75	55
I would work over-time to earn additional income	25	25	24	31	24	22	26	18	30
I would work over-time when majority of my colleagues agree to do so	5	4	5	12	5	4	1	3	7
I would definitely not work over-time under any circumstances	4	3	4	3	1	3	10	2	5
	2								
	1								
I would not work over-time as my normal activities would be disrupted		2	3	*	3	3	2	2	2
No opinion		1	1	3	*	*	1	1	1
Base: All working persons ('000)	(1049)	(668)	(382)	(140)	(451)	(228)	(231)	(456)	(557)

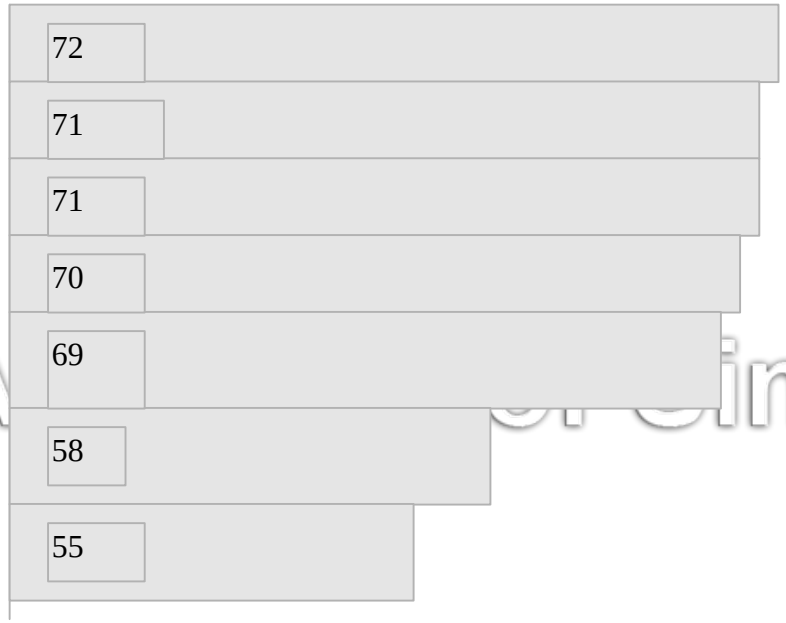
National Archives of Singapore

CHART 6
HINDRANCES TO HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY

QUESTION : a. Do you think that the following factors hinder(s) productivity in your company?

b. Which one of these factors, do you think, hinders productivity most?

	'YES' (%)	Hinders Most (%)
Poor labour-management relations	72	26
Everyone-thinking only of himself	71	18
Management is not good at dealing with workers	71	16
Worker's lack of understanding of productivity	70	11
Workers' reluctance to put productivity concepts to work	69	10
Workers are not encouraged to offer suggestions	58	2
Fear of being disliked by fellow workers for above-average performance	55	4



National Archives of Singapore

Base: All working persons (1,170,000)