SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW

AT THE LAUNCHING OF PRODUCTIVITY MONTH

AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL

ON 1 NOVEMBER 1984

PRODUCTIVITY: THE KEY TO CONTINUING GROWTH

I get blasé when second-time visitors to Singapore tell me how struck they are by the dramatic changes in our physical environment: the modern office blocks, hotels and shopping complexes; the good public housing and the new wide roads. But I listen carefully when they tell me of the changes they notice in the people, their growing confidence, their social discipline, their sense of purpose and commitment. The physical environment is easily changed by concrete, glass and tarmac. Look at the progress of the countries which have money, like the Gulf states. But the changes in the people are vital qualitative improvements. They are fundamental, not superficial, changes in attitudes and behaviour, and of immense survival value.

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A top American executive of a large multi-national company with substantial investments was first in Singapore in the early Seventies. He though the average Singaporean was transient in outlook and approach. There was no person identifiable as a Singaporean. Each was out to make a quick buck. The American said that if the Government had campaigned then for "teamwork" to achieve higher productivity, it would have fallen on uncomprehending ears.

When this American came back after a gap of six years in 1982, he noticed the difference. The Singaporean is identifiable. He is confident. He has the will to preserve his stake and to improve on what he has achieved. He understands that his future depends not only on his efforts, but also on those of others; that he has to work as a team to achieve the fullest for the team. He realises that if it is every man for himself, the ceiling of his own achievement will be lower. In other words the Singaporean is prepared for a productivity movement.

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This combination of individual excellence within good teamwork, ie group excellence, is what the productivity movement is about. We have to change settled work and social habits. We have to get people to adopt new teamwork habits. Workers must willingly participate in QCCs. Management must develop a training tradition with people-centred management practices.

Three years after the first launching of the productivity campaign in 1981, the Times survey shows significant improvements in attitudes. Forth-two per cent of workers now feel that they, the workers, would benefit a lot from higher productivity - double the 23 per cent in 1982.

Ninety-three per cent either feel that they are doing their best in their jobs or that they are willing to do better; 78 per cent last year (Chart I). Eighty-four per cent are willing to forward their ideas for improving work methods to their manager or immediate supervisor; 47 per cent last year (Chart II). Sixty-one per cent are very interested in working as a team; 48 per cent in 1982. Thirty-eight per cent are very interested in participating in group discussions within the company; 17 per cent in 1982 (Chart III).

However, I am astonished to find that 59 per cent of workers surveyed admitted to the fear of being disliked by fellow workers for doing their job well; an increase from 55 per cent last year. We must get people to shake off this negative attitude.

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The Government has amended the Trade Unions Act and redefined the role of trade unions from one of confrontation with management to one of cooperation. In August this year, we amended the Employment Act to remove

impediments to productivity improvement. For example, employers will be able to arrange work schedules to use manpower and machines more efficiently. They will also be encouraged to introduce or expand the practice of cashless pay days. The Government has opened the way for managers to take the initiative.

Three quarters of workers feel that their companies have implemented some improvements in work methods and introduced job enlargements. Their companies have also improved communications and held dialogues or meetings between employees and supervisors or managers (Chart IV).

It is up to managers to initiate a flow of activities to enable workers to participate in productivity movement activities. When their understanding of productivity has increased, workers become restless if there is no activity to engage their urge to higher productivity. Last year 72 per cent felt that poor labour-management relations hampered productivity improvement in their companies. This year 86 per cent. Last year 71 per cent said that management was not good at dealing with workers. This year 82 per cent. Last year 58 per cent felt that workers were not encouraged in their companies to offer suggestions. This year 70 per cent (Chart V).

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These are not negative feedback. They demonstrate that our workers want to do something to increase productivity; that they expect their managers to give them lead. The momentum of activities must not falter if we want to keep workers enthusiastic.

Productivity cannot be an ad hoc or piecemeal exercise. It has to be a crucial function charges to a senior manager, who can give it the same serious attention as is given to other management functions, like personnel, marketing or finance. Such senior managers will have the time to think up new ideas and to organise new activities to improve productivity. NPB can assist such managers get started through the 3Ps programme (ie Productivity, Promotion, Programme within companies).

Productivity managers can look at the practices of successful companies for new ideas to improve productivity. On QCCs, Work Excellence, Company Welfarism, Training, People-centred Management, the NPB has got together good companies, both local and foreign, to explain how they got their programmes started and sustained.

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Our younger workers are better educated and more skilled. All are willing to work hard to improve themselves. Ideally, the schools should have imbued

them with the right attitudes to productivity. This has not been done and it will take years to incorporate these in the school syllabus. Therefore the habits have to be taught and acquired at work.

It will take us another two decades to achieve our full potential in higher productivity. We have had several thousands of middle management attend courses on how to take the practical next steps in their workforce. NPB will train 12,000 managers and supervisors this year; more than double the figure of 5,000 in 1981. NPB is getting experienced help from the JPC and other centres to widen the range of its courses.

Since 1980, the Skills Development Fund (SDF) has given training grants for 186,000 trainees. Forty-four thousand were trained in management and supervisory courses; 40,000 in computer courses. Management must take advantage of these grants for comprehensive and integrated training of their staff. NPB can help to identify training needs and also assist in training programmes.

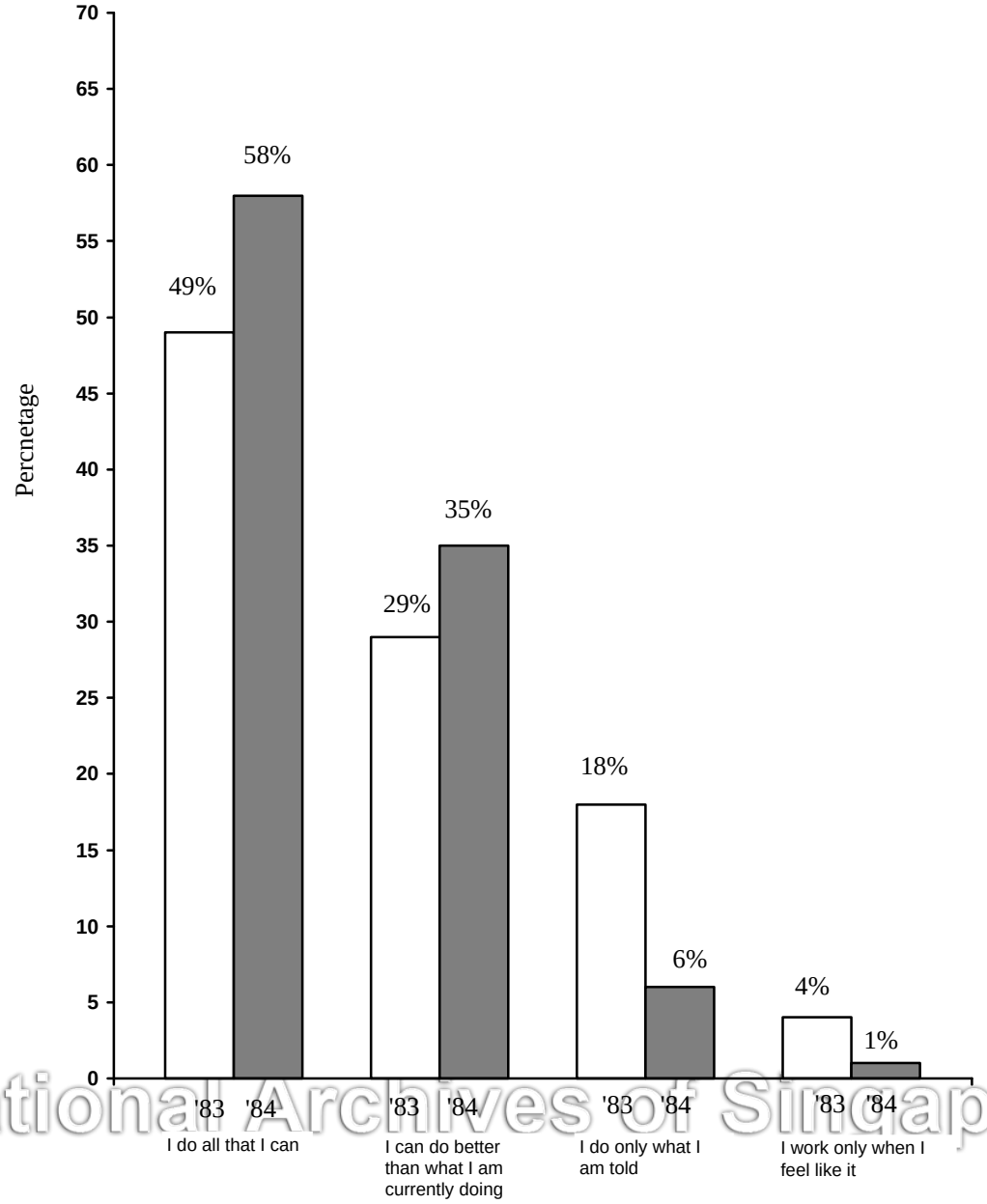
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Finally, if there was one finding in the Times survey (Chart 16) which can startle the most hardened of cynics, it is that 81 per cent of those aged 15 and above, said yes to the question: Are you confident that in the next 25 years, Singapore's economy will continue to progress as in the last 25 years? We

increased our per capita GDP about five times from $1,200 in 1959 to $5,730 in 1983 (at 1959 $). It will be a near miracle to repeat such an increase in our per capita GDP from $5,7000 in 1983 to $27,300 in 25 years (at 1959 $). This is robust optimism. Eighty-one per cent of Singaporeans believe we can increase our productivity annually to make the same progress in the next 25 years. They have the confidence to do it. The job of the NPB and management is to translate this confidence into productivity practices in the workplace.

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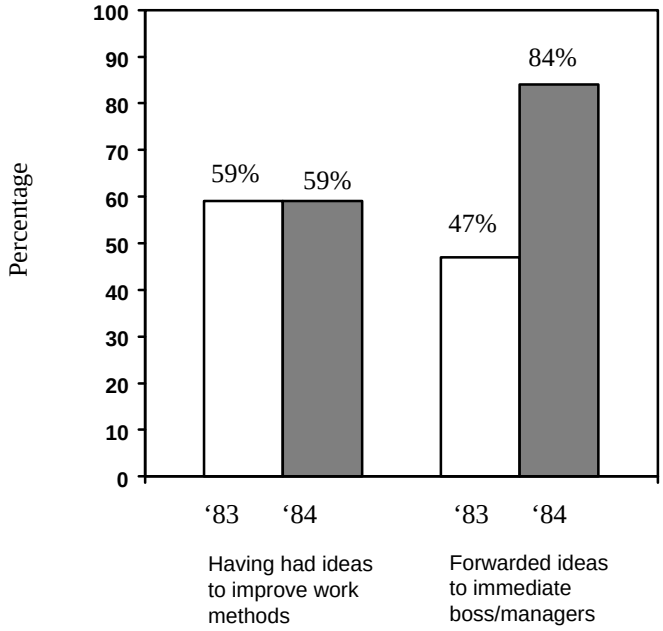
CHART I : ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK



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Source : National Survey on Productivity Will 1983
Survey on Productivity Attitudes 1984
(Both Surveys by Research & Information Department,
Times Publishing Berhad)

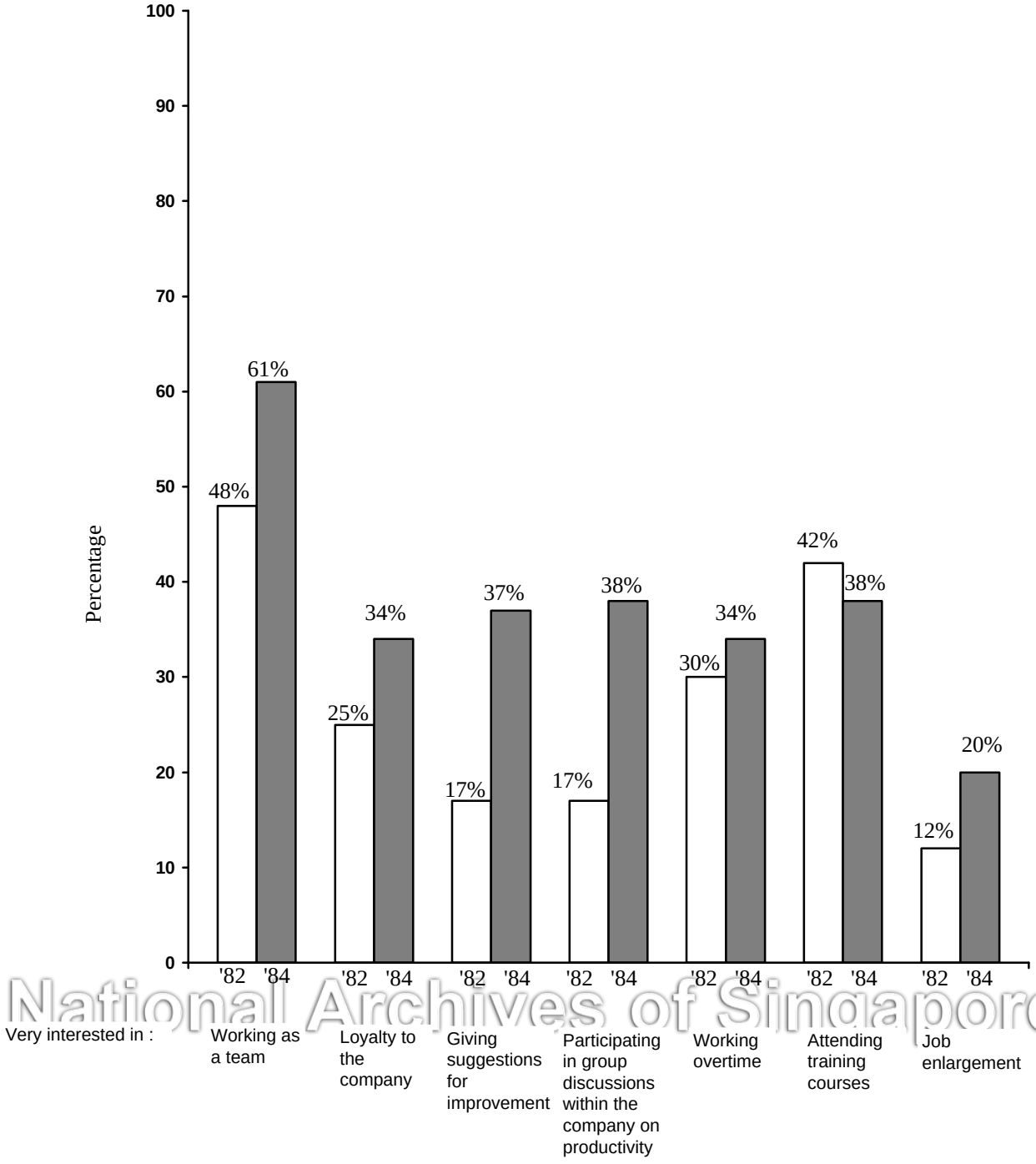
CHART II : MAKING SUGGESTIONS FOR WORK IMPROVEMENTS



Source : National Survey on Productivity Will 1983
Survey on Productivity Attitudes 1984
(Both Surveys by the Research & Information Department, Times Publishing Berhad)

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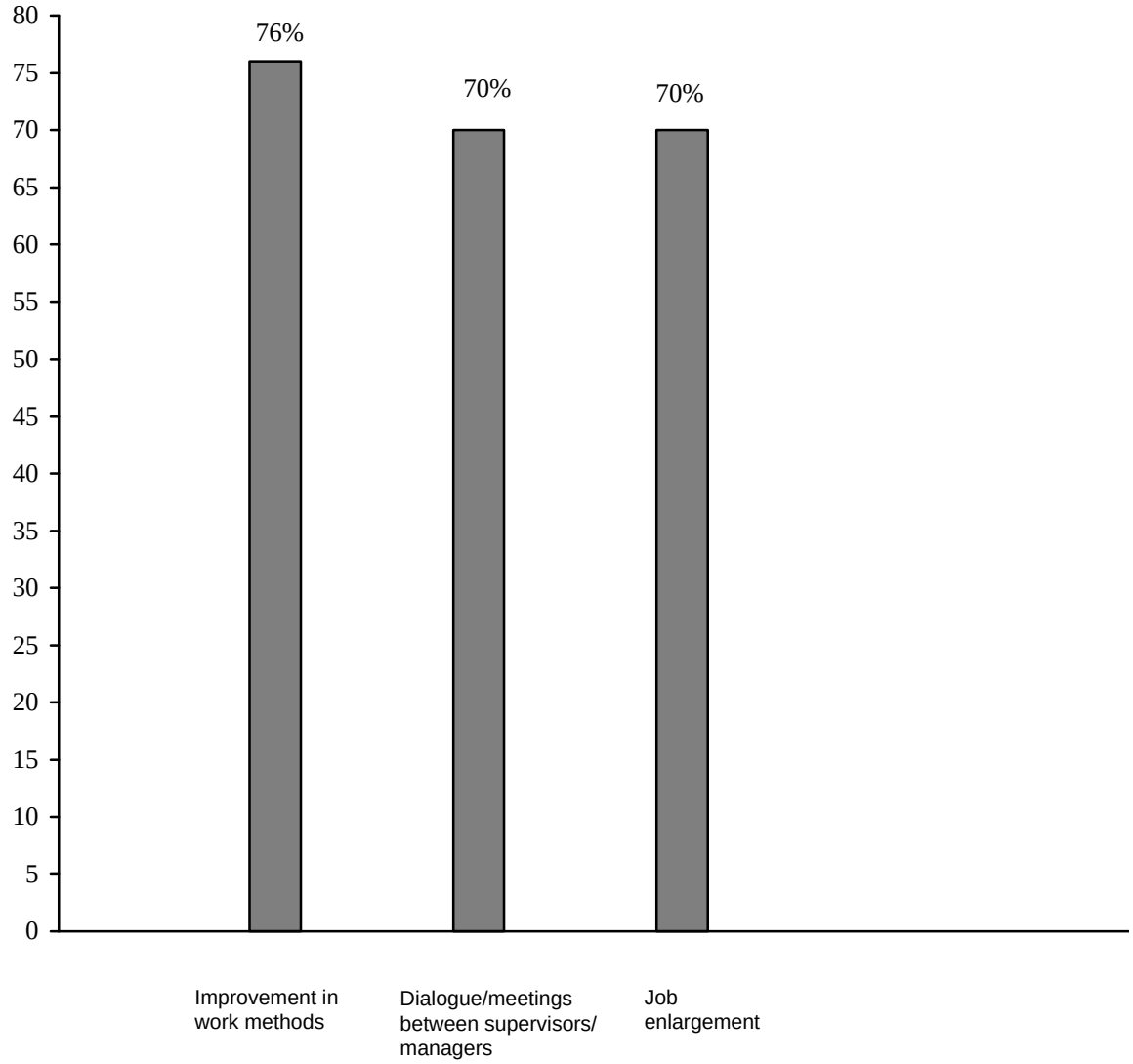
CHART III : WORKERS' INTEREST IN PRODUCTIVITY MEASURES



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Source : National Survey on Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Productivity 1982
Survey on Productivity Attitudes 1984
(Both Surveys by Research & Information Department,
Times Publishing Berhad)

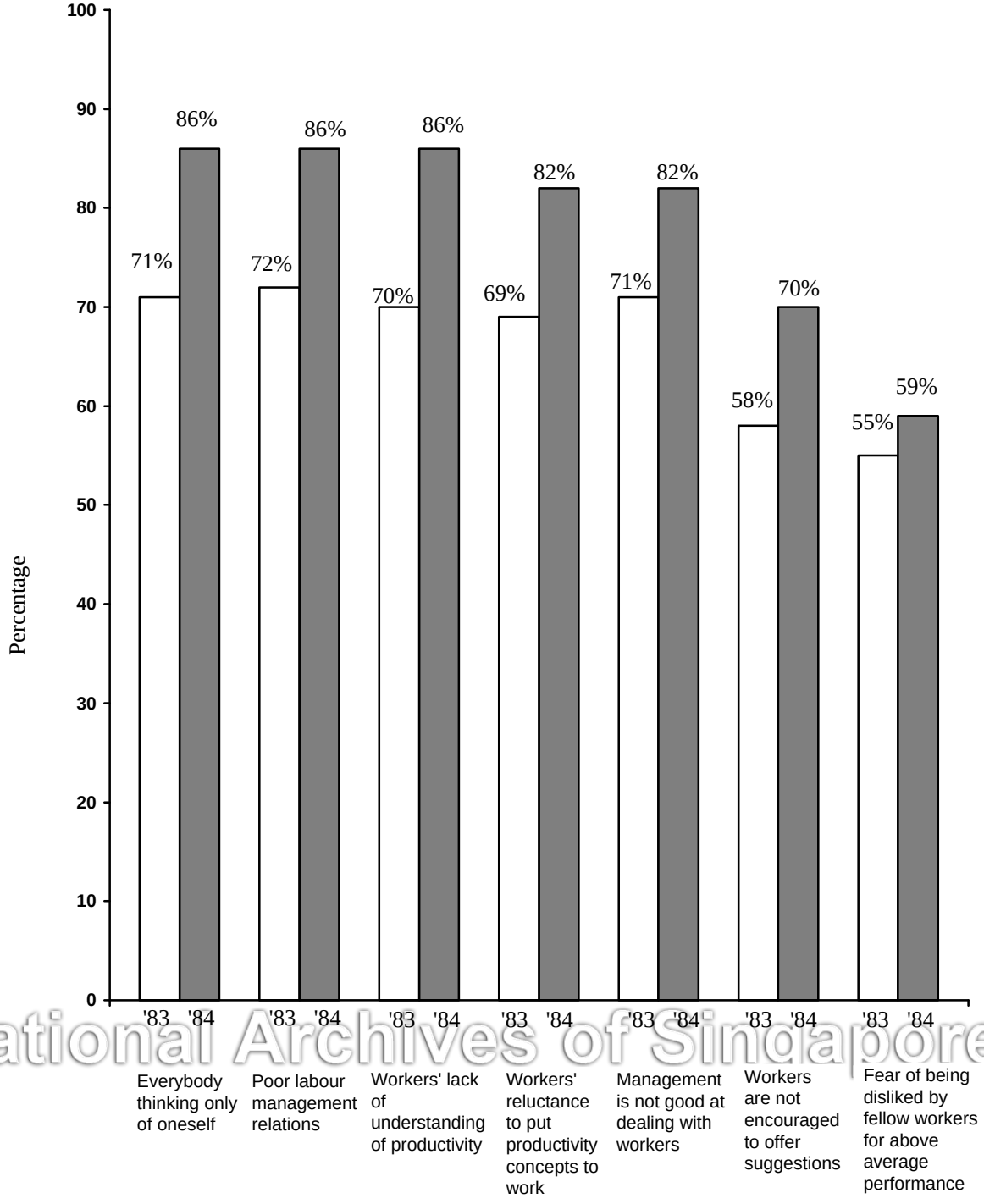
CHART IV : IMPLEMENATION OF PRODUCTIVITY SCHEMES



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Source : Survey on Productivity Attitudes 1984
(Survey by Research & Information Department,
Times Publishing Berhad)

CHART V : HINDRANCES TO HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY



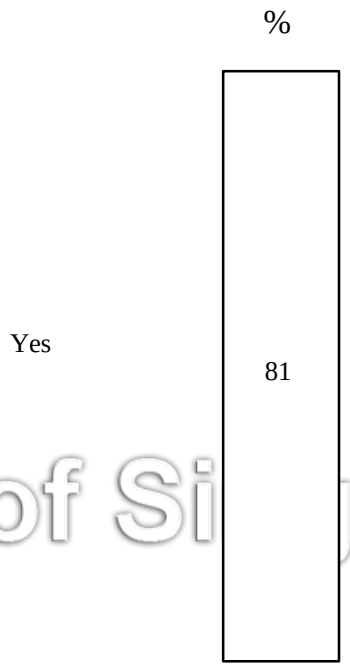
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Source : National Survey on Productivity Will 1983
Survey on Productivity Attitudes 1984
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CHART 16

SINGAPORE'S ECONOMY IN THE NEXT 25 YEARS

QUESTION Are you confident that in the next 25 years, Singapore's economy would continue to progress as in the past 25 years?



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BASE ; Persons Aged 15+ (1,903,000)