

WINNING THE  
SINGAPORE QUALITY AWARD –  
A JOURNEY TOWARDS  
ORGANISATIONAL EXCELLENCE

DR LAW SONG SENG  
Director & Chief Executive Officer  
Institute of Technical Education  
SINGAPORE

---

This paper was presented at the International Conference on Vocational and Technical Education– Transforming Vocational and Technical Education in a Global Economy– International Perspectives 2006, Singapore, 17-18 August 2006.

It is reprinted as an ITE Paper in view of its professional interest to others in the vocational and technical training field.

---

## CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ITE's Unique Mission</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ITE's Total Organisational Excellence Framework</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Journey of Transformation (1995-2005)</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Why is ITE World Class?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Key Success Factors</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Reflection on Journey</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Figures</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>26</b>

---

## ABSTRACT

With rising expectations of students, industry and other stakeholders, the need for educational institutions to seek organisational excellence to stay relevant and responsive is imperative. This was how the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) set out on its journey of continuous transformation since its establishment as a post-secondary education institution in 1992. As a mission-driven institution, its goal has always been to deliver the best quality education to ensure the success of its graduates in serving the economy and society. The first education institution to win the Singapore Quality Award (SQA) in 2005, it has created a unique brand of a “*Hands-on, Minds-on and Hearts-on*” world-class ITE College Education. This presentation will share ITE’s unique mission, transformation and experiences in its journey towards organisational excellence. Appropriately, winning the SQA will be ITE’s springboard in achieving its new vision to be “A Global Leader in Technical Education”.

---

## INTRODUCTION

As host of this “International Conference on Vocational & Technical Education”, let me on behalf of the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), extend a very warm welcome to all our participants. As policy makers, administrators, professionals, teachers and industry partners who are directly engaged in and championing the cause of vocational technical education, this is a great opportunity to share our challenges and experiences. I also want to convey our special thanks to our overseas speakers and participants whose contributions will add an international perspective to a better understanding of the dynamic changes and development in vocational technical education (VTE).

Vocational technical education systems play a crucial social and economic role in the development and progress of a nation. It is an important pillar in the education and training system. Owing to their dynamic nature, they are continuously subject to the forces driving change in the schools, industry, society and the cultural environment. Often shaped by the needs of the changing economy and local community, our challenges and opportunities are unique. The target student groups are more diverse. The image, standards and values often elusive. It was against these challenges and rising expectations that the ITE in Singapore set out on its journey towards organisational excellence.

Likewise, the transformation of ITE as a world-class educational institution has been shaped by the rapidly changing technology, globalisation and knowledge economy. With the pervasive use of technologies, in particular, Information Technology (IT), having a direct impact in the workplace, management, learning and living, a key challenge in education is how to stay relevant and responsive to the changing needs of students, industry and society. The knowledge economy requires that employees not only have the technical knowledge and skills for the jobs but also values for lifelong learning. Employers are looking for graduates who can think independently, innovate, communicate and work in teams. From the national and institutional perspectives, graduates must not only be knowledgeable, well-trained, entrepreneurial and confident, but also ready to contribute to society and serve the community. Hence, how do educational institutions continue to ensure the relevance and quality of their programmes and services? With increasing focus on educational outcomes and performance indicators, how do institutions ensure that they remain focused, attractive and add value to school leavers and adult learners? Beyond academic

---

matters, how do institutions respond to the increasing expectations of stakeholders and customers in terms of organisational management, operating systems, processes and best practices?

ITE's response has been to seek organisational excellence within an academic teaching and learning environment. In this respect, ITE has undergone a major transformation as a post-secondary education institution since its establishment in 1992. Today, we have successfully built a strong ITE brand, well-recognised locally and internationally, as a world-class institution for its relevance, quality and values. The first educational institution in Singapore to win the Singapore Quality Award (SQA) for business excellence in 2005, it has succeeded in creating a unique brand of an ITE College Education. While we are honoured to share our experiences, it is useful to remember that a journey towards organisational excellence is never-ending. In reality, the work is never done. It is a journey marked with milestones but has no final destination.

In this paper, I shall begin our SQA journey by sharing with you the uniqueness of ITE as a post-secondary education institution, its mission and challenges. This will be followed by our Total Organisational Excellence framework and the journey of transformation over a ten-year period from 1995 to 2005. I will then highlight the key initiatives undertaken, answer the question why ITE is world class, share the success factors and conclude with a reflection on ITE winning the Singapore Quality Award.

---

## ITE'S UNIQUE MISSION

So, what is ITE and what is so unique about its mission and challenges? ITE is a government-funded post-secondary institution focusing on vocational technical education. We are not a University, nor a Polytechnic. Often viewed negatively by the society, vocational technical education is also the “weakest link” in the educational systems in many countries. ITE’s focus is to train technicians and skilled personnel for jobs and careers in the major sectors of the economy. Our uniqueness is that despite the difficult challenges, we have succeeded in creating a unique brand of an ITE College Education for a quarter of a school cohort in Singapore.

Called “*Hands-on, Minds-on and Hearts-on*”, this holistic education as illustrated in **Figure 1** has provided the motivation, assisted student learning and nurtured all-rounded graduates who are ready to take on the challenges of the global economy. The “*Hands-on*” training ensures that students acquire a strong foundation in technical skills. “*Minds-on*” learning develops independent-thinking and flexible practitioners able to cope with changes. And “*Hearts-on*” learning develops the “complete person” with the passion for what they do with confidence and care for the community and society. The uniqueness of this ITE Education and success of ITE graduates was specially highlighted by the Singapore Prime Minister during his National Day Rally Speech in 2005. The educational outcomes are market-relevant, enterprising and adaptable graduates for a global economy and lifelong learners for lifelong employability.

ITE is an integral part of the national education and training system as shown in **Figure 2**. Established as a post-secondary institution in 1992, its mission is “To create opportunities for school leavers and adult learners to acquire skills, knowledge and values for lifelong learning”. As a matter of policy, all students in Singapore receive 10 years of general education in schools. Depending on their academic achievements, about 90% of a student cohort would progress to post-secondary education and training in Junior Colleges, Polytechnics or the Colleges of ITE. The Junior Colleges provide an academic high school education for the top 25% of a school cohort who would prepare for a university education. The next 40% of school leavers would enter the Polytechnics for a wide range of practical-oriented three-year diploma courses in engineering, info-communications technology, applied & health sciences and business & services.

---

The lower 25% of a school cohort, in terms of academic abilities, are oriented towards vocational technical education in ITE. ITE courses for young school leavers are essentially full-time institutional-based and conducted in three Colleges. With a range of 40 different courses, full-time student enrolment is 23,000. Another 30,000 working adults do part-time Continuing Education and Training courses every year. There are two basic levels of certification under the National ITE Certificate (*Nitec*) system. Depending on the educational achievements in schools, students may enroll at the *Nitec* or *Higher Nitec* mainly two-year courses in Engineering, Business & Services, Info-Communications Technology and Applied & Health Sciences. As a total system, there is articulation for progression to the Polytechnic and University based on merit performance. As the natural aspiration for students and their parents is to get a university degree, a key challenge for ITE is therefore in developing a “successful” alternative pathway for those who do not progress to the university or the polytechnic. The success of doing so would depend on the robustness of the education system in maintaining high standards at all levels while responding to the diverse interests, aptitude and needs of school leavers.

Staying focused on our mission, vision and values (MVV) is another key challenge in the process of transformation. We call this the “ITE Heartbeat”. As part of ITE’s five-year strategic plan, it represents that inner spirit of commitment in always asking how we can better serve, add value and meet the needs of our students, industry and the community. The mission statement was fine-tuned in 2005 largely in recognition of the new challenges posed by the increasingly global economy. An additional emphasis is placed on “values for lifelong learning in a global economy”. That means, the importance of employability skills such as thinking and problem-solving, IT literacy, communications, independent learning and orientation towards the realities of the global economy. Our aspiration to be “A Global Leader in Technical Education” recognises the need and challenges our readiness to engage more actively with the development and changes rapidly taking place in vocational technical education in the wider regional and international community. And lastly, to ensure commitment and teamwork, we have inculcated among staff, a set of core values represented by *ITE Care*. It stands for Integrity, Teamwork, Excellence and Care for students, staff, partners, the community and society. And in particular, the care and concerns of our staff for the students.

---

## ITE'S TOTAL ORGANISATIONAL EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

A journey towards organisational excellence is long and never-ending. A framework is therefore necessary to plan, coordinate efforts, monitor results and sustain continuing progress in the organisation. It is a systematic learning platform for reaching new milestones through identifying new approaches, consensus building, instituting best practices and achieving results. Evolved together with the journey itself, ITE's Total Organisational Excellence framework has three key elements as shown in **Figure 3**. On the left is the *Public Service for the 21st Century or PS21*, a governmental initiative launched in 1995 to bring about mindset changes towards change and excellence so that the public service can be "in time for the future". It provides the impetus for ITE with a wider platform in driving its journey towards organisational excellence. At the centre is ITE's very own five-year strategic plan, the current one being the *ITE Advantage*. This development plan provides the roadmap in defining the goals, strategies and programmes, which will help to achieve ITE's mission, vision and values.

Complementing *PS21* and *ITE Advantage* on the right is the *SQA Model* adopted to help align and benchmark ITE's approaches, systems and processes against the best practices in the world. The SQA is the national benchmark for "World-Class Business Excellence" for both the public and private sector organisations in Singapore. It is modeled after the American Malcolm Baldrige and the European Quality and Australian Quality Awards for business excellence. Formally adopted by ITE in 1995, the overall total organisational excellence framework has given us the necessary building blocks in driving the SQA journey towards organisational excellence with key focus on people, systems, customers, stakeholders and partners. In ITE, the SQA Model is complemented by a range of other standards and tools such as the People Developer System for people excellence, ISO 9001:2000 for Academic Quality Management System, Balanced Scorecard for strategic alignment with long-term and annual corporate plans, Net Economic Value for resource management and Knowledge Management for information sharing and learning. Applied consistently and persistently throughout the organisation, they have led to the successful transformation of ITE into a world-class institution and winning the SQA Award in 2005.

---

## JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION (1995-2005)

ITE's journey of transformation is characterised by its consistent use of five-year strategic plans. Each plan would be developed through a rigorous and comprehensive process of review and consultation with customers, partners and stakeholders. The total plan would include a mission, vision, goals, strategies and specific programmes. Two such plans were successfully completed over a ten-year period from 1995 to 2005. The first wave of transformation (1995-1999), driven by the "*ITE 2000 Plan*", was aimed at positioning ITE as an established post-secondary technical institution. The vision of the second wave of transformation (2000-2004) under "*ITE Breakthrough*" was to build ITE into a world-class technical education institution for a knowledge-based economy. Under the current third five-year plan (2005-2009), the "*ITE Advantage*", the vision is to a global leader in technical education. Underlying the transformation are key initiatives, which will now be elaborated.

### First Wave of Transformation (1995-1999)

The key initiative under this first wave of transformation was the positioning of ITE as a post-secondary education institution as illustrated in **Figure 4**. This was the result of a crucial decision by the Ministry of Education in 1991 when it adopted a new policy of at least ten years of basic general education for all pupils in schools. This decision opened up new avenues and possibilities in the subsequent development of ITE. It was an opportunity to upgrade and restructure the vocational technical education system to better meet the higher expectations of school leavers, parents and the changing economy. It eventually led to the creation of a unique ITE College Education for a quarter of a school cohort who need and can benefit from such an education.

Another significant initiative was infrastructural campus development. Under this initiative, a system of ten modern and well-equipped campuses was developed from the mid-1990s to 2000 to support a conducive teaching and learning environment as illustrated in **Figure 5**. As can be seen, the older campuses on the left pale in comparison with the more attractive campuses developed over the recent years. The reason for highlighting this is that the physical environment does have a significant impact on the public perception

---

and image of the institutions. It is an important signal on the importance government places on vocational technical education. “Seeing is believing” and there is really no short cut to changing the old mindset and negative perception about vocational technical education.

Good physical infrastructure, though very important, would not be sufficient to achieve a major transformation as a world-class education institution. Central to education must be the professionalism, quality and commitment of the staff. As such, another key initiative was in enhancing staff capability as illustrated in **Figure 6**. Focusing on people development, schemes were put in place to help staff upgrade their professional qualifications and stay relevant and up-to-date with technology and industry practices. Other platforms were introduced under the SQA Model to foster teamwork and inculcate a culture of commitment and care for students, staff, partners and stakeholders, and especially, the care and concerns of the staff for students. Some of these activities, which promote staff participation, would include work of the Organisational Excellence Steering Committee and its Working Groups, Innovation and Learning Circles (ILCs), Staff Suggestion Scheme and Annual Work Plan Seminar.

## **Second Wave of Transformation (2000-2004)**

The vision under the second wave of transformation was “To build ITE into a World-Class Technical Education Institution for a Knowledge-Based Economy”. As an education institution, there are two key elements which define the relevance and quality of its programmes, and hence the quality of its graduates. So, in 2000, the curriculum and pedagogic models were reviewed and redefined to better align with the changing needs of the global economy. The new curriculum model representing the contents, the “what to be delivered”, is shown in **Figure 7**. ITE’s courses are built on skills competencies and standards. Being “*hands-on*”, typically, 70% of curriculum time is practical and 30% theory. To ensure a strong foundation in technical skills and high employability, 80% of the curriculum time would be taken up by the core modules, which define the occupational areas where the graduates will seek employment. What was a fundamental change was the introduction of a compulsory “life skills” module

---

for all students. Taking up 15% of the total curriculum time, it ensures that students also acquire the skills of communications, teamwork, thinking and problem-solving, sports and wellness, career development and planning and customer service. In this way, students will be better equipped as lifelong learners and remain adaptable in the global job market.

The second important element is pedagogy, the “how” part of teaching and learning. A pedagogic model was articulated with an overall objective of developing “thinking doers”, graduates who can apply what they have learned into practice. This is shown in **Figure 8**. Called the “Plan, Explore, Practise and Perform” or “PEPP” Model, the approach is interactive and process-based. Under the guidance of a teacher, the student plans the work to be done, explores the information required, practises what he has learned and finally performs with competence, the knowledge, skills and values he has mastered. Through this approach, the student acquires three key competencies, namely, technical, methodological and social.

Also crucial in the second wave of transformation is in creating an innovative teaching and learning environment as illustrated in **Figure 9**. In particular, with the pervasive use of Information Technology (IT) in the society and knowledge economy, it is important that students learn in a rich IT-based environment that better prepares them for the real working world. Thus, guided by the ITE IT Master Plan 2000, two pioneering systems, the *eTutor* and *eStudent* were launched in 2002. The *eTutor* is a web-based on-line learning system. Leveraged on the advances in IT and e-learning technologies, the *eTutor* has transformed ITE into a community of connected on-line learning campuses. It provides flexibility, convenience and easy access to e-learning for students and staff in a personalised, interactive, multimedia and collaborative learning environment. As ITE’s programmes are highly practice-oriented, e-learning is presently focused on the knowledge and theoretical component of the curriculum. This e-learning system has enabled ITE to deliver 20% of its total curriculum on a web-based platform.

The *eStudent*, on the other hand, is a web-based fully integrated student services administration system. The first of its kind in the region when it was

---

developed, this system has changed the way ITE students manage their academic and student-related services, from enrolment to financial transactions, choice of elective modules and academic advising anytime, anywhere. In the process, they take responsibility for planning their studies and initiatives in doing things independently. This seamless one-stop centre on the web replaces the many otherwise manual and unproductive systems of student enrolment and administration. It has helped ITE to redefine its academic structure, streamline processes and improve its student services. Significantly, the *eTutor* and *eStudent* systems have created a new way of teaching, learning and living in ITE campuses. They provide an important bridge in preparing our graduates to better face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Another initiative, integral to the transformation of ITE, was efforts devoted to building its image and public perception- the rebranding of ITE. Having developed an excellent product, that is, a unique ITE Education, the question then was who and how do we communicate so as to cultivate public support and enhance its image. This, as we know, is not easy as parents continue to cherish the hope that their children will go on to a university. There are two aspects to this. The first is communications and marketing as illustrated in **Figure 10**. Over the years, we have put in place, a comprehensive marketing programme, focusing on reaching out to students, teachers, parents and the community. Annually, promotional talks are conducted for potential ITE students in secondary schools. Those in secondary 2 and 3 would also spend two days in an innovative “Experience ITE Programme” in ITE campuses experiencing the relevance of an ITE College Education to themselves, the economy and society. The highlight of this experience is the exposure to a range of hands-on manufacturing, office and service skills required in the real world through an integrated simulated learning system. Other regular marketing activities include open houses, road shows and media publicity. This comprehensive approach reaches out to some 50,000 individuals and receives 300 to 400 positive media mentions every year.

The second important aspect of image building is rebranding as illustrated in **Figure 11**. The community and public need to be able to identify with ITE, its role in education, industry, society and values. Since 1998, ITE has launched

---

three branding campaigns with creative themes such as “*ITE Makes Things Happen*”, “*ITE-A Force Behind the Knowledge-based Economy*” and “*Thinking Hands Create Success*”. Professionally commissioned and executed through advertising media such as newspapers, posters, buses and trains, the underlying messages have helped the public to associate the success of ITE students with the dynamic transformation of ITE as a world-class education institution. A brand-equity tracking model has shown that the image and public perception of ITE has significantly improved by 47% over an eight-year period from 1997 to 2005.

### **Third Wave of transformation (2005-2009)**

The year 2005 will long be remembered as a historical milestone when ITE won the prestigious Singapore Quality Award (SQA). It was also the beginning of the third wave of transformation under the current five-year strategic plan, the *ITE Advantage*. Our vision is to be “A Global Leader in Technical Education”. Building on the successful transformation of ITE as a world-class institution, the new plan will further position ITE and its graduates for the challenges in an ever-changing social, economic and global environment. There will be new challenges and opportunities presented by the dynamic changes in an increasingly competitive global environment. The intent is to further build on the unique ITE Brand of College Education and create additional competitive advantages for our students, staff, employers and other stakeholders. Appropriately, winning the SQA will be ITE’s springboard in achieving its new vision of global leadership in vocational technical education in its continuous journey towards organisational excellence.

It is a bold vision for ITE. A global leader is one internationally recognised among peers for leadership, innovation, quality programmes, “best-in-class” practices and organisational excellence. To stay relevant and responsive as a global leader, ITE must be more actively engaged with the transformation rapidly taking place in vocational technical education in the wider regional and international community. There will be the readiness for greater collaboration in and sharing of core capabilities, experiences and resources with other

---

educational institutions. While injecting a greater global perspective in our operation, we will continue to benchmark our systems and learn from the best practices from other educational institutions. Ultimately, it is about meeting the needs of our students and helping Singapore develop the next generation of a highly-skilled and globally-competitive workforce.

Supporting the new vision of the *ITE Advantage*, are 4 goals, 9 strategies and 19 programmes. Briefly, *Goal 1* on “An ITE Education for A Global Economy”, is aimed at preparing and orientating our students to the realities of an increasingly competitive global environment. Some of the key programmes being implemented include greater flexibility in the curriculum framework, enhancing intake selection system and global education for students. *Goal 2* focusing on “Lifelong Employability for ITE Graduates” will help our graduates remain “career relevant” in the fast-changing workplace. Programmes such as “on-demand” updating courses and joint ITE-Industry Certifications will ensure the continuing relevance of knowledge and skills for employment. Building on the ITE brand name, *Goal 3* will seek to achieve “An Increased Global Presence for ITE” through establishing strategic alliances and greater collaboration with the international community. To sustain the first three goals is *Goal 4* which is focused on “An Enhanced Capability for Organisational Excellence”. Developing the internal core capability of ITE staff through establishing Centres of Technology in partnership with industry technology leaders will be a key initiative in the continuing journey towards organisational excellence.

---

## WHY IS ITE WORLD CLASS?

But why is ITE a world-class education institution, one may ask? One good reason is that it was assessed under the SQA Model for overall business excellence, a model patterned after similar awards in other countries. It was a rigorous and thorough three-day site assessment by a panel of seven assessors, including an international member. In addition, there were two other supporting indicators. The first is that ITE is being recognised as a world-class institution in vocational technical education through endorsements by international observers and commissioned study reports, as follows:

- *“Singapore has developed one of the most sophisticated and strategically placed programmes for vocational and technical education anywhere in the world. Its new facilities are world class, its teaching staff are eager and qualified”, Professor Robert Zemsky, Institute for Research on Higher Education, University of Pennsylvania, USA, “A Six-Nation Education Research Project”, 2001.*
- *“We have witnessed ITE’s many great transformations and innovations in one short decade. We note that ITE has already established a very comprehensive and robust Organisational Excellence and Quality System for Vocational Training that is global in class and mature. ITE’s VTE system is comparable with or even better than the world’s best in advanced countries like Germany, Switzerland, Japan and the United States of America”, His Excellency, Mr Helmut Rau, Deputy Minister for Education, Youth and Sports, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, 2002.*
- *“ITE has achieved significant breakthrough by establishing itself as a post-secondary institution. It has effectively rebuilt and transformed its former “vocational” institutes into top-line educational colleges. ITE has given skilled occupations a new social and economic importance, creating viable careers for its graduates”, The South Asia Region, The World Bank Report, 2005.*

- 
- *“ITE is a brand of education that is unique in the world. Their tagline is “Thinking Hands Create Success”. You think about it. It is a very good slogan because with hands you are doing something, but the brain behind it, it knows what to do. Smart. So, when they train, they are training people to be “Hands-on, Minds-on and Hearts-on”. So, they develop a complete rounded person”, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, National Day Rally Speech, Singapore, 2005.*

Secondly, ITE has been able to demonstrate that it can achieve and sustain world-class results as shown in **Figure 12**. The full-time student enrolment more than doubled from 1995 to 2005, confirming its success in establishing ITE as a post-secondary institution and alternative pathway for 25% of a school cohort in vocational technical education. It was able to maintain a remarkably high satisfaction rate of over 90% from employers and graduates since 1999. The graduate employment rate for a five-month job search period has also been consistently high and was at 90% in 2005. With the restructuring of ITE as a post-secondary institution, it was able to significantly improve the success rate from a low of 61% in 1994 to a high of 77% in 2005, an outstanding achievement in the context of a vocational technical education system. Students have given ITE lecturers and the College environment a very high satisfaction rate of 94%. Underscoring the significant transformation of ITE as a world-class institution is the turnaround of the image and public perception of ITE. A major breakthrough in the image of vocational technical education, the brand equity index of ITE improved a remarkable 47% over an eight-year period from 1997 to 2005.

---

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

So far in this paper, I have shared with you our unique mission, journey towards organisational excellence and transformation as a world-class education institution. But, winning the SQA requires a concerted effort of leadership, people, culture, and support of customers, partners and stakeholders. And you need time, commitment and resources. So, what are some of the success factors, many would want to know. There are no secret formulae but for ITE, I would identify the key contributing factors as follows:

- Constancy of purpose in pursuing our mission, vision and values as illustrated by the consistent use of five-year strategic plans in supporting the journey of transformation. The clear planning, focus and persistence in following through the many initiatives has helped to produce the results expected of a world-class institution.
- Building a strong and committed team of leaders and staff dedicated to vocational technical education. This was attested to by the SQA assessors who said, “We are very impressed with the commitment and enthusiasm of the G7 (Group of 7 senior management) leadership in leading ITE to achieving its mission and goals, and in inculcating a culture of *ITE Care*, especially the care and concerns towards the students”.
- Relentless pursuit in adopting a pro-active approach in always asking ourselves how we can better serve, add value and meet the needs of our students. Our willingness to learn from and adopt the best relevant practices of other educational systems in building the ITE system is evident in areas such as the key competencies in the “PEPP” pedagogic model from the Germany, DACUM curriculum development methodology from the United States and the On-the-Job (OJT) training practices from Japan.

- 
- Created a brand of an ITE College Education for the lower quarter of a school cohort in vocational technical education that is unique in the world. This education philosophy of a “*Hands-on, Minds-on and Hearts-on*” education has helped ITE to nurture all-rounded students. It has earned ITE local and international recognition for the quality of its programmes, facilities, learning resources, graduates and organisational excellence. ITE has produced confident and well-equipped graduates to meet the needs of the modern economy.
  - And, finally, the SQA assessors were able to sense the strong culture of teamwork and *ITE Care* permeating through the One ITE System and Three Colleges. There was a real sense of passion, commitment, purpose and meaning in the work done in ITE.

---

## REFLECTION ON JOURNEY

ITE's journey towards organisational excellence formally started in 1995 with the adoption of the SQA Model. Winning the SQA in 2005 was a key milestone in this continuing journey. However, on reflection, one may ask why is the journey important to ITE as an educational institution? What does winning the SQA mean to ITE? What are the challenges beyond the SQA?

My sense and belief is that educational institutions need to respond to the rapidly changing local and global environment. With increasing expectations of students, industry and other stakeholders, educational institutions need to look at new ways of organising themselves in order to stay relevant, responsive and resilient in delivering quality programmes and services. Embracing quality assurance systems, tools of organisational excellence and benchmarking against the best international standards and practices are no longer an option but a necessary reality. A Model such as the SQA is therefore a good starting point to ensure that the institution has the ability to stay focused and align its efforts and resources in achieving its mission, vision and goals.

So, although ITE is an educational institution, the need to achieve organisational excellence remains imperative. To achieve our mission, vision and goals, we need to plan, understand the market environment, introduce innovative products and services and create competitive advantages for our students through continuous improvements. In this context, the SQA Model has given us a focused, systematic and sustainable approach in striving for the highest standards in organisational excellence. As a mission-driven institution focusing on vocational technical education for the lower 25% of a school cohort, our overall goal has always been to deliver the best quality education and training to ensure the success of our graduates in serving the economy, society and the community.

Winning the SQA is a milestone for any organisation. For ITE, it means the national recognition of our transformation as a world-class post-secondary institution focusing on vocational technical education. It reaffirms our belief and success in offering a unique world-class quality education to a quarter of our school cohort who would otherwise have been left behind in many education systems in the world. It adds meaning and purpose of what we do for our

---

students. As educationists at heart, our greatest satisfaction in winning the SQA is that we are able to provide the best opportunities for those who need an ITE College education to succeed in life and society. It means knowing that we have built a strong and robust system of people, education, culture and practices, which will sustain our hallmarks of organisational excellence.

Beyond the SQA, our vision is to be “A Global Leader in Technical Education”. Supporting this vision is our current five-year strategic plan, the *ITE Advantage*, which will reposition ITE and its graduates to better face the dynamic challenges in an increasingly global economy. The goals, strategies and programmes will continue the process of improvement, innovation and building on the ITE Brand of College Education. In line with the vision, there will be a greater global perspective in our work through a more active engagement and collaboration with overseas partners and institutions. An increased global presence for ITE will help to ensure the continuing relevance, responsiveness and resilience of an ITE College Education in a global economy. It means creating additional competitive advantages for our students, industry partners and stakeholders. Appropriately, winning the SQA will be ITE’s springboard in achieving its global leadership in vocational technical education.

## FIGURES

Figure 1: "Hands-On, Minds-On, Hearts-On" Education

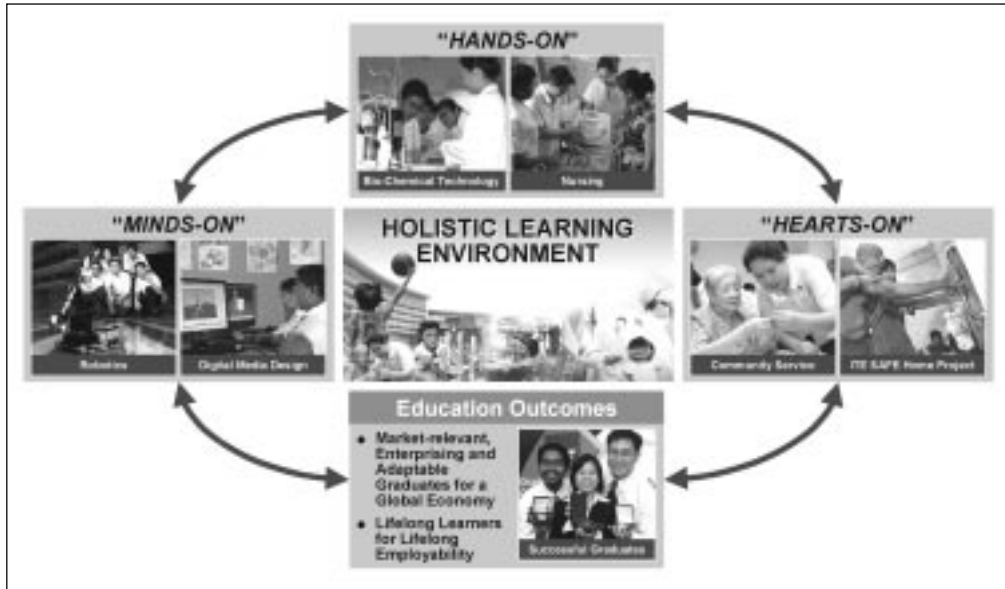


Figure 2: ITE as a Post-Secondary Institution

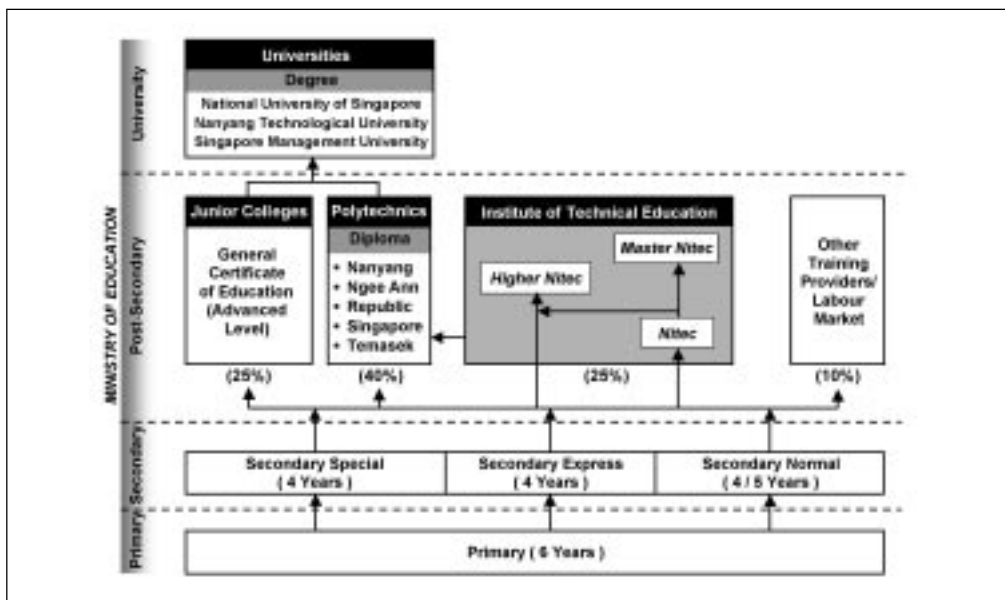


Figure 3: ITE's Total Organisational Excellence Framework

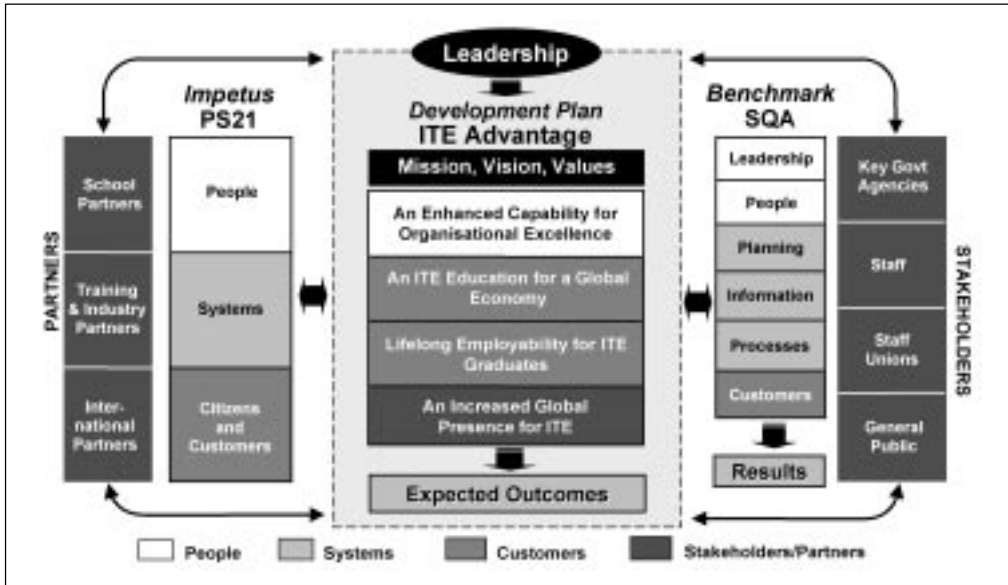


Figure 4: Positioning ITE as an Established Post-Secondary Institution



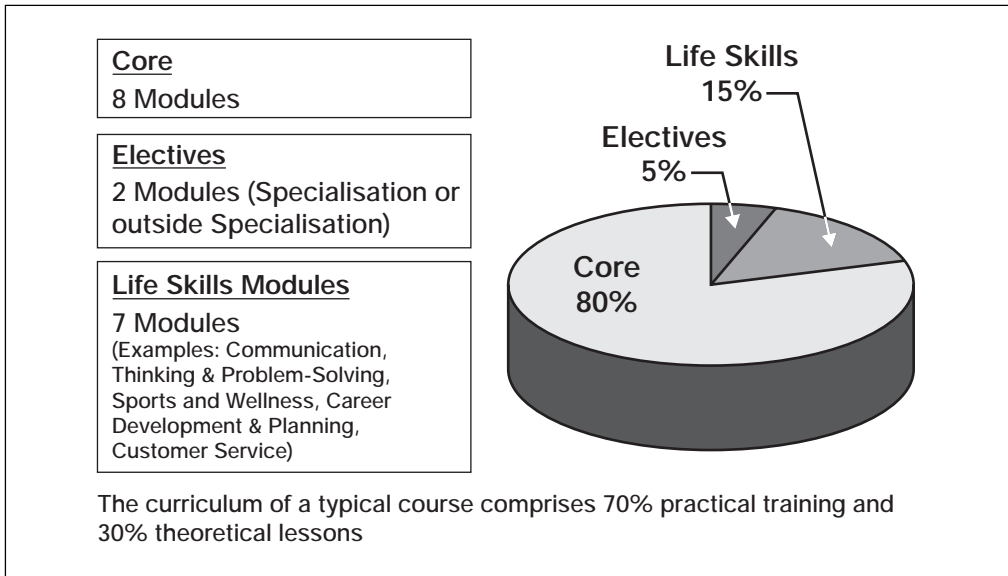
Figure 5: Upgrading Systems and Infrastructure



Figure 6: Enhancing Staff Capability



**Figure 7: Practice-Oriented Curriculum Model**



**Figure 8: Process-Oriented Pedagogic Model**

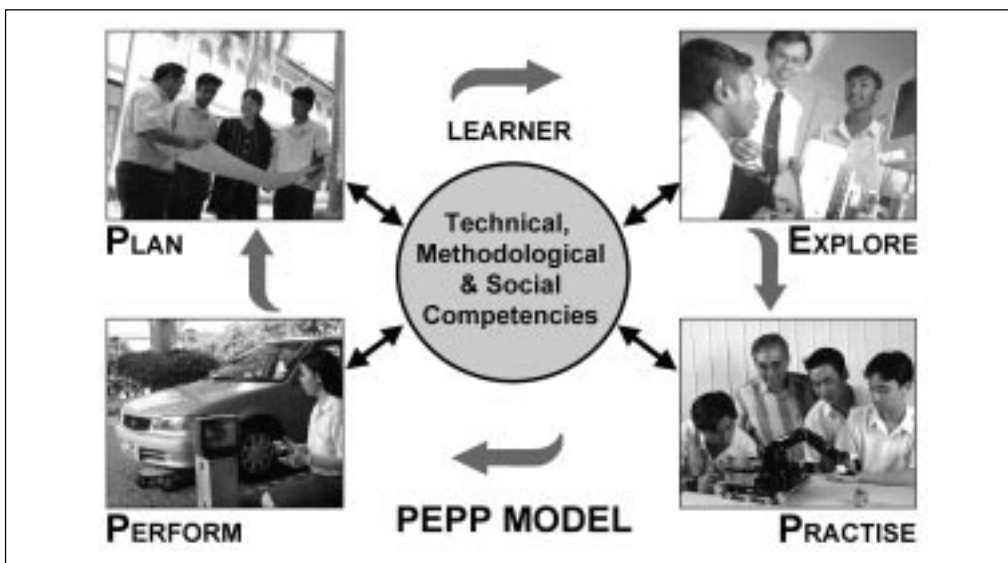


Figure 9: Creating an Innovative Teaching and Learning Environment



Figure 10: Communications and Marketing



Figure 11: Creative Rebranding of ITE



Figure 12: World-Class Excellent Results



---

## REFERENCES

- 1 Chiang M, From Economic Debacle to Economic Miracle: The History and Development of Technical Education in Singapore: Times Edition, 1998.
- 2 Metzger C, Berset J E, Zemsky R, Law S S and Innozzi M, Different Paths, Similar Pursuits- The Economic and Personal Potential of Vocational Training and Education in an International Context, Studies and Reports 12, University of St. Gallen, Switzerland, 2001.
- 3 Singapore Quality Award Framework for Business Excellence, Singapore Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board, 2003.
- 4 Law S S, A Journey Towards Organisational Excellence- The Singapore Experience, International Symposium on Quality Management and Quality Assurance in Colleges and Vocational Education, Esslingen, Germany, 2003.
- 5 Institute of Technical Education, *The Advantage* Plan, 2005.
- 6 Law S S, Dynamics and Challenges in Vocational Education and Training- The Singapore Experience, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Symposium- Western China's Vocational Education and Social-Economic Development, Liuzhou, China, 2005.