Use IT for business innovation, not just for IT’s sake

DOES IT still matter?

Yes, and if Dr John Seely Brown has anything to say about it, information technology is more important than ever before.

Speaking at the Singapore Management University (SMU) last month, Dr Brown revived the buzz around IT, sharing his views on its continued importance and its need to evolve.

The distinguished fellow with the Idea Factory and visiting scholar at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School of Communication talked about the “changing game of IT”.

He noted that “today, it seems businesses are running faster to stay in the same place”, attributing the stagnation to the “old ways of doing IT”.

Old IT platforms and processes are not integrated easily with other platforms and processes, making the merging of two banks, for instance, problematic.

Instead of helping improve the business, the IT system put in place ended up “locking businesses into ways that do not change”, he said.

“We need new service-oriented architectures that allow IT today to be more flexible and innovative,” Dr Brown said.

And that’s the job of his audience, the current and prospective students of SMU’s School of Information Systems.

The only one of its kind in Singapore, the BSc (Information Systems Management) was set up to address both the technical aspects of business information systems and the business skills for analysing these systems.

The trick is knowing how to use IT to develop business innovation and not employing IT for IT’s sake.

This is where, said Dr Brown, “ambidextrous skills” were needed — knowing enough about both management and IT to ask the right questions to make a judgement call.

First-year students Alvin Chia and Raymond Leong both chose the course because it offered a good mix of IT and business skills.

Said Raymond: “The talk addressed the fears that students have, whether the industry wants hardcore IT or hardcore business backgrounds.”

Added Alvin: “Now we have a better perspective and know that we are needed in the industry.” — Sheratyn Tay