Giving services industry a boost

New courses in Service Science are in line with the iN2015 goal of producing ‘techno-strategists’, writes AMIT ROY CHOUDHURY

A move that will give a further boost to the robust services industry in Singapore, the Republic’s three universities will start offering courses for Service Science, a new multidisciplinary research and academic discipline, in collaboration with IBM.

The courses will begin from the academic year starting in August 2008. Different departments of Nanyang Technological University (NTU), National University of Singapore (NUS) and Singapore Management University (SMU) signed separate memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with IBM Singapore yesterday for this purpose.

The MoUs cover Service Science curriculum development and research exploration with IBM, leading to the full programme called Service Science, Management and Engineering (SSME).

Speaking to BizIT, IBM Singapore’s managing director Teresa Lim said Service Science complements, rather than replaces, the main disciplines that contribute to knowledge about service.

“Service Science is a new academically disciplined field that integrates aspects of computer science, operations research, engineering, management sciences, business strategy, social and cognitive sciences, and legal sciences,” she said.

Ms Lim noted that 40 per cent of the world’s labour force is now employed in the services sector, compared with 38.7 per cent in agriculture and 21.3 per cent in manufacturing.

She added that despite this global shift towards a services economy, there was until recently no concerted effort or formalisation of educational programmes to nurture services professionals and researchers. “SSME is an urgent call to action to develop a science of services.”

According to IBM, the services sector in Singapore comprised 138,700 establishments in 2005. A total of 1.07 million workers were employed in this sector.

IBM signed the MoUs with the NTU College of Engineering, NUS School of Computing and the Institute of Systems Science (ISS) of NUS, and SMU School of Information Systems.

IBM has designated Jim Spohrer, director of Service Research, and Paul Maglio, senior manager, Service Systems Research, both from the IBM Industrial Market Group, as the service science leaders.

The collaboration includes the review of existing curricula, development of new coursework and case studies, and defining areas for service research.

Ms Lim noted that the MoUs are part of a larger push by IBM, the three universities and 15 organisations supported by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) to collaborate to push the frontier of service innovation through Service Science education, research, talent development and collaboration with government, academia and industry.

The IDA, together with Ayava Singapore, DBS Bank, IBM Singapore, Singapore Computer Systems (SCS) and Singapore Telecommunications (SingTel) are sponsoring talented students who are keen to pursue info-comm and SSME-related courses through the National Infocomm Scholarship (NIS).

Ms Lim added: “Greater and more open collaboration among the academia, government and industry will certainly enhance Singapore’s status as an info-comm hub, he added.

“The efforts by industry leaders like IBM and the IHLs are most encouraging,” IBM’s Ms Lim added that the introduction of the SSME programme by IBM and the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) is a timely one for Singapore.

“It’s aligned with the iN2015 Inteligent Nation 2015) masterplan where nurturing a pool of techno-strategists is critical in helping to achieve the vision of an intelligent nation, global city powered by info-comm,” Rear-Admiral Tay said.

Developing a multi-disciplinary info-comm workforce ready for the service-based economy will certainly enable the Republic to cement its global position, Ms Lim said.

The companies in Singapore which have expressed their support for Service Science and SSME include Ayava Singapore, Cisco, DBS Bank, Fuji Xerox Singapore, Intel Technolgy Asia, the Land Transport Authority, Lenovo Singapore, OCBC Bank, Oracle Corporation Singapore, Pow-rSeraya Ltd, Singapore Airlines, SCS, Singapore Power Ltd, SingTel and United Overseas Bank Ltd.

Ms Lim said: “After gaining practical experience across multiple industries and with rapidly evolving technology tools and solutions that transform businesses and institutions, they will then go on to be successful entrepreneurs, executives, researchers, and practitioners, with a solid grounding in theory and best practices in designing high-value service solutions.”

Ms Lim added: “The collaboration with the universities aims to develop a new breed of service scientists and service entrepreneurs who understand service systems, are trained to enable efficient and systematic approaches to service delivery, and serve as catalysts for service innovation in organisations and for various industry sectors.”

According to her, SSME-trained graduates will likely enter the workforce as solution designers, consultants, engineers, scientists and managers.

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