

THE PULSE OF SMES: **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, MEANINGFUL WORK, AND EMPOWERMENT**

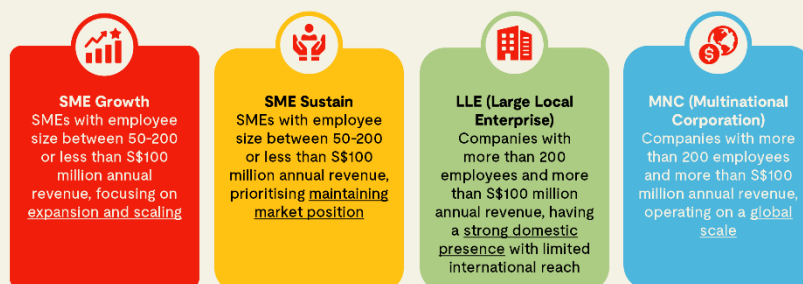


The Pulse of SMEs: Skills Development, Meaningful Work, and Empowerment

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are crucial to Singapore's economy, representing 99% of all enterprises and employing 71% of the workforce. *The Pulse of SMEs* explores Singapore's workforce landscape with a focus on SME employees' career needs, aspirations, and challenges. It identifies where SMEs are facing difficulties or making strides in upskilling, motivating, and retaining talent.

A Strengths-Based Perspective: An Archetypal Analysis for Organisations

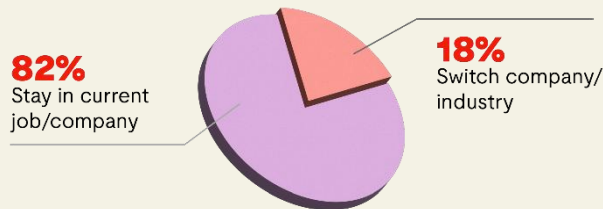
The study adopts a **strengths-based perspective** and applies **archetypal analysis**, segmenting organisations into four archetypes based on company types, employee size, and self-reported perception of their organisational growth:



Note: Study surveyed other archetypes of SMEs (i.e. SME Rebound and SME Decline). However, due to their smaller sample sizes, analysis does not focus on these groups.

Challenges Faced by SMEs When Investing in Their Workforces

The majority of SME employees surveyed prefer to stay in their current company, suggesting greater benefits for employers to invest in and develop their existing workforce.

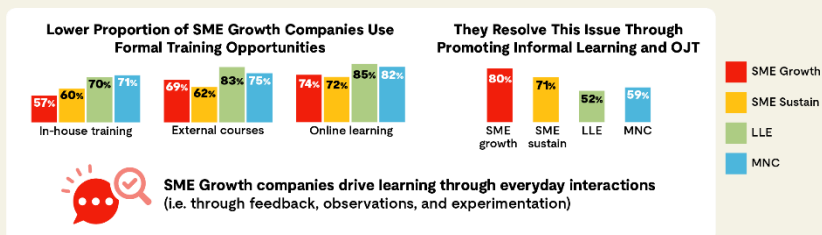


However, SMEs faced **4 key challenges** preventing them from investing in their workforce:



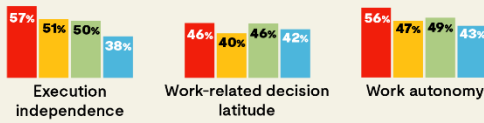
Lessons from SME Growth Companies

Despite challenges and limited resourcing, SME Growth companies still prioritise **skills development** but through learning on-the-job more than formal training.

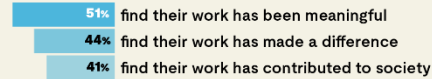


SME Growth companies are able to engage employees with **meaningful work**, which taps into deeper, non-monetary motivations beyond wages. Meaningful work can effectively engage self-determined employees.

SME Growth Companies Offer More Work Autonomy



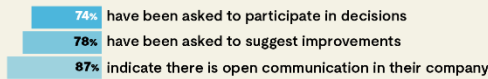
SME Growth Companies Enable Meaningful Work



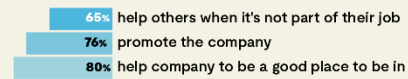
Employees in SME Growth companies exhibit higher career satisfaction where a higher proportion of employees have personal satisfaction, interest, and enthusiasm for their careers

SME Growth companies offer a shared vision for their workforce, **empowering** decision-making at work, growing their careers, and fostering shared ownership and belonging. This speaks to enhancing human capital development capabilities, strengthening HR support, and encouraging more of such progressive HR practices.

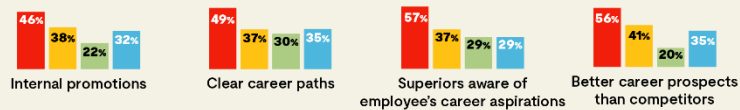
SME Growth Companies Involve Employees in Decision-Making at Work



Employees in SME Growth Companies Contribute Beyond Formal Responsibilities

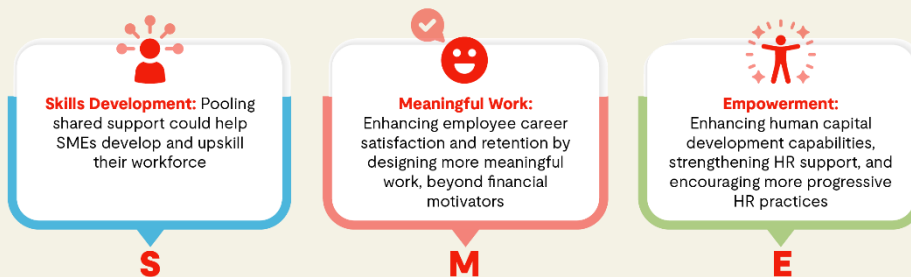


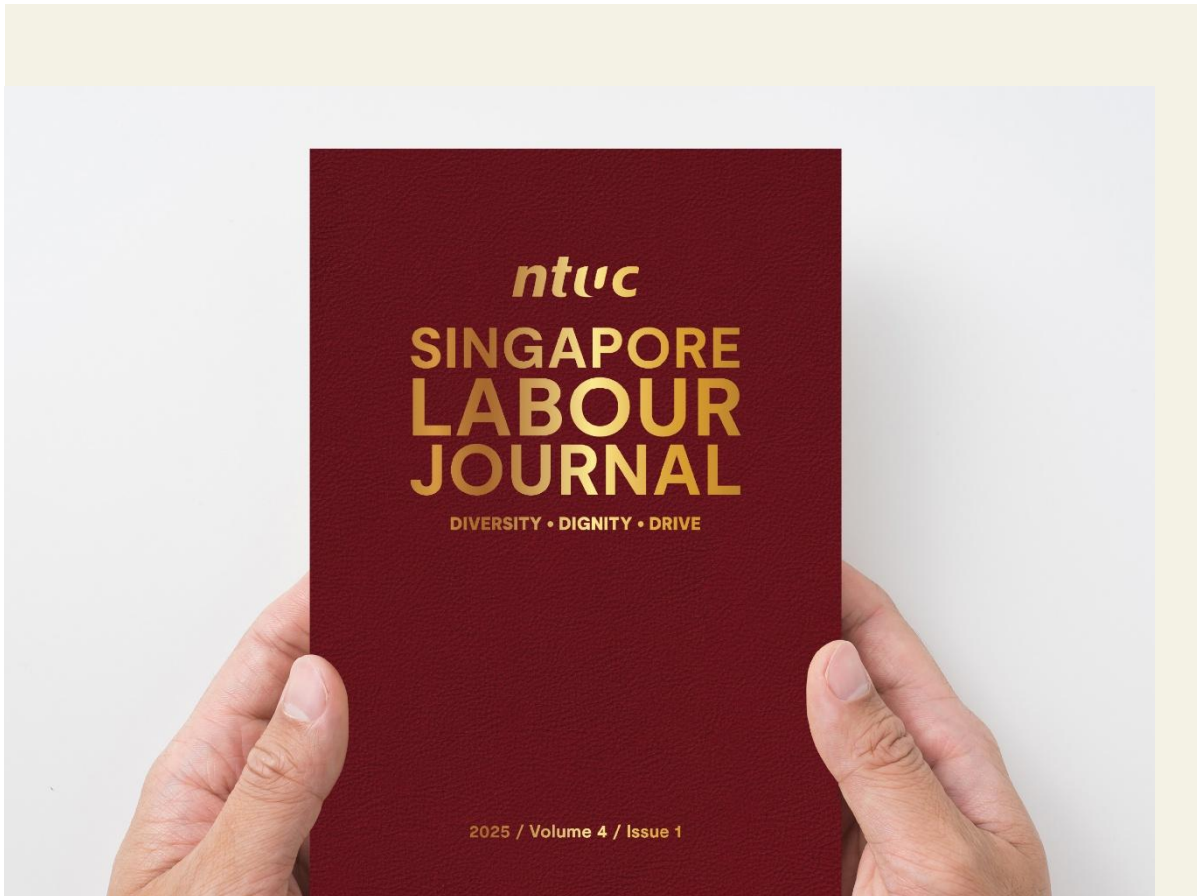
SME Growth Companies Promote Career Planning and Advancement



Key Recommendations

Cultivating a skilled, motivated, and engaged SME workforce that drives organisational success needs a multi-faceted approach. Drawing on the research findings, we recommend S-M-E:





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NTUC Strategy recently successfully launched the fourth volume of NTUC's *Singapore Labour Journal* in November 2025! The theme of this edition is "Diversity · Dignity · Drive", which reflects the Labour Movement's commitment to building a workforce where every individual is valued. This reflects the Ordinary Delegates Conference 2025 theme of a more representative Labour Movement, championing workers' interests, towards better jobs and better lives for all. Check out individual articles from the latest Volume 4 [here](#).

If you're interested in contributing an article to the *Singapore Labour Journal*, please get in touch with us at: strategy@ntuc.org.sg

[Explore other insights and resources on Labour Research here.](#)

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MEANINGFUL WORK, AND
EMPOWERMENT**



Research Partnership between National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and Centre for Research and Development in Learning (CRADLE) @ Nanyang Technological University (NTU)

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RESEARCH STUDY ON
**WELL-BEING
OF WORKERS
IN SINGAPORE**



Research Partnership between National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and Institute for Adult Learning

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"Young Voices, Work Futures: An NTUC-SMU Dialogue on Youth Employment in Transition" brought policymakers, employers, academics, and graduands into the same room on 11 February 2026 to discuss what several speakers described as a "structural shift" in how young people enter the workforce. Organised with the support of SMU and NTUC Youth, the dialogue created a platform for fresh perspectives and collaborative discussion on the future of youth employment.

Hosted by NTUC Assistant Secretary-General Patrick Tay, the panel of speakers highlighted that while Singapore's labour market remains tight, opportunities for first-time jobseekers are becoming more uneven. The other speakers included LAB member and SMU Prof Sun Sun Lim; Workforce Singapore (WSG) Assistant Chief Executive Ms Tracy Lee; LinkedIn Head of Public Policy SEA Ms Trisha Suresh, and the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) Assoc Prof Justina Tan. The

Dialogue was moderated by SMU Asst Prof Cao Wenjia from the newly-launched Resilient Workforce Institute.

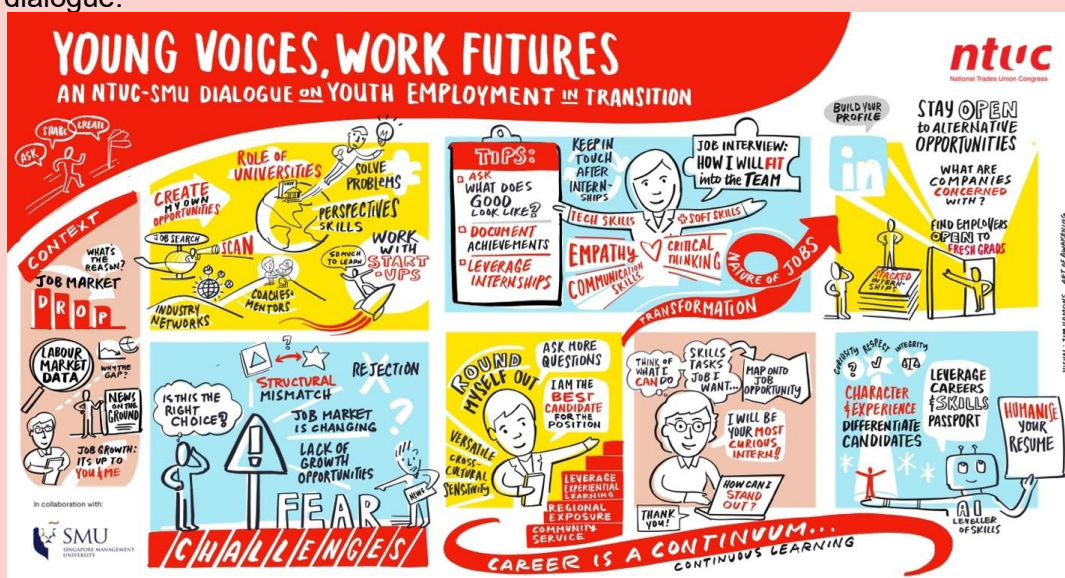


Students and recent graduates asked the speakers for advice on how they could secure an internship or a job, and shared concerns that Artificial Intelligence could be disrupting junior roles.

The session concluded with a call for more experimental approaches to workforce policy, including redesigned entry-level roles, stronger school-to-work bridges and platforms for youth voices to shape labour reforms.

Insights from the Dialogue would feed into ongoing policy thinking and programme design, and the session concluded with a call for stronger school-to-work bridges and the importance of youths' resilience and proactiveness in an evolving labour landscape.

The illustration below captures the key insights and ideas exchanged during the dialogue.



Thank you for reading this issue of the ***Singapore Labour Research Digest!*** Through this space, we aim to initiate discussions, promote debate, and advance our understanding of labour issues. Feel free to share this newsletter with colleagues who may find the resource relevant to their work.

Have feedback you would like to share or are interested in a research collaboration? Get in touch with us at strategy@ntuc.org.sg.

Stay tuned for our next newsletter!

Presented by NTUC Strategy

If you would like to find out more about the team behind the research, click [here!](#)



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