

ADDRESS BY MR CHAN CHUN SING, MINISTER, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AT THE ADULT LEARNING XCHANGE 2024, 19 JANUARY 2024 (FRIDAY), 9.00AM, RAFFLES CITY CONVENTION CENTRE

1. A very good morning to all of you and a happy new year.
2. Today, the topic is on adult learning. Let me first thank the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL) and the team for working very hard behind the scenes for organising this.
3. I will start with a question. How many of you believe that Adult Learning is important? If you do not, you will not be here, right? I'm not going to give you a long spiel about why adult learning is important, but rather how we can get it right.
4. Some of you here come from the Institute of Higher Learnings (IHLs), some of you are from corporates, but we all share the same challenges, which is, how do we get the adult learning model right?

5. Let me lay out some of these challenges. The first challenge is how do we ensure that we are able to deliver content at speed and just-in-time?

6. In every industry, everyone wants their employees to learn. But this is just the first step. Very often, we ask, where do I get the content? How do I organise the content? More importantly, how do I get the content in time, so that my employees can use them? The speed in which we generate content in the conventional way, is perhaps too slow. We take a long time to sense the market demands, curate content, find experts, and train the trainers before we train the trainees. This entire cycle can take more than a year and very often by then, the demand is outdated. This is the first challenge - How do we organise ourselves to create content at speed?

7. The second challenge that we face for adult learning is simply this. It is a much harder task to do this, than in our MOE schools.

Our MOE schools have to deal with, perhaps, ten to 15 cohorts of students of the same age band. Thankfully, we have a very well-organised National Institute of Education (NIE) that will provide us with the best pedagogies, the latest training methodologies, and ways to apply the latest technologies to help our students learn. The challenge of adult learning, which you are all familiar with, is delivering the same topic, the same subject, the same content to an audience that can range from 25 years old to 75 years old.

8. The content is the same, but the learners' abilities, the learners' spectrum and the learners' style are all different. So how do we mass customise the same content to this diverse group of people? If MOE must develop the pedagogy in our school for the 15 cohorts, IAL has to be the equivalent of NIE to develop the andragogy for 50 cohorts. So, what can we do to organise ourselves better? How can we leverage on technology to help ourselves get this done better?

9. The third challenge is recognising that all of us feel rather alone in this journey. We all have our own unique challenges. But yet at the same time, we all share a common challenge which is that we need to think of new models and apply new technologies.

10. This is where I hope all of us will come together and ask IAL to be a catalyst. IAL cannot do this alone. IAL is a catalyst to bring together the strengths of the respective partners and stakeholders in this area. So let me begin by sharing what I think we need to do.

11. First, in terms of content, we need a much faster sensing mechanism, a sensing mechanism that can tell us the demand of the new skillsets ahead of time.

12. Just to give a personal example – some time back I was talking to LinkedIn. LinkedIn has vast amounts of data on the type of skillsets that people are looking for, posting, and hiring for on LinkedIn. Every three months, IAL will gather with LinkedIn and its other stakeholders to publish the Most In-Demand Skills report,

displaying what skillsets are most desired. This is good. This helps to accelerate the cycle, where we figure out where the mismatches in skill demand are.

13. But in my conversations with LinkedIn, an even more interesting point came up. It is not so much about the data on what those mismatches are - but those skillsets that remained unmatched due to a lack of supply. For example, someone may look unsuccessfully for an employee with “green finance knowledge”. Though there was no match, the report can tell us that enough people are looking for someone with this skillset. If such skills have yet to exist, then we have an opportunity – as a business to create new content and the responsibility to organise ourselves to deliver it. So, sensing and making sure that we are always ahead of the curve, anticipating the future demand for new content is as important as organising ourselves to deliver the content that is inadequate or in short supply today.

14. It is no longer sufficient just to depend on the IHLs, the polytechnics, private education, and private training providers to generate such content. In fact, many of the latest content that we need may reside at the frontier of industry.

15. So the question is how can we organise ourselves such that the IHLs, the private education providers, and the frontier industries, can come together to combine the most forward-looking content with the best pedagogy, which we expect our training providers to master? This suggests that we need to think of ourselves as a network, as a community of practice, to come together to do this well.

16. The second challenge is how to make sure that we have the correct methodologies to teach 50 years of 50 cohorts of students from diverse backgrounds. This is where technology can come in to help. Currently, there's a lot of talk about AI. But even before AI,

I think the more important concept is how to use technology to help us with mass customisation, combined with adaptive learning.

17. The conventional teaching method we are familiar with is - I come into the room, I have a curriculum and I transmit my knowledge to you. There are a few features in this process that needs to change. First, it is a one-size-fits-all curricula. Second, it is the didactic model where I am a transmitter.

18. For adult learning, we will have to make a few changes to this conventional model. Adult learners come with prior backgrounds and diverse views. Instead of a didactic model, we must ask ourselves how we can facilitate adult learners to pool their knowledge and experiences together and learn, instead of via a one-way transmission.

19. Given that the 50 cohorts have different learning abilities, how do we pace the content such that each adult learner can progress

at their own speed? This is where adaptive learning technology comes in. We are starting to apply this in our schools, and it must extend to the adult learning sector.

- a. Take mathematics for example, we all have different levels of abilities when it comes to mathematics. For the strong learners, they must be stretched. For the weaker learners, they must be helped to catch up. So we need to have an adaptive learning system where you will be able to access materials suited to your level. Then moving on to the next step once you have completed that level. It is not very different from how we play games. You play games and master one level, you go up to the next level. We can apply such concepts to the teaching of adult learners.
20. The third very important thing when it comes to andragogy is this – adult learners, unlike our students in

school, are not coming back to school from 9am to 5pm, for us to transmit our knowledge. They are busy people with heavy responsibilities. We need to design modules that are accessible to them, anytime, anywhere. The holy grail of adult learning has always been bite-sized modules, accessible to people, anytime, anywhere and if possible, any subject that they want. This requires us to build up a body of knowledge, to have a community of practices to come together to design those modules.

21. It is said that it is easier to design a lecture for 20 minutes or an hour, than to design a TikTok video, or what we call a TeachTok video, for 120 seconds. We may know how to deliver a subject for 20 minutes, but the difference lies in delivering the same content in 120 seconds so that people can watch it on the go. If we are serious about helping our adult learners learn better, we need to redesign our andragogy.

22. We are not alone in facing these challenges. At ALX, this is where we can all come together, as partners to one another, to build a strong network. The partnership must include the schools, IHLs, private education providers and companies. Because one day, the content that you require from an adjacent industry, might just be available through the friends or contacts you have made today. The pedagogy that you want to use to reach out to a certain age group may also well-reside with someone else here who has tried this before.

23. This is why I would like to congratulate IAL today for bringing us together to start this new initiative, to start up this new community of practices. I hope that you all will give IAL your support so that we all can benefit from this initiative together.

24. Today, IAL, with the support of SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), will be launching the Adult Learning Collaboratory (ALC)

25. This ALC is the first of its kind that will try to bring together multiple stakeholders including researchers, training providers, industry players, to pilot new solutions for adult learning.

a. A physical facility will be set up as a lifelong learning institute, which will include a theatrette equipped with interactive technologies and collaborative workplaces, to facilitate dialogue and experimentation.

26. One of ALC's first projects will look at how mid-career and mature workers can respond meaningfully to the disruptions in AI technologies. We hope that instead of fearing AI, we will embrace it, and use it to help increase the

productivity of our workers. We hope that through this process, we will not only learn to do things better, but we will also learn to do better things.

27. So I look forward to this work by ALC, led by SSG and IAL, as well as your support and collaboration. We will never get this done facing these challenges alone. I know each one of you can contribute something to this repository of knowledge that we want to build up, this science of adult learning that we want to develop.

28. My wish is that one day our IAL, together with SSG, can perhaps leverage on this Collaboratory - and be the NIE for adult learning. Be the frontrunner in the andragogy of adult learning. By combining the resources of our frontier industry, our training institutions, both private and public, we will have that reservoir or depository of cutting edge knowledge that we will organise ourselves not just to meet current demands, but

have a forward sensing mechanism for the emerging skillsets that are most needed in the future economy, rather than yesterday's. Many other countries aspire to this - if anyone can get this right, Singapore must be one of them.

29. Well done and thank you very much.