

SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, MR CHAN CHUN SING, AT THE LEARNING ENTERPRISE ALLIANCE AWARD CEREMONY 2021 ON FRIDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2021

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Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

- 1 A very good evening to all of you. It is a pleasure to be able to join you, to recognise the commitment of our enterprises within the Learning Enterprise Alliance (LEA) network, towards developing the skills of our workforce. I will elaborate in the later part of this speech why this effort is so important to us as individuals, as companies, and as a country.
- 2 The Institute for Adult Learning (IAL) launched the LEA network in 2018, to build a community of enterprises that are committed to promoting continuous learning at the workplace within their organisations. To date, the LEA has welcomed over 80 enterprises into their network and completed more than 55 workplace learning projects.
- 3 When we embarked on the Next Bound of SkillsFuture in 2020, we made a concerted push to strengthen the role of enterprises in workforce transformation. As part of this effort, we have expanded the ecosystem of the National Centre of Excellence for Workplace Learning (NACE), to better offer structured support for local enterprises to expand their workplace capabilities. The National Centre of Excellence for Workplace Learning, or NACE, has also recently introduced the National Workplace Learning Certification, as a systematic way of recognising the workplace learning capabilities of our companies.

Importance of Workplace Learning

- 4 When we started these efforts, nobody could have anticipated the onset of COVID-19. However, the pandemic has clearly illustrated the value of these early moves to promote workforce learning. Today, we have seen how border closures and domestic restrictions have resulted in deep, structural changes to the global and local economic landscape.

Businesses have had to adjust and even revamp their processes in novel ways in order to remain competitive, and to survive.

- 5 In this fast-changing environment, the businesses that continue to thrive are those that are agile enough to adapt their operating models. And to successfully do this, it is not enough to simply re-engineer business processes, or invest in new equipment. Successful enterprise transformation is only possible if we also upgrade the capabilities of our workforce, so that they remain nimble and able to take advantage of the new technological trends.
- 6 Now let me at this point just share an important observation. I think many of us around the room tonight, or even beyond this room, would be very concerned with the technological disruptions or business model disruptions that we have experienced over the last few years.
- 7 The good and bad news is this – with or without COVID-19, the disruption will continue. The question for us in Singapore is this: will we survive? Will we thrive? And how do we do this?
- 8 Success will not belong to those who have the most resources or have the biggest size. In my view, success will belong to those who can evolve the fastest. Speed is certainly more important than size.
- 9 How then do we achieve speed of evolution? Speed of evolution for our business models, speed of evolution for training of our workforce. If we can leverage the disruption from new technologies, we will emerge as victors from the transformation.
- 10 That is why tonight's event is so significant. What IAL, the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) and SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) wants to achieve with all the partners in this room is precisely this – for us to speed up the evolution of our businesses, business models, and the skills of our workers. If we get this partnership right, starting from IAL, SUSS, SSG and all the partner organisations here tonight and beyond, then Singapore will have as good a chance as anyone else in the world to not only survive the disruptions and outrun the competition, but to thrive for another generation to come.
- 11 That is why when I first joined the Ministry of Education (MOE), I wanted IAL to be the "secret weapon" that complements our National Institute of Education (NIE), and National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC), as an important third prong in our lifelong education.

- 12 NIE, over the many years, has transformed our foundational education system. NIEC has helped us to uplift the entire pre-school sector. These two pillars are important, but not sufficient. We need a third pillar – from pre-school education to formal school education and then to lifelong education.
- 13 If we get this third pillar right, and we embed the culture of lifelong learning not just our workers but also our enterprises, then I am sure we will achieve the speed of evolution necessary to seize opportunities, and to do even better than what we have done. I am confident that we can achieve this together as a community.
- 14 Employers and employees often find it challenging to set aside time for worker upskilling. One way to address this is through the adoption of workplace learning.
- a. Workplace learning today takes many forms – it can include in-house training, coaching, mentorship programmes, job rotations and other workplace initiatives.
 - b. Employees can learn on the job and apply their skills directly to the real-world environment, where employers can reap the benefits of increased productivity and enhanced skillsets for their workers.

Recognising Leading Companies

- 15 This evening, we will be recognising 19 award recipients. These are enterprises that have set themselves apart in their approach towards skills development. Despite the immediate challenges in the operating environment, they have distinguished themselves through their foresight and focus on the long term, by investing in the skills and development of their workforce and management teams.
- a. One of them is Singapore Airlines (SIA). SIA sees staff training and development as key to attaining the highest standards in the aviation industry. It is currently developing the capabilities of its trainers through evaluating the effectiveness of its training programmes, by incorporating elements of learning experience design and improving its trainers' group facilitation skills. This helps to inculcate a dynamic learning culture within SIA and improve its operational efficiencies. So it is not just about training the trainees, it also about training the trainers and putting in place a system, and a culture within the organisation to promote this.
 - b. Lim Kee Food Manufacturing Pte Ltd, a leading home-grown food manufacturer is another example. It is working with IAL to review its staff training process through design thinking and equipping their supervisors with skills to create digital training resources. This will allow supervisors to deliver a more effective on-the-job training

(OJT) for the new and existing staff, and in turn improve the staff's workplace performance. This is another example whereby it is not just about big companies. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and all companies can participate in this journey.

- c. Lastly, I am pleased to highlight the example of DP Dental. Despite being a small-sized enterprise, DP Dental recognises the importance of upskilling its employees to improve organisational performance. It is partnering IAL to develop a formal workplace learning curriculum, including staff training and train-the-trainer materials, to support their patient relations executives to upskill. This will greatly speed up the onboarding process for new hires, allowing them to perform their day-to-day tasks well within two months without any supervision. DP Dental shows us that it is not just the larger and better-resourced companies which can pursue workplace learning. Regardless of size, all companies can and should invest in and benefit from upskilling their workforce and management teams.

16 Today, IAL will also be signing MOUs with 8 organisations to signify their commitment towards developing workplace learning capabilities and propagating the culture of learning at their workplaces through a series of projects. This will help develop a skilful and resilient workforce to lay the foundations of Singapore's post-COVID economic recovery.

Conclusion

17 Ladies and gentlemen, our ability to recover from this crisis will depend on the strength of our businesses and agility of our workforce to transform and seize new opportunities. We may not know when COVID-19 will end, but if we start today we will be much more ready for the post-pandemic environment.

18 I hope to see more companies follow in the footsteps of our award recipients and LEA network members, by taking active steps to invest in the skills of their employees and foster a culture of lifelong learning at the workplace. This will enable us to emerge stronger from COVID-19 and put us in good stead to take on the challenges ahead.

19 Lastly, I would like to make a pitch for everyone to share this philosophy. It is not just about the training and upskilling of our workers, it is also about the training and upskilling of the management teams. It is about instilling the lifelong learning culture across the entire organisation – from management to workers. Then we can be very confident that we will stay ahead of the competition for many more years to come.

20 Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to all of you for your partnership. Today, IAL has more than 80 partners. I am confident that in time to come, the network will expand many times more. Thank you very much, and I wish you all the best.