

OPENING SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, MR CHAN CHUN SING, AT THE LEARNING ENTERPRISE ALLIANCE AWARD CEREMONY 2022, 16 SEPTEMBER 2022, MARRIOT TANG PLAZA HOTEL SINGAPORE

Professor Cheong Hee Kiat, President of the Singapore University of Social Sciences

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1 A very good evening to all of you. Good to see all of you back physically.

2 Tonight, we are gathered here to celebrate your partnership and recognise many of the companies which have joined us in this journey to upgrade our workers.

3 Before I go into the speech, I wanted to highlight four words on the backdrop behind me that resonate very much with me.

4 The first word is 'evolution'. It is a theme that is close to my heart, because I have always believed that Singapore's competitiveness is never about our size or resource base. Ever since our independence, our competitiveness has and will always depend on how fast we can evolve to meet market demands. This word is a very important reminder.

5 The next question is, how do we evolve faster than others? How do we evolve faster than our competitors? And this is where the next three words on the backdrop come in useful. Out of the three words – 'employee', 'enterprise' and 'ecosystem' – which do we think is most important? We need all three to work in a certain way for us to remain competitive.

6 Let us start with 'enterprise'. Everyone says that if an enterprise wants to be more competitive, they must start with their culture. What is this critical culture that will determine the speed of evolution for us? The desire to keep improving, to keep pursuing excellence, I think that is a given for enterprises. Beyond that: How do we define success for our enterprises? Is it just about the ROI, or is it something more? If

it is just about the ROI, one way to achieve success could be to simply try to improve the bottom line by cutting costs. In fact, many enterprises try to do that and it is essential, but that is usually not the most satisfying way to achieve goals.

7 What if our enterprises have a culture of not just trying to improve the bottom line by cutting costs, but also by adding value and creating sustainable wage growth for our workers? That is a different challenge. If we can establish that as a Singaporean enterprise culture, that will really distinguish our enterprises from others, because we do not just look at the bottom line, but also how we enable our workers to keep growing.

8 Another aspect I would like to touch on is collaboration. Do our enterprises have in them a culture of collaboration that brings them together to compete as Team Singapore? If we can strengthen that aspect of our enterprise culture, then we will evolve even faster.

9 Tonight's dinner is important in this aspect, because it is not just about every one of us coming here to receive the award for ourselves, but also a commitment by all of us to collaborate with one another, so that we can learn faster and evolve faster.

10 Let me come to the second point, which is the 'employee'. I have asked all the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) to work closely with companies to bring about transformation. If we can help our enterprises transform, employee transformation will naturally follow.

11 Today, we have many good examples amongst us that show how the relationship between employee training and enterprise transformation can go the other way too. Because many of you have invested in the training and upgrading of your employees, they too become the catalysts to transform and improve your businesses from within. You will hear many of these examples later.

12 Many enterprises want to upgrade and upskill their workers, but in the past, we were very often unable to do this at scale and at speed. To do so, we need to articulate and aggregate the demand for new skills, particularly for our Small & Medium Enterprises. This is where Institute of Adult Learning (IAL), Singapore University of

Social Sciences (SUSS) and other IHLs can step up and work with the unions and Trade Associations and Chambers, to better articulate and aggregate skills demand.

13 Many enterprises are no longer as interested in the full-time degree or diploma today. They are increasingly looking at just-in-time skill sets that can be applied to their businesses. For enterprises to harness these, a few things must change in our ecosystem.

- a. On the individual's part, we should look at modules that are just-in-time, and perhaps stackable towards an eventual degree or diploma.
- b. Industry should also look beyond just traditional qualifications or the number of years of working experience when hiring a potential employee, and recognise skill sets that are relevant and just-in-time.
- c. At an institutional level, we need to evolve how we package our modules into just-in-time, industry-relevant modules for our workers. For our IHLs to deliver these, IHL-industry partnerships will need to evolve, where the IHLs are not developing courses and curriculum in isolation, but in partnership with companies. The faster and better we close the knowledge loop between frontier industry to academia, the faster we will be able to upgrade our workers' skillsets in service of our companies.

14 Finally, 'ecosystem'. As I have described, our companies should partner our IHLs closely to develop the modules necessary to give our workers a leg up. And the ideas go both ways. A lot of our cutting-edge research and innovation, products and services must flow into enterprises, and our cutting-edge enterprise practices must be quickly infused back into academia, so that we can maintain the learning loop.

15 That is why partnerships like the Learning Enterprise Alliance is so important, because it is about academia and industry learning together. If we can do that, we will be able to achieve the speed of evolution that will ultimately determine our competitiveness.

16 Earlier, I asked you which of the words was most important for us to evolve at speed. To achieve evolution at speed, all three supporting enablers must work in

tandem. If any one part does not work well, we will not be able to achieve this evolution, be it for enterprises, employees or for the entire ecosystem.

17 We hope that many more companies, many more organisations will join us in this endeavour to keep upgrading our enterprises, keep upgrading our workers, and keep improving our ecosystem, so that we can distinguish ourselves as a nation that is able to achieve evolution at speed.

18 While we may be small, we are never hampered by our lack of resources or our lack of size, but we always distinguish ourselves by the speed of our evolution. Thank you very much for your partnership. And congratulations to all of you.