

**OPENING REMARKS BY MINISTER FOR MANPOWER,
MRS JOSEPHINE TEO AT THE WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY FORUM ON
8 MAY 2018, 4.45PM
AT RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA**

1. Thank you for inviting me.
2. I shared with the IBM team that among the distinguished speakers you have gathered today, I'm the least qualified to talk about the digital economy or what it takes to lead a tech organisation.
3. What I hope to do instead is to share with you some of the issues we have observed on the ground with digital disruption, in the course of carrying out our work in the MOM.
4. A bit about MOM. As you know, our mission is to ensure we have an inclusive workforce and progressive workplaces.
5. It isn't in just Singapore but every country with an ageing population, that we want in particular to see seniors being able to work for as long as they wish. In other words, an inclusive workforce must value seniors and progressive workplaces are those that make it possible for seniors to contribute meaningfully.
6. We introduced the concept of re-employment after the legal retirement age of 62. Thereafter, up to age 67, employers are obliged to offer their existing employees employment, but not necessarily the same job or the same pay.
 - We know employers are concerned about costs and productivity.
 - We have a Special Employment Credit which helps to offset the employers CPF (or social security) contributions.
 - We also have generous grants to help employers redesign jobs and workplaces so their older workers can remain productive.

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7. In the last 10 years, the employment rate of seniors (aged 55-64) has improved from 56.2% to 67.1%. Today senior employment in Singapore is ranked 9th compared to the 35 OECD countries.

8. What has this got to do with tech?

9. We know that our economy stands to gain much by embracing technologies and digitisation.

- The potential for productivity improvements are enormous.
- Tech also promises to create new jobs and exciting careers, all of which will help Singaporeans reach our higher aspirations.

10. But there is also the fear of job losses and people being displaced.

- The concerns are especially prominent for older workers and even younger workers whose current jobs do not require much digital skills.
- The risk of a digital divide opening up, cannot be discounted.

11. What might this digital divide look like? Three encounters are stark reminders.

12. The first concerned a cleaning company which decided to introduce an autonomous scrubber.

- The manager told the cleaning staff, who is an older worker, that it would help her with much of the routine mundane work, and she could concentrate on the tighter corners which the robot could not quite reach.

- The robot was also easy to operate.
- In any case, the manager told the worker, they would train her to use it and back her up with technical support in case she had difficulties.
- She would also be entitled to a higher pay of at least \$200 more per month under the PWM.
- The cleaner was so worried about it that she preferred to resign and get a new job doing her old job, without having to use any machinery.

13. The second concerned my previous role in the Ministry of Transport.

- Just about 3 years ago, in the first year that ride-hailing apps took off in Singapore, I recall saying in Parliament that the 3rd party ride-hailing apps contributed to less than 5% of all taxi bookings.
- Last week, the Prime Minister updated at the May Day Rally that 1 in every 2 taxi and private hire car rides are booked via Grab/Uber.
- What a rapid pace of change!
- But I sometimes wonder whether it will ever get to 100%, because some users will still prefer to dial the familiar number for the taxi operators' call centres, and the line remains open.
- Currently, around 40,000 call bookings are made to taxi operators each day.
- These differences play out in households all the time.
- When the kids are around, calling a cab means using a smartphone app like Grab.
- When the kids are out, it's back to the land line.

14. The third concerned my own domestic helper.

- She's in her mid-50s, has been on the job for about 20 years and is completely reliable.
- At her request one Saturday, I brought her for grocery shopping at a new mall near our home.
- She was very enthusiastic up to the point we had to do self-service checkout.
- In the moment, her brows narrowed and she looked at the self-service kiosks in the most disapproving way.

- We managed to check out reasonably quickly.
- But all the way home, I got an earful about how terribly unfriendly and impersonable it was to have self-service check-out.
- I guess you know by now that our family won't be going back to the new mall anytime soon.

15. The point I'd like to leave with you is that tech has the potential has to divide the workforce into the tech-abled and tech-disabled, and advancement may look very different for those are digital-ready and those who are still digital-wary.

- This is a kind of inequality we hope not to see.
- By extension, it has the potential to divide communities and societies, unless we find ways to bridge the divide.

16. From MOM's perspective,

- I would like to see more tech applications that enable seniors to work longer, more safely and productively.
- I would like to see tech being used in ways that allow women and all other caregivers better manage both their work and family commitments, so that employers can tap this pool of talents.
- I would like to see technology uplift the productivity of lower-wage workers, so that with enlarged jobs and higher skills, they earn better wages.
- Persons with disabilities but who are otherwise gifted in their own ways should have more opportunities to move from the margins into mainstream workplaces.
- Ex-offenders too should remain connected with developments in tech so that they stand a better chance of re-integration with society after long periods of incarceration.
- All employees would like a greater sense of engagement and empowerment. Can tech help deliver that?
- Employers like IBM can lead the way to create environments that have a culture that not only embraces technology, but make efforts to change and nurture workers in the newer ways of getting work done.

17. Because you are people with great ability to turn visions into realities, I'm very grateful to have the chance to put these ideas to you.

- At the same time, I want you to know that MOM and indeed so many of the government agencies have all kinds of schemes and programmes that are helping our people to embrace the digital future.
- For example, under the Adapt and Grow initiative, we now have more than over 100 Professional Conversion Programmes in more than 30 sectors that help professionals transit from their previous jobs to new jobs being created.

18. But the government cannot on its own transform the workforce and workplaces.

- It is very much up to you, business leaders to bring about transformation.
- It is also very much up to you, the leaders of tech to not allow the divisive potential of tech to prevail, but instead to find ways for tech to bring people together and unify them, through work and other social interactions, and to enable everyone to fulfil our human potential.
- In particular, I hope more women can participate in and gain from the tremendous value-creation of tech business.

19. In Science and Technology (S&T) in Singapore, just one in four employees is a woman, and this proportion has barely inched upwards in a decade.

- Female enrolment in S&T courses at our local universities has also flatten out at around 3,300. As a proportion of S&T enrolment, the share of women appears to be dipping below 40%.
- As Patricia said, women made up half the population, yet women are under-represented in STEM and leadership roles.

20. I hope in your discussions today, you will exercise your imagination and leadership, so that with the help of digital technologies, our workforce can become more inclusive and our workplaces more progressive.

21. That's surely a future worth creating.

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