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SPEECH BY MR OTHMAN HARON EUSOFE

MINISTER OF STATE FOR MANPOWER

AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF

THE ASIA-PACIFIC CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING '99,

"SURVIVING IN A KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY : LEARN, UNLEARN AND RELEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE"

AT THE APOLLO HOTEL ON 25 NOVEMBER 1999 AT 9AM

Mr Adrian Teo, Chairman of the Advisory Board for APCEEL '99

Mr Lee Kok Wai, President of STADA

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

1 I am happy to join you this morning for the Opening Ceremony of APCEEL '99. I must commend Singapore Training and Development Association (STADA) and the Association for Experiential Education of the US for taking the initiative to organise this conference in Singapore. It is most timely as it reinforces a key message of the Manpower 21 Blueprint that was launched last August, namely that to become a knowledge economy, we must embrace the practice of lifelong learning to keep our knowledge and skills relevant throughout our lives.

Manpower 21 and Lifelong Learning

2 The knowledge economy is one characterised by constant change. Hence we have to provide our people with the strong capability to cope with change,

adapt to change, facilitate change, and where necessary, to promote change. This requires the application of cognitive skills to a much greater extent than in the past. The theme of this conference, "Surviving in the Knowledge Economy: Learn, Unlearn and Relearn from the Experience", is therefore very apt.

3 The Manpower 21 Report, which serves as our charter to develop a competitive workforce for Singapore, emphasises the need to develop the capacity for Life Long Learning. Human and intellectual capital is now the new competitive factor. As Microsoft founder Bill Gates said "Knowledge is the Ultimate Power Tool". New jobs will require higher levels of competencies, while existing jobs are calling for a wider range of skills. There is no more lifetime skill or a lifetime job. Job requirements will continue to change quickly over time requiring new knowledge and skill sets. We have seen production operators in manufacturing increasingly needing basic IT and other new skills to operate sophisticated equipment, or input and process data.

4 How can workers stay employable in a fast-changing economy? This is a priority issue that the government, in partnership with employers, unions and community organisations, is working to urgently address. Manpower 21 outlines a comprehensive set of strategies that are now being implemented. They include the setting up of a National Skills Recognition System (NSRS) to develop definitive workplace skills standards; expanding support for the Skills Redevelopment Programme (SRP) to train workers to certified skills; launching a Singapore Learning Festival to promote learning as an enjoyable and enriching experience; and working with the private sector to enhance our learning infrastructure in terms of facilities, training programmes and training personnel.

Learning Trends

5 The knowledge economy will impact the way people learn. With the use of technology, learning can be made much more flexible, convenient and effective, while at the same time enabling access to information on a scale unimaginable before. The Internet has revolutionised the way students learn in schools by opening up a whole new research tool for their assignments. The use of multi-media engages the learner more fully in the learning experience by stimulating his senses.

National Archives of Singapore

6 Training is increasingly moving out of the classroom as innovative ways are found to deliver training and facilitate learning. Many are convinced that on-line learning is the wave of the future. More organisations are turning to on-line delivery of training. They are leveraging on their IT networks and using multi-media applications to help them deliver training to their employees cost-effectively across time and geographical boundaries. Recent innovations include e-learning programmes that incorporate a hands-on approach and real life simulation, making training less costly, more efficient and meaningful.

7 However, technology is not the only driver of change in training methodology. Research in behavioural and social sciences have also contributed new ideas and methodologies to enhance the learning experience. Experiential learning, the theoretical underpinning of the adventure learning methodology, could prove an effective and powerful tool for organisational development. APCEEL '99 is significant because it brings together two strands – the technological and the social – and provides a forum to explore how they can reinforce each other for

greater learning effectiveness.

Trainers

8 Whatever the training methodology, skilful trainers or facilitators can make learning truly powerful and effective. The training profession itself is undergoing a transformation. The forces of increasing competitiveness combined with the rapid development of technology, have re-defined the role of the trainer. A trainer can no longer consider his or her job as a mere teacher at the front of a classroom who imparts from a set curriculum. The scope of a trainer's function has expanded today. It begins from understanding a company's business objectives and the competencies it needs to be more competitive, to design the best way to equip employees with the relevant skills and to assess if the training indeed produces the desired results. Many companies today call their trainers by a variety of labels – "performance specialist", "knowledge manager", or "learning officer". This is a reflection of the expanding role of trainers.

9 In Singapore, trainers have a key role in our efforts to promote a learning culture. Trainers have a tremendous influence on a person's learning experience. They can either enlighten and set learners on a fulfilling journey of lifelong learning, or disappoint and make cynics out of potential lifelong learners. We need highly professional and committed training personnel to help us achieve our goal as a learning nation. The Manpower 21 Report recommends that we should raise the professionalism of our trainers and others in the manpower industry. We need to define skills standards for manpower professionals and develop the manpower industry into a vibrant and progressive player in our quest for a world class workforce.

10 The Ministry of Manpower will help to facilitate initiatives to develop skills standards for trainers and other manpower professionals. The competency standards must be developed by the stakeholders themselves, namely the private sector employers, human resource professionals and trainers. The objective should be to establish a comprehensive set of standards that will serve as benchmarks to guide companies in their efforts to upgrade their trainers, and for HRD practitioners to evaluate their own skills requirements.

Conclusion

11 I am pleased to note that STADA has over the years been very active in promoting the professional development of training practitioners. APCEEL '99 is another example of a worthwhile initiative by STADA, as it allows the opportunity for all of us to share experience and learn from experts all over the world. I am sure that you will make the most of the sessions to gain useful insights into experiential learning.

12 On this note, I wish all of you a fruitful and stimulating session.
Thank you.
