

**SPEECH BY MR LEO YIP, HEAD, CIVIL SERVICE**  
**AT THE 2018 ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE DINNER & PROMOTION**  
**CEREMONY ON 3 APRIL 2018, PARKROYAL ON BEACH ROAD**

Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean,

Ministers,

Chairman and Members of the Public Service Commission,

Distinguished Guests,

Colleagues and Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good evening to all of you.

2. Let me begin by thanking all my Administrative Service colleagues here this evening for your service and contributions to the Public Service and to Singapore. Today, the Administrative Service community stands at 330 strong, and I would like to congratulate the 16 officers appointed into the Administrative Service this year, and the 57 officers who have been promoted.

3. I want to pay tribute to three of my former Permanent Secretary colleagues who have retired over the past year. They have collectively served over a hundred years! Please note that I said collectively. First, my predecessor Mr Peter Ong, who led us for 7 years through a period of rapid change and disruption. He shouldered the burden of leadership which only now I am able to fully appreciate. Second, Mr Tan Tee How and Mr Choi Shing Kwok, both of whom had helmed various organisations and ministries with distinction. To the three of them – Peter, Tee How and Shing Kwok – on behalf of the Administrative Service, our deep appreciation for your years of devoted service, for your contributions, and for your friendship and camaraderie. We extend to you and your families our very best wishes.

### **Directions for the Public Service**

4. Over the past few months, we have done much work across the Public Service on two new initiatives.

5. The first is to **refresh the agenda of policies and programmes** to support the priorities of the Government over the next few years. This track of work comprises new policies that we want to develop, new thinking on existing policy work, and the key shifts that we will have to make across the Public Service.

6. This Agenda embodies our strategic response to the major shifts that Minister Heng spoke about. Our Agenda aims to position Singapore to ride the winds of change that are blowing within and outside Singapore – such as our ageing population, technological disruptions, new economic competition, and changes in our society.

7. These are not abstract, distant possibilities. They are real trends, they are already unfolding, and they will change Singapore's trajectory and affect our lives. For example, our local workforce will start to plateau as we approach the next decade. The implications of that for our economy, for our society, and for our families are profound. So the Agenda addresses the key issues affecting Singapore – as a nation, as a city, as an economy, and above all, as a society and a community.

8. The second major stream of work we have embarked on, is to chart the **next phase of Public Sector Transformation or (PST)**. This is to build on the earlier phase of PST that my predecessor Peter Ong initiated in 2012.

9. Our refreshed Agenda and PST go hand-in-hand. In order to develop and implement the Agenda in support of the Government's priorities, we need new capacities within our system – new ways of working together, new capabilities, and new mindsets – and that's PST. And the converse is true. Even as we develop our officers and strengthen our organisations, we must be channelling our efforts towards a common set of outcomes – and that is our refreshed Agenda. So developing our Agenda and PST must be done together. Our Agenda encompasses the future we want for Singapore and how we are to attain that future; the next phase of PST is about how we prepare the Public Service so we can deliver on the Agenda.

10. The same driving forces that affect Singapore will affect the Public Service – the need to embrace technology, to adjust our operating processes for an ageing workforce and so forth. What big, bold – and sometimes uncomfortable changes – do we need to initiate for ourselves (*in ourselves even*), so that the Public Service – using the analogy of a vessel or a ship if you like – can navigate the turbulent seas ahead and turn the winds of change into waves of opportunities for Singapore.

11. The changes we will initiate include digitalising the Public Service, revamping how various ministries and agencies operate so that we are truly ready for the future, enhancing our service delivery and citizen engagement – and above all, working more closely together as One Public Service.

12. We also need to better equip and ready our officers to navigate the major and disruptive changes ahead; and turn their anxieties into confidence about the future.

### **Leadership in an Era of Transformation: Ambition, Alignment & Action**

13. In order to achieve all this, let me now address the ethos within the Administrative Service that will be critical to help us realise the Agenda and push ahead with the next phase of PST.

National Archives of Singapore

14. We are in a phase of significant change. Within Singapore, we are confronting inflexion points in our demography, economy, and society. We are also confronting massive technological disruptions and the shift in global economic and strategic weight towards Asia.

15. In response, as part of PST, we have to make many changes, including at the system level. For example, every ministry and agency will be confronted by higher workload and/or new challenges in the year to come, but with an increasingly tighter and ageing workforce.

16. In such a period of deep change, our colleagues across the Public Service will look to us in the Administrative Service to exemplify these changes and make them happen.

17. As Administrative Officers you are called upon to lead. And all of us who lead are called upon to be stewards. And as stewards, we are here for a higher purpose – to make the Public Service and our organisations better.

18. Transformative change must first come from within. You must first have that personal conviction that such change that we are embarking on is critical. Then as leaders, you can explain to your teams and mobilise them to make this journey, together.

19. There are three key characteristics that are critical for the success of this change journey. They are **Ambition, Alignment and Action**. These characteristics are what I hope the Public Service as a whole can embrace – especially Administrative Service officers.

20. Let me explain. Firstly, to have a strong sense of **ambition** for Singapore. The notion of ambition goes to the heart of why we serve in the Public Service. Because we believe in and want to contribute to building a better future for our fellow citizens and for our country.

21. Ambition is about pushing the bounds of possibilities for our people and our country; not just settling for what is doable, or possible, or what is within reach. It is about continually pushing the boundaries of success, even if we feel we have succeeded and the world tells us we have. It is about making bold, big and uncomfortable changes, because they are good for Singapore. It is about Singapore and Singaporeans deserving a Public Service with that drive, that push, to do better, to exceed itself, to excel.

22. In the early years of our nation building, that ambition was for Singapore to succeed against the odds. We are in a different place today. But the purpose of Public Service remains just as salient.

23. We cannot allow short term difficulties and hurdles to hold us back. Instead we should re-activate that spirit of making the impossible happen – that once turned mudflats into a metropolis, Third World into First, housed a nation, built a military from scratch, created NEWater. Public officers, working closely with the political leadership, helped achieve those impossibilities and many more. So, let not a lack of ambition for our country and our people hold back this generation of public service leaders.

24. The next attribute is **alignment**. We need to think and act as One Public Service. That does not mean we have groupthink or proceed mechanistically. But in order to operate effectively as One Public Service, we must have alignment in direction and effort across the whole Public Service.

National Archives of Singapore



25. All we do in Government is connected. We are working to build a brighter future for Singapore and for Singaporeans. We are working to create a Smart Nation together. We are working for a stronger economy that creates opportunities for our people in a digital age. We are all working to deal with the challenges of an ageing population. We are all working together to ensure Singapore remains safe and secure. And all these require us to move in the same direction, working for the same outcome – a brighter and optimistic future for Singapore.

26. Recently, a retired Head of Civil Service of a commonwealth country told me that in her country, 10 years ago, ministries would spend 80% of their time acting in a silo manner and 20% in collaboration with other ministries. But today that 80-20 is reversed.

27. This same phenomenon is taking place in our Public Service for similar reasons. Increasingly, the solutions to our problems are multi-dimensional in nature. They cut across the domains of different ministries. This is especially the case in the areas of technology, service delivery, and citizen engagement.

28. As Administrative Officers, you must be guided by the big picture of One Government and One Public Service. Regardless of where you are sitting, the work on our economy is joined with our work on security, with our work on the social front, with our work on infrastructure and so on. You belong to a service of officers who are recruited, developed, and relied on to work across the Whole of Government. You are called upon to exemplify this alignment, in your thinking as well as in your actions.

29. It is therefore incumbent on you as Administrative Officers to draw connections between all these areas of work, not draw boundary lines; to build bridges between different agencies, not create silos. It is also incumbent on you as leaders to be driven by the larger purpose towards which your organisation is contributing, not your own success. For we all belong to a service where the success we seek is for our fellow citizens and our country, not for ourselves or even the organisations to which we belong.

30. The third attribute is **action** – or a bias towards action. This is about the willingness and ability to make things happen.

31. In this era of rapid innovation and change, being slow to act can make us irrelevant, including to the public that we serve. We must not be paralysed because of an overdose of deliberation, or from fear of failure. The public does not benefit from just good ideas. It is only when good ideas are translated into good action that we can bring tangible benefits to our people. It is through doing or action that we learn more; and it is through doing that we prove what works and what doesn't.

32. If you agree that we are confronting many inflexion points in our operating landscape, then we must be prepared to take new trajectories of action. That is what an inflexion point means. New trajectories necessitate new, big and sometimes bold actions. As the saying goes, "a ship in harbour is safe, but that's not what ships are built for" – certainly not the Public Service. Where the new ideas are complex and untested, let's take a risk management approach. Test-bed and experiment first, before scaling up. But don't avoid risk – manage it. Above all, try out new things, act.

National Archives of Singapore

33. Later this evening, we will recite our Public Service Pledge. We will pledge that we shall always carry out our duties guided by the values of integrity, service and excellence, to be a first class Public Service, worthy of Singapore. To be worthy of Singapore, let's embody an ethos of ambition, alignment and action.

34. So you might ask, where and how do we start? The approach that I shared with you this evening has been discussed in detail over the past few months and has the full support of all your Permanent Secretaries. Your Permanent Secretaries, together with other senior public sector leaders, form the collective leadership of the Public Service. They will lead the drive to realise the two major fronts of work I spoke about: a refreshed Agenda and the next phase of Public Sector Transformation.

35. The work has already started. We have organised the work for you, in turn, to contribute to in the months ahead, ranging from the transformation and digitalisation plans for each ministry to new Agenda work streams. Some of you are already involved in this work; in time to come, the rest of you will too. Give this work your all. This is what I expect from all of you. Take it up with conviction, and with a mindset inclined towards ambition, alignment and action.

## **Conclusion**

36. Let me conclude. We are in challenging and also exciting times, for the Public Service as well as for Singapore. There are challenges ahead, but also opportunities; inflexion points, but also new pathways. That is why we have embarked on this transformative journey to create a refreshed Agenda and PST movement. Both require from us new thinking, new ways of doing things, and new ways of working together. It is about being ready for the future, about turning challenges into opportunities, and about blazing new trails of success. This is why the spirit of stewardship and a sense of ambition, alignment and action are critical for us to rise up to this task of creating a better Future Public Service, for a better Future Singapore.

37. Thank you very much.

National Archives of Singapore