

SPEECH BY MR TAN CHUAN-JIN, MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MANPOWER, AT THE INAUGURAL ASTD-STADA ASIA PACIFIC (ASAP) CONFERENCE 2011, 16 NOVEMBER 2011, 9.15 AM, SANDS EXPO & CONVENTION CENTRE, MARINA BAY SANDS SINGAPORE

Mr Tony Bingham, President & CEO, American Society for Training & Development (ASTD)

Mr Lim Khia Tat, President, Singapore Training and Development Association (STADA)

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

Introduction

1. I am pleased to join you today at the inaugural ASTD-STADA Asia Pacific (ASAP) Conference 2011. This is the first time in its 67 years of history that ASTD is holding its conference outside the US. We are proud that it has chosen to do so in Singapore in partnership with STADA. The hosting of the ASAP Conference 2011 here in Singapore marks a milestone in the Government's efforts to position Singapore as a hub for human capital development (HCD). We are happy that ASTD and STADA have come together to make it happen.

Asian Dynamism amid Global Uncertainty

2. Presently, the global economic outlook remains highly uncertain due to unresolved issues such as the sovereign debt crisis in Europe and the sluggish economic recovery in the US. However, not all is lost as Asia continues to experience some growth and the world is increasingly looking to Asian economies to help drive global growth and steer it away from recession.
3. In line with the growth story in Asia, research has shown that Asian companies are also stepping up their workforce development efforts as the quality of a corporation's workforce has become a key differentiator. Enterprises have to review the skills mix of their employees much more regularly to respond to the opportunities and threats created by globalisation and technological change.
4. There are two key reasons why workforce competitiveness is especially critical in Asia. Firstly, as the epicentre of global economic growth shifts to Asia, so do the increasingly mobile global talent. Since the quality of any corporation's workforce is crucial to its success, managing a more globalised workforce in culturally-diverse Asia becomes particularly challenging.
5. Secondly, as global companies shift their business focus to set up business networks and expand their markets in Asia, they will face evolving challenges in human capital development. This makes the transfer of knowledge and skills between the West and East increasingly important.
6. As wage pressures grow around the world and talent becomes more mobile, businesses need to focus on increasing their productivity to improve their business offerings and create higher-value jobs. It is no longer viable to attract and retain human capital through higher salaries.
7. Instead, talent are placing growing importance on other developmental factors such as training opportunities, career prospects and job satisfaction in their career considerations. In a world where knowledge and talent become increasingly critical advantages in the global competition, so does the importance of human capital development.

The ASTD-STADA Asia Pacific (ASAP) Conference 2011

8. The theme of this conference - "Real World Human Capital Development Solutions for the New Asia Economy", is both timely and relevant for initiating this knowledge-sharing process. More than 80 renowned practitioners and academics from 13 countries will be sharing their insights from Western and Asian perspectives, with some 800 delegates from 24 countries here today. They will also touch on real solutions that marry key management ideas with best practices.
9. This conference is a launch pad for several international strategic initiatives by STADA, that will help strengthen Singapore's position as a human capital development hub in the Asia Pacific region. For example, STADA and ASTD are collaborating to promote ASTD's educational programmes, including the accreditation of Certified Professional in Learning and Performance for workplace professionals in Singapore and Malaysia.
10. In addition, Dr Fons Trompenaars, a leading consultant in the field of cross-cultural communication, has relocated to Singapore. One of his first research projects, done in collaboration with STADA and our local tertiary institution, Temasek

Polytechnic, is on inter-cultural, gender and generation competence in Singapore. The study will offer valuable insights into developmental needs, to provide necessary skills in managing a multi-cultural workforce.

11. The study revealed four diversity-related dilemmas stemming from national, organisational, geographical and demographic differences, which impact the performance of a workforce. In order to strengthen and develop the sustainability of Asian Pacific economies - education, training and development policies need to be convergent, supportive and enabling of two complementary components. First, education and training should be supportive of developing **skills and knowledge** of cultural differences – so that the younger and future generation of workers have a higher level of knowledge about the world at large.
12. Second, education and training should be supportive of developing **effective behaviours** that enable the application of this knowledge of different cultures. This is not only to avoid embarrassing situations that may arise due to cultural faux pas, and prevent cultural misunderstandings. More importantly, it celebrates cultural differences and leverages on these different points of view to strengthen our economies further, by creating new solutions that build on the different contributions that other societies can offer. These learnings have relevance for Singapore – a global talent capital.
13. Dr Fons will share more details on his findings later, and what interventions companies should consider in order to optimise their talent management strategies.

Taking Innovations in Human Capital Development to the Next Level

14. Another study by the Institute for Adult Learning's (IAL) Centre for Research in Learning,¹ found that both employers and employees value **workplace learning** because knowledge and skills can be more effectively developed when learning is integrated into the work activities and environment.
15. The research involved an in-depth and comprehensive look at eight different workplaces through two different studies: one using a semi-ethnographic approach involving observations, interviews and analysis of training and development policy documentation; and the other through interviews, surveys and a similar document analysis. Trainees who have recently completed or were completing a training programme, and their workplace supervisors, were interviewed and observed. The study then came up with findings on what makes workplace learning more effective.
16. Given these findings, IAL has initiated a major undertaking to help improve the adoption of effective workplace learning by aligning standards, curricula and programme design with workplace learning and assessment. This includes developing a practical framework of workplace learning, drawing on extensive research worldwide, to address diverse human capital needs and organisational circumstances.

Preparing for the Challenges Ahead

17. To encourage new and innovative ideas for the enhancement of workforce learning, and in turn improve our workers' employability and competitiveness, the Singapore Government has aside \$3 million for the CET Innovation Fund where training providers and professionals can tap on to pilot new and innovative CET methodologies. So far, close to \$1 million has been committed to fund various innovative CET projects since the fund was launched one year ago.
18. In addition, IAL is developing a **New Media Learning Masterplan** which aims to strengthen the national CET infrastructure by harnessing social media and new media platforms.
19. New media learning will be used to complement the national CET infrastructure as technology can help us overcome certain barriers to training such as time constraints at work and the need for physical presence in classroom training. By incorporating the use of info-comms and technology into the national CET infrastructure, workers and companies can expect a more seamless training and learning delivery system.
20. Under this initiative, IAL started a pilot with the Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment (ACTA) programme which takes a more holistic approach towards adult learning and assessment, guided by **practice** (such as presentation skills and use of trainer resources), **reflection** (through creation and review of one's training philosophy) and assisted by **technology** (with the use of tablet, blogging and filming).
21. This approach leads industry-ready trainers to leverage on technology as a learning and training tool, and helps them become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Continuous assessment is introduced through the learner's population of their learning blogs with potential evidence in the form of pictures, videos and reflections. What this means is that throughout the course, there will be many opportunities for the learners to develop and showcase their ability as a trainer and assessor. By posting their experiences and views on their own blogs, their assessor can already start to assess them, even while the course is still on-going.
22. Education is both an art and science. There are sound principles, but it is also highly individualised. We want to walk the talk, by recognising that adults come in with their own experiences and viewpoints, and to harness that to create a learning

experience that is highly personalised and deep. What this translates to is a highly-facilitated course that gives learners room to share their experiences and develop new insights in a group-based environment. This requires a re-thinking in the way learning and assessments are done in a competency-based environment.

23. This approach, as of now, is an evolutionary one. We are refining our prototypes as we find out what works and what does not. At the end of the day, what is most important is the learner's experience – which should be personalised, reflective, practice-based and comfortable, in order for learning to be truly effective.

Conclusion

24. Singapore is well-positioned to leverage on Asia's growth by bridging the East-West divide. Being strategically located at the gateway between the East and West, our workforce is familiar with management best practices from the West and at the same time, is culturally attuned to the nuances of Asian business practices.
25. As a global city which welcomes top talents, we understand the importance of cultivating talent and continually enhancing our peoples' skills. Only by doing so can we achieve a sustainable and inclusive growth and create fulfilling jobs, to improve the quality of life for Singaporeans and the people in this region.
26. I am confident that the ASAP Conference 2011 will be a fruitful event for us to gain the latest insights on human capital development issues. With that, I hope the conference will provide both our speakers and delegates a thought-provoking and rewarding experience.
27. Thank you.

¹ The WSQ Workplace Learning and Assessment programme.