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When was the last time you went for a training course to hone your skills?

According to an estimate by the World Economic Forum in 2021, half of employees around the world need some reskilling by 2025 to remain relevant in a world of increasing technological adoption.

Most Singaporeans, with the Government's push for lifelong learning with the SkillsFuture movement, recognise that staying up-to-date with the latest skills and knowledge has become more important than ever before. A UOB survey conducted in 2021 with 1,030 individuals aged between 18 and 65 in Singapore found that 90 per cent of employees believed they will need to reskill or upskill.

But their attempts to translate that desire into action have consistently thrown up three roadblocks.

### THREE ROADBLOCKS TO RESKILLING

First, in a world where the nature of work is still evolving, determining which skills and knowledge are necessary can be a complex exercise.

Some industries and job functions, like those in the retail and built environment sectors, have clearly defined competencies and frameworks.

Others in more complex sectors undergoing disruption, like management consulting or fintech, may lack a precise definition or have unclear boundaries due to their complexity, interdisciplinary focus and overlapping responsibilities, making it difficult for anyone to discern what courses to take to develop useful skills.

This lack of clarity can make it tougher for working professionals to plan their careers and make informed decisions about continuing education and training.

Second, even if workers have identified areas for training, finding suitable high-quality training programmes that can help them meet their learning aspirations and level up their game can be tough.

There is a vast, sprawling number of educational establishments and training providers in Singapore, both online and offline, synchronised and asynchronous. For instance, Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) offers over 900 modular continuous education courses at its Centre for Continuing & Professional Education across online and offline modes.

A check also reveals over 26,902 courses available on the Myskillsfuture portal covering a wide range of skills and domains. Then there's also global providers like Udemy, which offers over 200,000 courses – the most number of courses available

compared to other online learning platforms.

This abundance of options and information to sift through can be overwhelming for someone seeking to determine the most suitable course that will advance their career path.

Third, even if workers have identified the right kind of course, they face time constraints.

More than two in five employees in Singapore who leave their jobs do so because of insufficient training and development, a 2019 LinkedIn survey found. And not because employers do not offer training opportunities as commonly believed, but because busy employees just had no time.

Respondents also highlighted how professional development programmes may not align with their training goals, with only one in six in Singapore satisfied with their company's learning

and development programmes – an outcome corroborated by surveys by the Cognizant Centre for the Future of Work.

In short, training in theory can sound like the answer to overcoming displacement and creating career mobility, but the actual journey is rarely the well-trodden path it's made out to be.

These challenges are compounded for mature workers in their 50 and 60s – because seniority can blind them to the need for upskilling where gaps can be plugged by younger, technologically savvy teammate, or because the payoffs just seem insufficient when many are close to retirement.

Outmoded employer mindsets stereotyping older employees and assuming they have less productive potential can also shape passive attitudes of mature workers towards lifelong learning.

# Singaporeans know they need to reskill. The challenge is how

Jobs-Skills Integrators can play a key role in overcoming the challenges to equip workers with the skills necessary for the future



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specialised training are highly sought after and they know it. According to a recent PwC survey, employees who claim that their job demands specialised training are far more likely to request a raise or promotion within the next 12 months.

If only Singapore SMEs can come around to benefits of embracing continuous training, which not only increases staff retention and saves hiring costs, but can also improve work productivity and job satisfaction. Firms that invest in training experience also see an increase in bottom lines and employee satisfaction, according to studies by SkillsFuture and MTI.

These are consistent with findings by HR Magazine that companies allocating \$1,500 towards training for each employee generated an average of 24 per cent more profits than those which invested less.

### MUCH-NEEDED INTERMEDIARY

For these reasons, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Lawrence Wong's announcement at Budget 2023 for Jobs-Skills Integrators that can ensure jobseekers are adequately prepared, and employers are connected with the right candidates for their needs should be welcomed.

By identifying and bridging the gap between the skills that jobseekers possess and the skills that employers require, such intermediaries can help develop targeted and deliberate training that meets the needs of companies. Such an intermediary should engage enterprises, training partners and job placement agencies and have the competencies to identify individuals with the right aptitude, abilities and interest for training and jobs.

With the world moving towards a "zero-sum" global economy, Singapore must take measures to ensure that its workforce remains relevant. Workers already recognise the imperative.

A study by Curious Core, an education UX design start-up, found that almost half of Singaporean workers will seek a new job in the next six months, with almost eight in 10 recognising they need to upgrade their skills if they want a role in another industry.

Jobs-Skills Integrators can play a key role as Singapore embarks on the next lap of its journey amid rapid technological change and a more competitive labour market in a fractured world. They can be the bridge between employers and workers, helping both to navigate challenges and tap opportunities in the future.

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### FIRMS NEED EXTRA HELP

A second part of the challenge stems from firms, especially Singapore's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which hire 70 per cent of the workforce.

Many are not familiar with available training options, and would therefore rather wait for a better candidate to come along rather than hire a less perfect jobseeker needing additional training.

Though efforts have been under way to map skills needed under the Industry Transformation Maps, these require the cooperation of firms to identify skills needed and share hiring plans, so training institutes can design suitable courses.

But the issue here is that many companies themselves do not actively track skills their new evolving business model needs.

"There is little to no data available on people's skills and qualifications once they leave formal education. This makes it difficult to see what capabilities would benefit the workforce and hence deserve funding and support," Associate Professor Walter Theseira, a labour economist at SUSS, told The Straits Times last November.

Time-starved businesses focused on putting out today's fires could use some help. Concerned over the return on investment, many employers think such an exercise can be expensive, time-consuming and disruptive to daily operations.

Employers may also hesitate if they believe training may "over-qualify" their staff and lead them to ask for a pay raise, or leave the company, taking their newly acquired skills and knowledge with them.

This is not an unfounded fear. Employees who possess