challenge

10 THINGS YOU SHOULD READ

BEFORE YOU JOIN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

EDITOR'S NOTE

Thanks for being a fan of Challenge! Whether you're considering a career in the Public Service, already working in the Public Service, or just curious, here's 10 articles that we've specially curated to help you get to know what life is like in the Public Service a little better.

For those looking to join the Public Service or looking for new challenges, check out "Take Ownership Of Your Employability", contributed by our Chief Human Resources Officer, PSD, Low Peck Kem, in which she shares 5 tips to take charge of your personal development and be future-ready.

In "Take Charge of Your Career", former P&G Asia Chief Information Officer and current Senior Director (Capabilities Development), PSD, Lee Mui Ling, speaks of the differences between the private and public sector and of the joy and fulfilment she has found since joining the Public Service.

There's a wider variety of jobs within the Public Service than may be apparent at first glance. In "'Odd' Jobs? Even Better!", we take a look at some "real cool" jobs that are available in the Public Service. Disclaimer: these jobs are so cool that they may already be filled, but check out Careers@Gov for more positions!

Of course, it's not always plain sailing as a public officer. Challenge speaks to some public officers to find out the reasons behind their passion to serve, despite the many setbacks faced along the way, in "It's A Tough Job".

To help you face the challenges of working in the Public Service, check out the invaluable advice that HDB CEO, Cheong Koon Hean, and MOH Deputy Secretary (Policy), Ngiam Siew Ying, have for young public officers, in their letters entitled "Why Are You (Still) In Public Service?" and "Know Who You Are And What You Stand For".

Learn about "The Digital Movement" sweeping across the Public Service, and how public services can stay relevant in the face of digital transformation, in this piece by Government Chief Information Officer/Deputy Chief Executive, GovTech, Chan Cheow Hoe. On the flip side, collaboration is still key to the work of the Public Service, and is one of Deputy Secretary (Strategy Group), PMO, Tan Gee Keow's key values ("The Relationships Matter Just As Much As Getting The Job Done").

Finally, it's always healthy to be able to take a step back and laugh at ourselves from time to time. Challenge has consistently tried to inject some humour into every issue, so to end off on a funny note, here's some uniquely Public Service words and acronyms that we should all start using ("Is Your Intern Texting About The Public Service" and "Words That Sum Up Life As A Public Officer").

Kick back, relax, and enjoy the read!

Shaun

Shaun Khiu, Editor
Challenge
Public Service Division

Take ownership of your employability

Stay relevant with an up-to-date résumé in an ever-changing work environment, says Ms LOW PECK KEM, Chief Human Resources Officer, Public Service Division.

How important is continuous learning and development in the Singapore Public Service? The fact that every public officer has a minimum of 100 training hours a year, regardless of job level, age, gender or seniority, is telling.

With such a conducive environment in place, the onus is on all officers to take ownership of their personal development and employability. Let me share how to profile and prepare yourself to be future-ready.

1. Know yourself and what you want in life

Each of us has unique strengths and weaknesses. It is important to know what makes us excel in some areas and which areas are more taxing on us, physically and mentally. Use resources such as Gallup Strengths Finder to find out. Research has shown that we gain more mileage by building on our strengths rather than trying to work on our weaknesses.

Next, spend some time to reflect on your aspirations and what you want to achieve in life beyond your career. Discuss with your loved ones and seek guidance from mentors to get a clear idea of your life direction for, say, the next 15 years.

Then use this clarity of mind as a guide on which areas you should invest more effort, where you may have to make compromises (with eyes open), and what you may need to let go.

2. Profile yourself

We are our own biggest critics. We often let modesty obscure our real strengths and potential. Learn to profile yourself truthfully – your competencies, skills, attitude, capabilities and values. These will help get you to other places within the organisation.

Make yourself known and visible to take advantage of opportunities that arise. It is easier to quit smoking or lose weight if you tell others and gain their support. Similarly, to progress in your career, make your intentions known to other people, and share your profile on various platforms.

A good start is to review your résumé. Does it give a good sense of who you are and what you stand for? Does it show your values, your aspirations, your career objectives, your strengths, limitations, competencies, skills, capacity to grow, and finally, the value you can bring?

Even if you are not looking to change your job, review your résumé regularly to keep up with the changes around you.

3. Be open to opportunities and be prepared to explore

We have all heard of the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment we are in. It is no longer an option to shy from levelling up.

Opportunities could appear due to job redesigns or organisational restructuring, or when we purposefully seek them because of a desire for career progression. We cannot predict the future. But we can proactively create a future we wish for by staying agile, continually learning and being open to opportunities.

4. Stay relevant, stay valuable

All organisations evolve as a result of both internal and external forces. We must make the effort to stay relevant and add value to support the organisation's transformation; otherwise we will be left behind. So keep your eyes open to trends, find out what the latest and most-sought skills in the market are, and try to acquire them.

5. Build your network

Often, it is not how much you know, but who you know that matters. The ability to network, work with communities in your ecosystem and tap on the wisdom of the crowd are critical skills. It also matters more what you do with the increasingly available information rather than how you get that information.

Update your résumé and make it accessible to those who matter. Expand your network to include the entire public sector, social media communities (such as LinkedIn), communities of practice, and so on.

Within the Public Service, there are numerous platforms to build networks – through courses, milestone programmes, cross-agency task forces, inter-agency and whole-of-government work groups among many others. The opportunities are limitless! ℃

A letter from
LEE MUI LING
Senior Director (Capabilities Department), Public Service Division, Prime Minister's Office (2014 – present)
Asia Chief Information Officer and Director, Global Business Services, Procter & Gamble Asia (2007 – 2013)

Take charge of your career

Remain inquisitive and questioning, and contribute. Don't fade into the background.

DEAR YOUNG OFFICER,

I am perhaps newer than many of you to the Public Service, having only joined the Public Service Division in February 2014. But I have 26 years of experience in brand management, human resources (HR) and IT in the private sector.

I notice that many of you ask me what the private sector is like, and how it compares to the public sector. Perhaps some of you are even considering a job switch.

Implied in your questions is the notion that the private sector is a glamorous, exciting place to work in. Many of you seem to have a romanticised view. The truth is that work life can be very challenging in the private sector. The hours are long and you may have to work night shifts because of international business dealings.

My typical work day in the past would start as early as 7am at home for teleconference calls to the US. My second shift would be from 10am to 6pm in the office, before returning home for a quick dinner. Then, my third shift starts as I log on for night calls from 10pm to midnight. Typically, I would have up to four night calls per week.

What public officers may also take for granted is the face-to-face contact they enjoy with their colleagues and the people they serve. When I was in the private sector, a lot of meetings were conducted via video conference. This makes building relationships much more challenging.

That said, there is much that young public officers can learn from the private sector.

Young people in the private sector take charge of their careers. They decide on what assignment or job posting they want next, and they ask for it, rather than wait for their bosses to tell them. I would love for all our public officers to be open about their career aspirations, the skills they want to learn and which strengths they want to leverage in their next assignment.

I also notice that young officers tend to defer to hierarchy a lot once they enter the Public Service. So my challenge to you is to remain inquisitive and questioning, and contribute. Don't fade into the background.

As public officers, being accountable to citizens may be more challenging, but it is infinitely more meaningful. For instance, I feel that it is important for public officers to empathise with and help people from humble backgrounds.

For me, as I come from a poor family, I find that walking in the shoes of the under-privileged comes quite naturally to me. When I see construction workers hard at work, I will offer them cool drinks or snacks. At the MRT station, I once chatted with the staff directing human traffic and asked if she enjoyed her job. She told me that she gets scolded almost every day. I told her that she was making a difference and thanked her, and I could see tears well up in her eyes as I left for my train ride.

Another taxi uncle I chatted with told me that the opening of the Marina Coastal Expressway cost him $18 in extra ERP charges, as his passengers refused to pay for the charges incurred through his unfamiliarity. So I asked the HR Director from the Transport Ministry if they could introduce a grace period of no charges whenever a new ERP gantry is put up. In response, he said that the suggestion could be considered.

Being in touch, knowing the challenges faced in daily life by the people we serve and helping them is a delight. This has given me joy and fulfilment every day since I joined the public sector and I believe I have become a better person today because of the work I have chosen to pursue. ◐

"Odd" jobs? Even better!

Think all the fun jobs in the Public Service get outsourced? Not quite. *Challenge* compiles a list of real cool jobs as varied as the individuals who make up the Service.

World's best airport seeks architect/planner for new terminal

Do you have lofty aspirations and ideas ready for take-off? The Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore is seeking a principal architect/planner to oversee the development of Changi Airport's Terminal 5. You will take part in a design review, plan and design airport spaces for optimal passenger and baggage flow, and contribute to related support infrastructure in Changi East. The completed Terminal 5, to be launched in 2030, is poised to facilitate happy journeys for up to 70 million passengers annually. Changi Airport has been ranked the top airport for five years (World Airport Awards, 2013–2017). Only experienced pros who can handle the challenge of keeping the airport number one need apply.

Take your shot: Senior basketball coach wanted

Certified to coach and have years of sports curriculum planning under your belt? Sport Singapore is looking for a Senior Head Coach to helm the ActiveSG Basketball Academy. You must be able to play ball with both kids and grown-ups: besides building an effective curriculum for players aged 5 to 14, you will also develop the academy's network of assistant and volunteer coaches. Other responsibilities include building rapport with the parents of players on the academy team, and raising public awareness about the academy and its programmes. No height requirements apply. In fact, being able to see eye to eye with academy players, their parents and other members of the sports community will be a huge advantage.

Classifieds

Ready to be a cyber defence warrior?

Sharp-eyed detective. Quick problem-solver. Crazy about Singapore being a Smart Nation that's also cyber secure. Sounds like you? Then the Cyber Security Agency wants you on the Singapore Computer Emergency Response Team (SingCERT). As a junior systems engineer, you will be trained to handle reports of cyber security incidents, and partner with international CERTs for joint cyber drills and training. Expect to roll out digital forensics to diagnose cybersecurity issues, study international cybersecurity incidents to assess threat levels to Singapore, and create outreach and awareness programmes for businesses and the public. The "CERT" title may not *sound* the coolest, but joining a new, dynamic team that will shape and safeguard Singapore's cyber landscape sure is.

Keeping the Tote Board "A Great Place To Work"

In the Public Service, there's plenty to learn, even as an intern. A few lucky interns will get the chance to audit corporate culture at the Tote Board. In this project, interns will chat with staff members to learn how the latter feel about and perceive their corporate culture, including its norms and values. But it's not all shop talk – you will use surveys and other research methodologies to get a deeper understanding of how the Tote Board is functioning. All of this will be documented in an assessment of strengths and areas for improvements, with recommendations that match the organisation's vision and mission. It's a great start for anyone keen on a career in human resources or organisational development.

To see what other public officers get up to at work, go to **fb.com/PSDSingapore** or **fb.com/CareersGov**

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Text by
CHEN JINGTING
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IT'S A TOUGH JOB

More brickbats than bouquets. Projects shelved after months of hard work. And high expectations that continue to rise. Public officers today face heat from all sides. Yet some of them remain committed and fired up about their work. *Challenge* finds out the reasons behind their passion.

BECAUSE I'M HAPPY
CLAP ALONG IF YOU FEEL LIKE
HAPPINESS IS THE TRUTH
BECAUSE I'M HAPPY
CLAP ALONG IF YOU KNOW
WHAT HAPPINESS IS TO YOU
BECAUSE I'M HAPPY
CLAP ALONG IF YOU FEEL LIKE
THAT'S WHAT YOU WANNA DO

The lyrics from hip hop artist Pharrell Williams' hit single "Happy" sound simple but its message about seeking happiness is powerful, judging by the nearly 450 million views of its official music video on YouTube.

In the video, a kitchen assistant, a teacher and a construction worker groove and sing along to the catchy tune. Indeed, employees finding happiness – including motivation – at work has become a much talked about topic.

Just in April this year, the Singapore Human Resources Institute and consulting firm Align Group launched the National Workplace Happiness Survey 2014 to measure how happy our employees are at the workplace. Based on the PERMA Model of positive psychology, happiness is defined as going beyond positive emotions – it includes engagement, positive relationships, meaning and accomplishments. The survey results are expected to be out this month.

Meanwhile, literature on motivating staff has been flying off the shelves. *New York Times* bestseller *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* by Daniel H. Pink sheds light on how organisations can get workers to happily give their best at work. It argued that dishing out external monetary rewards would not be as effective as stoking intrinsic motivational forces, such as giving employees autonomy over tasks, helping them to achieve mas-

tery in skills and ensuring they see purpose in what they are doing.

Work happiness is not a new concept though. Authors Dan Baker, Cathy Greenberg and Collins Hemingway of *What Happy Companies Know: How the New Science of Happiness Can Change Your Company for the Better*, wrote how research in 1949 and the 1980s already showed that employees highly value being appreciated at work, which adds to their happiness.

But what if such acts of appreciation are few and far between? Today with demands on public officers increasing, receiving a heartfelt "thank you" from anyone is considered a bonus rather than the norm. How do officers then keep their spirits up, and continue serving the public with drive?

Believe that your work is meaningful

Mr Adrian Rakesh, Manager of Community Partnership Division (North West) at the Land Transport Authority (LTA), feels good helping the public to solve its problems.

He has to work beyond official hours whenever road and MRT works occur in his district, or when the LTA announces plans to upgrade public transport services. After two years on the job, Mr Adrian is used to interacting with all types of people, when he handles enquiries from the

public in the day ("why does it take the government so long to improve the bus system!") and attends grassroots meetings in the evenings to explain the LTA's latest policies.

Asked if he has had to deal with nasty members of the public, the mild-mannered man replied quietly: "I cannot please 100% of people. If I can make 95% of people happy, I've done my job." Calling himself a change agent, he hopes his work changes people's perception towards the LTA.

And though he may be "small" and "get pushed around", Mr Adrian takes it in his stride by focusing on the bigger picture. "Have you seen dominos falling? The end result is an amazing display," he said, alluding to the importance of each domino despite its size.

A few years ago he and his colleagues helped unhappy residents at Sunset Way understand the LTA's scope of work at a junction that connected their homes to the main road. To improve traffic flow there, the LTA had to realign parts of the road in sections to rebuild the curb and repaint the road markings. Because not all of the residents were aware of what was being done, they thought the government was closing off the lane entirely.

After getting angry calls and emails from them, Mr Adrian and his colleagues went to the site to explain what the LTA was doing. The residents ended up appreciating its efforts to improve traffic

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conditions and one even apologised for their outburst. They also started a neighbourhood committee to facilitate better communication with the agency, said Mr Adrian.

Mr Leong Wei Jian too has had his fair share of trials in his two years as Lead Strategist at the Strategic Policy Office (SPO), Public Service Division. His main task is to influence public agencies to act on ideas or trends that would affect the government or country in 10 to 15 years.

That's not an easy job because ministries are usually too caught up with current-day problems to look at issues in the future, said Mr Leong. If they do not come onboard, a project, which would have taken him and his team months of rigorous research, may be shelved or even "killed", he said.

Still, the greatest difficulty is that he cannot directly effect change in the agencies. Instead, he recognises the need to engage agencies early and help them see why thinking ahead is relevant to their work.

Compared to his previous stint as a teacher, where he could see the more tangible differences he made to his students' lives, dealing with abstract ideas as a strategist zaps a little of his drive at work, he admitted.

How does he keep himself motivated then?

"You must have some measure of faith that your work is meaningful," he said. "I must believe that ultimately my research will help the government be [better] prepared in dealing with changes."

Make progress a priority

Most public officers know that their work is meaningful. But seeing purpose in their jobs alone may not be enough to keep them driven.

Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer, authors of *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*, contend that there is another important ingredient – progress.

In the book, the authors analysed 12,000 diary entries by employees of different organisations and found that when employees make real headway in their work, they feel satisfied, joyful and confident of their self-worth. These feel-good effects lead to "positive views of the work and, sometimes, the organisation", they wrote.

Mr Dan Koh and Ms Chen Sze Leng, both Senior Assistant Directors at the Auditor-General's Office (AGO), would agree. An independent entity, the AGO audits ministries and public agencies and reports its findings in management letters to the agencies' management and in annual reports to the President. Mr Koh and Ms Chen gain satisfaction from helping agencies improve their systems for better stewardship of public resources.

Much as it is human nature to be wary of auditors during their yearly checks, Mr Koh admitted to *Challenge* that this defensive stance is the biggest hurdle he has faced in all his 17 years as an auditor, as he needs officers to understand and trust that auditors are there to work with them to improve the accountability system in the Singapore Public Service.

Ms Chen agrees: "At the AGO we check if there is wastage of resources. I look forward to that, because it helps to ensure proper accountability for the use of public monies. That gives me a sense of achievement and has made me stay in the AGO for five years."

There needs to be continual effort to communicate, in order to build trust, said Mr Koh. Thus he and Ms Chen will take pains to explain why they need certain or more information from the agencies.

Over at the SPO, Mr Leong "chunks" each project into stages – each stage has a concrete deliverable. In a project that studied how the role of the State is evolving, Mr Leong and his colleagues had some success in piloting their card game at a recent interagency workshop. To him that's progress, though the impact may seem minor now. "I look at small wins that keep me going."

He also saw "bigger wins" when he was on the Our Singapore Conversation (OSC) secretariat last year. Despite having to run many dialogues on weekday nights and Saturday mornings, he found it tremendously rewarding to see that citizens were willing to communicate with one another, and that made a difference.

"They say things like, 'I'm as anti-government as I can be. But I want to be the change, that's why I'm here.' That's very powerful. It makes you feel that all your effort is worth it," said Mr Leong.

Dealing mechanisms

Though they may be highly motivated, officers in tough jobs still need to find their own ways of handling work stress.

When the Population White Paper was released last year with a mention of plans for an estimated population of 6.9 million by 2030, it upset many members of the public who took to the Internet to question the officers who had worked on the Paper.

The person in charge, Ms Ngiam Siew Ying, Director, Policy and Planning Directorate at the National Population and Talent Division, shared with *Challenge* how her team dealt with that experience.

"For all the hard work that was put in to [design] the policies and recommendations, we stumbled at the final hurdle in delivering the product to the public," she said candidly. "We picked ourselves up, saw what we could do to fix the problem, and then learnt the lessons we needed to learn."

Working with committed colleagues who "don't run away when the going gets tough" helps her cope with the difficulties she meets in her job, she shared. So does "loving the people of Singapore". She concluded: "I think this goes a long way, and helps me to keep going even when things don't seem to be going according to plan."

What more can be done

Pink, of the book *Drive*, had a bold proposition for organisations – that they may be better off without the traditional models of "management", as it is just a euphemism for ways to control employees. This drains their motivation and affects their work performance.

He cited examples of successful companies releasing some control over em-

FROM THE FRONTLINE...

Veteran frontline officer Ms R Vahsugi encounters difficult customers regularly. The Constituency Support Executive at West Coast Community Centre (CC) shared that some residents sometimes show up at community events just to get free goodies, or expect immediate responses for services not provided by the CC, and kick up a fuss when they don't get what they want.

Though their actions do get her feeling down, Ms Vahsugi remains motivated about helping others.

Each time she finds herself struggling to calm an emotional resident, she calls out to a colleague who is her "buddy"

This buddy system is indispensable at her workplace. When angry customers see more people around, they calm down more easily, explained Ms Vahsugi, who has been with the People's Association for 26 years.

Ms Vahsugi also taps her own painful experiences – she lives with panic disorder and was depressed for two years after losing her father and cat – to empathise with others. Two months ago, a woman, whose husband had lost his job and started drinking heavily, approached the CC for help. Feeling helpless and hopeless, she considered suicide. Ms Vahsugi counselled her out of her suicidal thoughts, gave the woman her personal mobile number, and connected her with a Community Development Council to apply for financial support.

ployees. For instance, global technology company 3M gives employees the freedom to work on anything they want up to 15% of their work time. The Post-it note was invented as a result.

The idea of "letting go" may sound outrageous to the Public Service, where layers of checks are common and necessary. But Pink's audacious suggestion provides some food for thought in how organisations can better engage employees by giving them more control over their jobs.

Responding to Pink's suggestions, Chief Human Resource Officer at PSD, Ms Low Peck Kem, disagreed that management is the problem, saying that the idea of self directed teams and co-creating solutions can definitely work in public service.

She added: "Management's job, then, is not to exercise control, but to fan the burning ambitions of wanting to do a good job, create the platforms for teams to exercise creativity to do their work, and then step aside and let their officers shine."

At a 2010 lecture at the Civil Service College, Professor Francis Flynn identified autonomy as one of the top motivating factors in work performance. In his speech extract published in *Ethos: Insights*, the Paul E. Holden Professor of Organizational Behavior at the Stanford Graduate

> **The idea of "letting go" may sound outrageous to the Public Service, where layers of checks are common and necessary.**

School of Business defined autonomous employees as "being independent, being trusted to exercise discretion".

Granting employees autonomy and control doesn't mean management is obsolete. Instead, public service leaders should aim to inspire, said Chairman of the Economic Development Board Leo Yip in a 2012 interview with *Challenge* (May/June).

It is the leader's job to make sure officers work knowing that they are connected to "something bigger", and that they feel a sense of belonging to a work environment where they can discover "meaning and fulfilment", said Mr Yip. Instead of the top management deciding the direction of the organisation alone, he believes in involving staff to co-create a vision together.

Having "very supportive" bosses enables Career Coach Jeremiah Wong from the Singapore Workforce Development

Agency to manage the obstacles in his job. He helps match unemployed clients to potential employers, and links them to training courses and one-to-one coaching. Mr Wong has helped people from all walks of life, from clients who get verbally abusive to single mothers who struggle to find "no overtime" work.

For example, when he struggled with a recent project because of a lack of experience and knowledge (he's coming to three years in this job), his supervisor stepped in to provide insights and prepare him for the potential challenges ahead.

"My boss would stay back late after work to guide me on effective project management… and point out areas which I had overlooked," said Mr Wong. "She did so right up to the night before the project launch, and for that I am very grateful!"

From having positive relationships, finding meaning in their work, feeling a sense of accomplishment – no matter how small – to being engaged and positive at work, these fired up public officers fit the PERMA Model of happiness, which keeps them going when work gets tough.

In a time where many see happiness as a priority, as the "Happy" song suggests, it makes sense for those in management to further consider how they can cheer their employees on, and up, at work. ◉

TEAMWORK

PROGRESS

DR CHEONG KOON HEAN
Chief Executive Officer, Housing & Development Board (HDB), 2010–present
Chief Executive Officer, Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2004–2010

Why are you (still) in public service?

Dear young officer,

At the HDB, I make a point of meeting new recruits during their orientation, often asking them why they joined. Many (especially mid-career recruits) explain they want a "stable job" and "work-life balance". At times, I get an encouraging response when some say they like to help people. In turn, younger staff's favourite question for me is, "Why are you still in public service?"

The reality is, being in public service can be challenging. When formulating policies, we rack our brains to find solutions to seemingly intractable issues – be it firing up the economy, dealing with an ageing population or securing the safety of our small nation. At the frontline, we meet demanding customers and may be "rewarded" with criticism, rather than appreciation.

Certainly, if our aspiration is just to "have a stable job", it is not likely to inspire nor motivate us beyond the routine. So to my young colleagues, it is useful to ask why we joined the Public Service in the first place.

The "meaning" behind the job

When I graduated as a young architect, I wanted to design and build those amazing buildings we often see in glossy architecture magazines. But as fate would have it, I was thrown into the world of urban planning. I soon realised that beyond the aesthetics of a single building, bigger existential issues had to be solved in our small island city-state. At only half the size of metropolitan London, do we have enough land for development and enough water to survive? How do we ensure a sustainable and liveable environment and provide quality, affordable homes in one of the densest cities on Earth?

Being in the Public Service, we are in a position to address these issues and influence on a much larger scale. Not many jobs offer this exciting privilege.

Of course, the journey is not always smooth. For example, the plans for Marina Bay were formulated and revised over many years as our economic and social needs changed over time. When we were finally ready to implement the plan in 2003, we were hit by SARS, which triggered a crisis of confidence. We persevered by marketing Marina Bay internationally. We convinced the government to proceed with the development of world-class infrastructure, despite the economic downturn, as a show of commitment. This helped us to secure many investments, which kick-started Marina Bay.

Along the way, we had to convince decision makers, overcome funding challenges, ride through property cycles, and win over partners. There have been heart-stopping moments (will we end up with a half-finished Marina Bay Sands?), a lot of fun (what a fantastic sight it would be when fireworks light up our beautiful city skyline), and fulfilment too (when our residents thank us for building beautiful homes for them).

When the city shapes up beautifully, families have good homes, people's lives improve and their aspirations are fulfilled, the sense of satisfaction is immense. My colleagues and I truly believe that we can and have made a difference. That we receive thousands of visitors every year eager to find out "how we do it" is validation for many who have worked hard to make Singapore what it is today.

Love what you do and stay the course

Public service cannot be "just a job". We need that sense of purpose and passion to sustain us through the long journey to achieve what we set out to do.

Singapore continues to improve because each generation builds upon the legacy of the previous one. You are in a great position to bring fresh ideas and perspectives to take Singapore forward to the next lap. But even in this fast-paced world, the values of patience, perseverance and hard work still hold if we want to do great things. So I wish you the best in finding meaning in what you do and to stay the course. ▮

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ILLUSTRATION **MUSHROOMHEAD**

NGIAM SIEW YING
Deputy Secretary (Policy), Ministry of Health, 2016 – present
Senior Director, National Population and Talent Division, 2011 – 2016
Director (Land Transport), Ministry of Transport, 2010 – 2011

Know who you are and what you stand for
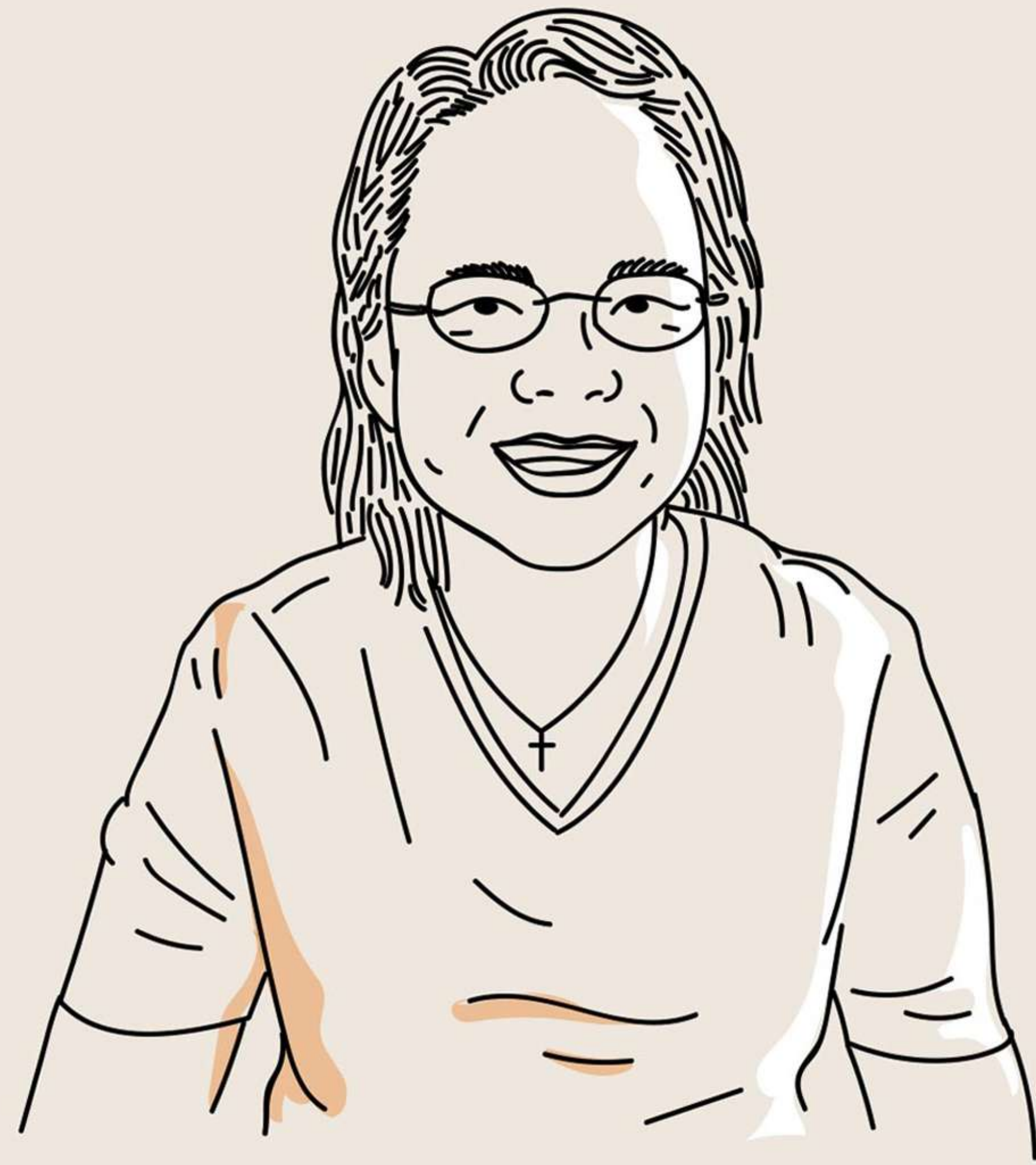
Dear young officer,

If there was something I wish I had been told when I first started working, it would be to know who you are and what you stand for.

Why? Because an internal compass will help guide you through life's journeys.

You will be frequently called upon to make tough decisions. They could be decisions at work; whether to prioritise your family or your career; or how much you value your relationships with the people around you, influencing, for example, how you treat your teammates and how you lead them. You might also wonder whether you should choose the faster but less ideal solution, or the longer but more complete option. There will be times too when the considerations on two opposing sides are equally compelling, or the risks similarly high.

These moments require us to dig deep to recognise who we are, and make the decision that is best aligned with what we stand for.

I have been blessed over the years to have had many role models. Each of them personifies different elements of character and attitude that resonate with me. And for the elements I admire – I watch, I learn and I keep. And use them to shape what I stand for and the kind of person I want to be.

I once had a brilliant colleague who was somewhat ahead of his time. He could see problems well before they surfaced, and worked on finding solutions for them. Whenever he voiced his ideas, they would often get shot down because they did not involve the most pressing issues of the day.

Then the moment would come when someone says, "we have this problem", and he would already have a solution at hand. Even if he didn't get credit for his ideas or was under-appreciated, he never despaired. He just kept on doing what he believed would benefit our Public Service.

In another case, I had a boss who was as tough (and mean) as they come – so tough that people would try to escape when they saw him approaching. He was not one to mince his words. He had high and exacting standards, with the expectation that you put your best into everything you do. Nothing less.

He invested in his team. He would gather small groups of engineers for sessions that ran till 11pm, without a dinner break. He drilled us on our proposals and concepts to make sure we were clear about what was needed. He put in his own time and effort, made sacrifices, and ensured others could take over and carry on when it was time for him to move on. He was tough, and yet I learnt much under his care.

These individuals, and many more, have given me glimpses of the kind of person and leader I want to be. From them, I have shaped my own leadership philosophy, which is to "do the right thing, and do the thing right".

Often, it takes courage to "do the right thing". You may have to go against the current, break with the status quo, or disagree with someone more powerful. You have to work against self-interest. If we worry about all that, we can't be the person we need to be.

But thinking we are right does not give us the license to be obnoxious about it. To "do the thing right", we have to be intentional and purposeful. There is a right way to do what needs to be done: a right time, a right strategy, and a right route to take. If we can figure all that out, the right thing that needs to be done can get done.

So that's my leadership philosophy, which guides me each day. I encourage you to come up with yours. Shape it, nurture it and grow it over time. If you know who you are and what you stand for, you won't lose your way. ▌

CHAN CHEOW HOE
Government Chief Information Officer/Deputy Chief Executive, GovTech

THE DIGITAL MOVEMENT

Keeping public services relevant in the face of digital transformation.
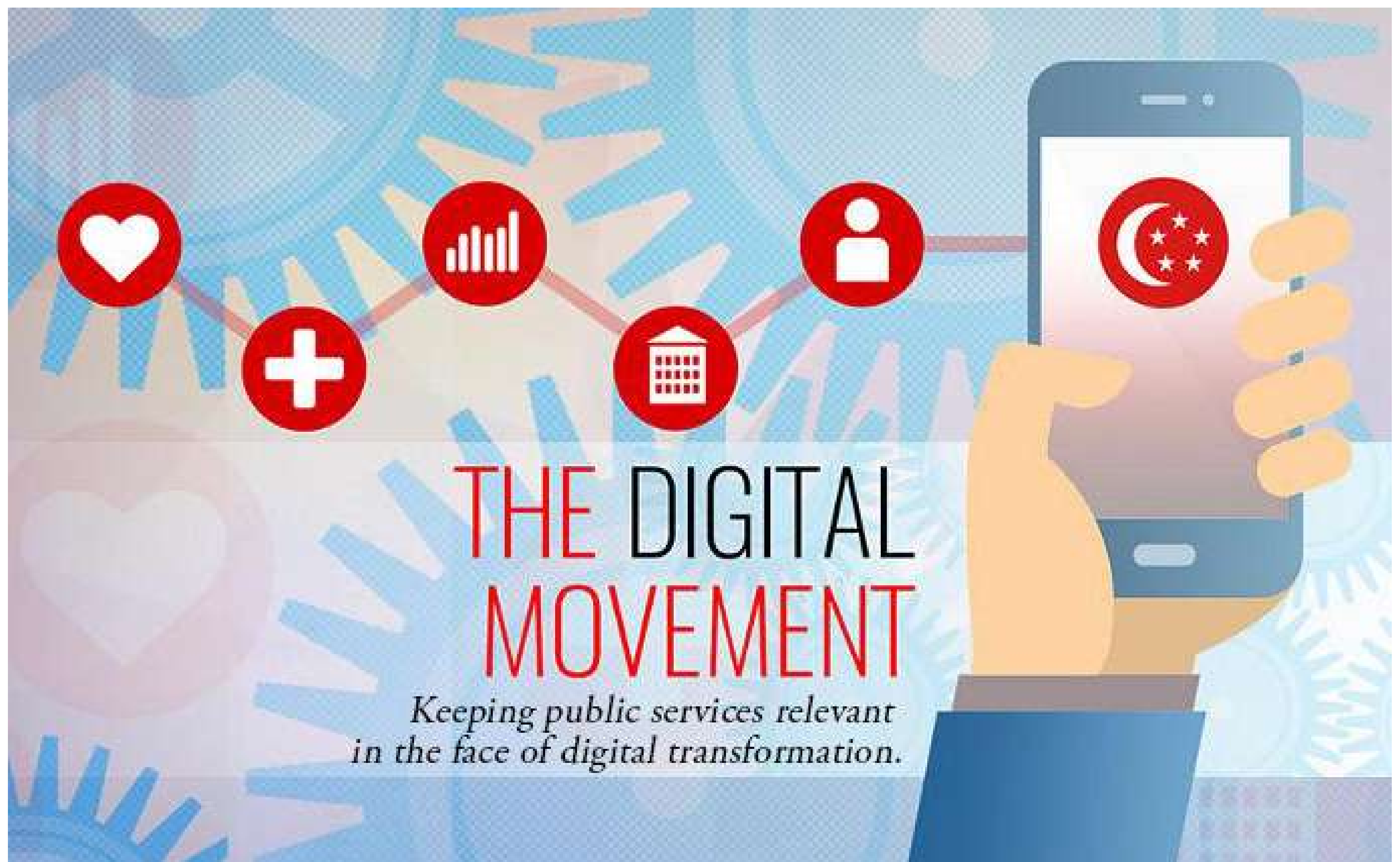
In the early part of this century, Marc Andreessen was prophetic in saying that "software is eating the world."

Today, the truth lies before us. More and more major businesses and industries are being run on software and delivered as digital services – from music to toys to medical services to national defence. Many of the winners are Silicon Valley-style entrepreneurial technology companies that are invading and overturning established industry structures.

Unfortunately, most governments are still playing catch-up and risk losing relevance to citizens in the digital space. The digital divide is getting wider by the day.

However, there is hope. A new breed of non-government natives is leading the digital movement to improve user experience, citizen engagement and build digital communities. From the United States and the United Kingdom to Scandinavia to Singapore, collaborations between government officials, technopreneurs and digital natives are creating a new digital economy based on software, data and things. In Singapore, the creation of the Government Technology Agency, or GovTech, for short, is a strong signal that the Singapore Government will play a significant role in the digital movement to amplify the rallying cry of Smart Nation. Indeed, software is eating government.

Changing mindsets and paradigm

In 2014, when I first joined the public sector, I realised that my colleagues used to look at me quizzically whenever I mentioned "customers." All the work we were doing was based on an "inside-out," government-centric view of the world.

The transformation from an "inside-out" to an "outside-in" view of the world through the eyes of citizens is happening quickly. More and more services are being designed with the citizen's needs in mind, cutting through most of the friction and bureaucracy that is synonymous with government.

For example, some people find it difficult to know the right agency to report an issue to government. Be it a choked drain or a dead animal or a fallen tree, which is the right agency to deal with the problem?

In 2015, an outside-in approach was taken to solve this problem, and the OneServiceapp was created to simplify citizen interaction with government. The focus on user experience and design thinking has helped changed the mindsets of many around us, and made us realise that we

are citizens, too. Being citizen-centric, anticipatory and demand-focused is transforming the way we approach all new services and the way government is engaging citizens – software-driven or otherwise. It will continue to change our operating paradigm in the years to come.

Innovation, disruption, practicality

At GovTech, our focus is on applied innovation. Distinguishing hype from reality is a very fine line. Using proven technology in an innovative way to solve citizen problems – that is what we do. We cannot afford the bleeding edge of innovation. Most of the time we have proven that it need not be expensive to disrupt.

Recently, we were presented with the need for an Intelligent Virtual Assistant to augment our search capabilities in government services. Many solutions were presented, ranging from intelligent FAQs to complex cognitive computing. The initial instinct was to push the edge of technology and experiment with the most complex solutions. However, we re-examined the needs of agencies and concluded that a S$20,000 solution would essentially fulfil the use-case of most agencies. We made it happen in four months. It was disruptive, practical and served the needs of many agencies without breaking the bank. Defying the conventional wisdom that innovation has to be state-of-the-art, cost a lot of money and "cure cancer" in one fell swoop has allowed us to shorten the innovation cycle and keep delivering value.

The pursuit of talent

The digital movement is a war for talent. The image of tech specialists as "factory workers" in the sweat shops of developing countries is slowly being replaced by "master craftsmen" at Google and Facebook with degrees from Stanford and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The game has

changed from cost leadership to differentiation as described by Michael Porter in his book Competitive Advantage.

Government faces an uphill task in attracting world-class tech talent. In terms of compensation, prestige, infrastructure and culture, there is no way to match the likes of the Silicon Valley firms or startups. When we built Hive@Sandcrawler a year ago, it was conceived as a startup-like organisation with the culture to match any Silicon Valley firm. Talented engineers joined us because of a strong sense of purpose in doing good for society and a free hand to make things happen.

Hive managed to attract more than 100 tech talents in a short period of time because of its collaborative culture, sense of purpose and impactful work. Using technology to save lives, create a better environment, solve social issues and build digital communities is something the private sector cannot offer. In 2015, we launched a crowd-sourcing app for lifesavers called myResponder. To date, whenever a life is saved because of the assistance of that app, the team at Hive would actually cheer and celebrate. There is no greater impact than contributing to life-saving.

The abundant availability of data makes the government a "candy store" for data scientists and digital warriors. There is a place for tech talent in government and many countries have shown that it is possible and sustainable to create a technical core. In Singapore, GovTech is leading the charge to rebuild tech capabilities in the public sector.

Staying agile and relevant

In the digital movement, it is apparent that the only way to stay relevant is to stay agile. Agile is not just a software development concept; it is embedded into the culture of all customer focused companies. Making the paradigm shift in government to become more customer focused, necessitates a shift to agility. This fundamental shift is very difficult

for all governments as the status quo is based on stability and predictability. The emergence of a bi-modal organisation is key to success.

The agility movement needs not threaten the stability of day-to-day operations. The two modes are like two sides of a coin and must co-exist for the government to function properly. Both modes are important. One of the biggest challenges is to build collaboration between the two modes to become mutually reinforcing instead of mutually destructive. Everyone can be successful as this is not a zero-sum game. Mode one is focused on operational effectiveness and stability; mode two is focused on transformation. Both modes can be agile and innovative in the pursuit of their common goal to serve the citizen.

The digital movement is here to stay and government is not excluded from this revolution. It is heartening to see that many governments are taking this movement head on and transforming its relationship with citizens digitally. Government will probably never be like an Amazon or Facebook because the roles are different. People go to commercial organisations because they want to. Most of the time people go to government because they have to. At least when they have to come to government, it is a pleasant and productive experience. And GovTech will aspire to do that for all the citizens in Singapore.

Text by
TAN HWEE HWEE
Photos by
ROY LIM

"The relationships matter just as much as getting the job done"

Collaboration is one of Ms Tan Gee Keow's key values, something which she applies readily to her work at Strategy Group.

Ms Tan Gee Keow is Deputy Sec-retary of Strategy Group in the Prime Minister's Office. The 41-year-old, who tells *Challenge* she never thought she would be invited to *A Cuppa With…*, comes across as an intelligent, easy-going person, often sharing perceptive insights that she rounds off with a pleasant laugh.

Formed in July 2015, Strategy Group aims to strengthen whole-of-government policy development and action on national priorities, especially those that cut across multiple agencies.

And when it comes to initiating and managing collaboration between the nu-merous agencies, having "a thick skin" helps, Ms Tan says. This means speaking her mind even when it could be risky doing so – when she has to gently prompt others to take a different, non-silo perspective to get a good discussion going, for example.

"My husband and I always joke that he should not take any risks in his job on the same day I have to go to an important meeting, where I might have to say something controversial, so I don't have to worry even if I'm sacked!" she writes in an email right after our interview, punctuated with a "*smile*".

A thick skin has also made her una-fraid to ask questions, even if they might make her look silly. That has helped her familiarise herself quickly with any new role or task, and navigate through a career spanning policy work and research in the education and defence ministries, as well as ground-level work at the Community Development Council.

Her time at the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources was one of her most challenging yet exciting undertakings: handling the 2013 haze crisis, Singapore's worst since 1997.

Her Permanent Secretary then, a former army general, had asked her to mobi-

PHOTOS TAKEN AT YELLOW CUP COFFEE

lise a crisis team. But the army jargon he used – "Con ops", "S1", "S3" – stumped her. Ms Tan quickly approached her colleagues with military backgrounds to help "decrypt" his language, and jointly put together a crisis organisation structure.

Ms Tan also chaired daily media briefings for updates on the haze. With a background in Economics, she was the least technically trained member on the panel, which included weather experts and scientists. So she had to ask many questions to quickly pick up the knowledge needed, and is now proudly her family's "Chief PM2.5 Scientific Advisor".

But she is most proud of how the various ministries involved banded together quickly to "dust off contingency drawer plans" and put them into action.

"There were easily 8 to 10 agencies working together," she recalls. "In all our conversations… it was always, 'I'm going to try and do what I can to help you.' That gave me confidence and comfort to know that the whole of government can work very well together given a common mission."

Coming together

The experience drove home for Ms Tan the power of collaboration, which is precisely at the heart of Strategy Group.

She defines its mission as bringing different parts of the government together to work on national priorities, "so we can get the best outcome for Singapore and Singaporeans".

"Increasingly, it's hard to do things by yourself," she explains. "The policies that we do within an issue, more often than not have an impact on another agency's policies and issues, so we have to come together more often to work out solutions together."

At inter-agency meetings, she notes, people sit behind name tags that state their respective ministries – and almost immediately, they put on ministry-centric hats.

"Yes, we want them to bring their ministry's expertise to the discussion, but what we want eventually is to develop solutions that are beyond individual ministry hats.

"Success is when it becomes second nature for a ministry to step forward and make a contribution that helps achieve another ministry's mission," Ms Tan says.

Success is when it becomes second nature for a ministry to step forward and make a contribution that helps achieve another ministry's mission.

For example, if secure retirement is a goal for the Ministry of Manpower, then the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of National Development can also contribute towards this goal through their affordable healthcare and housing policies.

And although working out solutions together can be "very painful" – it is more time-consuming for everyone, and requires uniting people who have not teamed up before – she strongly believes that the outcome will be almost always be "superior" to a single unit's effort.

Building trust to lead

To achieve collaboration, one must first earn and build trust, Ms Tan points out. "We should start with a common mission, what we are trying to achieve together and get people's minds out of the silo of vested interests."

So during the first few months, she and her Strategy Group colleagues came together to develop a shared vision and mission. It was also important to her that everyone shared the same set of values.

"It's not just about what we do, but how we do it. We have to do things like build trust, collaboration, understand people's motivations and where they come from, make sure that the relationships matter just as much as getting the job done."

Reciprocating trust is another principle she holds: she trusts that others will do the best job that they can. And if someone lets her down, her approach would be to first find out why, and talk things through.

"As a parent, being let down is something that happens all the time, right?" Ms Tan, who has three children, says good-humouredly.

She relaxes by spending time with family. "I joke with my kids a lot, they joke with me a lot… so I de-stress by going crazy with my kids.

"In August last year, we waved our National Day star-clappers wildly from our car at pedestrians and strangers in other cars. It was great to find that most of them would smile and wave back!" ☯
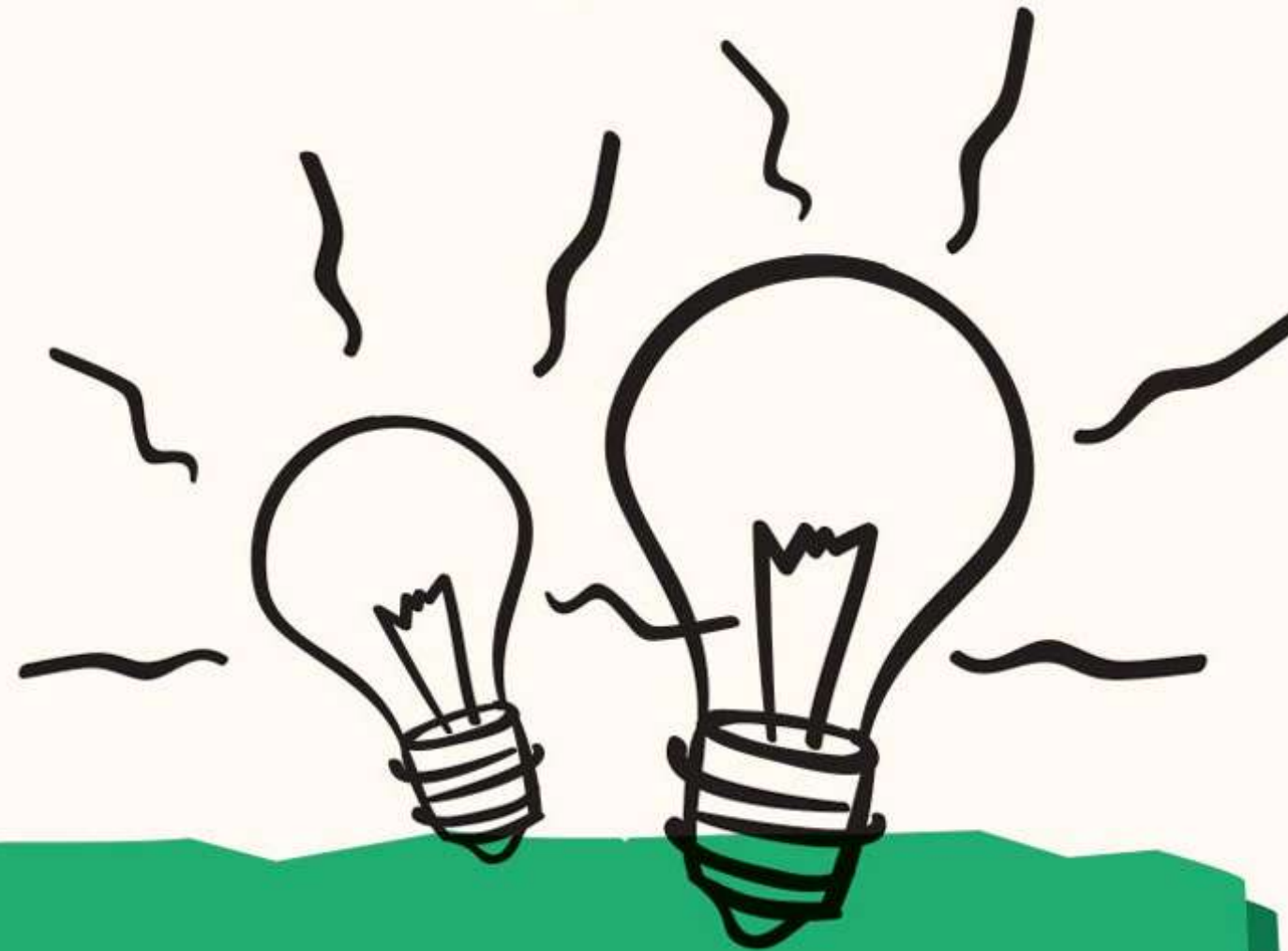
ILLUSTRATION **RYAN ONG**

Is your intern texting about the Public Service?

Kids these days! Who knows what on earth they're really talking about?
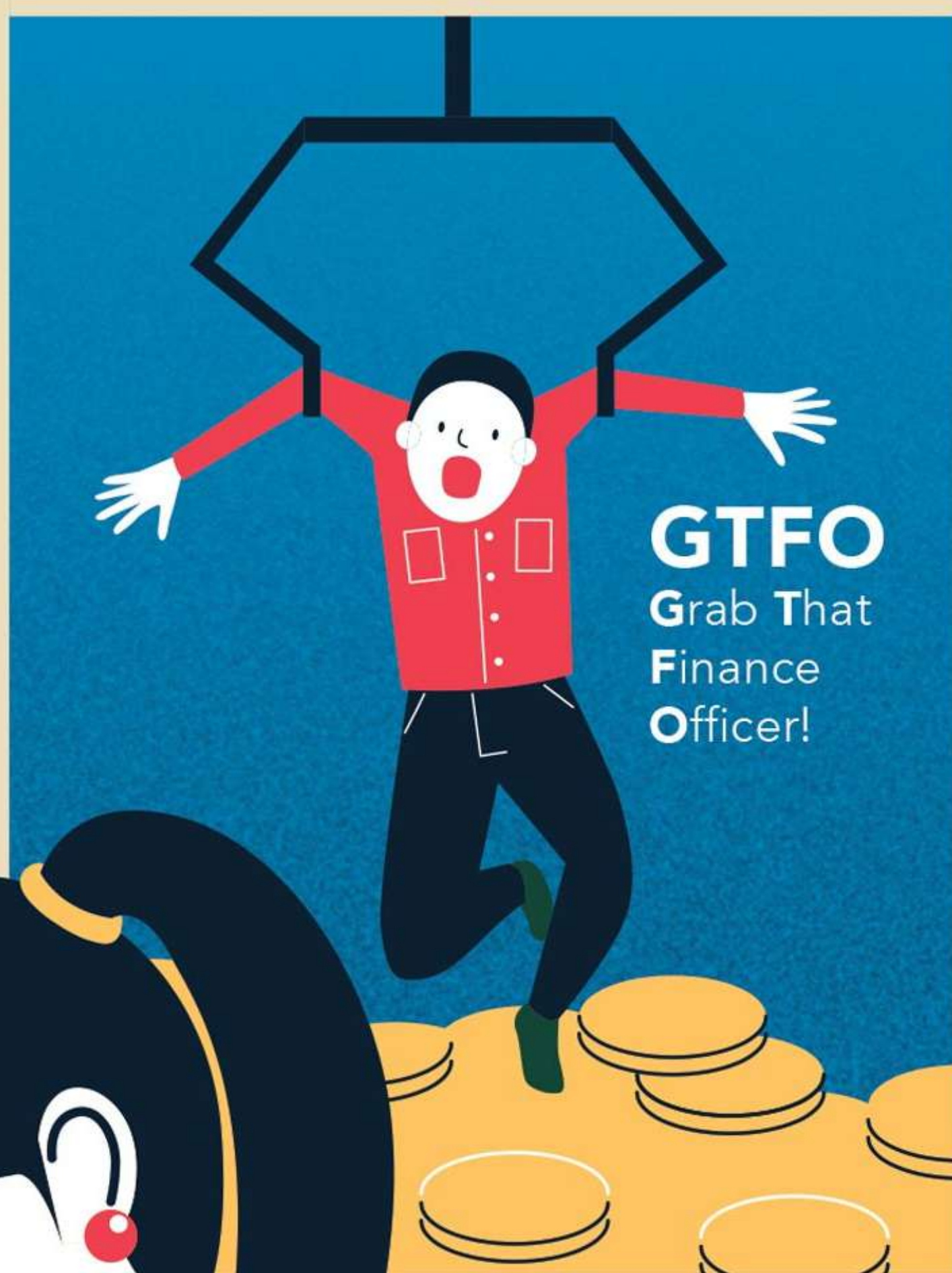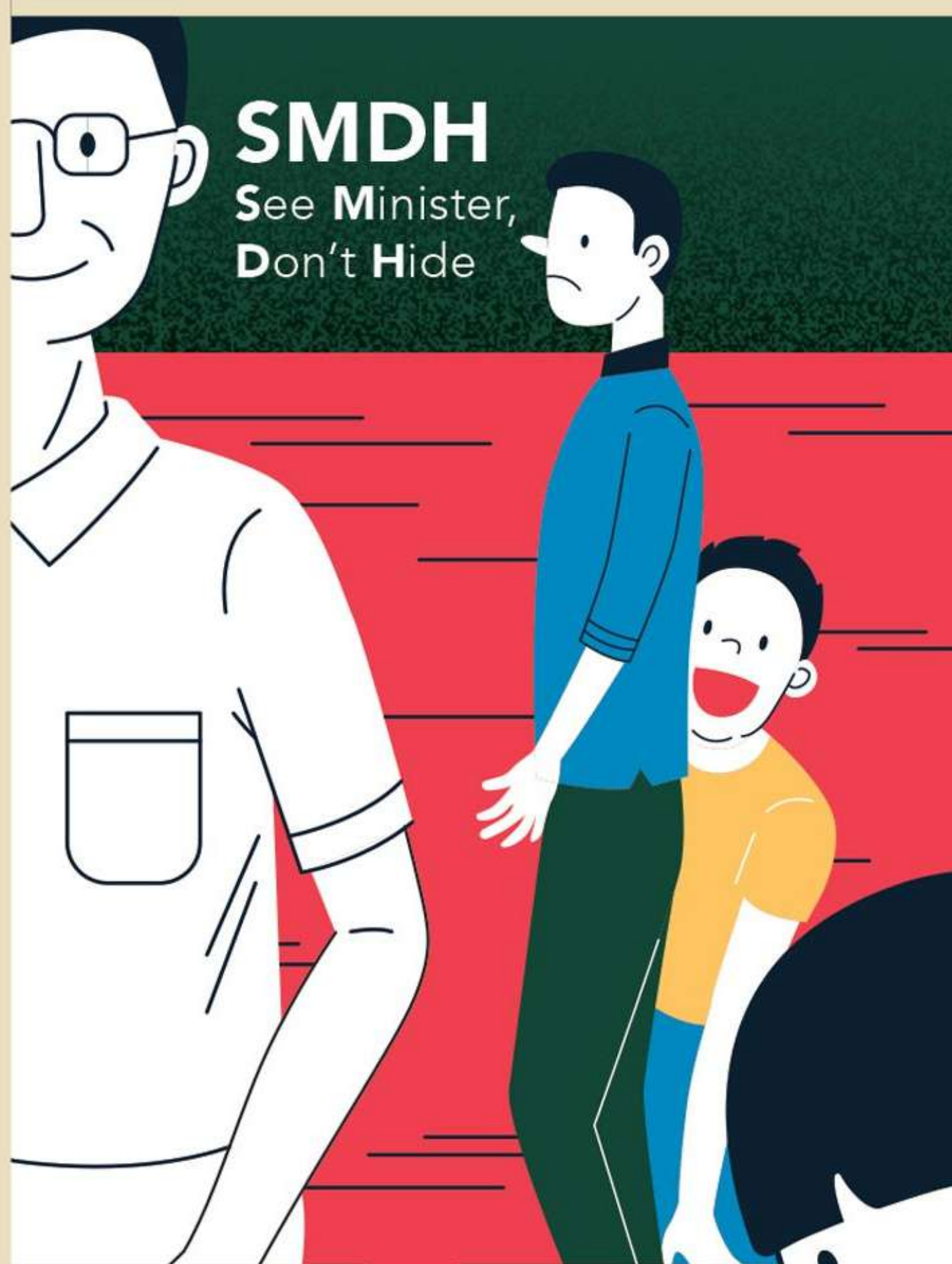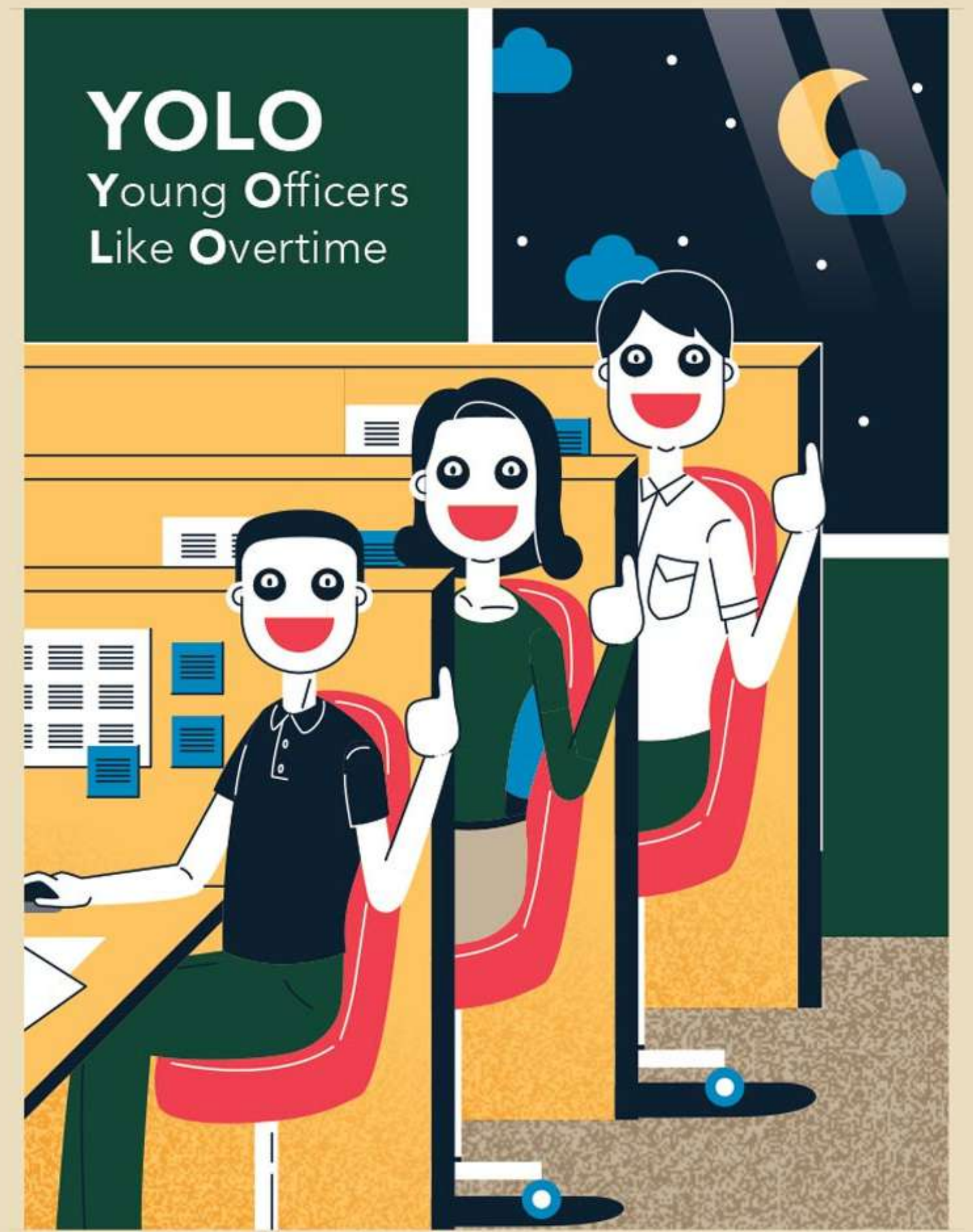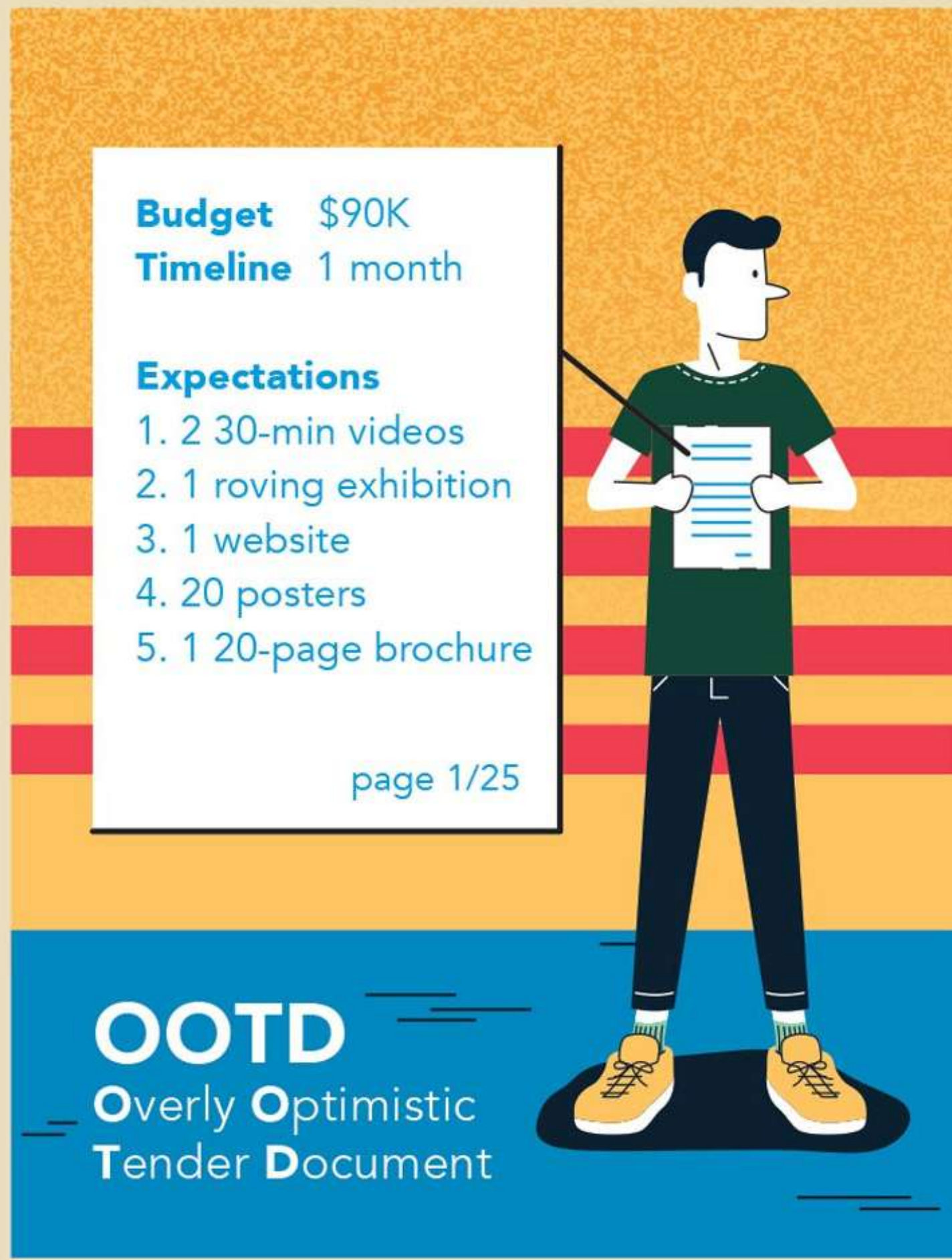
Words that sum up life as a public officer

Aren't there times when you wish you could describe convoluted situations in a snappy way – using just one word? Thanks to the new Challenge Neology Council, now you can.

Seat-ocol
noun | sēt-tə-ˌkȯl

The fraught art of seating people according to their rank and designation, such that no one takes offence at being placed in a location unbefitting their status, at conferences and meetings.

"Priscilla was so stressed planning the seatocol for the big meeting yesterday, she's taking this whole week off to recover."

Inno-visible
noun | i-nə-ˈvi-zə-bəl

Those super creative ideas which, after being implemented at great expense and effort, end up making no tangible changes or improvements.

"Yet another meeting to discuss how to make work fun? How innovisible."

Hope-listic
adjective | hōp-lis-tik

The just-stay-afloat approach many of us adopt, in contrast to the all-rounder public officer who juggles multiple portfolios, spends quality time with family and does volunteer work – all without breaking a sweat.

"I wish I could do it all too but after looking at all this work I have to do, I can only be hopelistic."
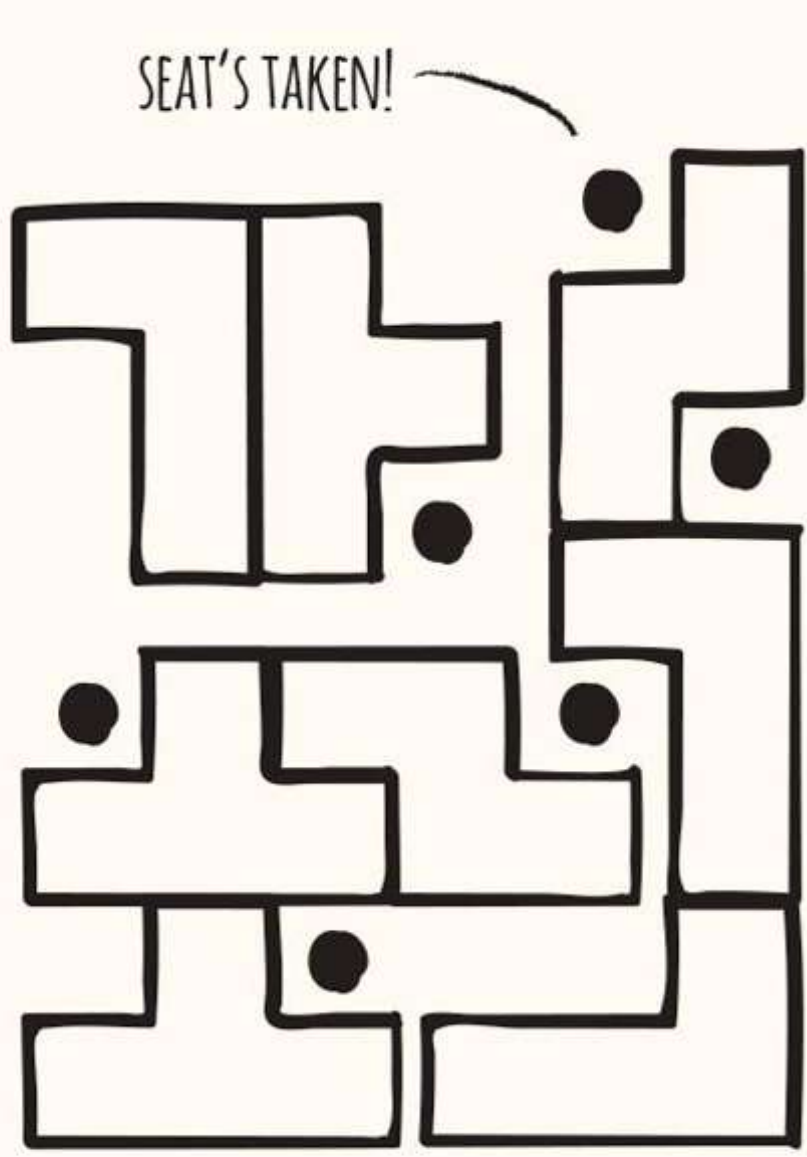
Desk-tris
noun | desk-trəs

The daily game of trying to find the perfect corner to work in offices that practise hot-desking, much like fitting the puzzle pieces in Tetris.

"Vincent's got a strong desktris game going – he comes in super early to work every day."

Tender-rogation
noun | ten-dər-ə-ˈgā-shən

Refers to the endless procurement-related questions that you have no idea how to answer (and sometimes you don't even know why they are asked).

"They asked me a million and one questions in their clarification emails – worst tenderrogation ever!"

Boss-ception (boss + Inception)
noun | bȯs-ˈsep-shən

Like the dream-heist movie, this is the art of planting an idea in a subtle manner to make your boss think he came up with your idea so that he's more likely to approve it.

"I can't believe you managed to get this idea approved. You must have done some really good bossception."

Manner-agement
noun | ma-nər-rāj-mənt

The delicate technique of managing staff who have temper and etiquette issues (shown over email, IM, during meetings and at social functions).

"Wow, what a terrible email he wrote, all in caps! It looks like we will need some manneragement to work with him."