

CONVERSATIONS

THE ROBOTIC REVOLUTION: ITS IMPACT ON THE WORKFORCE

About 90 C-suite leaders and HR professionals attended an HCP Conversations event titled 'Are robots replacing humans in the world of increasing automation?' to find out how they can develop human development strategies while harnessing technology at the workplace.



[From left to right] Professor Annie Koh, Vice President for Office of Business Development at Singapore Management University; Ms Cham Hui Fong, Assistant Secretary-General, NTUC; Mr Jonas Prising, Chairman and CEO, ManpowerGroup; Ms Theresa Phua, Group Head, HR Relationship Management & Singapore HR Head, DBS; and Mr Brendan Daly, General Manager, YOTEL Singapore

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been the talking point across various industries in recent years as people pit Man vs. Machines with trepidation. While there are talks of humans being replaced by robots, people are increasingly coming to understand that the AI revolution enables humans to work with machines instead of getting displaced, with the added benefits of working better, smarter and faster.

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP), supported by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and the ManpowerGroup, organised 'HCP Conversations: Are robots replacing humans in the world of increasing automation?', where industry experts and HR professionals shared their views on how robots are changing the way we work.

Mr Jonas Prising, Chairman and CEO of ManpowerGroup, kicked off the event with a keynote address. He shared on ManpowerGroup's report, 'Humans Wanted, Robots Need You'. An interesting finding from the report was that 87% of employers planned to increase or maintain their manpower headcount as a result of automation. Such trends play a part in the Skills Revolution, where in-demand skills, as a result of the digital age, are changing too rapidly for companies to find the right talents to match them.

Mr Prising also touched on the 4Bs of Talent Strategies employers could take to stay on top of the Skills Revolution:

- **Build:** Upskilling their current workforce through learning and development
- **Buy:** Going to external markets to find talents that cannot be built in-house
- **Borrow:** Cultivating communities of talent outside the organisation, including tapping automation as well as part-time, freelance and contract employees
- **Bridge:** Helping people move on and up to new roles inside or outside the organisation

The next segment of the event – a panel discussion – was moderated by Professor Annie Koh, Vice President for Office of Business Development at Singapore Management University. The panellists were:

- Mr Jonas Prising, Chairman and CEO, ManpowerGroup
- Ms Theresa Phua, Group Head, HR Relationship Management & Singapore HR Head, DBS
- Ms Cham Hui Fong, Assistant Secretary-General, NTUC
- Mr Brendan Daly, General Manager, YOTEL Singapore

They shared their views on measures employers could take to foster a digitally ready workforce such as adjusting company cultures, policies and programmes, and training opportunities for employees.

"It really starts from the top," said Ms Phua, when asked about the impact of culture and leadership on managing challenges in human capital.

"One of the slogans we have at DBS is to 'leave no one behind'. We understand that technology will transform jobs. But we are all about upskilling and building a culture where our people are data-driven, innovative and willing to grow."

"To get such messages out, it's very important that from the top, we cascade down to the individual teams and people," she added.

Ms Cham agreed that many changes are very much driven by the top, and raised the importance of middle management's role in the communication process.

"We need to bear in mind that employees don't get to see top management very often – most of the time, they communicate with middle management," she said.

She also added that as the world undergoes technological transformation, NTUC has always committed itself to protecting the workers.

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– Ms Theresa Phua, Group Head, HR Relationship Management & Singapore HR Head, DBS

"We look at technology as enablers – and not something that will displace jobs. We do not promise people that we will protect their jobs – because jobs may go away. However, we will always protect our workers but they have to be willing to upgrade themselves to take on new opportunities."

On new ways of doing business with technology, Mr Daly raised the point of using automation in YOTEL to boost human capital's capabilities.

"We want to automate areas which will not detract from the guest experience but enhance it. To this end, we have introduced YOSHI and YOLANDA, guest service robots that deliver items to rooms."

The hotel also has self check-in kiosks that relieve front-office staff from mundane and repetitive work so that they can focus on higher-value tasks.

"These technologies don't replace humans. Our staff can now spend more time interacting and attending to guests, while the more mundane matters – checking in, credit card processing and more – are taken care of by technology," said Mr Daly.

TECH AT WORK

Robot colleagues, exciting job scopes and more – see how YOTEL Singapore Orchard Road uses technology to help its people work better, faster and smarter.

For Mr Ruslan Bin Ahmad, Cabin Crew at YOTEL Singapore Orchard Road, work is interesting and diverse, thanks to the hotel's mantra of "Constant and Never-ending Innovation."

"Living by this mantra, we are always looking out for ways to improve our operations, create better-valued jobs and develop the careers of our people, who we see as one of our key assets," explains Mr Brendan Daly, General Manager of YOTEL Singapore.

ROBOTS TO THE RESCUE, AND MORE!

Staff at YOTEL are supported by trusty helpers – robots named YOSHI and YOLANDA. The pair, which has been serving the hotel since it was launched in October 2017, handles guests' requests for amenities and services. This boosts employee productivity as it takes a significant load off staff – the hotel enjoys man-hour savings of 3.5 full-time employees per month.

Mr Ruslan joined YOTEL Singapore Orchard Road since it opened. Along the way, the hotel recognised his potential and wanted to develop him and expand his role. With the robots assisting in guest requests, the hotel was able to merge three housekeeping functions into one for Mr Ruslan. In doing so, he got to learn new skills, expand his knowledge in different functions and boost his employability.

"With YOSHI and YOLANDA helping to deliver room amenities to guests, I am able to expand my job scope and take on a more senior role. Today, I manage the uniform room and laundry operator, and am in charge of linen inventory and deployment," explains Mr Ruslan.

The hotel also has in place other automated initiatives to ease its people's work. At the self-service

kiosks, guests can perform some tasks independently including check-in, check-out, registration, collection and return of keys. Such kiosks relieve front-office staff from mundane and repetitive work so that they can focus on higher-value tasks.

"They can better focus on service delivery, with more interaction with guests in areas such as concierge services, assisting in passport verification, and elevating the customers' experience at YOTEL," explains Mr Daly.

DEVELOPING TALENTS

YOTEL also believes in equipping its people with multiple skills to take on different job functions, and advance into managerial positions.

"Today, at least 30% of our workforce have benefited from our multi-skilling initiative," says Mr Daly.

Engineering Manager Kevin Woo is one such example. He joined YOTEL Singapore Orchard Road during its pre-opening stage as a Senior Technician, where he was tasked with inspecting defects in all 610 rooms in the hotel. There, he displayed stellar qualities such as proactivity and resilience; his effectiveness and efficiency, especially in dealing with contractors and vendors, was also recognised by his superiors.

"So, when we launched a new hotel in 2019 – YOTEL Air Changi Airport – and needed an Engineering Manager, we knew that Kevin would be the best candidate," elaborates Mr Daly.

The management put in plans to further develop Kevin's career, paving the way for the Engineering Manager's position. He started off as a trainee and under his superior's mentorship, was equipped with expanded technical and management skills, and knowledge on various systems at the hotel. With a



YOTEL Singapore Orchard's Cabin Crew, Mr Ruslan Bin Ahmad at his workplace

strong foundation built during his time at Yotel Singapore Orchard, he was able to take up his new role, and manage the new hotel's engineering systems and needs independently.

In 2018, YOTEL sent some of their employees on overseas assignments to Europe, with opportunities to observe and learn best practices from other YOTEL hotels. Through this initiative, the employees gained insights on improving hotel operations and implemented them locally.

A new player in the local hospitality industry and one of the most recent companies to come on board the Human Capital Partnership (HCP) Programme, YOTEL will explore more initiatives to build a more productive and engaged workforce.

"We will continue working towards providing a hotel experience that is seamless, intuitive with extraordinary value for our customers – and we seek to achieve this through innovative technology, design, and importantly, our people," says Mr Daly.

JOB SHARING: WHO, WHY, AND HOW

The Ministry of Manpower and Singapore National Employers Federation's new guide on job sharing in Singapore helps employers and employees enhance flexible working arrangements. Here's a quick summary of the content before you download the full guide below.

WHAT IS JOB SHARING?

A flexible work arrangement (FWA) where two or more people share the responsibilities of one full-time job. Job responsibilities may be split by function, location, time or workload and requires proper handover between employees who are on this arrangement.



WHO BENEFITS AND HOW?



EMPLOYEES

- Greater work-life integration
- More time for upskilling
- Retention of skills and experience



EMPLOYERS

- Increase employee productivity
- Increase cost savings from hiring
- Improve company branding
- Tap on wider pool of capabilities



HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONERS

- Reduce voluntary turnover
- Enhance succession management
- Improve talent attraction
- Improve staff morale and reduce absenteeism

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS IMPLEMENT JOB SHARING?

01

PREPARE FOR JOB SHARING

02

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS ON JOB SHARING

03

SUSTAIN JOB SHARING ARRANGEMENT

MORE USEFUL RESOURCES IN THE GUIDE:

Implementation of job sharing	Success Stories	Pre-Job Sharing Readiness Assessment	Sample Addendum to Employment Contract	Sample FWA Policy
Find out what are the steps needed to implement job sharing at your workplace	Read about how other employers and job sharers have benefited from job sharing arrangements	Complete a simple checklist to see if your company is ready for job sharing	Get ideas on how your job sharing employment contract can look like	See some suggestions on how to implement such arrangements

Useful Contacts:

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Singapore National Employers Federation
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Download the guide [HERE](#).