

EMPOWERING INCLUSIVITY FOR WORKFORCE AND WORKPLACE **16 Nov 2023 ITE College Central**

PANEL DISCUSSION – ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES IN WORKPLACE facilitated by Ms Chia Yong Yong, Lawyer, SPD Advisor, Former NMP

OPENING REMARKS BY CE/VITAL

Thank you for the opportunity to be on the panel. My opening remarks are in 3 parts – first, on VITAL. Second, our journey to get here. Third, why it all matters.

First, about VITAL. We were set up in 2006, as a Department within the Ministry of Finance. We serve more than 100,000 public servants, and more than 100 government agencies, providing shared services in HR, Payroll, Finance and more. Our workforce now stands at more than 500. 2.5% of our staff are Persons with disabilities. If you include our vendor workforce, it is almost 6%. We are Enabling Mark (Gold) certified under SG Enable.

Second, our journey. We started in 2016 as part of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) efforts. We partnered Autism Resource Center, to employ persons on the autism spectrum in our digitalization initiatives. Over time, we expanded the scope of work for our PWD colleagues. For example, today we have hearing impaired officers handling the payroll and finance portfolios.

We aimed to empower those in need. This means strong leadership from the top, managing expectations of what our PwD colleagues can or cannot do, putting in place sensible and appropriate accommodations to help PwD officers do their work better. These empowering conditions allow our PwDs to take ownership of their career and life, paving the way for a brighter future. It is about giving dignity, and not just doing charity. Working closely with our trusted partners like ARC, SPD and SG Enable was critical to our success.

Third, why it all matters. When I joined VITAL as Chief Executive back in 2020, we already had a good system in place. My first thoughts were merely to continue our efforts to be a socially responsible employer.

But today, I can tell you from my heart that it is so much more. I would like to submit to all today that we can both do good and do well.

In running VITAL (or any operations outfit), we have KPIs to meet; our staff are under huge pressure to deliver. But I submit that it is possible and even desirable to create an environment where our PwD colleagues are productively employed. In doing so, we build up a stronger and more inclusive organization for all.

Our PwD staff are now an integral part of our workforce. 3 of our PwDs have been promoted in recent years; one promoted twice in the span of 7 years – this officer is one of my best Ops-Tech specialists, building automation solutions using low code tools for his Division.

In addition, our PwD officers are not only productive but loyal to VITAL. This is most helpful when VITAL's turnover hit almost 20% in the past couple of years.

Let us focus on the abilities and skills of all our staff, and not their disabilities or limitations. And this leadership principle applies to ALL officers, and not just officers with disabilities. We are all human beings, and we all have our strengths and our limitations. So, my message for leaders is that by creating opportunities for all, we can bring out the very best in our people.

Ok, let me hand back the time to moderator Ms Chia, thank you.