

# What Women Want

Professional And Personal Aspirations



**Embrace The  
Uncomfortable**

**26**

# Show the world you make a difference

FROM THE  
ISCA COUNCIL

## EMBRACING DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION



Balasubramaniam Janamanchi  
FCA (Singapore)  
ISCA Council Member

Dear members,

**FEMALE CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS (CAS)** take centrestage in this April issue as the cover story examines some of the key findings from Chartered Accountants Worldwide (CAW)'s global report titled "Mapping Women's Career Journeys". The report, launched on International Women's Day, analyses the quantitative and qualitative responses of over 3,500 CAs from six professional accountancy bodies including ISCA, that are part of the CAW network.

In this global examination of female CAs, it is obvious that the intersection of being a woman and a parent is where there are the most hurdles to attaining career and family aspirations. And, although Singapore has fewer workplace biases than other countries, more can be done so that women can realise their professional and personal goals. The cover story, "What Women Want", maps the career path of female CAs and looks at the challenges and ambitions that they have – through their eyes.

In Singapore, even as companies are increasingly embracing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) as a strategic priority, more needs to be done, and we bring you the action steps in the cover story. Clearly, organisations and CAs alike have a part to play to create the "best" environment that works for both.

In this post-COVID-19 era when flexible work policies are finding their way into corporate settings, organisations that continue with archaic business practices are at risk of losing their human assets – women and men. I urge you to relook your DEI policies, before it's too late.

### ABOUT BALASUBRAMANIAM JANAMANCHI

Mr Bala has been a Council member since 2017 and was part of the Executive Committee serving as Treasurer from 2018 to 2019. He is a member of the Ethics Committee and had previously served on other committees within ISCA, including the Auditing and Assurance Standards Committee, and Public Accounting Practice Committee.

Mr Bala has more than 25 years of comprehensive multi-industry experience in external and internal audit. He is Founder and Managing Director of JBS Practice Public Accounting Corporation, which he started in 2012 under the name of Shanker Iyer & Company. Mr Bala has professional duties which cover a wide range of services including the provision of auditing, accounting, financial advisory and management consultancy services to a wide diversity of international clients.

Mr Bala is actively involved in Singapore International Chamber of Commerce. He has been the Finance Member of the Hindu Endowment Board since 2020.

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Female chartered accountants face the most challenges during the mid-stages of their careers. This is largely due to expectations and biases at work and at home, especially in relation to childcare and family responsibilities. Both employers and employees can do their part to support women in their career ambitions.

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# Diversity Gathering Momentum Among Listed Companies And Statutory Boards

**BOARD DIVERSITY IS GATHERING MOMENTUM IN ALL SECTORS**, according to the Council for Board Diversity (CBD)'s annual study of gender diversity in the boardroom of companies listed on the Singapore Exchange (SGX), institutions of a public character (IPCs) and statutory boards in Singapore.

Of the more than 1,300 organisations covered in the study, new appointments to the boards of the largest 100 listed companies and to statutory boards reached almost 40% of total appointments in 2022 – a record high (36% for companies; 38% for statutory boards). Among first-time company directors, women's appointments also reached a record high of 45%.

Statutory boards achieved 31.4% women's participation on boards (WOB) as at end-2022, up 1.7 percentage points from 29.7% a year earlier. Progress is rapid and determined, coming from only 23.3% at the establishment of the CBD in 2019. For the 100 largest listed companies, women held 21.5% of board seats at end-2022, an increase of 2.6 percentage points from 18.9% the year before. The 100 largest IPCs had 29.3% of



board seats held by women, an increase of 0.9 percentage points from 28.4% in 2021. WOB on the Top 100 companies have progressed beyond the first leg of their target<sup>1</sup>, to the next stage of 25% by end-2025. Statutory boards have exceeded the 30% level and are looking at improving other aspects of diversity.

TABLE 1 WOMEN ON BOARDS

	%WOB		
	As at 31 Dec 2022	As at 31 Dec 2021	As at 31 Dec 2018, before CBD was established
Top 100 companies	21.5% (181 / 842 seats)	18.9% (157 / 831 seats)	15.2% (130 / 854 seats)
Statutory boards	31.4% (293 / 934 seats)	29.7% (275 / 925 seats)	23.3% (206 / 885 seats)
Top 100 IPCs	29.3% (403 / 1376 seats)	28.4% (400 / 1408 seats)	27.4% (383 / 1400 seats)

Source: Council for Board Diversity, March 2023



<sup>1</sup> CBD set out its long-term ambition for equal proportion of men and women directors on boards in 2019. It had also set WOB targets for the intermediate term, which take into consideration the different starting positions of each sector in terms of WOB:

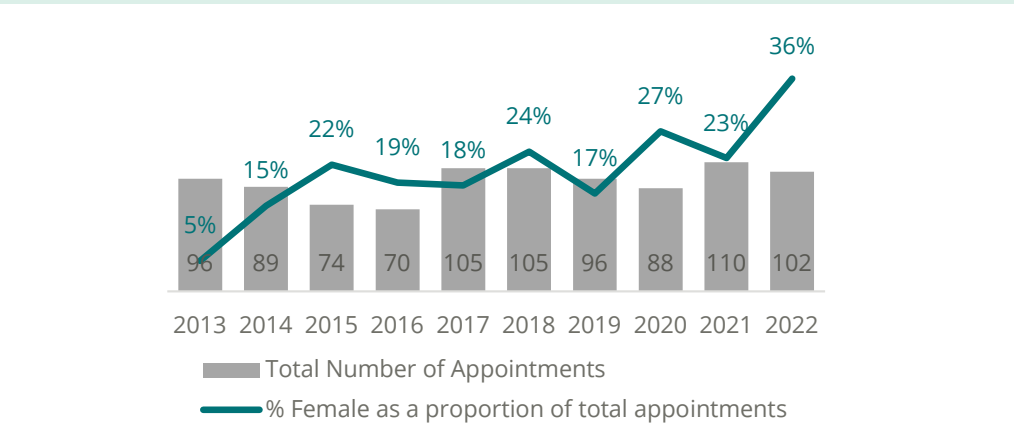
- Top 100 primary-listed companies: 20% WOB by end-2020, 25% by end-2025, 30% by end-2030
- Top 100 IPCs and statutory boards: 30% WOB as soon as possible

TABLE 2 PROPORTION OF BOARDS WITH AT LEAST 30% WOB



Source: Council for Board Diversity, March 2023

TABLE 3 WOMEN'S APPOINTMENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL APPOINTMENTS TO THE TOP 100 COMPANIES



Source: Council for Board Diversity, March 2023

None of the boards of statutory boards are single gender, whereas there are still four all-male boards among the Top 100 IPCs, and 13 among the Top 100 companies. Additionally, the study shows that women chair 22% of statutory boards, which is the highest among the three sectors. At the Top 100 company boards, 9% of boards are chaired by women, and 16% of the Top 100 IPCs are chaired by women.

"Our statutory boards have made good progress in improving the gender diversity of their boards," said Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister-in-Charge of the Public Service. "With greater diversity in demographics, experience, and skill sets, there will be more robust discussions and decisions, taking into account a wider range of perspectives, to benefit Singapore and Singaporeans."

"The government's commitment to lead by diversifying their statutory boards in various aspects, including skills, gender and race, has gained significant traction. This demonstrates that diversity on boards is a growing necessity for organisations to thrive in today's environment and is achievable when there

is a concerted effort to make it a priority," said Mrs Mildred Tan, Co-Chair of CBD and Chair of Tote Board Singapore and Singapore University of Social Sciences Board of Trustees.

"With the business environment changing at a much faster pace than before, diversity of thought on a board has come to the fore as organisations seek to capitalise on new opportunities and navigate challenges," highlighted Mr Loh Boon Chye, Co-Chair, CBD and CEO, SGX Group. "Many large companies and statutory boards are showing commitment to diversifying their boards to strengthen their capability."

"While it is difficult to look ahead and predict what lies ahead in the future, it is important that charities are able to remain relevant and adaptable to the changing needs of society," said Dr Gerard Ee, Chair of the Charity Council. "Charity boards should embrace the culture of continuously evaluating and revitalising their boards, and ensure that they adequately represent the community they serve."

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

# Improving Employee Wellbeing Factors Can Enhance Company Performance By Up To 55%



A RECENT SURVEY BY AON<sup>1</sup> reveals that improving employee wellbeing factors can enhance company performance by at least 11% and up to 55%. It also shows a relationship between wellbeing and a sustainable work life, which can impact company performance. The higher an employer's ratings are in overall employee wellbeing, culture and climate of wellbeing, performance of wellbeing initiatives and funding allocation toward wellbeing, the better their scores are in workforce resilience, agility and belonging, which support a sustainable work life.

The study, which analysed the data from more than 1,100 organisations across 46 countries and multiple industries, also shows that employers are increasingly prioritising wellbeing programmes, in both recognising the issues and aiming to take action.

Encouragingly, nearly two-thirds of respondents reported that wellbeing has become more important to their company since 2020, and just under half said that employee wellbeing has increased in priority in that same timeframe.

## Mental health and wellbeing

According to a global survey by McKinsey Health Institute<sup>2</sup> conducted across 15 countries, at least 60% of respondents have experienced a least one mental health challenge at some point in their lives – a figure consistent with other global research studies. This can affect their work performance. But there can be no keeping them away from the workplace until they are better, as they *are* the workforce. Mental wellbeing is a real challenge and increasingly,

companies are dedicating unprecedented resources to employee mental health and wellbeing, says the report. The data show that 87% of companies have at least one wellbeing initiative in place, similar to a 2020 finding. However, 83% of companies now have a wellbeing strategy, compared to 55% in 2020.

The McKinsey report suggests that improving workplace factors, such as eliminating toxic behaviours, boosting inclusivity, and creating sustainable work can be several times more predictive of employee mental health and wellbeing than providing access to resources alone.

Put simply, companies must be proactive and purposeful in creating a safe and conducive work environment that supports employees' mental health and wellbeing, if they want to get the best out of their employees.



<sup>1</sup> <https://aon.mediaroom.com/2023-02-28-Improving-Employee-Wellbeing-Factors-Can-Enhance-Company-Performance-By-at-Least-11-Percent,-Up-to-55-Percent,-According-to-Global-Aon-Survey>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/present-company-included-prioritizing-mental-health-and-well-being-for-all>  
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/10/the-importance-of-worker-well-being-in-the-future-of-work/>

## Post-COVID workplace priorities

COVID-19 has provided insights into employee wellness and shown that mental and emotional health have a rightful place at work. An article<sup>3</sup> on the World Economic Forum website outlines some considerations for creating a supportive work environment:

- **360-degree wellness**  
Provide employees and their dependants frictionless access to professional healthcare services. Establish work-life balance.
- **Feedback-based action**  
Engage the workforce to get their perspectives on employee initiatives, and course-correct based on that feedback.
- **Communication**  
Keep open the avenues of communication; ensure that these are two-way streets.
- **Employee engagement**  
Empower employees; give them greater flexibility and autonomy at work.

PHOTO SHUTTERSTOCK



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# Almost Half Of SMEs Surveyed Are Optimistic About Business Growth In 2023



**ALMOST HALF (49%) OF LOCAL SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMEs)** are optimistic about their growth prospects for this year, while over 60% cited first-time overseas expansion and exploring additional new markets as key business priorities.

The business owners continued to place high priority on ensuring consistent cash flow and managing cost. They were most concerned about rising global interest rates, labour costs and availability, and inflation. These were the results of DBS’ annual SME Pulse Check Survey released in March 2023.

With the persistent challenging business environment, 62% of respondents shared that ensuring consistent cash flow and managing cost were their top business priorities for 2023. Exploring additional new markets for their businesses (33%) and first-time overseas expansion (31%) were the next important priorities, underscored by the reopening of borders and support from government schemes, such as the enhanced Enterprise Financing Scheme announced at Budget 2023.

Areas of priority for SMEs in 2023		%
1	Ensuring consistent cash flow and managing cost	62
2	Additional new markets for their businesses	33
3	First-time overseas expansion	31
4	Hiring, retaining and upskilling manpower	29
5	Sustainability and greening their businesses	25
6	Digital transformation and innovating new business models	21

This was followed by hiring, retaining and upskilling manpower (29%); sustainability and greening their businesses (25%), and digital transformation and innovating new business models (21%).

Unsurprisingly, ensuring consistent cash flow and managing cost was also the top priority among the survey respondents last year (85%), although they had indicated confidence in coping with cost pressures. In the latest survey, against a backdrop of uncertain geopolitical conditions, SMEs ranked the rising global interest rates (50%) and labour costs and availability (43%) as their top concerns, followed by inflation (36%), GST hike (26%) and supply chain disruptions (25%).

With Singapore’s efforts to go green, the majority of SMEs said the return on sustainability (35%) was the main challenge in building a sustainable/green business. This was followed by the cost of deployment (27%), and lack of government incentives/funding (19%). Some SMEs (16%) said they did not know how to start building a sustainable/green business, while a small number (4%) did not intend to build a sustainable/green business.

“SMEs are the backbone of our economy and have weathered different business and economic challenges over the last few years,” said Mr Koh Kar Siong, Group Head of SME Banking, DBS. “They are resilient and optimistic, as our survey has shown.” He cautioned that continued headwinds from rising global inflation and high interest rates will add to SMEs’ operating expenses, so managing cash flow and liquidity needs, along with effective credit risk management, will be critical to their success.

DBS ran its regular SME Pulse Check Survey with 116 SMEs across a broad spectrum of industries to better understand the needs and concerns of the SME community.

# Outlook For Global Economy Takes A Positive Turn In First Half Year



**THE OUTLOOK FOR THE GLOBAL ECONOMY TAKES A POSITIVE TURN IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2023** as inflationary pressures begin to ease, but ongoing geopolitical tensions and domestic challenges in key markets are slowing any return to sustained growth, according to KPMG’s latest “Global Economic Outlook” report. As global energy prices are returning to levels last seen prior to the invasion of Ukraine, and commodity and food prices ease, they have helped put further downward pressure on inflation for the rest of 2023.

Despite the positive news, major economies throughout the world – most recently the UK and USA – are facing their own domestic pressures, delaying any hopes of improving market conditions and a drop in inflation. The nuanced, complex picture in each country, region and territory is placing unprecedented pressure on central banks, with worries that core inflation could remain sticky and price rises could become entrenched due to the relatively tight economic environment facing a number of territories. The global organisation is forecasting GDP growth of 2.1% in 2023 and 2.6% in 2024, with inflation forecast at 5.3% in 2023 and 3.2% in 2024, and global unemployment levels of 5.2% in 2023 and 5.4% in 2024.

With monetary policy focused on moderating inflation while stabilising financial markets, fiscal policy is left as the potential tool to boost economic growth. Unfortunately, the public finances have deteriorated significantly over the past three years. Governments have spent significant amounts on first shielding their economies from COVID-19 and, subsequently,

on protecting households and businesses from higher energy prices. That left public debt at historically elevated levels, with less room for expansionary fiscal policy. In the US, federal spending is expected to slow despite the ramp up in infrastructure spending. In China, fiscal support is to be stepped up following the reopening of the economy. The rise in interest rates has made these larger debt levels more costly to service, putting further pressure on government finances. Nevertheless, some positive growth momentum is expected this year from the relatively smooth reopening of the Chinese economy following the lifting of COVID-related restrictions in December 2022.

The pressure on global supply chains has eased significantly in recent months, while shipping costs have dropped too. This should help alleviate some inflationary pressures and improve supply capacity. Global trade remains relatively weak, although it is expected to recover this year as trade flows normalise with the reopening of the Chinese economy and a recovery in global growth. Geopolitical tensions will continue to exert some pressure on trade flows over the medium term.

Consumer demand is also expected to pick up this year, with excess savings – money saved during the pandemic when spending on certain services was not possible – still relatively high in China and Europe, which could potentially be deployed once confidence returns. Already, consumer confidence has started to improve in Europe, although it remains at relatively low levels.

“Singapore stands out as a beacon of hope amid global economic uncertainties,” said Mr Paul Kent, Partner, Advisory, at KPMG in Singapore. “Even as the world faces challenges such as geopolitical tensions and banking crises, Singapore continues to experience steady growth in its economy that is expected to remain notably higher compared with other regions, thanks to strong optimism in the ASEAN region and sustained international investment in the nation.”

# ISCA’s Inaugural Council Alumni Network Gathering



Attendees of the inaugural Council Alumni Network get-together at ISCA House on February 9



ISCA President Mr Teo Ser Luck provided updates on the Institute’s strategic direction and its key initiatives

**ISCA TURNS 60 THIS YEAR.** As we take stock of the Institute’s achievements over the years, we recognise that we would not have come this far without the firm foundation established by the hard work and wisdom of our dedicated leaders. As a mark of their contributions, the Institute set up the Council Alumni Network so that we can continue to engage our former Council members. The Network also serves as a platform for former Council members to network and build connections among themselves.

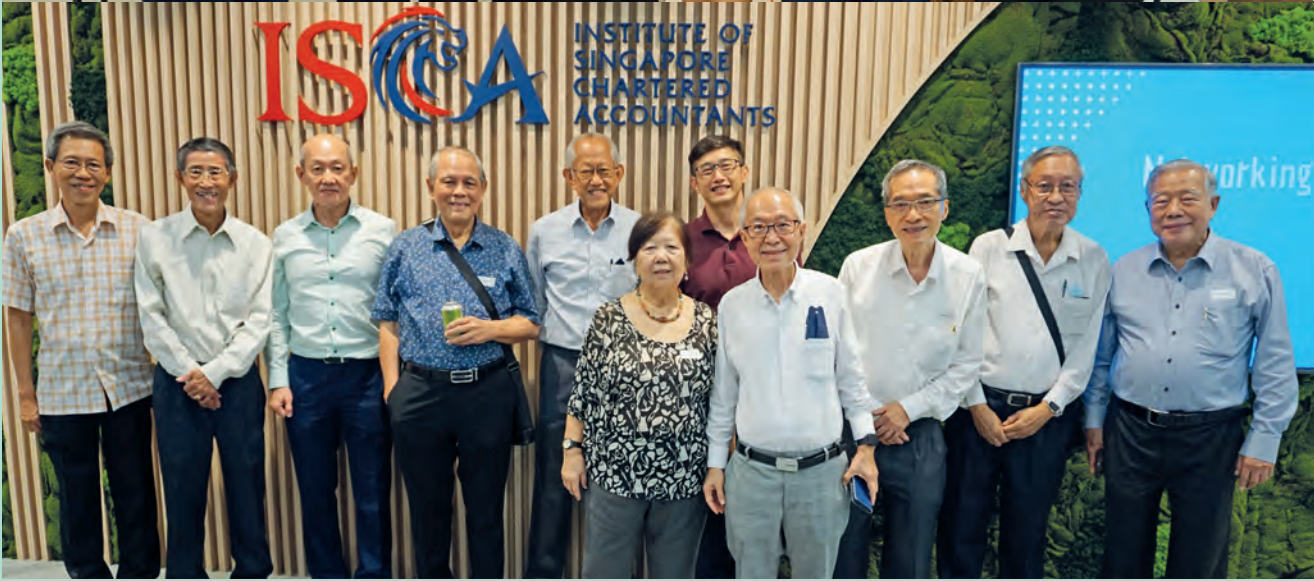
The launch event, held on February 9 at the recently renovated Members Lounge at ISCA House, was a heady mix of nostalgia and excitement as former Council members from as early as 1974 returned to the Institute. They took a trip down memory lane, reconnected with old

friends and made new ones, and were brought up to speed on ISCA’s plans and activities.

ISCA CEO Ms Fann Kor shared fun facts about ISCA’s history while former ISCA President Dr Ernest Kan and former Council member Ms Lim Kexin shared anecdotes from their time serving on the Council. ISCA President Mr Teo Ser Luck then spoke about the Institute’s strategic direction and recent initiatives, including the new ISCA Corporate Membership.

Regular meet-and-mingle sessions will be organised for the Network every quarter.

We look forward to meeting more Council Alumni Network members at the upcoming sessions and creating more happy memories at ISCA House!



More photos for the album!

# SPF And ISCA Sign MOU To Advance The Development Of Financial Forensics In Singapore

**THE FIGURES TELL A STORY** – that there is a need for financial forensic professionals to bolster the nation's fight against financial crime. From 2017 to 2021, the Singapore police had investigated about 18,700 cases of white-collar crime, with a total subject matter value of about S\$4.49 billion.

On February 2, the Singapore Police Force (SPF)'s Commercial Affairs Department (CAD) and ISCA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to advance Singapore's development of financial forensics and widen the talent pool of qualified financial forensic professionals. The MOU was inked by ISCA President Mr Teo Ser Luck and CAD Director Mr David Chew.

Under the MOU, both organisations will collaborate to streamline the process for CAD officers and relevant SPF officers to attain the ISCA Financial Forensic Professional (FFP) credential, and support each other's professional development programmes to nurture and attract more financial forensic talent to the industry.

In 2021, ISCA and the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) had also signed an MOU, paving the way for CPIB officers to get the credential. To date, close to 40 CPIB officers have been conferred the ISCA FFP credential, bolstering the talent pool of qualified financial forensic professionals here.

The ISCA Financial Forensic Accounting (FFA) Qualification, developed by ISCA and industry experts, provides specialised training in forensic accounting and investigation, digital forensics, combating financial crime, and professional ethics. Completion of the programme and relevant forensics work experience will lead to the conferment of the ISCA FFP designation.

"To combat white-collar crime, we need skilled talent who understand the most recent developments in financial forensics in an increasingly sophisticated and tech-enabled environment," says Mr Teo. "Our collaboration with CAD will enrich the talent pool and contribute



ISCA President Mr Teo Ser Luck and SPF CAD Director Mr David Chew signed the MOU, witnessed by ISCA CEO Ms Fann Kor and CAD Deputy Director Mr Ian Wong



The MOU is another step to enrich the financial forensic talent pool and contribute to Singapore's sterling reputation as a financial hub

to upholding Singapore's integrity as a global financial centre and business hub."

"The collaboration with ISCA serves as an important step towards capacity building in the financial forensics arena, which could be a game-changer in how we detect and investigate financial crime," says Mr Chew. "This strategic alliance will benefit not only our SPF officers but also the financial industry as a whole."

To learn more about ISCA's financial forensic pathway, please contact us at [qualifications@isca.org.sg](mailto:qualifications@isca.org.sg) or 6597-5533.

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# What Women Want

## Professional And Personal Aspirations

TAKE AWAYS



- A global survey found that female chartered accountants (CAs) face the most challenges during the mid-stages of their careers.
- Worldwide, childcare and parenthood are heavily gendered, placing heavier demands on a working mother's time, thus leaving her with less time for professional pursuits.
- Although Singapore is considered to have largely gender-equal workplaces, more can be done to integrate diversity, equality and inclusion as corporate values.
- Both employers and employees have a part to play, to create a more flexible and favourable work environment.

**IN SINGAPORE, MID-CAREER WOMEN SEEK TO JOIN MORE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES** to advance their careers. This is one of the key findings in a new global study undertaken by Chartered Accountants Worldwide (CAW)'s Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Taskforce.

The study sought to understand and map the career journeys of women in Chartered Accountancy through indepth interviews and surveys. After engaging more than 3,500 survey respondents and conducting 40 indepth interviews worldwide, it was clear that the mid-stages of women's Chartered Accountancy careers face the most challenges. Having said that, these challenges are not insurmountable, and both employers and employees can play a defining role in overcoming them.

### MID-CAREER WOMEN IN CHARTERED ACCOUNTANCY: A GLOBAL NARRATIVE

Across the world, women are still expected to be primary caregivers and undertake childcare responsibilities. When asked about their top barriers to career progression, 43% of women survey respondents chose "being a parent/guardian" and "taking time off to have/care for children", compared to only 7% of men. This suggests that childcare and parenthood are still heavily gendered, placing heavier demands on a working mother's time, thus leaving her with less time for professional pursuits. Qualitative responses uncovered tension between career demands and starting a family for mid-career female chartered accountants (CAs).

One female respondent explained that she made a conscious decision to leave a well-paying job to seek employment in a less demanding sector before she started a family.

### COVID-19: A window to what is possible

Fortuitously, the period of the research coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw the widespread implementation of flexible work schedules. The study found that these new working arrangements were significantly more impactful for female mid-career CAs. While 67% of male mid-career CAs agreed with the statement that they found it easy to work efficiently from home, 80% of their female counterparts agreed with the same statement.

The pandemic also opened a window of opportunity to better recognise mental wellbeing needs. Speaking up on mental health and wellbeing is no longer seen as taboo, which allows a more honest approach to these needs. A female mid-career CA from Scotland reported that during the pandemic, "you are seeing so many more posts on LinkedIn about more personal issues, especially the challenges that women face. I think this is really helpful". This suggests that the widespread sharing of parenting challenges has helped to forge solidarity among parents, who were facing similar daily challenges. This, in turn, created a sense of community, comfort, and support.



PHOTOSHUTTERSTOCK



The report found evidence that companies in Singapore have incorporated strong childcare and family policies

### SINGAPORE: A CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR FAMILIES

Comparatively, Singapore has a conducive environment for working parents. Almost 80% of the resident population live in public housing; these are affordable and quality homes that are in high demand by most residents in Singapore. Public housing policies, such as the proximity housing grant, incentivise families to stay close to each other. This makes it easier for many working parents to get help from their extended family members, to share the childcare responsibilities. In addition, childcare subsidies and grants make it easier for mid-career CAs to meet the financial costs of childcare services. If additional help is required, professional domestic help services are also available to augment childcare needs. Because of the good mix of support – from domestic helpers, professional childcare services and family members – there is confidence in the quality of care for young children. A female respondent noted that her career has been smooth sailing, and she

can put in long hours with the knowledge that her daughter is well taken care of.

Respondents perceived Singapore to be a largely gender-equal society with little gender discrimination regarding career and job opportunities. The report found evidence that companies in Singapore have incorporated strong childcare and family policies. When asked about the biggest enablers to career progression, Singapore CAs were four to eight times more likely to select "support when returning to work after a break", "pro-family government policies", and "additional care leave" as their top enablers, in comparison to the global average. This indicates that pro-family government policies are more widely implemented by companies in Singapore. These policies are key enablers for female mid-career CAs to continue pursuing their career ambitions; it also suggests that there are strong support schemes, such as the assignment of buddies, training or emotional support, for mid-career women when they return to work after maternity leave.

Supportive managers are key to creating an inclusive environment to meet diverse needs. They help carve career paths that align professional goals with personal responsibilities, such as career progression and starting a family respectively.

CHALLENGES FOR SINGAPORE: FIGHTING FOR TIME

Despite having a supportive environment for families, Singapore’s female mid-career CAs continue to face challenges. Expectations of long working hours and the pervasiveness of presenteeism create invisible constraints, and they place undue pressure on personal relationships, work-life balance, and the decision to start families or have children. Although these barriers are not targeted at women, the expectation is for everyone to always perform similarly; this ignores unique needs, especially those of mid-career women, who may be thinking about having children.

Time constraints also place invisible limits on work and career opportunities. Although technical or accountancy-related training and resources are seen as a big enabler to career progression, the lack of opportunities to attend training courses was perceived as a barrier to advance careers. The report found that Singapore’s female CAs felt that they lack knowledge of industry opportunities. This may be due to the lack of time to be more engaged with professional networks or to discover the networking opportunities available.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SINGAPORE

The study found that Singapore’s women in Chartered Accountancy are willing to make career shifts to work in a more inclusive workplace. Female CAs in Singapore gravitate towards managers and peers who can understand their needs. They are almost three times more likely to choose inclusive workplaces as their biggest motivation for a career change, compared to the

global average. They are also motivated by real-life examples of working mothers who are thriving at the workplace. The interview data suggest that mid-career women use personal networks to identify supportive managers who are understanding of their personal and professional needs, to discern genuinely inclusive workplaces.

The study uncovered a real and clear desire for empathy and understanding from organisations in Singapore – diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) are corporate values that most employees desire. Not only are women willing to move for a more favourable environment, the men, too, will make that shift. For instance, the study found that Singapore’s male CAs are more than two times more willing



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK



Female as well as male CAs in Singapore are willing to make career shifts to work in a more favourable environment

EMPLOYERS: Implement flexible working policies

Employers can create inclusive workplaces by implementing flexible working policies. Over one in three female mid-career CAs highlighted flexible working policies as enablers for their career progression. Flexible working policies should be applied to all employees, to avoid the labelling of flexible working as an exclusive “working mother” policy. Flexible working policies would allow working parents to better meet and share their childcare and career responsibilities by giving them the freedom to plan their time across the day.

Senior management should also set the tone for inclusive workplaces. For instance, when it comes to being present, instead of privileging those that are “seen all the time”, senior management could help normalise core hours for all employees. Hence, the period from 10am to 4pm could be the core hours where physical meetings and employee presence are required. Beyond that, there could be flexibility in fulfilling work tasks. Senior management should also set the tone for networking opportunities to be inclusive. For instance, networking events can take place around convenient working hours, such as during breakfast or lunch. Networking events can also be better curated to include working mothers, by being better spaced out and excluding alcohol.

to change jobs to work in socially responsible organisations, compared to the global average.

Table 1 are some recommended steps for creating a more conducive work environment.

TABLE 1 RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

For employers		For employees	
1	Implement flexible working policies	1	Practise time management
2	Train managers to be inclusive	2	Speak up on microaggressions
3	Implement mentorship programmes	3	Apply soft skills to communicate needs

**EMPLOYEES: Practise time management**

Flexible working policies would only be productive for employees who practise effective time management. Besides managing their personal and work responsibilities, employees should also seek ways to optimise their time at the workplace. One way is to break down work tasks into small parts that can be achieved in small pockets of time throughout the day. It could also involve being more sensitive to opportunities to improve time management. For instance, employees tracking time spent on work tasks and processes may in fact be accumulating important data for their organisation in the consideration of adopting automation and other technological innovations for productivity.

**EMPLOYERS: Train managers to be inclusive**

Supportive managers are key to creating an inclusive environment to meet diverse needs. They help carve career paths that align professional goals with personal responsibilities, such as career progression and starting a family respectively. Managers should be skilled or upskilled with regular diversity and inclusion training, to be attuned to evolving best practices. For instance, some best practices include having regular check-ins, especially with those who recently returned from maternity leave, to identify the needs and challenges working mothers face. Timely adjustments and reviews focused on work tasks, rather than presenteeism, would also provide a better working environment for all.

The report found that supportive managers had the greatest impact on the career progression of women. According to the findings, 75% of mid-career women acknowledged that a supportive line manager and being given the opportunity to work on new projects helped with their career progression. It is clear that supportive managers are needed to properly execute flexible working policies.

**EMPLOYEES: Speak up on microaggressions**

While having a supportive manager is useful, employees should also play an active role in creating a more inclusive organisational culture.

For example, employees should speak up against microaggressions. Microaggressions are the subtle, indirect, and sometimes unintentional speech and behaviour that can reinforce discriminatory behaviours or attitudes. For mid-career women, working environments can suddenly turn toxic when they become working mothers. Cultural assumptions or organisational culture might lead to negative or unreasonable expectations about working mothers' career aspirations, abilities and roles. Employees must speak up against microaggressions both formally, to their human resource department, and informally, in meetings and conversations. Doing so would prevent microaggressions from becoming an organisational norm.

**EMPLOYERS: Implement mentorship programmes**

When employees experience changes in their life journeys, they require guidance from experienced mentors. The report found that 56% of women respondents have indicated their interest to be mentored at the mid-career stage.

Respondents perceive mentorship to be an important source of career advice, for instance, to find ways to better plug gaps in their resumes. In addition, mentors may also serve as an avenue for emotional support. This is especially pertinent during the mid-career phase, when women are beset with negative emotions, such as stress, frustration, exhaustion, disappointment or isolation.

**EMPLOYEES: Apply soft skills to communicate needs**

Employees should acquire soft skills training to better communicate their needs to their organisations. Skills such as negotiation, teamwork, and communication are key to explaining unique needs and conveying possible solutions to managers and colleagues. The global report found that one in five female mid-career CAs recognise the value of soft skills as a career enabler. Effective soft skills would also be a good starting point to introduce supportive management skills to create new organisational norms that are more aligned with the values of DEI.



Flexible working policies would only be productive for employees who practise effective time management.



The report found that supportive managers had the greatest impact on the career progression of women

PHOTO GETTY IMAGES

**CONCLUSION**

"Mapping Women's Career Journeys" has highlighted both the successes and persistent challenges for Chartered Accountancy in achieving gender equality and inclusion. In this examination of women's experiences in Chartered Accountancy, it is clear that the intersection of being a woman and a parent is where the most barriers exist. However,

many of these barriers can be overcome through supportive managers, communities, environments, and organisations.

Chartered Accountancy, particularly in Singapore, has achieved much, but there is much more left to do. ISCA

Joshua Sim is Senior Research & Insights Manager, ISCA.



The global report, "Mapping Women's Career Journeys", was launched by CAW on International Women's Day 2023. ISCA is proud to be one of the six professional bodies from across the world that took part in the research. The other professional bodies are the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland, Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand, Chartered Accountants Ireland, South African Institute of Chartered Accountants, and Institute of Chartered Accountants of Zimbabwe.

The key findings of the study are available at: <https://charteredaccountantsworldwide.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Mid-Career-women-short-deck.pdf>



Fann Kor

# Updates From The CEO

## It Takes A Village To Nurture Accountancy Talent



- There are not enough accountants to fulfil the needs of the business world.
- ISCA set up the SCAQ Advisory Panel to enhance the Singapore Chartered Accountant Qualification (SCAQ) – an essential pathway to the profession.
- The SCAQ's challenges are interconnected with issues facing the profession. It requires a holistic plan of action to address these issues.
- All stakeholders must play a part; it takes a village to nurture accountancy talent.

### A BUSINESS WORLD WITHOUT ACCOUNTANTS?

Unimaginable.

Can you envisage a business world without accountants? I may be exaggerating but I can't visualise a world without the interpreters of the language of business. Accountants are the guardians of the public interest. They make the business world go round by driving business strategy, providing unbiased financial advice, maintaining financial transparency, ensuring compliance with laws and regulations, identifying and reporting fraud and contributing to the development of accounting standards. This is evidenced by the various roles that accountants play in business, such as chief finance and sustainability officer, company board director, chief executive officer, chief financial officer, head of risk management, business valuation partner, mergers & acquisitions director, financial controller, data analyst, external auditor, internal auditor, financial forensics professional, and the list goes on.

### WHERE HAVE ALL THE ACCOUNTANTS GONE?

The five local autonomous universities<sup>1</sup> produce around 1,400 accountancy graduates annually. According to the Graduate Employment Survey 2022<sup>2</sup>, approximately 94% of accountancy graduates landed full-time permanent employment within six months of graduation, compared to the national average of 87.5%. The demand for accountants continues to significantly surpass the supply. As a result, this has led to a labour crunch in accountants.

To address the manpower challenges in the accountancy sector, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) and Singapore Accountancy Commission set up the Accountancy Workforce Review Committee (AWRC) in August 2022. One of the areas the AWRC examines is the quality, accessibility and attractiveness of the Singapore Chartered Accountant Qualification (SCAQ). As the SCAQ is the pathway for attaining the Chartered Accountant of Singapore designation and an essential part of



<sup>1</sup> The five local autonomous universities refer to Nanyang Technological University, National University of Singapore, Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore Management University, Singapore University of Social Sciences  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.moe.gov.sg/-/media/files/post-secondary/ges-2021/web-publication-nus-ges-2021.pdf>

PHOTOSHUTTERSTOCK



the sector, we aim to proactively work with the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA) and MOF towards its success.

As the national accountancy body, ISCA took the lead to form the SCAQ Advisory Panel in June 2022 to review, discuss and provide recommendations to enhance the SCAQ to the government. The panel comprises representatives from the Institute, government representatives, professional accountants in business and practice, and academia. The panel

has reviewed the SCAQ Framework, which includes the entry requirements, learning objectives, module exemption policies, practical experience and outreach plans, including regionalisation.

The panel is supported by three subgroups, which comprise the SCAQ Advisory Panel members as well as external members. The Learning Contents Subgroup reviews the syllabus for relevance, competency assessment and possible module exemptions for undergraduates in local accountancy programmes. The Practical Experience and Outreach



(Accountants) make the business world go round by driving business strategy, providing unbiased financial advice, maintaining financial transparency, ensuring compliance with laws and regulations, identifying and reporting fraud and contributing to the development of accounting standards.

Subgroup reviews the Practical Experience and Accredited Training Organisation (ATO) framework, policies and competencies, and advises on employer and community outreach strategy and plans. The Regionalisation Subgroup advises on plans to support SCAQ's next phase of growth, including regionalisation and diversification of the talent pipeline.

Intensive work was done over the last six months. The SCAQ survey garnered more than 600 responses, and 12 focus group sessions were conducted to gather feedback from students, SCAQ candidates and working professionals. The panel has concluded its work and the recommendation report was submitted to MOF in the first quarter of 2023.

The ISCA team is privileged to have worked alongside the SCAQ Advisory Panel. We had many meaningful discussions with the panel members, including frank conversations about what we have done well and where we could have done better.

Let me share a few observations and takeaways from our discussions.

#### ➤ The need to address accountancy's image problems

The accountancy profession has long suffered

from image problems. Even though accountancy is a specialised profession like medicine and law, the value of accountants is not as highly regarded nor apparent.

There is a misperception among young people that accountancy may be less exciting than other emerging fields. In reality, accountancy is a "passport" to enter diverse careers such as in entrepreneurship, fintech, banking, operations, data analytics and sustainability, as it provides access to all industries.

There is insufficient awareness that accountancy knowledge is highly portable and applicable across all sectors. Imagine if professionals such as lawyers, engineers and architects, and C-level personnel such as the CEO, CTO and CSO, are equipped with accountancy knowledge... wouldn't that be a powerful add-on to their skill sets? We need to enhance our engagement efforts with the business community to spread this powerful message.



Accountancy is a "passport" to enter diverse careers

PHOTOSHUTTERSTOCK

The humble starting salaries and intense workloads make it challenging for the accountancy profession to recruit talent. According to the Graduate Employment Survey 2022, Information & Digital Technology graduates earned a gross median salary of around \$5,600. Compared to the business/accountancy graduates' median salary of around \$4,100, the differential is significant.

The young ones are attracted to disciplines with high pay, and also new and interesting roles which have surfaced in the last decade, such as AI specialist, software architect, app developer, data scientist and content creator. We need to build a stronger case for the profession by enhancing the value proposition and image of accountancy professionals, to prevent the increasing loss of talent.

#### ➤ The need to address misplaced fears about technology replacing accountants

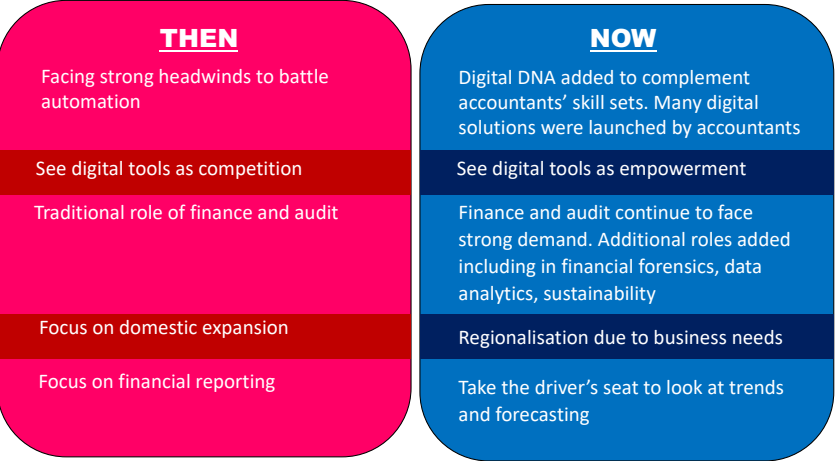
Many young people do not have a good understanding of what accountants do, and do not appreciate the career opportunities and stability the accountancy profession offers. For many, accounting equates to bookkeeping or auditing. Many also have the perception that accounting roles will be taken over by technology and machines.

Two decades ago, there was a call to action for accountants to embrace new technologies and digital transformation, or risk losing their jobs to automation and other emerging technologies. Two decades later, a misguided message of sorts – that accountants are being displaced by machines – seems deeply entrenched in the minds of many, including parents who are now dissuading their children from majoring in accounting. In reality, the accountancy profession has evolved over the years, and the high demand for accountants speaks for itself.

In fact, the development of sophisticated software and technology has enabled accountants' roles to evolve and value-add in

FIGURE 1

The Accounting Profession



different aspects (Figure 1). There is a projected demand of 6,000 to 7,000 new accounting jobs by 2025<sup>3</sup>, in the areas of advisory services, taxation, risk advisory, mergers and acquisitions, financial forensics and business valuation.

> The need to catch them young

To attract more talent, we must engage the young ones, and by young, I mean those in the secondary and even primary schools. ISCA is widening our outreach efforts beyond junior colleges and universities to include the polytechnics, secondary schools and primary schools as we believe that the young ones need to realise that accounting knowledge and skills are prevalent and important in their lives. For kids, accounting helps them manage their allowances; families need the skills to plan and manage their household expenses and wealth; businesses rely on professional accounting and finance advice for their day-to-day operations. Moving forward, you will see ISCA actively doing school outreach.

To reach out to students, ISCA ran a #backtoschool campaign where our members gave talks at different educational institutes, from primary schools to universities, to spread the message that accounting knowledge is versatile and portable across industries, and

that everyone needs to have accounting and finance knowledge.

To grow and diversify the talent pool, we will also need to expand our reach to tertiary students outside the conventional accountancy and business routes.

THE DIFFERENCE A QUALIFIED ACCOUNTANT MAKES

The very first paragraph of the ISCA Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics states, "A distinguishing mark of the accountancy profession is its acceptance of the responsibility to act in the public interest." When it comes to matters of public interest, there can be no compromise in the ethical standards to be upheld and the quality of work to be delivered. They should be performed by competent qualified individuals who have undergone professional training and been ingrained the mantra to do the right things. It should not be an "anybody-can-do" task.

One good example of a matter with a public interest nature is the preparation of financial statements, especially that for a listed company. Imagine the repercussions if the financial statements do not comply with the relevant financial reporting standards and other regulations – financial scandals, fraud,



In fact, the development of sophisticated software and technology has enabled accountants' roles to evolve and value-add in different aspects.



PHOTOSHUTTERSTOCK



Scan QR code for the report



cash flow troubles, going concern issues... the list goes on. Where is the accountability to the shareholders who have invested their hard-earned monies into the companies? Surely the preparers must be accountable to some degree. Or are they?

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Having gone through months of discussions with the SCAQ Advisory Panel, it is clear that we cannot solve the challenges facing the accountancy profession and SCAQ unless we take a holistic view of the problem statements and resolve them.

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes all hands on deck to tackle these urgent issues, and they include the policymakers, ISCA, employers, educators and parents of schoolgoing children.

I invite everybody to read the recommendation report by the SCAQ Advisory Panel. In all, 13 recommendations have been identified to enhance, strengthen and update the SCAQ. What do you think of the recommendations? Do share your views with me by writing to [ceo@isca.org.sg](mailto:ceo@isca.org.sg). ISCA

Fann Kor, CA (Singapore), is Chief Executive Officer, ISCA.



The young ones need to realise that accounting knowledge and skills are prevalent and important in their lives



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sac.gov.sg/jobs-transformation-maps-launched-finance-and-accounting-functions-and-accounting-practices>

● member profile

# Embrace The Uncomfortable

Lee Bing Yi, CA (Singapore), Director, Sustainability and Climate Change, Financial Services Assurance, PwC Singapore



- TAKE AWAYS**
- In the area of sustainability, accounting professionals can play a role in keeping companies accountable for what they do – from driving high-quality sustainability reporting, engendering trust, to advising strategies and practices that positively impact society, communities and the environment.
  - It is important to cultivate a mindset of lifelong learning as the work environment is constantly evolving.
  - If an overseas work opportunity arises, take it. It will broaden mindsets and enhance professional and personal capabilities.

**AS A TEENAGER IN JUNIOR COLLEGE,** Bing Yi took to economics as a subject. “I enjoyed the subject as it was very relatable,” he shares. “It taught me about how society works, and how businesses and individuals drive our economy through choices and behaviour. So, I had this inkling that I probably wanted to study something in university that was equally relatable and could be applied to the real

world – perhaps something that is finance- and business-oriented.”

He began researching and talking to graduates and undergraduates from business schools, and came to a different conclusion. “I learned that accountancy is one of the most versatile degrees that opens doors to many different career choices. Beyond audit, tax and reporting, accountancy graduates are

also sought after in many fields such as business consulting, risk management and investment banking,” he says. He made the decision to study accountancy at Nanyang Technological University, where he eventually graduated as the top student of his cohort in 2010. Thereafter, he joined PwC Singapore and started his career as an auditor in the financial services practice.

After two short years, Bing Yi was given the opportunity to be seconded to PwC Australia in Sydney for more than two years. “Looking back, it was quite a life-changing experience,” he shares. “It was a rare opportunity for a young professional, whom I was back then, to experience an extended work stint overseas, so I took it, but it wasn’t easy.”

Working in Australia presented a host of new challenges for Bing Yi, ranging from living to work-related matters. “I arrived at the end of June 2012, which was the start of the audit peak season in Australia where most companies have a June financial year-end. I was immediately immersed in the busy season,” he recalls.

“I had to settle in quickly. It was winter and it was cold. I remember house-hunting and settling into my apartment within two weeks, fixing up all the IKEA furniture and doing various household chores late into the night,” he relates. “At the same time, I was juggling work in a new environment where I had to deal with new clients, new colleagues and a whole new culture.”

“The key to growth is to put yourself in uncomfortable places. That’s how you push the boundaries and expand what you’re capable of.”



“See the world and try new things; there is so much to learn in a different environment.”

Although the secondment was a golden opportunity, accepting it was not an easy choice to make. Bing Yi explains, “I had spent two years with PwC Singapore and I was comfortable where I was. I already had the rapport and trust of the people I was working with. But in Sydney, it was a whole new team, so I had to build my reputation from scratch. There was also the need to adjust to different working styles and cultural differences, such as having to speak up a lot more at work.”

An overseas experience is invaluable, and he encourages young accountants to grab the opportunity if it knocks. “Go when you are young, when you have fewer commitments,” he advises. “See the world and try new things; there is so much to learn in a different environment. Sometimes, you lose your sense of adventure if you stay put for too long.”

## BREAKING GROUND IN SUSTAINABILITY

Bing Yi was given the opportunity to take on a role in PwC’s Sustainability & Climate Change practice several years ago. “Things are developing rapidly in this space, and there’s so much new information to keep up with all the time. You really need to constantly read up and stay current.”

He admits he finds himself doing a fair amount of “weekend homework”, such as reading the news and catching up on related articles that he has little time for during the week. “When I talk to other sustainability practitioners, everyone is kept very busy these days because sustainability has become such a huge topic in recent years.”

It may be daunting to some, but Bing Yi finds it exciting. “It’s relatively new, and things are evolving. In my work, I often find myself venturing into uncharted territory, starting with a nearly blank piece of paper to develop ideas and solutions.”

Acknowledging that this is a nascent space and that things are not straightforward, Bing Yi adds, “Sometimes you have to trust your judgement and take that first step. The uncertainty is a challenge, but it is also what makes things very invigorating.” The fact that



“An accountancy degree is very versatile, and it trains you to be a good ‘systems thinker’ and be part of the solution.”



“Having a growth mindset as well as the agility to embrace change will ... be critical for success.”

Singapore is not alone in navigating this new space helps too – Bing Yi and his team frequently tap on the experience of their global counterparts across PwC’s network and community of solvers, particularly in Europe where the market is generally more mature.

While sustainability can be a specialised domain, Bing Yi believes it is a relevant topic for various functions and roles in any organisation. Chief Financial Officers, for instance, are increasingly focused on sustainability, given its relevance to external reporting, risk management, funding and strategic planning. “Job roles will evolve and will align with or address sustainability needs in one way or another,” says Bing Yi. “Not everyone needs to be a sustainability expert or know all the science behind climate change. However, given its across-the-board implications on governance, strategy, supply chains, human resource and so on, everyone will have a role to play in contributing to the sustainability agenda.”

Likewise, accountancy professionals can play a role in keeping companies accountable for what they do – from driving high-quality sustainability reporting, engendering trust, to advising strategies and practices that positively impact society, communities and the environment. “As an example, the standard setters for our financial reporting standards today have taken on the development of the new IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Standards, which will provide a comprehensive global baseline for sustainability reporting,” says Bing Yi. “With sustainability information becoming increasingly important for stakeholders, having high-quality, reliable disclosures is key,” he points out. “So as auditors, we also have that role to play in engendering trust and accountability by providing assurance over sustainability disclosures.”

## LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE NEXT GENERATION OF ACCOUNTING

To Bing Yi, as the focus on sustainability continues to grow, it represents a promising space for those trained in accountancy. “Actually, the current talent pool is quite small, so there is a need for capacity and capability building across both private and public sectors,” he highlights. “Tertiary institutions are also increasingly infusing sustainability topics into the accountancy curriculum.”

His advice to young accountants is to cultivate a mindset of lifelong learning. “University is just the starting point, the future of work and required skill sets will only evolve continually,” he says. “Knowledge acquisition doesn’t end when you get your degree. When I was studying, I never imagined I would one day specialise in sustainability – it was a very different world back then! Global megatrends will continue to disrupt and reshape our world – technological advancements, geopolitical developments, climate change, among others. Having a growth mindset as well as the agility to embrace change will therefore be critical for success.”

Stepping into the unknown may be unnerving for some, but Bing Yi endorses it. “The key to growth is to put yourself in uncomfortable places,” he says. “That’s how you push the boundaries and expand what you’re capable of.”

Bing Yi shares that his ISCA membership has enabled him to stay connected to others in the field. For example, as a member of one of ISCA’s sustainability-focused working committees, he had the opportunity to work with various practitioners to develop the ISCA Climate Disclosure Guide, published in April last year.

While he recognises that globally, accountancy seems to be losing its lustre among the current generation of students, he hopes that by sharing his professional journey and the variety of opportunities a degree in accountancy has given him, including his foray into sustainability, he can encourage more to enter the field. “An accountancy degree is very versatile, and it trains you to be a good ‘systems thinker’ and be part of the solution,” he says. “I encourage our young to join this exciting profession and be prepared to embrace new skills as a future-ready accountant.” ISCA

# Engaging Youths And Building An Accountancy Talent Pipeline

Attractive Career Prospects In Accountancy



- ISCA organises different activities throughout the year to engage students, from secondary through to the university levels, and interest them in a career in accountancy.
- Students are becoming more aware of the career opportunities afforded by an accountancy education, and the diverse jobs available across industries.
- ISCA invites Chartered Accountants as well as Student Members of ISCA and Youth Ambassadors to speak at its outreach activities, so that participants can hear about their real-life experiences.

### “WHAT DO ACCOUNTANTS DO?”

This is a common question that students ask at our outreach activities and talks. Over the past few months, the ISCA team has interacted with students across academic levels ranging from secondary school to tertiary education levels. Without fail, they have expressed a curious interest to hear more about the accountancy profession and explore the varied roles that our profession offers.

In November 2022, our ACCTraordinary hybrid event, jointly organised by the five polytechnics and ITE Singapore, attracted over 270 students from the secondary school level and above. After hearing from speakers from various industries share their career experiences and the professional roles they helm, more than 50% of attendees shared that they are likely to explore the accountancy profession.

The students’ feedback was heartening. One of them liked that “accountancy can help us in

other fields not related to accountancy”. Another shared that “knowledge in accounting can be useful in every aspect of work, including managing a business. It can be widely utilised across different sectors and firms”. He also took to heart what a speaker had said, “Find a career which is an intersection between purpose and passion. That way, everyday won’t feel like a chore.”

The Institute is gratified that the outreach sessions were able to inspire students to explore a future in the accountancy profession.

**ENGAGING YOUTHS**

To allow the students to learn what accountancy is about as well as the plentiful career opportunities it offers, ISCA has been actively holding career pathway talks at the secondary schools, junior colleges, polytechnics and universities.



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More than 270 students attended the ACCTraordinary hybrid event in November 2022



Reaching out to secondary school students in March 2023 and October 2022 respectively

## HEAR FROM STUDENT MEMBERS OF ISCA AND YOUTH AMBASSADORS

Apart from career talks, hands-on experiences are vital as well, in helping the students be career-ready. ISCA provides internship opportunities to our student members by tapping on our network of members and partners. We also offer complimentary skills workshops to our student members as constant upskilling and keeping in touch with the latest industry trends are essential.

ISCA invited a few student members to share their thoughts and advice for the younger generation of students who may be unsure of their academic pathway.



**CHEN ZHONGYAN**  
STUDENT MEMBER OF ISCA  
AND YOUTH AMBASSADOR  
SINGAPORE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Since young, Zhongyan has known that he wanted to pursue a career in the finance sector, and he sees accountancy as the perfect ticket to ride into this exciting field. He enjoys solving complex financial problems and working with numbers. With the skills and knowledge he has acquired through his undergraduate accountancy programme, he is well equipped and confident of pursuing a career in investment banking after graduation.

Asked how he decided which role is more suitable for him, he shares, "If you're the type who loves crunching numbers, keeping a close eye on the market trends, all while being a pro at building meaningful relationships, then investment banking just might be your jam!"

He further explains, "Not only does accountancy give you a rock-solid foundation in financial management, analysis and reporting, it equips you with other sought-after skills like an analytical mindset, an eye for detail and a high level of ethical standards, which can help you carve out a career in a vast array of industries."

To his fellow students, he says, "My life motto is pretty simple: 'You paiseh, you lose!' In other words, if you're too shy or hesitant to try new things, you might miss out on some incredible opportunities. So, always keep an open mind and be willing to explore new paths; you never know where they might lead you."

In Kaylene's view, accountancy professionals are always in demand regardless of the economic fluctuations, which translates to job security. Add to that, every business needs an employee with an accountancy background to properly fulfil business needs, which makes it an ultra-relevant profession. Hence, she went into the undergraduate accountancy programme at SMU.

One thing that she loves about the profession is the abundance of career pathways available to accountancy graduates. Contrary to popular belief, an accountancy student is equipped with technical knowledge in different fields, notably, accounting, audit and assurance, taxation, finance, and risk management. In recent years, schools have started providing specialised accounting modules to keep up with the growing demand in the industry; these modules include Accounting Data Analytics, Financial Forensics, Statistical Programming. In other words, there is something for everybody, and finding your niche never gets boring.

Kaylene spent her tertiary student life exploring various industries as an intern, and throughout the process, she learnt a lot about what she liked. Ultimately, her time as a tax intern in a professional services firm gave her the highest job satisfaction as the job scope and career prospects aligned with her personal interest. Therefore, she is clear of her plans – she would like to join a professional services firm as a tax associate to gain hands-on experience, advance up the corporate ladder, and acquire the Singapore Chartered Accountant Qualification within the next five years.

When asked why she picked accountancy, she shares, "Reading accountancy has numerous benefits, but if I had to pick one, it would be the practicality of the acquired knowledge and skills on a personal and professional level. Even if one decides to leave the profession, the skills are easily transferrable, such as the ability to interpret financial data, ensuring compliance to accounting standards, and tax strategies."

For students who are unsure of their next steps, her advice is, "Be resourceful and expose yourself to opportunities. The beauty of being a student is that you have the next three to six years to figure out what you want, where your priorities lie, and what motivates you every day. As a starting point, do preliminary research on your area of interest, attend career networking sessions, and apply for internships or contract jobs. You never know where life will take you, so always keep an open mind with a genuine interest to learn."



**PHANG WEI SHUN**  
STUDENT MEMBER OF ISCA  
AND YOUTH AMBASSADOR  
SINGAPORE UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Wei Shun has always wanted to join the accountancy profession as it sets the foundation for understanding the big picture of how organisations, regardless of size, work. Apart from that, he finds that it is also a profession that provides challenge, is constantly evolving and always in high demand.

He finds the accountancy profession attractive as accountants' skill sets are highly valued globally. Despite dissimilar accounting rules in different jurisdictions, the foundational concepts are almost always the same, which in turn opens many doors to global opportunities; this is especially important in today's increasingly connected digital world.

Since there are many possible career routes in the accountancy industry, Wei Shun shares that choosing a role based on passion and interest will ensure that you find a role that is suitable for you. To achieve this,



**KAYLENE MAK KAILING**  
STUDENT MEMBER OF ISCA  
AND YOUTH AMBASSADOR  
SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY



▲ CA-liculating Your Steps, Accounting for Your Future was an event organised by Youth Ambassadors of SUSS in collaboration with ISCA, September 2022



To provide further insights into the different job roles undertaken by accountants, the Institute invited our members – many of them Chartered Accountants (CAs) – to these school outreach events. They shared their experiences and views on the essential skill sets to stay ahead of the changing economy, and how being a CA enables them to pivot to diverse roles and industries.

Students also had the chance to develop their interest and hone their accountancy knowledge through case competitions. A recent event was the Accounting Challenge (ACE) organised by Singapore Management University (SMU) School of Accountancy Outreach student club in March 2023. ISCA members, Mr Koh Hongzhuang, CA (Singapore), Partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and Ms Kong Lai San, CA (Singapore), Partner, Deloitte were the invited judges for the event.

The case competition included concepts about financial accounting, financial reporting and managerial accounting. The polytechnic students in the competition were outstanding in their accounting knowledge and business acumen, and many aspire to continue pursuing their interest in accountancy at the university level.



▲ At the ACE Challenge held in March 2023 were judges Ms Kong Lai San, CA (Singapore), Partner, Deloitte (second from left) and Mr Koh Hongzhuang, CA (Singapore), Partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (first from right)

he suggests taking on different internships to understand the different job scopes and tasks, so that you can better understand your interests for a permanent role in the future. He foresees himself being an auditor in the future as it will allow him to gain significant exposure to major accounting issues across many big clients and vertical industries. He explains that being an auditor will also "expand my network and allow me to transition smoothly to the advisory sector where I can provide even more value, based on my past experiences".

As an accountancy undergraduate, Wei Shun finds that possessing accounting knowledge not only has value to corporates, it provides personal benefits. Some of the benefits include being able to manage his personal finances; he can also appreciate and critically evaluate global financial issues that are arising around the world.

### GATEWAY TO KNOWLEDGE

ISCA strives to continuously advocate the diverse career pathways within the accountancy and finance sector, and provide opportunities for students to explore and upskill through the complimentary student membership.

If you or your family and friends want to know more about the accountancy profession, or are looking to take on internship roles or be equipped with technical or soft skills, please reach out to us at [marketing@isca.org.sg](mailto:marketing@isca.org.sg). Or, simply join our complimentary student membership at [https://eservices.isca.org.sg/youth\\_app](https://eservices.isca.org.sg/youth_app). ISCA

# Managing Global Aspirations

Considerations And Potential Pitfalls



- A first-mover advantage and a risk mindset are good to have when exploring or entering emerging markets.
- Doing your due diligence is crucial. Ask the right questions – from whether you have the resources to expand to how well you understand the business environment, and the rules and regulations of the country/market you are going into.
- Set clear goals about why you are going into that particular country/market.
- Look for available support, including tapping on government schemes that support companies' internationalisation efforts.

## MORE SINGAPORE FIRMS ARE PLANNING TO EXPAND OVERSEAS

**THIS YEAR**, according to the annual SME Pulse Check survey by DBS. This tracks closely with the objectives of the Singapore Economy 2030 plan, as outlined in Budget 2022. The survey, as reported in *The Straits Times*<sup>1</sup> recently, noted that while most companies took defensive stances last year, they are planning more aggressive moves in 2023 and beyond. More than 60% of the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) surveyed – which includes 116 SMEs across a broad spectrum of industries – will be exploring new markets and expanding overseas. These moves are being supported by the Enhanced Financing Scheme included in Budget 2023, according to the survey.

Expanding one's business overseas is both daunting and tempting. Finding more customers can only be a good thing (one would think) but there is a lot to do before the first dollar even comes in, and that includes making investments to ensure that the expansion goes to plan.

So, how does one plan for a business move overseas, especially if it is the first such move for the company? Ultimately, there is no one-size-fits-all approach, but there are plenty of examples to look at, including that of ShopBack, the homegrown shopping and rewards platform that expanded overseas to Malaysia and the Philippines back in 2014 – the same year it was founded. It now has a presence in 10 markets and serves approximately 38 million users.



There is no one-size-fits-all approach to overseas expansion



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/business/exploring-new-markets-and-expanding-overseas-are-top-priorities-for-most-s-pore-smes-survey>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.todayonline.com/big-read/big-read-short-spore-firms-renew-overseas-push-thinking-out-box-1855116>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pwc.co.uk/private-business-private-clients/how-to-expand-overseas.pdf>

PHOTO SHUTTERSTOCK



## EMBRACE A RISK MINDSET

On the other hand, things can go sideways, as the pandemic demonstrated, and local software firm Inspire-Tech can attest to this. Inspire-Tech was founded in 2000 and is a provider of cloud security services, among other software solutions. As reported in *Today*<sup>2</sup> last year, Inspire-Tech's international business virtually ground to a halt during the pandemic, with revenue falling between 30 to 50% in 2020. The company weathered this storm however, and is now continuing on its expansion path. "It takes

courage and a certain risk mindset to dare to go to emerging markets," Inspire-Tech CEO Sharon Teo told *Today*. "The first-mover advantage and being willing to try new markets are important."

## CONSIDER COSTS VERSUS BENEFITS

Helpfully, the first steps towards going regional or even global are relatively easy to identify and can be generalised to be inclusive. You, as the business owner or party assigned to consider the expansion move, have to consider if it is worth doing.

While many businesses can bring

their products and services to market in other places besides their home countries, not every business can. This can be obvious, as in the case of a local grocery store or private health clinic, but it also includes companies that do not have the resources to scale up their businesses.

## ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Making considerations on whether or not to expand, particularly overseas, raises the importance of asking the right questions, which is noted in a PwC report<sup>3</sup> on preparing for international business expansion. The



Companies should have a clear idea of what their goals are in expanding their footprint.



PHOTO SHUTTERSTOCK



Going Global FAQ

- Do you have the capacity in your business to invest the time and capital required for international expansion?
- How do you plan to fund the expansion and how long can you fund it until it sustains itself?
- How will going international impact your local business?
- Is this a short- or long-term proposition?
- Will you be increasing your competitiveness?
- How will you staff this expansion, and how will you recruit them?
- Who are the local competitors?
- Who are your potential customers and how will you get to know about them?
- How different is local business etiquette from your own?
- What are the implications for intellectual property?
- What is your global tax strategy?
- What is your risk management strategy?
- What due diligence will you need to do?
- Do you have a good understanding of your liabilities in terms of international reporting?

same reports asks a pointed question about whether the business has the resources to expand, which builds on an established trope about why SMEs frequently do not expand abroad.

Also, do consider the rules, regulations and restrictions that have been put in place in the country/ market that you are hoping to expand to. These may have implications on matters such as ownership status, tax issues, employment guidelines and more. There are also the differences in business etiquette to consider. Thus, you may not be able to run your business abroad exactly the same way you do in Singapore, and you will need to consider the potential hassle and difficulties that may ensue due to this.

**SET CLEAR GOALS**

The points raised so far are important because growing a business is not always or even primarily about finding new customers. That same PwC report makes the following observation, “Knowing the specific aim of your new venture will be key to developing the correct structure and strategy for your plans but also gives you a clear set of factors to judge your performance against.”<sup>4</sup> Companies should have a clear idea of what their goals are in expanding their footprint. For example, it might be useful to have a research and development facility overseas or establish a manufacturing centre in a good location in a country with favourable and competitive costs. And, as an Auxadi news post<sup>5</sup> puts it, “perhaps you want to launch a back-office facility to reduce head office costs. You might be looking to offer 24-hour services to your customers and need a base in a different time zone, or maybe you’re looking to

diversify through various routes to market. Maybe you want your own production centre to ease quality control monitoring. Or you might simply want to reduce supply chain issues by being nearer the source”. Auxadi is an international business expansion consultancy, with a local office in Singapore.


**LOOK FOR AVAILABLE SUPPORT**

If the homegrown business can indeed grow outside its home, it would do well to consider all the official support that is available. This includes a custom starter kit for any business considering overseas expansion, available via Enterprise Singapore (ESG)<sup>6</sup>. To get customised support, the company must provide extensive information about the business in question, including all relevant financials. A company that is ready to pursue a big move internationally should be prepared for such disclosures.

In a story published by CNA<sup>7</sup> late last year, ESG noted that there is everything to gain from at least exploring international opportunities, because there are many global companies emerging from Singapore. “Indeed, while we have had global champions in the past like Creative Technologies in the 1990s, we have many more globally recognised companies like Ninja Van, Secretlab and NanoFilm in recent years,” said Jeffrey Siow, Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer of ESG to CNA. It all comes back to the initial questions that businesses have to ask themselves as they weigh the pros and cons of international expansion. With the kind of support offered by the likes of ESG, perhaps one additional question to bear in mind is a simple one, “Why not try?” *ISCA*

Enterprise Singapore noted in a CNA interview that there is everything to gain from at least exploring international opportunities

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pwc.co.uk/private-business-private-clients/how-to-expand-overseas.pdf>  
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.auxadi.com/news/global-expansion-different-types-of-foreign-market-entry-strategies/>  
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.enterprisesg.gov.sg/non-financial-assistance/for-singapore-companies/business-toolkits/internationalisation-toolkit>  
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/big-read-singapore-business-expand-overseas-global-2603266>

TEXT BY   
  
Andrea Wong



Demand is very high at present for skilled financial planning and analysis talent as finance teams rely on forecasting, budgeting, and planning to stay ahead of the competition.

**FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING PROFESSIONALS ARE IN HOT DEMAND ACROSS SINGAPORE.** But it can be challenging to know the market value of your skills and experience. Robert Half’s “2023 Salary Guide for Singapore” provides valuable insights on current salaries and the latest hiring trends across the sector.

**SALARY RANGES FOR KEY ROLES IN 2023**  
The Robert Half 2023 Salary Guide not only details salaries for an extensive cross-section of finance and accounting roles, it drills down into salary differentials based on skills and experience as we understand salaries are not a one-size-fits-all.  
In Figure 1, the 25th percentile shows salaries for a candidate with limited experience, who is still developing relevant skills. The 50th percentile indicates the

# Finance And Accounting 2023

Hiring And Salary Trends



- Three trends fuelling the demand for accounting and finance talents are: expansion in the finance sector, post-COVID recovery and restructuring, and insufficient specialised professionals to meet demand.
- Employers are looking for experience, skills and certifications, as well as soft skills and cultural fit. Certifications such as Chartered Accountant, Certified Practising Accountant and Chartered Financial Analyst are highly valued, as is an MBA for senior management roles.
- With the continued demand for scarce talent, employees can expect to see higher salaries and other non-financial benefits that contribute to work-life balance.

current salary for candidates with average experience and most of the necessary skills.  
The 75th percentile addresses salaries for finance and accounting professionals with above-average experience and most or all of the required skills, who may bring specialised certifications to a role.

**HOW DO ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE SALARIES COMPARE TO OTHER SECTORS?**  
Accounting and finance skills are often highly transferable to other sectors. But how might your salary be impacted if you make a move?  
As an indication, in the fast-paced banking and financial services sector, one of the most in-demand roles is Fund Accounting Manager. Typical salaries for the role range from \$96,000 to \$132,000, depending on experience.



Accounting and finance skills are often highly transferable to other sectors

Across the tech sector, skilled talent is in particularly high demand. Business Analysts are especially sought after, and can command a salary of \$85,000 to \$121,000, in line with experience and breadth of skills.  
Similar to technology, top candidates with in-demand finance and accounting skills still hold bargaining power in today’s market, and may find themselves as the recipients of larger salary increments when negotiating a new job offer.

FIGURE 1 2023 SALARY RANGES FOR A SELECTION OF ROLES WITHIN FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING\*

Job title	25th percentile \$	50th percentile \$	75th percentile \$
Accounting/Finance Manager	95,000	116,000	126,000
AP/AR Accountant	58,000	63,000	69,000
AP/AR Manager	84,000	100,000	120,000
Cost Accountant/Analyst	53,000	63,000	79,000
Cost Accounting Manager	94,000	115,000	132,000
Credit Controller	94,000	110,000	120,000
Finance Controller	158,000	168,000	178,000
Finance Director	210,000	231,000	252,000
Finance Management Accountant	53,000	63,000	69,000
FP&A Analyst	68,000	73,000	78,000
FP&A Senior Analyst	94,000	99,000	104,000
FP&A Manager	125,000	147,000	168,000
(Senior) Internal Auditor	75,000	94,000	104,000
Internal Audit Manager	125,000	157,000	188,000
Risk and Compliance Manager	115,000	137,000	168,000
Senior Accountant	73,000	84,000	94,000
Tax Manager	125,000	137,000	168,000
Treasury Accountant/Analyst	73,000	84,000	94,000
Treasury Manager	125,000	157,000	178,000

\*The starting salaries in this guide represent gross yearly salaries, and do not include bonuses, benefits, and contributions to Central Provident Fund (CPF).  
Source: 2023 Robert Half Salary Guide Singapore



THREE KEY TRENDS IMPACTING FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING

Several trends are expected to drive future demand for accounting and finance professionals in Singapore. These include:

1.Expansion of the finance sector

In September last year, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) launched its Financial Services Industry Transformation Map (ITM) 2025 – essentially a blueprint to further develop Singapore as a leading financial hub in Asia<sup>1</sup>.

MAS projects the financial sector will experience growth averaging 4–5% annually through to 2025, creating an average of 3,000 to 4,000 net jobs each year.

2. Increased headcount and restructuring are stimulating hiring

Singapore's post-COVID industry recovery is stimulating hiring demand. Manufacturing, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), and



MAS projects the financial sector will experience growth averaging 4–5% annually through to 2025, creating an average of 3,000 to 4,000 net jobs each year

fintech companies are all increasing financial headcount to assist with planning and digital transformation initiatives.

Manufacturing companies are struggling to attract talent due to their location and business requirements. To secure the right candidates, these businesses are offering attractive benefits packages which include hybrid working and transport support.

Restructuring in the fintech industry is further adding to the demand for finance talent, to fund growth and expansion.

3. Employers are responding to a candidate-scarce market

In Singapore's skills-scarce market, specialised financial talent continues to be in short supply, creating intense competition among employers.

Companies must be prepared to go beyond salary to secure the finance skills they need, such as extending more flexibility and other benefits to improve work-life balance.



PHOTO SHUTTERSTOCK



Ongoing digitalisation is creating new hybrid tech-finance roles to manage big data analytics and protect against systems failures and data breaches.

FIGURE 2 IN-DEMAND ROLES



FIGURE 3 IN-DEMAND CERTIFICATIONS AND SOFT SKILLS



THE “HOT” ROLES FOR FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING IN 2023

The most in-demand roles are evolving in line with business needs (Figure 2). Demand is very high at present for skilled financial planning and analysis talent as finance teams rely on forecasting, budgeting, and planning to stay ahead of the competition.

Financial Controllers, Management Accountants, and Financial Accountants are keenly sought after to guide business transformation initiatives. In addition, ongoing digitalisation is creating new hybrid tech-finance roles to manage big data analytics and protect against systems failures and data breaches.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mas.gov.sg/news/media-releases/2022/mas-launches-financial-services-industry-transformation-map-2025>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aventis.edu.sg/popular-part-time-mbas-in-singapore-and-how-much-do-they-cost/>

THE EXPERIENCE, SKILLS AND CERTIFICATIONS EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR

As companies in Singapore face real challenges finding skilled finance and accounting candidates, employers are willing to hire on potential and negotiate on some non-essential skill sets like knowledge of specific systems, combined with the support of training and professional development programme (Figure 3).

Soft skills and cultural fit however, remain highly important with attitude, personality, communication skills and adaptability being the most sought-after non-technical skills.

Employers in Singapore tend to look favourably on postgraduate qualifications as candidates with professional designations are seen as well-placed to drive efficiencies and improvements.

When it comes to accounting talent, both the Chartered Accountant (CA) and Certified Practising Accountant (CPA) certifications are highly regarded, and can give professionals a competitive edge.

In the finance sector, the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation is keenly sought after by employers.

An MBA calls for a significant investment of both time and money. However, it can improve career prospects particularly at senior management and executive levels. An MBA can be especially attractive to employers in the finance sector<sup>2</sup>, with some companies signalling an MBA as desirable (if not essential) for C-suite candidates.

THE BOTTOM LINE: THE BENEFITS FLOW CANDIDATES’ WAY

As one of the world's leading financial centres, Singapore continues to offer finance and accounting professionals a rewarding career.

Continued demand for skilled talent is pushing salaries higher for those with sought-after skills. Digitalisation is opening new opportunities in other sectors, and more broadly, candidates have greater choice around non-financial benefits that can enhance work-life balance. ISCA

Andrea Wong is Managing Director, Robert Half Singapore.

# Futureproofing The Tax And Finance Functions

Become A Strategic Partner To Business



PHOTOSHOTTERSTOCK

TEXT BY 



Chia Seng Chye

## TAKEAWAYS

- Global developments and megatrends are impacting the business environment. As such, tax and finance functions must transform, to become a key and strategic partner that adds value to business.
- There are three key hurdles to transformation: talent acquisition, legislative and regulatory compliance, and costs and investments to adopt technology and collect data.
- Organisations have the option of either investing in their own infrastructure, engaging an outsourced service provider or adopting a combination of both.
- The time to act is now.

**THE GLOBAL LANDSCAPE IS UNDERGOING A SEISMIC SHIFT**, with the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerated digitalisation being among the key triggers. In response to this shift, many businesses are re-examining and re-evaluating aspects of their operating models, and one area is the transformation of the tax and finance functions.

In this article, we discuss why and how the tax and finance functions must transform today – to go beyond being a support function and become a strategic partner that adds value to the business.

### What impact does the current global landscape have on the tax and finance functions?

It is increasingly clear that in this current landscape, tax can no longer stay as a mere support function in their organisations. It needs to transform into a key business and strategic partner of the operating units in the organisation, and more actively and directly add value to their organisations and stakeholders.

But this transformation journey is hindered in several ways, in particular, in the areas of talent acquisition, keeping up with legislative and regulatory changes, as well as the costs and investments to adopt technology and collect data.

Governments around the world are increasingly adopting digital tax-filing. We expect the breadth and depth of digital tax-filing to increase manifold over time. The challenge for organisations and their tax and finance functions is to have the right technology tools and data to meet what we believe to be a heightened level of compliance.



Having the right technology tools and data can help meet the heightened level of compliance



Organisations should continuously re-evaluate their operating models to identify gaps in people and technology, and aim to respond promptly to changes and shifts.

It is also quite clear that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) initiatives would precipitate overhauls in many countries' tax regimes. For example, in Singapore, as announced in Budget 2022, the government is exploring a top-up tax called the Minimum Effective Tax Rate (METR) that will affect multinational enterprises (MNEs) operating in Singapore with annual global revenues of at least €750 million. As one country overhauls its tax regime, other countries are not staying still. In the next 12 to 18 months, we should see a complex web of tax-filing and reporting challenges, especially for enterprises with a regional or global footprint.

The headline findings of the "2022 EY Tax and Finance Operations Survey"<sup>1</sup> (TFO survey) mirror the reality on the ground. It shows that businesses are actively transforming or looking to transform. For Asia Pacific,

73% of respondents are revamping their tax and finance operating models. They focus on priorities such as automation, use of shared service centres and co-sourcing. A large portion of the remaining respondents indicated that they are planning to change their operating models in response to the array of challenges they face.

**Is the increased focus on ESG having a significant impact on the tax and finance functions?**

Tax and finance functions now play a bigger role in helping their organisations address their environmental, social and governance (ESG) objectives. Seventy-nine percent of the TFO survey respondents for Asia Pacific say they are currently or considering co-sourcing ESG reporting activities. Even when adopting the

co-sourcing approach, one challenge remains with the organisation – automation of its information and data infrastructure to harvest reliable data to meet the reporting needs. More likely than not, this challenge falls on the tax and finance functions.

Incidentally, the survey shows that respondents are now more focused on making voluntary disclosures about their organisations' tax activities. This trend is driven by the demands for transparency in tax reporting. The disclosures range from the tax governance framework to variety of tax payments made to governments.

The increased focus on ESG places more emphasis on having the right talent and also the right data to meet the demands of delivering such insights in an accurate, complete and timely manner.

**Is the function also challenged by "The Great Resignation" and "The Great Reshuffle"?**

The tax and finance functions are not spared from these global phenomena. People with the right combination of specialised tax technical skills, and data, process and technology skills are in short supply.

In fact, all of the Asia-Pacific survey respondents believe their tax and finance teams will need to upgrade their tax technical skills, as well as data, process and technology skills within the next two years to keep up with the demands of the functions.

It is one thing to invest in upgrading the team's skill sets, it is quite another to retain them. "Talent grab" is common in the market. People with the right skill sets are in such high demand that rapid turnover creates a further challenge – retention of institutional memory. At the moment, no one can tell if this is just a passing phase or if it is a longer-term structural shift.

**How can organisations manage these multifaceted pressures on the tax and finance functions?**

More organisations are now tapping into technology tools to automate and manage the increasingly demanding tasks and activities in the tax and finance functions. Organisations have the option of either investing in their own infrastructure, engaging an outsourced service provider or adopting a combination of both.

One of the benefits of outsourcing or co-sourcing is that it gives organisations instant access to qualified and experienced tax professionals who can meet their demands, yet leaving the retention, replacement and training of this manpower resource to the service provider. It also offers organisations access to high-end technology that leverages data to provide insights that may otherwise be too costly to acquire on their own.

To that end, some tax advisory practices have been helping clients that are keen on an outsourcing or co-sourcing approach to reimagine their tax and finance operating models. We are also doing so, with our Tax and



Outsourcing or co-sourcing gives organisations instant access to the right tax talents

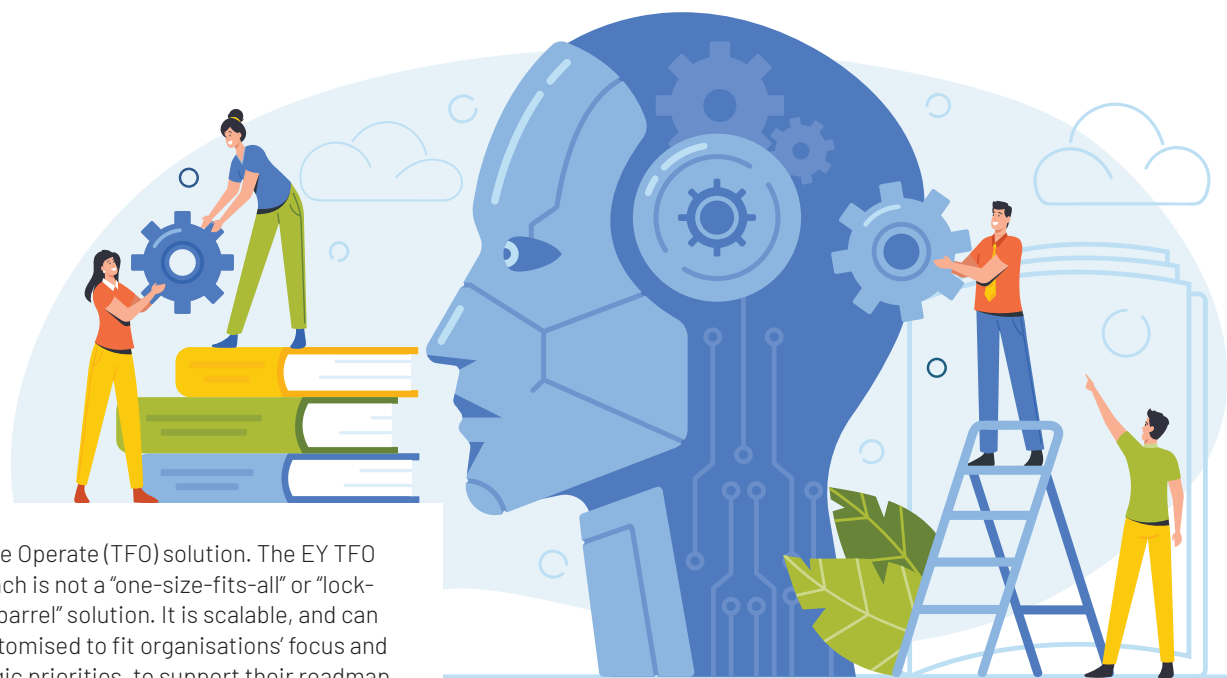
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK



<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ey.com/en\\_sg/tfo-survey](https://www.ey.com/en_sg/tfo-survey)

## VIEWPOINT

Finding the right mix can help improve both effectiveness and efficiency of the tax and finance functions while empowering the inhouse tax function to become a value-added partner to the business.



Finance Operate (TFO) solution. The EY TFO approach is not a “one-size-fits-all” or “lock-stock-barrel” solution. It is scalable, and can be customised to fit organisations’ focus and strategic priorities, to support their roadmap to build “an intelligent tax function”. In a nutshell, an intelligent tax function is one that accesses a single source of data and leverages advanced technology to effectively address risks across the organisation’s tax life cycle.

With the TFO solution, organisations are not burdened by the cost of constantly adapting their own capabilities. The outsourcing or co-sourcing approaches arguably require less management focus and investment. They should also allow the inhouse tax team to focus on more strategic activities.

There are pros and cons to these options as an option that appeals to one organisation may not offer the same appeal to another. Evaluating these options in the context of an organisation’s current and likely future needs must be the first step in this tax and finance function transformation.

### And finally, what would be the advice for businesses looking to undertake such transformation?

With the tremendous volume of changes facing tax and finance functions, the time to act is now.

The transformation urgency is greater for enterprises operating in multiple jurisdictions.

Most of these organisations have started their enterprise transformation. They are in various stages of upgrading their information technology systems and setting up shared service centres. At the same time, businesses are facing cost pressures, and some of them are embarking on headcount reduction initiatives.

Some organisations may decide to address these challenges internally. Others may consider an outsourcing arrangement. Whichever course they take, organisations should continuously re-evaluate their operating models to identify gaps in people and technology, and aim to respond promptly to changes and shifts. They would want to decide which activities are “high value” and “best-in-class” that should remain inhouse. Activities that are “best-in-cost”, that is, more routine, highly repeatable and rules-based, may be performed more efficiently via co-sourcing with a third-party service provider.

Ultimately, it is about finding the right mix that can help improve both effectiveness and efficiency of the tax and finance functions while empowering the inhouse tax function to become a value-added partner to the business. **ISCA**

Chia Seng Chye is EY Asean Tax and Finance Operate Leader.

# Stone Forest

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# Technical Highlights

## AUDITING AND ASSURANCE

### ISCA Issues SSA 600 (Revised)

SSA 600 (Revised) deals with special considerations that apply to a group audit, including when component auditors are involved. The standard includes new and revised requirements for better alignment with recently revised standards (such as the quality management standards) and strengthens the auditor's responsibilities related to planning and performing a group audit, among other revisions. It is effective for audits of financial statements for periods beginning on or after 15 December 2023.

For more information, please visit

<https://isca.org.sg/content-item?id=44799472-f4fc-442d-8ea2-f6f03ffbcac8>

### IAASB Issues New Technology-Focused FAQs

The FAQs address questions about investigating exceptions and the concept of performance materiality when performing audit procedures using automated tools and techniques (ATT). While not unique to ATT, questions on these topics have become more prevalent with the increasing use of ATT, which enable analysing data sets with large volumes of information.

For more information, please visit

<https://www.iaasb.org/news-events/2023-02/new-technology-focused-faq-now-available-iaasb>

## ETHICS

### IESBA Proposes Revisions To The Code Addressing Tax Planning And Related Services

IESBA has released for public comment the Exposure Draft (ED) *Proposed Revisions to the Code Addressing Tax Planning and Related Services*. The deadline for submission of comments is 18 May 2023.

The proposed revisions respond to public interest concerns about tax avoidance and the role played by consultants, including professional tax advisers, in light of revelations in recent years such as the Paradise and Pandora Papers. The proposals strengthen the ethical expectations for professional accountants in business and in public practice when performing tax planning activities for employing organisations or providing tax planning services to clients, respectively.

For more information, please visit

<https://www.ethicsboard.org/news-events/2023-02/global-ethics-board-raises-expectations-ethical-conduct-tax-planning>

## FINANCIAL REPORTING

### ISCA Comments On IASB's ED On International Tax Reform - Pillar Two Model Rules (Amendments To IAS 12)

We are supportive of the temporary exception for the accounting of deferred taxes arising from the implementation of Pillar Two model rules. This will provide entities with timely relief from accounting for deferred taxes in relation to a complex new tax law, and allow stakeholders time to assess the implications. At the same time, this will avoid inconsistent interpretations of IAS 12 *Income Taxes* in practice.

Cognisant that this exception may lead to potential loss of information to users of the financial statements, the ED has proposed additional disclosures which indicate entities' potential exposures to paying top-up taxes and the jurisdictions in which those potential exposures might exist. However, we have concerns over the introduction of such disclosures.

Furthermore, with the intensification of international efforts to create a more equitable and transparent corporate tax base, international tax rules for multinationals are changing at a rapid pace. This will be a good opportunity for IASB to perform a holistic review of IAS 12, specifically on its scope.

For more information, please visit

[https://isca.org.sg/docs/default-source/fr-eds-and-comment-letters/isca's-comment-letter---international-tax-reform-\(for-submission\).pdf](https://isca.org.sg/docs/default-source/fr-eds-and-comment-letters/isca's-comment-letter---international-tax-reform-(for-submission).pdf)

### IASB Gives Insights Into Decisions Made On Merger And Acquisition Disclosures And Goodwill Accounting

IASB has published an "In Brief" article which explains the reasons for IASB's decisions about how companies could disclose better information about mergers and acquisitions, and whether to retain the impairment-only model to account for goodwill or to explore reintroducing amortisation of goodwill.

For more information, please visit

<https://www.ifrs.org/news-and-events/news/2023/01/iasb-gives-insights-into-decisions-made-on-merger-and-acquisition-disclosures-and-goodwill-accounting/>

### January 2023 IASB Podcast Available

In this podcast, IASB Chair Andreas Barckow and IASB Vice-Chair Linda Mezon-Hutter joined Executive Technical Director Nili Shah to share on IASB's discussions at the January IASB meeting. These include discussions on disclosure requirements relating to the Business Combinations – Disclosures, Goodwill and Impairment project; continued redeliberations on the Subsidiaries without Public Accountability: Disclosures project; and progress in the Primary Financial Statements project as a result of stakeholder outreach.

For more information, please visit

<https://www.ifrs.org/news-and-events/news/2023/02/january-2023-iasb-podcast-now-available/>

## SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE CHANGE

### ISSB Ramps Up Activities To Support Global Implementation Ahead Of Issuing Inaugural Standards End-Q2 2023

ISSB has taken its final decisions on all the technical content of its initial standards. Given the importance of capacity building to ensure this is a truly global initiative, ISSB will focus efforts on developing further guidance and training material, as well as working with partners to deliver a core capacity-building programme across different economic settings, so that all market participants can access its benefits.

For more information, please visit

<https://www.ifrs.org/news-and-events/news/2023/02/issb-ramps-up-activities-to-support-global-implementation-ahead-of-issuing-inaugural-standards-end-q2-2023/>





Felix Wong



Joseph Tan



In deciding whether consent should be provided, businesses should assess the validity and scope of each specific request. When in doubt, businesses should consider their rights and liabilities pertaining to withholding consent or providing consent, as the case may be.

# Extension Of IRAS' Power To Disclose Taxpayers' Information

## Understanding The Enhanced Powers



- TAKE AWAYS**
- Income Tax (Amendment) Act 2022 introduced legislative changes to both the Income Tax Act and the Goods and Services Tax Act, to enhance IRAS' powers to obtain and disclose taxpayers' information to public officers and officers of statutory boards for the performance of their official duties.
  - The amendments to the official secrecy provisions in these Acts have been made to support data-driven policymaking, operations, and integrated service delivery.
  - Taxpayers should assess the validity and scope of the request to evaluate its impact on the business.



Accredited Tax Advisor  
(Income Tax and GST)  
Mr S. Sharma, Consultant  
at Adsan Law LLC, shared  
his insights into IRAS'  
enhanced power to obtain  
and disclose taxpayers'  
information to public  
officers and officers of  
statutory boards for their  
official duties

**IN THIS ERA OF BIG DATA**, businesses and organisations place great importance on data privacy and confidentiality to assure customers and users that they can be trusted with personal data. It is no wonder that some eyebrows were raised last year when the government proposed amendments to tax laws to facilitate the disclosure of information by the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS).

On 4 November 2022, legislative changes under the Income Tax (Amendment) Act 2022 to section 6 of the Income Tax Act 1947 (ITA) and section 6 of the Goods and Services Tax Act 1993 (GSTA) came into effect concerning the confidentiality of taxpayers' information. Essentially, the changes enhanced the Comptroller of Income Tax (CIT)'s and the Comptroller of Goods and Services Tax (CGST)'s power to obtain and disclose taxpayers' information to public officers and officers of statutory boards for the performance of their official duties, as well as to third-party contractors engaged by the government or a statutory board ("authorised person").

At a recent webinar organised by the Singapore Chartered Tax Professionals, Accredited Tax Advisor (Income Tax and GST) Mr S. Sharma, Consultant at Adsan Law LLC, shed light on these legislative changes and provided insights to taxpayers and their advisers on the business implications of such changes.

### IRAS' ENHANCED POWERS TO FACILITATE THE DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION FOR OFFICIAL DUTIES

Although the tax legislation had earlier provided for exceptions for disclosure for the carrying out of certain official duties and the scope of



On 4 November 2022, legislative changes under the Income Tax (Amendment) Act 2022 came into effect

such exceptions had been extended over time (for example, amendments had been made in the Income Tax (Amendment) Bill 2018 to empower IRAS to share information with other law enforcement agencies), such exceptions have been seen by the authorities as inadequate to support the performance of official duties.

In his Second Reading Speech on the

Income Tax (Amendment) Bill 2022, Senior Minister of State for Finance Mr Chee Hong Tat explained that further amendments to the official secrecy provision of the ITA and GSTA would be made "to support data-driven policymaking, operations, and integrated service delivery" by facilitating the disclosure of information by IRAS for official duties.

### Sharing of information by IRAS with express consent from taxpayers

Prior to the latest amendments, both CIT and CGST were only allowed to disclose information collected under their Acts to specific public officers, statutory board officers or authorised person with express consent from the taxpayer to assist with official duties in administering or facilitating the administration of any written law or public scheme. In other words, the Comptrollers would not have the authority to share information where the official duties of public officers go beyond administering a written law or public schemes unless specific exemptions apply.

On this, the Minister shared an example where IRAS was unable to share a company's information with Enterprise Singapore for its regular review of the internationalisation schemes, even though the company had given its consent, as the review did not fall within the "administration of any written law or public scheme". Following the amendments to Section 6 of the ITA, IRAS can now disclose the information to Enterprise Singapore for the performance of official duties in similar situations.

### Sharing of Information by IRAS without express consent from taxpayers

Under the new Section 6(12B) of the ITA and Section 6(9C) of the GSTA, IRAS is now allowed to disclose a prescribed list of identifiable company-related information to public sector agencies for the performance of official duties, without obtaining express consent from taxpayers. The prescribed list includes information such as name of company, revenue, net profit (or loss), tax deduction claimed under specified tax incentive schemes, income received in Singapore from outside Singapore, total value of supplies and total value of zero-rated supplies made by the company.

"The list of prescribed information can provide economic agencies with useful insights, such as business trends and effectiveness of existing incentives. These insights to public officers may prove useful in helping to shape Singapore's future policy directions," explained Mr Sharma.



The sharing of information without express consent from taxpayers applies solely to company-related information and will not apply to the data of individuals

Interestingly, the sharing of information without express consent from taxpayers applies solely to company-related information and will not apply to the data of individuals.

### Safeguards on the sharing of information

In his Second Reading Speech in Parliament, the Minister acknowledged the importance of protecting data confidentiality and assured that safeguards would be put in place as the government strives to balance data confidentiality with service efficiency and convenience. An example of such safeguards is that information in the prescribed list will only be made available to public officers and

will be provided in less granular form (for example, values would be presented in ranges instead of exact amounts).

The Minister also reiterated that all information on taxpayers "will continue to be safeguarded under existing tax legislation, the Official Secrets Act and the Public Sector (Governance) Act, as well as data governance policies set out in the government's instruction manuals" and reassured taxpayers that any unauthorised disclosure of data is an offence.

### UNDERSTANDING WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR BUSINESSES

Amid the changing disclosure environment, businesses need to adjust and operate on the basis

Should they encounter unauthorised disclosure of information, taxpayers should fall back on the prior and newly-introduced safeguards available under the relevant legislation.

that prescribed information (including non-anonymised information) could be shared with other government ministries, departments or other public sector agencies as no express consent is required for disclosure by IRAS. Accordingly, businesses should be prepared for potential queries from other government ministries, departments or other public sector agencies arising from the prescribed information. Should they encounter unauthorised disclosure of information, taxpayers should fall back on the prior and newly-introduced safeguards available under the relevant legislation.

Where express consent is required for IRAS to disclose information to public officers and officers of statutory boards for the performance of their official duties, businesses need to be vigilant where their information may end up, as IRAS may or may not reveal the identities of the public officers or officers of statutory boards requesting such information.

In deciding whether consent should be provided, businesses should assess the validity and scope of each specific request. When in doubt, businesses should consider their rights and liabilities pertaining to withholding consent, or providing consent, as the case may be.

### CONCLUSION

As the saying goes, "The best lightning rod for your protection is your own spine." Notwithstanding the safeguards available to protect taxpayers, businesses need to be proactive in understanding the legislative amendments and consider conducting an internal review on the possible business impact from IRAS' enhanced powers to disclose taxpayer data to public officers and officers of statutory boards. Where appropriate, an action plan should be mapped out in advance to deal with the issues that could arise between the business and public sector agencies.

Know your rights. Be prepared. ISCA

Felix Wong is Head of Tax, Singapore Chartered Tax Professionals (SCTP), and Joseph Tan is Tax Manager, SCTP.

# Tax Matters In Budget 2023

Making It Fairer, More Progressive  
And Sustainable



- TAKE AWAYS**
- Budget 2023's numerous tweaks to the tax system send the message that Singapore will use tax as a public policy tool to disincentivise undesired behaviour, safeguard progressivity and keep up with growing government expenditure and changes in the global tax system.
  - The government coffers are supported by a good mix of taxes on income, assets and consumption, making it more resilient.
  - The overall tax burden does not rest disproportionately on any one category of taxpayers.

## WHO DOES SPRING CLEANING AFTER CHINESE NEW YEAR?

And yet on February 14, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Mr Lawrence Wong demonstrated that some house cleaning was in order, as he delivered his Budget statement.

Under Mr Wong's leadership, Budget 2023's numerous tweaks to the tax system sent the message that Singapore will use tax as a public policy tool to disincentivise undesired behaviour, safeguard progressivity and keep up with growing government expenditure and changes in the global tax system.

### Bigger sin taxes

As announced by Mr Wong, smokers are expected to pay more with a 15% increase in excise duties on tobacco products with immediate effect. Such sin taxes – taxes on undesirable commodities with adverse health effects such as alcohol and sugar – always have advocates ardently arguing to price

in the bill of higher future healthcare costs and promote healthier lifestyles.

Coming just five years after the last increase of 10%, the time may indeed be right to send another clear signal to discourage smoking.

Widespread speculation concerning an impending sugar tax in Budget 2023 has been quelled for now. Mr Wong may seem as if he had opted for familiar ground in deciding to raise the tobacco excise duties. But while this change is expected to pull in only \$100 million, the potential for government revenue upside on other sin taxes is huge. With a high bar for tobacco, there is arguably more room for the Singapore government to move aggressively on sugar and alcohol in the future.

### Closing loopholes to ensure taxes remain progressive

In the same vein, the increase in vehicle taxes is hardly surprising in a land-scarce country with a buoyant car market that is keen to keep a lid on traffic congestion and emissions, yet is finding it

PHOTOSHUTTERSTOCK



Taxation pays for the  
provision of public goods  
and services

tough to do so when taxing vehicular use through the electronic pricing system can generate backlash from drivers.

In this, the 2022 record-high prices for a certificate of entitlement required for every vehicle on the road may have suggested to the authorities that there was room to tax ownership. Still, this year's announcement of higher marginal additional registration fee rates for expensive vehicles did raise eyebrows, given that the last hike came just last year in Budget 2022.

Nonetheless, this move, coupled with a \$60,000 cap on the preferential additional registration fee rebates – which seek to encourage

car and taxi owners to deregister dirty, less-efficient vehicles early – has made vehicle taxes more progressive overall by ensuring that owners of high-end luxury vehicles pay more taxes. Singapore and Singaporeans benefit from this move as a further \$200 million will be added to the public coffers, giving the government greater fiscal space.

A similar ethos of creating greater progressivity in the Singapore tax system to keep pace with rising incomes was also reflected in adjustments to the Working Mother Child Relief scheme.

Working mums will receive a fixed tax relief amount for each child regardless of their income level for children born in 2024 and after, closing



Mr Wong has clearly signalled that Singapore cannot rely narrowly on any one major tax type to fund the country's projected future increases in government expenditure.



Compare this with past changes in the BSD regime, which focused on cooling speculation in the property market by levying higher rates on the additional BSD in 2021, limiting the impact to investors buying a second or subsequent property, or hikes to the BSD rates of the top end of residential properties in 2018.

#### More revenue sources

These innovative moves in Budget 2023 seek to broaden Singapore's tax revenue streams further and come at a timely juncture. Corporate income taxes – the largest source of the nation's tax revenues – may face headwinds with the impending changes in global tax rules as a result of the Base Erosion and Profit Sharing initiative.

Mr Wong has clearly signalled that Singapore cannot rely narrowly on any one major tax type to fund the country's projected future increases in government expenditure. Rather, a safer and more sensible strategy is to rely on a good mix of taxes on income, assets and consumption, to ensure Singapore's tax system remains resilient amid global developments. Equally important, however, is the need to ensure that the overall tax burden does not rest disproportionately on any category of taxpayers.

"Taxation pays for the provision of public goods and services ... it is also a key ingredient in the social contract between citizens and the economy," the World Bank and PwC wrote in their "Paying Taxes 2020" publication.

The challenge is how to convince Singapore businesses and Singaporeans that taxes eventually cannot be something someone else pays. ISCA

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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

another tax loophole favouring the well-to-do. For decades, high-salaried working mums benefited more from the scheme as they could save substantial personal taxes since the scheme was initially pegged to earned income.

#### Wealth tax

Property stamp duties also featured in Mr Wong's slew of tax measures to prepare Singapore in its new way forward. Following Budget 2022 where property taxes for non-owner-occupied residential properties and high-end residential properties were hiked, this time around, he levied higher buyer's stamp duty (BSD) rates across both residential and non-residential properties on the pricier end.

Given the progressive nature of the change and its skewed effects towards higher-end properties, Mr Wong essentially levied a new wealth tax to boost the government coffers.

Estimated to take in \$500 million more each year, it establishes higher property taxes on luxury homes as a fixed feature of the tax system, providing the government with an equitable and sustainable source of additional tax revenue.

Budget 2023's slew of tax measures prepares Singapore in its new way forward



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