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Efforts to develop workforce for digital economy must include workers from all sectors: Iswaran

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SINGAPORE - Singapore has to take an inclusive approach to develop a workforce to meet the changing needs of the digital economy, said Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran on Friday (July 19).

Although the information and communications technology (ICT) sector will continue to spearhead digitalisation efforts, supporting non-ICT workers is crucial as the disruption caused by digital technologies cuts across all industries and workers.

"This is not just about those who are in the tech industry or have a tech education. If we are to navigate this transition successfully what we need is a workforce with deep skills able to adopt a lifelong learning culture," said Mr Iswaran.

More than 74,000 training places have been taken up or committed to since the launch of the TechSkills Accelerator (TeSA) in 2016, he said.

TeSA is a SkillsFuture initiative comprising a host of programmes aimed at equipping workers with emerging digital skills that are in demand by companies.

The Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) is also working with the Singapore Computer Society (SCS) to reach out to non-ICT trade associations and chambers (TACs) in the manufacturing, accounting and legal sectors.

Mr Iswaran was speaking at the Tech3 Forum organised by SCS at the JW Marriott Hotel Singapore South Beach, where the 10 winners of the biennial Best Tech Companies to Work For awards were announced.

Winners were divided into three categories: large organisations, mid-sized organisations (50-500 staff globally) and start-ups or small organisations (fewer than 50 staff).

The four overall winners were global software consultancy ThoughtWorks (large organisations), fintech firm M-DAQ and artificial intelligence company ViSenze (mid-sized), and tech start-up Web Imp (small).

Mr Iswaran commended the winners for not only supporting the improvement of workers' skills but also nurturing an inspiring culture and innovative spirit within their organisations.

"That is the key to workplace excellence and competitiveness in the infocomm media industry," he added.

Employees at home-grown fintech firm M-DAQ, which develops cross-border payment solutions, are treated as family, to the point where those who leave for other jobs are considered to be taking "sabbaticals".

"We keep their employee numbers when they quit, telling them they're welcome back at any time. And if they return, we give them our Boomerang Award," said chief executive officer Richard Koh of M-DAQ, which employs 55 people.

"When we reach out to those who have left, they're often very happy to help us because there's this strong loyalty that has lasted beyond the term of employment."

At start-up Web Imp, which creates websites, apps and digital platforms for clients among other digital services, its 18 employees come into work any time they want, often voluntarily staying till 10pm.

There was no deliberate effort to engineer a positive work environment, said Web Imp's business director Wilson Tan.

"It really just comes down to management staying consistent to the values they pitch to employees," he added.

"There's no finger pointing. I always take a nap after lunch and everyone sees me doing it. So I won't turn around and scold someone just because I see them not doing work."

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