

Women who raise the bar for the industry

More female executives are taking on sector-wide roles to help shape the future of their industries. BY FRANCIS KAN

WOMEN need to play a bigger role in influencing the direction of their industries' development given their significant presence in the workforce, say female industry leaders here.

They can do this by taking on senior roles in industry associations to help set standards and support their member companies. More local enterprises are leaning on such bodies to help them cope with the rapid pace of technological change and disruption. By taking on industry-wide responsibilities, women can also inspire their peers to do the same.

"A diversity of views is important in any committee and women bring different perspectives and approaches to issues which make for a more informed and richer dialogue. I know very capable women who can be tapped to play a more positive role in the community and industry," says Aileen Tan, group chief human resources officer at Singtel. Among other human resource (HR) sector-related appointments, Ms Tan co-chairs the national HR Sectoral Tripartite Committee, which is working to establish a national HR certification framework.

With almost every sector of the economy undergoing significant transformation, she believes that HR professionals can help navigate these changes by better managing talent and helping organisations to develop new capabilities and a culture of change.

"I have seen a lot of development in the HR arena over the last few decades, but nothing as significant as the digital disruption that we are all experiencing today. This calls for us to band together as HR professionals to formulate and implement strategies that will strengthen the profession so we can help move the workforce into the digital economy," explains Ms Tan.



"A diversity of views is important in any committee and women bring different perspectives and approaches to issues."

Aileen Tan, group chief human resources officer at Singtel



"I feel encouraged when a young female professional with leadership potential overcomes her fears or misperceptions and takes up a leadership position."

Chng Sok Hui, DBS Chief Financial Officer

Grooming new leaders

Meanwhile, some senior executives are helping to groom a new generation of young female leaders who can take on industry roles. One of them is DBS chief financial officer Chng Sok Hui, who mentors up-and-coming talent.

"I feel encouraged when a young female professional with leadership potential overcomes her fears or misperceptions and takes up a leadership position. I look to mentoring young female leaders whenever I can," she says.

Ms Chng is a council member of the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC), a global coalition of regulators, investors, companies, standard setters, the accounting profession and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that promotes communication about value creation through a process known as integrated reporting. In particular, integrated reporting enables organisations to better communicate how they are executing against strategy and creating value for key stakeholder groups.

As part of the council that provides advice and strategic direction to the IIRC, she is playing an important role in the development of corporate reporting globally. DBS joined the IIRC's pilot programme in 2012 as the first listed company in South East Asia, and is the chair of the coalition's global Banking Industry Group. The bank has also been leading the drafting of two guidance papers on how to implement elements of integrated reporting.

"By taking the lead in integrated reporting, DBS paves the way for other organisations to consider how they might adopt integrated reporting in their communications. DBS has also engaged in multiple conferences and smaller forums where we have shared some of the practical issues that arise when companies look to apply the IIRC Framework for the first time. We learn from these engagements as well," says Ms Chng.



"My experience in managing and motivating volunteers has enabled me to improve and deepen my management skills in my professional job."

Irene Boey, consulting director of Integral Solutions (Asia)



"Unlike the Europeans, Asians are not vocal as we tend to keep a low profile and prefer to let our actions speak for themselves."

Lisa Teo, executive director (corporate development) at Pacific International Lines

Giving SMEs a leg-up

Other executives like Irene Boey are impacting their industries more directly by transferring their years of accumulated expertise and experience to younger companies.

In 2004, Ms Boey felt that she was ready to help other SMEs and organisations with their digital transformation after years of working in the technology sector. She is currently the consulting director of Integral Solutions (Asia), a firm that helps companies leverage artificial intelligence, data mining and business analytics to make better decisions.

"As a data strategist who leads digital transformation for different industries, I am comfortable with making sense of data to help organisations improve. Moreover, on a personal level, I believe that we are all given talents to make this a better place, so I have been contributing my time to various communities and associations since 2004," she says.

Ms Boey has served on the boards of women's business and professional NGOs, and organised the first 'APEC Digital Economy Forum for Women 2008' in Singapore.

She is also the Vice President of Strategies & Development at the Association of Small & Medium Enterprises (ASME) the chairman of SME centre@ASME. The centre is one of the five centres supported by Spring Singapore (now Enterprise Singapore) to assist SMEs in Singapore. Her role is provide leadership to the Board and support the Centre Director and his team of Business Advisors to provide professional services for SMEs and aspiring entrepreneurs to obtain information, advice and assistance.

"We do this through offering free business advisory services, providing business diagnostics for businesses to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, conducting workshops and facilitating group based upgrading for SMEs in the area of digital transformation," she says.

She believes that taking on industry responsibilities will help females expand their experience, deepen their sense of achievement and improve their confidence. "My experience in managing and motivating volunteers has enabled me to improve and deepen my management skills in my professional job."

Charting a new course

For Lisa Teo, taking up a position in the Singapore Shipping Association (SSA) is an important way of promoting the interests of the local shipping sector on the global stage. Ms Teo, executive director (corporate development) at Pacific International Lines (PIL), is SSA's vice-president and honorary secretary.

She also represents the SSA on the Federation of ASEAN Shipowners' Associations, which is a member of Asian Shipowners' Association. Asian shipowners today own or control over 50 per cent of the world's fleet.

"The company views the SSA as an important platform which speaks for the industry, by people of the industry. I have been nominated to the council since 2011 and I continue to be a strong believer in what we do at SSA. Over the years, we have made great strides in terms of promoting the maritime interests of Singapore and representing Singapore in the international shipping," she says.

"The traditional maritime powerhouses from Europe have taken notice and that's why they are setting up offices in Asia. Unlike the Europeans, Asians are not vocal as we tend to keep a low profile and prefer to let our actions speak for themselves," she adds.

The SSA works closely with the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore to cement the country's position as an international maritime centre and support the sea transport Industry Transformation Map by connecting the association's members to innovation, technology and productivity initiatives.

Looking ahead, Ms Teo is optimistic that others like her will step up to take on industry positions. She says: "There is a wave of transformation taking place. We are seeing a greater proportion of women entering the maritime industry and taking on leadership roles. I am hopeful that these numbers will continue to climb."

Other women who take the lead



JANET ANG
 ■ Vice-President, Industry Solutions & Business Development, IBM Asia Pacific
 ■ IBM Industry Academy Member
 ■ Chairperson, Institute of Systems Science, National University of Singapore
 ■ Chairperson, Caritas Singapore

"Women lift up half the sky. We are, however, under-represented in the executive board rooms with only about 29 per cent of the senior management positions being filled by women, and only about 15 per cent on the boards of top 100 SGX-listed companies are women.

"It is hence even more important that women executives lend their voices and add to the diversity of the conversations and debates around policies and industry standards so that the outcomes can be more holistic and relevant to all.

"I believe that women executives who have the opportunity to be an influence, have the responsibility to give back to society by contributing our professional expertise and leadership whether in enhancing education, in 'partnering the poor' or championing diversity and transformation."



SIMRAN TOOR
 ■ Partner, Specialist & Private Client Disputes Practice, WongPartnership
 ■ Elected member of the Council of the Law Society of Singapore since 2010, and served on its Executive Committee from 2016-2017
 ■ Co-chair for the Women In Practice Task Force, set up in 2018 to review and recommend changes on issues affecting female legal practitioners

"Standards influence how we run our businesses, the nature of services we provide, and the people we attract to work for us. Through the wealth of experience unique to us, women bring a different - yet equally valuable - perspective to the table. Our views form an integral part of what a fair and reflective set of standards should be, and it is only when there is a balance of leadership and ideas that businesses can look towards meeting the needs of the future most effectively."



LYNETTE LEONG
 ■ CEO of Capitaland Commercial
 ■ Serves on the boards of Singapore's National Environment Agency, the Singapore International Chamber of Commerce and the advisory board of Singapore Management University's Lee Kong Chian School of Business.

"A growing body of research shows that executive teams with more ethnic and cultural diversity - and more women - generate better financial outcomes and meaningful innovations. With increased globalisation and mobility, we should see more such diversity in our organisations. Women, who are customers and employees themselves, have a particularly crucial role to play by bringing unique perspectives to the table and creating new solutions. This will inform our designs as we build the office of the future.

Capitaland is committed to and practices diversity - our global workforce comprises an almost equal proportion of males and females. In Singapore, Capitaland's proportion of male to female staff is 40:60 and female staff are well represented at the middle and senior management level."

Brought to you by

 In collaboration with the Diversity Action Committee