



FINANCE

Rise of digitisation, fintech leading to new jobs in financial sector

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SINGAPORE — After four years at a creative agency designing mobile and tablet applications in his job as a user-experience (UX) and user-interface (UI) designer, Mr Gordon Goh decided in 2014 that it was time to expand his horizons.

A Google search for similar available positions in other companies led him to DBS Bank's career portal.

"I asked myself, 'Why would a bank want a designer?'," said Mr Goh, 33, who graduated from the University of New South Wales with a degree in industrial design.

Out of curiosity, he applied for the job. And despite his lack of financial knowledge, he snagged it.

"At the interview, they did say having financial knowledge would be good but it wasn't a priority and I could learn it on the job. They just wanted someone who could design prototypes for them," said Mr Goh, adding that his family and friends were initially surprised that he had joined a bank. "They asked, 'What are you doing there? Are you becoming a banker?'" he recalled.

Mr Goh has been working under the DBS Innovation Group for almost three years. He was part of the team responsible for the giant interactive map on a 76-inch LED television — showing the bank's credit card and Nets transactions across the island — that greets visitors at DBS' 16,000 sq ft innovation space at the Sander Tower Building at Fusionopolis. Mr Goh and his team had come up with the idea, making use of data compiled by the bank's data analytics team to help other departments understand consumer trends.

Amid the digitisation wave and rise of fintech (financial technology), many new positions — including UX/UI designers, app developers and data scientists — that did not exist previously, are now in need of filling across the financial industry, which consists of sectors such as banking and insurance.

Among his varied duties as a UX/UI designer at DBS, Mr Goh designs

prototypes of mobile apps for the bank's products and services. He has also worked on a project, among others, to redesign the user interface of the bank's ATM machines.

"Seeing your product out there in the market is a dream. But the coolest part about the job is improving people's lives," he said. "Previously, you had to queue up to use the machine to pay your credit card bills. Now, you can pay your bills while you're in the MRT on the way to work."

Another UX/UI designer, Mr Leonard Goh, 28, joined fintech start-up GohBear in June last year. The company runs a comparison site for insurance, credit cards and loans.

"Improving the user experience so that consumers can access financial services or products easily revolves around design. The world is in need of UX/UI designers right now," he said, reiterating that financial companies are starting to understand the importance of design as part of their business operations.

GohBear's head of information technology and development Ivonne Bo-Joh, 43, said she is looking to hire two more designers to add to the existing team of three in the coming year. "All companies are more driven towards user- or customer-centric design to ensure whatever you have created is what your customers are expecting," she said.

DBS, for instance, is also looking for people with skills in cloud computing and Hadoop — an open-source software framework used for big data processing — to support its digital initiatives. The bank's executive director for human resources James Loo said, "Our future success depends on our ability to harness the digital revolution and completely re-imagine the banking experience."

JOB CUTS — ONE SIDE OF THE STORY

Over the past year or so, news of several banks shedding jobs hit the headlines. This, however, is just one side of the story: Like many industries, the financial industry has been affected by technology disruption. This translates

to certain jobs being made redundant, while new ones are being created.

West Coast GRC Member of Parliament Patrick Tay, who is also the director of National Trades Union Congress' (NTUC) Future Jobs, Skills and Training department, said the job cuts were due to the recalibration and consolidation of business operations amid the disruption. Based on his interactions with financial professionals, he said that some positions such as analysts are being made redundant.

"You have workers who are redeployed to other roles within the bank; those who find similar or different roles in other firms; and then you have workers who would be forced to leave the industry because they really can't find suitable roles," said Mr Tay, who co-chairs the Financial Sector Tripartite Committee, which has set up a centre to coach displaced workers and match them with jobs that are in demand.

Banks such as DBS and Citibank have internal programmes to help staff develop new skills. For instance, DBS' internal mobility programme enables staff to make lateral career moves to gather different skills and experiences. It noted that, last year, about 30 per cent of its positions were filled by internal transfers.

SIM University economist Walter Theseira noted that it may not be straightforward for banks to train current employees for emerging roles. Banks have to assess whether it is cost-effective to cross-train workers, he said.

As a result, banks are hiring but also firing. One area facing a hiring shortage is compliance, for example. DBS' Mr Loo reiterated that hiring for specialised and niche positions continues to be a challenge because of the comparatively smaller talent pool. "It usually takes a slightly longer time to hire for these positions," he added.

From 2011 to 2015, the financial sector saw robust employment growth that averaged 3.3 per cent a year, creating around 6,200 jobs annually, said the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS). It expects more moderate employment growth in the coming years.

As the industry undergoes structural changes, external factors such as a growing middle class and deepening economic links between regional countries will drive demand for financial services in Singapore, which is a financial hub. As such, several traditional job roles across the industry's various sectors will remain in demand.

On some days, Ms Cheryl Tan, 36, can be found visiting aircraft hangars instead of being at her office. As a claims manager at Swiss Re Corporate Solutions — the commercial

insurance unit under the Swiss Re Group — she is required to be on site to assess the damage to aircraft and find out from engineers how the various components work.

"This is very different from just reading a report ... which helps in gaining a full understanding of the incident and the claim," said Ms Tan, a law graduate who has been working in the firm for almost two years.

Ms Tan, who started out as a lawyer at a boutique law firm specialising in maritime law, first entered the insurance sector some eight years ago as a senior claims adjuster in a different company.

She noted the common misconception about her current job being largely a "backroom operational function" and that all claims handlers are "chained to their desks", processing claims day in and day out. "This could not be further from the truth," she said.

Her colleague Mr Imran Shahid Hamid, 28, started out with Swiss Re Group's reinsurance business in its graduate programme. He noted that there is a lack of understanding about the reinsurance industry. Recalling his friends' reaction when he first joined the company, he said, "In a very Singaporean way, they asked, 'Do what one?'"

As a client manager, Mr Imran's job involves being an underwriter — a person who prices the reinsurance contracts for insurance firms. Noting the low profile of the reinsurance sector, the economics graduate from the Singapore Management University noted that future job seekers may not be aware that a wide range of positions — including in areas such as behavioural economics, natural sciences and data analytics — is available.

"The finance sector is beyond just about banks. There are also insurance and reinsurance," he said. "You



Mr Gordon Goh was working at a creative agency designing mobile and tablet applications, but began working at DBS Innovation Group three years ago. He now designs prototypes of mobile apps for the bank's products and services. PHOTO: RAJINDRAN

can come from a wide variety of backgrounds and still find something that you can do within the reinsurance business."

Even within the banking sector, job roles and the requisite skill sets differ. For example, as an operational risk officer with the Bank of China, Mr Nie Tongxin's duties include business continuity management, which requires him to identify the critical business functions in each of the bank's departments, so that, should a disaster strike, these services can still be conducted.

Mr Nie, 27, joined the industry in May last year after spending more than two years working as an economics and public policy researcher at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. The economics and engineering graduate underwent the Chartered Financial Analyst programme in order to make the switch.

DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT

Despite its reputation as a well-paying industry, the financial sector is also known for its hire-and-fire culture and relative lack of job security.

Mr Fanzhan Jii Ong, a senior vice-president at Citibank Singapore, recalled that when the global financial

JOB, TRAINING OPTIONS AVAILABLE

As one of the industries most affected by technological disruption, jobs with non-traditional roles are being created in areas such as data analytics and cyber security. Positions available include developer, user experience and user interface designer, operational risk officer, compliance officer and underwriter. Salary ranges from \$55,000 to over \$172,000.

SOME JOB OPTIONS

Risk Control Operations Specialist

Salary: \$65,500 to \$175,500
Job Description: Lead the implementation of credit decisions and assist credit officers with risk management. Review client portfolios and process, and proactively identify areas for improvements and contribute to driving efficiency and productivity gains.

Developer

Salary: \$58,000 to \$110,000
Job Description: Remove, replace and develop existing systems with newly developed in-house application without interrupting the business. Maintain existing software systems by identifying and correcting software defects.

Financial Crime Compliance Officer

Salary: \$66,000 to \$112,000
Job Description: Provide anti-money-laundering (AML) compliance advisory support on rules and regulations.

clients, transactions to the private banking business and supporting functions, as well as give guidance on AML policies and procedures.

MEDIAN MONTHLY WAGES OF COMMON POSITIONS

PMET

- Financial Insurance services manager — \$10,678
- Operations officer — \$64,170
- Compliance officer/Risk analyst (financial) — \$59,539

Non-PMET

- Receptionist, customer service and information clerk — \$55,222
- Secretary — \$55,335
- Finance and insurance clerk — \$52,685

PROGRAMMES FOR MID-CAREER PROFESSIONALS

Under a one-year part-time Professional Conversion Programme for compliance professionals, candidates will be matched by Workforce Singapore to companies and subsequently go through a training programme conducted by the International Compliance Training Academy. Candidates will undergo courses on AML, negotiation skills, counter terrorism financing, and risk and governance. Website: www.int-comp.com/icta-home/professional-conversion-programme/ Email: PCP_FINews@gov.sg

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crisis hit in 2008, there was a “sweeping anxiety” across the industry. “Markets were quiet, phones were no longer ringing, everyone was waiting to see what happened,” said the 35-year-old.

To thrive in such a dynamic environment, financial professionals have to be on their toes and keep learning. Recounting a piece of advice given to him by his mentor when he first

joined the industry in 2005, Mr Ong said, “You cannot have this ‘I have arrived’ mentality’ because you haven’t and you can never arrive. Because the environment is always shifting, things are always evolving.”

Starting out as a management associate, Mr Ong had spent time working in the foreign exchange and global markets, among others. Cognisant of the impact of technology disruption,

he switched last year from his previous role in wealth management to his current position as head of digital banking.

Noting how digital initiatives used to be under the remit of one department in his bank, Mr Ong said, “But as time went by, everyone has to start speaking the digital language, whether you’re a sales person or a relationship manager.”