In October last year, I spent a lovely evening at the NTU Alumni Homecoming. It is always pleasant to return to my alma mater and see how it has changed. Young and old, future and present—the occasion made me consider the human resource (HR) challenges before us as a nation, such as our ageing workforce.

As Lynda Gratton noted in her book *The 100-Year Life: Living and Working in an Age of Longevity*, it is likely that our children and grandchildren will live to celebrate their 100th birthdays. With lifespans increasing from the current average of 80 years, how can we make our additional 20 years a gift and not a burden? The answer lies in ensuring that we’re financially, physically and spiritually healthy. This requires a paradigm shift in how we view our working lives.

**THE MULTIPLE-STAGE PROFESSIONAL LIFE**

Our traditional notion of a three-stage professional life was one where we front-loaded our knowledge and skills in the first 20 years of our life, worked for another 40 years and spent our last 20 years in retirement. But this familiar school/work/retirement model is increasingly under strain. For one, we can no longer front-load with a degree and expect this single qualification to see us through our professional life.

Keeping in mind that we do want to make the additional lifespan of 20 years a gift, we’ll most likely see ourselves work 50 years to support 50 years of not working. But can we work the way we do for 50 years straight? Maybe, but most likely not. In all likelihood, we’ll have to look at a multiple-stage professional life, one where we actively learn, retrain and reinvent ourselves to stay current with technological progress and meet the need for changing skill-sets.

**A NATIONAL IMPERATIVE**

How do we better prepare our workforce to be ready for an uncertain future? Launched in January 2016, the SkillsFuture movement fosters a culture that supports lifelong learning and encourages us to make well-informed choices in our education, training and career.

Since SkillsFuture was launched, almost S$22.5 million in training funds have been used. But while SkillsFuture offers an avenue for us to up-skill ourselves, we must also actively seek new ways to learn and be future-ready.

**ORGANISATIONAL SEA-CHANGE**

At organisations, we are observing a profound change, with four generations of workers collaborating together at many workplaces. To tap on the strengths of this increasingly diverse workforce, public agencies will have to ask these questions when developing their strategic workforce plans:

• How can we better understand the profile of those who are part of our workforce?
• How can workers who have taken time off from their careers keep current and learn skills in demand by the job market? How can we facilitate their return, and help them through the transition?
• How can we build new partnerships with our stakeholders?
• How can we consider the welfare and development of temporary workers, contractors, sub-contractors, part-timers, consultants and advisers?

**INDIVIDUAL CHOICE, PERSONAL ACTION**

Seeing the enthusiasm of the students at the NTU alumni event, I thought about the choices ahead of them. Many of them know that lifelong learning is essential in an uncertain world, but I’d also urge them to learn to pace themselves. In practice, this can mean embarking on a more individualised—and exciting—career path, one with lateral moves and many peaks.

To sum it up, we should embrace a multiple-stage professional life, bite-sized learning, and a more holistic view of the ‘assets’ needed for a good quality of life. With determination and hard work, we’ll be ready for the future!