



# ETHOS

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## Sharpening the Public Service

*By Chng Kai Fong*



### ALSO FEATURING:

**ASHLEY AW**

*Pro Tips: Mindful Prioritisation*

**AMOS LAW**

*Addressing Tensions in Prioritising Work*

**EILEEN WONG AND THIJS WILLEMS**

*Rethinking Hybrid Work Design: Insights from Ethnography*

# Editorial

by **Alvin Pang**  
Editor-in-Chief, ETHOS

This release of ETHOS Digital Edition extends the theme, raised in our April 2023 issue, of how the Public Service can respond to a challenging global environment and a climate of greater resource constraint. A key tenet raised by several contributors in April is the need to reprioritise the work of the Public Service to better focus on what is most purposeful, both to public officers and the nation we serve. In so doing, we make better use of scarce resources—including the precious resource of our people's time, energies and commitment—by directing them to where they can do the most good.

For some, the [passing of an age of plenty](#) should also herald the end of an age of bloat. Even in the process of renewing a sense of prudence and discipline in public administration, there are opportunities aplenty to unclutter and reframe government processes, policies and institutions—shedding legacy systems and rules that are no longer fit for purpose—in order to be more ready for the 21st century's significantly different needs and potential. New technologies offer tremendous, yet still under-tapped opportunities; we need imagination, wisdom and courage to make them work for us and for Singapore. An important aspect of this reframing effort is to free up space for our officers to thinking, in order to make more considered decisions, rather than be caught up in reactive firefighting.

Devoting time and effort to what is important rather than simply what is urgent is by no means

a new approach. But it is a principle to hold to all the more in the flurry of activity to streamline workloads and priorities in the Public Service. ILOD researcher Ashley Aw [suggests practical tips on applying this principle](#) to our daily work.

Nevertheless, having to prioritise also means having to shed long-valued goals and ways of working. Reflecting from hard-won experience, ILOD senior researcher Amos Law addresses the tensions and uncertainties inherent in any such exercise and [offers tips on reframing perspectives](#) towards growth rather than loss.

As the public sector undergoes a profound refocusing and reconfiguring, the New Normal that arises will likely also mean fundamental changes to ways in which public officers work and interact, as the COVID-19 pandemic has already shown. Seeking insights on how hybrid work practices could change work culture, ILOD's Eileen Wong connected with organisational ethnographer Thijs Willems. An outcome of their fascinating exchange is the [reminder to consider how individuals actually do their best work](#), rather than imposing a top-down one-size-fits-all model that fails to consider individual styles and needs. In reprioritising goals in the Public Service to be more ready for the future, organisations could also surface and account for the varying priorities and preferences of their people—in order that they can bring their best efforts and best selves to the table.

I wish you an inspiring read.