



Mr Tony Lai
Managing Director, The Idea Factory

In a career spanning 22 years, Tony Lai has accumulated a range of experiences in leading and managing organizations – large companies, public institutions and even start-ups at senior levels. While his industry expertise has been focused largely around the services domain (hospitality, tourism, retail, media, education services, property management, F&B/Entertainment and management consulting), his functional capabilities have been broad covering areas such as **strategy, innovation, design**, leadership, business development, brand marketing & communications, human resources and corporate finance. These have been critical as Tony have been holding appointments at the CEO, Asst CEO, Managing Director, Chief Strategy Officer and COO levels since 2001 that includes direct P&L responsibilities.

Since 1st June 2016, Tony has been a **Director** (and a member of the ExCO) at the **Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) Pte Ltd** – the largest private education provider across Southeast Asia. His area of work involves strategy development (Project N); corporate branding and marketing; regional marketing and recruitment, continuous education and training (via the Employability, Productivity and Industry Transformation Centre); and a project involving investments in Thailand.

From April 2014 to June 2016, Tony was the **Chief Strategist** with the **Office of the Provost** at the **Singapore Management University**. In this role, Tony was responsible for driving University-wide strategies such as the development of the new **SMU Academy** and designing a strategy plan for embedding technology in instructional teaching. Concurrently, Tony was also with **the Institute for Societal Leadership** and in that role he provided the strategy and research directions for its core programmes such as the Country Insight Labs (for all 11 cities), Catalyst Asia (publishing model) and various Capability Programmes across Southeast Asia. This included a landmark Cross Industry Societal Collaboration Lab in Manila partnering PWC Singapore, PWC Philippines and the Ateneo University to help two social organisations in agriculture related sectors to develop new business plans.

On the academic front at SMU, Tony was invited to teach/lecture a module on innovation structure and systems for the **2016 and 2017 Doctoral Programme in Innovation (DInn) and Business Administration (DBA)** at the SMU School of Business. He also co-taught a 2016 undergraduate capstone module on **Critical Issues in Higher Education** at the SMU School of Social Sciences. He also wrote several articles on innovation and strategy for the SMU Catalyst Asia Journal and co-produced the Southeast Asia Country Insights Report 2015 which provided an analysis of the state of social enterprise development across the eleven capital cities in Southeast Asia.

Between Oct 2013 and April 2014, Tony Lai was the **Chief Operating Officer (COO) of ARA Property Management Pte Ltd** (reporting directly to the Deputy Chairman), the wholly owned property management services company of the SGX listed SGD\$26 billion property asset management company ARA Group. In this role as COO, he was directly responsible for the entire retail and office leasing business, mall marketing & promotions and tenant design functions of the company for properties that APM manages which includes the integrated Suntec City Mall, boutique

Park Mall and acquired office and residential properties of Straits Trading Company in Singapore and Malaysia (Tony led the integration process). During the period of Tony's leadership, Suntec City was undergoing a major SGD\$400million asset enhancement initiative and this required his direct involvement in project management, facilities upgrading and aggressive retail leasing efforts with targeted marketing strategies to bring in suitable and relevant tenants to the new mall.

Before APM directly recruited Tony from a referral, he was from June to September 2013 the **Managing Director of the 'Experiences and Outreach' business at Mediacorp Pte Ltd**. The business intent was to accelerate the growth of Mediacorp's non-broadcasting related companies in the areas of concert/musical promotions and MICE (Vizpro Pte Ltd), outdoor advertising (OOH Media Pte Ltd) and building a brand new retail outreach business. Tony had direct P&L leadership of the three companies and the plan was to accelerate these revenue channels that would supplement the core advertising-based model.

From March 2009 to June 2012, Tony was the **Assistant Chief Executive Officer (ACE) at the Singapore Tourism Board**. During those years he was directly responsible for 3 major business groups in the organization where 2/3 of the 500-strong organization reported to him. Tony led the strategy and planning group where he developed a new strategy direction for Singapore's tourism industry and managed the SGD\$2billion tourism development fund. He also led the global marketing group responsible for Singapore's marketing strategy across fifteen key markets with an annual budget of approximately SGD\$70million – which required segmentation at regional and country levels. Finally he led the industry development group where he is responsible for business development activities such as driving key investments to Singapore in the hospitality, retail, dining, attractions, entertainment, arts and sports industries. During those 3.5 years some of Tony's actual deliverables included the successful tender process for the appointment of the Marina Bay Cruise Centre operator, the creation and launch of the inaugural Asia 50 Best Restaurant List in 2013 and the execution of a new consumer-driven marketing strategy across all markets.

Before the Singapore Tourism Board, Tony was the **CEO/Managing Partner of The Idea Factory** for 8.5 years, a strategy and design consulting business that was originally founded in San Francisco in 1996. Tony set up the Asia Pacific HQ in Singapore in June 2001, and later executed a global management buy-out in 2002. Some of the organizations which Tony had personally directed strategy projects with were Levi' Strauss & Co. Asia Pacific, Johnson and Johnson Medical Asia, Kellogg Asia Pacific, Pernod Ricard Taiwan, Philips Asia Pacific, Lego Education, Abacus International, Pan Asia Paper, Accenture Singapore, Malayan Assurance Alliance, Microsoft Asia Pacific, SPH Magazines Pte Ltd, SGX, Ascendas and the Ministry of Education Singapore.

During those 8.5 years, Tony built the company to be one of the leaders in strategy with a strong innovation focus across the region for management services. The entire revenue portfolio was diversified with only 60% from Singapore and the rest from Kuala Lumpur, Taipei, Bangkok and Shanghai. At its height from 2004-2007, the company regularly achieved above SGD\$3million in a single year turnover with an EBITA range of 17-22%.

During that period, Tony was recognized as a global design leader and was invited to be a founding member of the **Danish Design Advisory Committee (INDEX) based in Copenhagen** and also a regular invited speaker at the annual Waldzell Council held in Vienna Austria. Tony was also invited to contribute a chapter to the Austrian 2008 award-winning design book "10 Ideas that would change the world" that recognized 10 global design leaders.

Tony was a member of the **Singapore International Foundation's (SIF) Board of Governors** from 2005 to 2012 (and member of its Executive Committee) and a member of the Management Board of **SJI (International)** from 2009 to 2012. He continues to be a member of **Nanyang Polytechnic's School of Business' Advisory Committee**, an appointment he has held since 2012.

In his earlier years from 1996 to 2001, Tony headed the Corporate Strategy & Planning function at the Singapore Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and was a key member of the corporate planning team at the Singapore Tourism Board (STB). He worked directly for Dr Tan Chin Nam when he was the CEO of the Singapore Tourism Board and later the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Manpower.

At the **Ministry of Manpower**, he led the rebranding and marketing of the Ministry when it changed its business from a 'Labour' perspective to a 'talent' perspective captured in the new Ministry name, logo and business outlook. While with the Singapore Tourism Board, he was part of the team that led the rebranding of Chinatown and Orchard Road under a strategy of thematic developments.

In terms of **national strategies**, he was involved with Singapore's Economic Review Committee (ERC 2002) as a member of the Task Force on Entertainment and Night Spots; headed the Manpower and Image Committee Secretariat in the Review of the Singapore Tourism 21 Plan in 2000/01; and headed the Steering secretariat for the Manpower 21 National Plan in 1999. Later in his life, he would return to design the most updated tourism strategy plan for Singapore named Tourism Compass 2015 with the Singapore Tourism Board as its Asst CEO. More recently, Tony facilitated a series of workshops that resulted in him co-writing with Dr Lim Lai Cheng SMU's Proposed Recommendations Report to the Committee for Singapore's Future Economy (CFE) in March 2016.

Tony graduated from the National University of Singapore (NUS) in 1996 with a Second Class Upper Honors Degree in Social Sciences (BSocSc) – specializing in Political Science and Public Policy. He also has a Bachelor of Arts with Merit (BA) from NUS FASS in 1995 in Political Science, History and Philosophy.

Between 2002 and 2008, Tony studied design theory, industrial design and design thinking as an Apprentice of Arnold Wasserman who was then the Chairman of The Idea Factory. Dr Arnold Wasserman was the former Chief Design Office of Xerox Corporation and IDEO as well as Dean of the Pratt School for Design. Recently he was the 2013-14 Nierenberg Chair at the Carnegie Mellon School of Design.

Tony studied at St Josephs' Institution from 1982 to 1986 where his core values were formed that helps him to stay true up to today.