

# Brown Bag Lunchtime Talk

Tuesday, 11 May 2021, 12pm - 1pm via Zoom



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## *Mastery in the Digital Age: Accelerating Effective Skills Development Amidst Technological Disruption*

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Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities



### Synopsis

This presentation reports on a study set out to explore the meaning of mastery for technical professionals when jobs and workplaces are increasingly being digitalized. The chief premise of our research is that the very core of what it means to be good at one's job is challenged and may fundamentally change when parts of that job are taken over, e.g. by robots taking over manual tasks or Artificial Intelligence taking over cognitive tasks. Moreover, in the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR), change has been happening at an increasingly faster pace, with tasks, jobs, occupations and even entire professions being subjected to continual transformation. However, mastery has long been understood as the step-by-step, incremental development of skills over a long period of time in individuals' careers as they gradually progress from novice to expert. Therefore, this poses a paradox and suggests the need to re-evaluate the meaning of mastery given the implications it has on Singapore's policies involving workforce development. In the presentation we will outline what expertise in a digitalizing workplace looks like and how it can be created, maintained and developed amidst ongoing disruption. We do so by drawing on fieldwork conducted with technical professionals in Singapore's manufacturing sector. This work was done in a project led by Poon King Wang and with the collaboration of Norazrina Binte Muhammad Mustafa, Basil Lee, Foo Heng Tong, Cheryl Tang, Ang Jia Ying, and William Liu.

### About the Speaker

Thijs Willems is an organizational ethnographer and generally interested in the daily work of people in complex and technological organizations, as well as how they experience their work in the broader organizational context. In his work, he draws on rich, ethnographic empirical data analyzed via practice and process theories. He is a Research Fellow at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities at the Singapore University of Technology and Design. In his current project he tries to untangle the question of what it means to be an expert and to develop mastery in your work when workplaces are increasingly being digitalized.