Dr. Tan had 33 years of distinguished service in the Singapore Civil Service holding various key appointments before completing his term as a Public Sector Leader at the end of 2007. He is now a senior corporate adviser serving on various boards including as Chairman of the Media Development Authority of Singapore and Temasek Management Services, Senior Adviser of Salim Group and Hexagon Development Advisers and Director, Stamford Land Corporation, Yeo Hiap Seng, Raffles Education Corporation and PSA International.

Dr. Tan began his career in the Civil Service with the Ministry of Defence where he held key positions in systems and information technology. He was actively involved in the National Computerisation Programme which led to the formation of the National Computer Board ("NCB"). He was NCB's first Chief Executive from 1982 and 1986 and was appointed its Chairman between 1987 and 1994. He assumed the position of Managing Director of the Economic Development Board between 1986 and 1994. Dr. Tan was Chief Executive of the Singapore Tourism Board ("STB") from 1994 to 1997. He was Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Manpower from 1998 to 2001, Chairman of the National Library Board from 1995 to 2002 and Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts from 2002 to 2007 and Chairman Media Development Authority since 2003. He is Chairman of the Resource and Advisory Panel for one-north development. He is also a member of the Board of Trustees of Bankinter's Foundation for Innovation.

Previous appointments held include Chairman of Singapore Mint, National Computer Systems, EDB Ventures and Singapore Broadcasting Authority, Deputy Chairman, Hitachi Electronic Devices (S), Director, Singapore Aerospace, Singapore Telecommunications, EDB Investments, Jurong Town Corporation, Sentosa Development Corporation, Singapore Computer Systems, Chartered Industries of Singapore, Telecommunication Authority of Singapore, Totalisator Board, the Esplanade Company, National Arts Council, Singapore Symphonia Co, Singapore Dance Theatre, International Advisory Board of Economic Development Board Rotterdam, and Singapore's Governor to the Asia-Europe Foundation.

Dr Tan holds four National Day Public Administration Medals comprising Bronze, Silver, Gold and Bold (Bar) conferred by the Government of Singapore and two honorary doctorate degrees.