

# ETHOS

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Published by the Civil Service College

The Civil Service College (CSC) is a statutory board under the purview of the Public Service Division (Prime Minister's Office). Established in 1971, the College is an integrated learning institution comprising the Centre for Governance and Leadership, Centre for Public Economics, Centre for Public Communications, the Institute of Policy Development, the Institute of Public Administration, Centre for Organisation Development, Centre for Leadership Development and CSC International. Its vision is to be the Heart of Learning Excellence and Development for the Singapore Public Service.

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ISSN: 1793-3773

Website: <http://www.cscollege.gov.sg/ethos>

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## FOREWORD

The Singapore Public Service has always strived to be forward-looking, effective, efficient and committed to continuous learning and growth. These efforts have helped Singapore to weather the turbulence of the past decade, and will stand us in good stead through the uncertainties ahead. Such capacities do not come about by accident: they are the outcome of deliberate, sustained and substantive investment in our people and institutions in the course of our development. In 2001, we made the strategic decision to incorporate the Civil Service College as a statutory board, subjecting our public sector's premier training institute to the discipline of market competition and financial self-sufficiency. We wanted an organisation that would be more responsive to economic conditions, emerging trends and promising innovations both within and outside the public sector, and thus better equipped to prepare our public officers for a complex future of accelerated change.

The Civil Service College has since done commendably. It has learned to operate, compete and thrive in a dynamic market. Its reputation as a learning institute and training provider extends beyond our shores. It

has developed important new research capabilities, helping to codify, renew and extend the tacit knowledge of the public sector, and catalysing new thinking. It has engaged with a growing network of top practitioners, experts and thought leaders from around the world, connecting Singapore to the global discourse on the business of government. Its milestone programmes and courses, enriched by its unique familiarity with government, continue to be relevant, impactful and very much in demand. Its corridors and classrooms are hives of activity, where our public officers exchange ideas, socialise, and develop shared perspectives and values. The College has become a powerful node of influence in shaping Singapore's Public Service. It is in a prime position to help address the fundamental challenges that now confront the public sector.

The value proposition of government is changing. This commemorative issue of the College's journal ETHOS examines some of the ways in which significant trends – from global upheavals and geopolitical shifts to changing demographics and a more diverse society – are transforming the nature of governance, and the relationship between government and society. How

can a nation become more resilient in the face of an uncertain future? What is the right balance of roles and responsibilities between the public, private and people sectors? What will it mean to be a public officer a decade from now? What different skills, capabilities and values will we need, and how can we best develop them? These are questions being asked at the heart of government today.

The Civil Service College will be an important partner as we continue to explore these issues. We will probably need to engage much more with a public that has become more informed, discerning and assertive. Most of the time, such interaction will be undertaken by the *corps* of civil servants who are at the forefront of service delivery. We will need to help them develop the competence and confidence needed to better serve and work more closely with stakeholders outside the public sector. Structural and cultural changes will be inevitable in many public sector agencies; authentic and transformational leadership will be called upon. These are areas in which the Civil Service College today is well-placed to make significant contributions.

The mission of the College is to develop people for a first-class Public Service. As we celebrate this milestone in its development, we should capitalise on its many strengths and continue to find new opportunities to do so.

Ms Lim Soo Hoon  
Permanent Secretary,  
Public Service Division,  
Prime Minister's Office  
and  
Chairman of the Civil Service College

## PREFACE

This special issue of ETHOS commemorates the 10th Anniversary of the Civil Service College's establishment as a statutory board. The College has done well in the past 10 years. Today, we serve over 60,000 local participants, over 4,000 foreign ones, offer some 400 different courses and engage around 300 trainers from all around the world every year. We have much to be proud of, thanks to the untiring efforts of our staff, partners and stakeholders.

The past decade has been an unsettling one the world over; the challenges ahead of us are likely to be even more volatile and multidimensional. The question is, what must we do to build up our collective capacity as a nation to anticipate, cope and thrive in the face of such change and uncertainty? In these pages we will explore ways of approaching some of these pressing concerns. I am grateful to all our contributors for their insights and perspectives.

The Civil Service College has a key role to play in shaping a public sector that can help build a more resilient and successful Singapore. Public officers look to us to equip them with the skills needed to do a superior job, so that

we may deliver superior public value. Our training courses and milestone programmes will continue to employ innovative, thoughtful and relevant methodologies and technologies. As needs and priorities evolve, we will incorporate new competencies into our curriculum.

We are also stepping up efforts to seek, understand, document and share the best in contemporary thinking about public sector practice – so that we can contribute to the dynamic development of ideas about governance, leadership and policies that can make a difference for Singapore. We want to facilitate on-going conversations among public officers and with leading thinkers and practitioners outside government, on issues that we care about. This will support more participatory, well-rounded thinking about public issues, and help broaden our shared understanding about the challenges that confront us as a nation.

In the process, we hope to help build up the sense of community, trust and common ground that the public service will need to deliver robust, holistic solutions. The best measure of our success will of course be the continuing vitality of an increasingly

sophisticated Singapore, ably supported by an effective, forward-looking, first-class Public Service.

Please join us in celebrating our milestone anniversary, as we look to the future with confidence and resolve.

Lionel Yeo  
Dean and CEO of the  
Civil Service College  
and  
Deputy Secretary (Development),  
Public Service Division,  
Prime Minister's Office

 EDITORIAL

While there is broad agreement that governments will need to work in partnership with other sectors in society in order to adequately address the complexities of wicked problems confronting nations today, there is not yet clear agreement on how best to go about doing so. There is recognition that exceptional national outcomes arise from exceptional collective effort – with government deeply and productively engaged with public perspectives and contributions, as Singapore’s Head of Civil Service points out (page 9). One initiative at the forefront of efforts to find a new, synergistic model for governance is the New Synthesis Project spearheaded by Canada’s Jocelyne Bourgon in collaboration with several leading administrations, including Singapore. Among the Project’s key outcomes is a framework that envisions the relationship between the public, private and civic spheres as a dynamic network of interlinking feedback loops that generates holistic public results (page 14); its chief value is to guide conversation and help uncover latent opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration and innovation.

It appears that societies in which there is broad active participation and co-creation of public results are likely to be more adaptive and robust in the face of changing conditions. This notion of social resilience has also become an important element in the field of national security (page 21), where there is renewed awareness of the need to build up preparedness more generally and to set aside a buffer of precautionary, risk-bearing capacity; accepting some degree of systemic inefficiency in order to better deal with unexpected shocks. Indeed, civic sector leader Laurence Lien argues that the non-profit sector addresses important nuances not readily provided for by public policy, and can therefore play a vital role in maintaining the overall health of society (page 30).

Beyond concerns of national resilience, governments have also taken the cue from the business world in employing technology to solicit ideas directly from the community (page 36). Such crowdsourcing initiatives, supported by new “open government” strategies to release and unlock the value potential of public data, are very much in their infancy. Nevertheless, they already indicate an important

new growth area for constructive engagement in the information age. To clarify thinking on public engagement strategies, Lena Leong from the Centre for Governance and Leadership outlines different approaches available to government and their respective best uses (page 43). Professor David Chan offers timely insights into the psychology of fairness (page 54), which can have a significant impact on the quality of interactions between stakeholders, and on subsequent outcomes.

Public engagement does not mean government responsibility will be abdicated or diminished. Instead, there is likely to be renewed attention on areas in which the public sector is clearly the most credible player. A livelier civic discourse calls on the public service to be more adept at serving as savvy referee, convenor, facilitator and co-investor. Making useful sense out of divergent views and emergent trends will draw on capabilities beyond the traditional mix of administrative skills (page 66). It may be premature to decide on any specific cocktail of competencies at this point. Indeed, the best strategy could be to develop a broad palette of skills and approaches that can be applied in judicious combinations in different contexts. Governance remains an art that will demand sound judgement, expertise and integrity, and

also foresight, creativity, and an instinct for the national interest.

Other contributions in this special issue of ETHOS explore the shifting frontiers of governance: Senior foreign public servants participating in Singapore's Leaders in Governance Programme discuss the evolving role of government, and the values it should retain (page 61). Futurist Riel Miller suggests that the best way to embrace the future is to find and explore the potential inherent in the complex present (page 81). Bertrand de La Chapelle charts the development of new forms of jurisdiction in cyberspace (page 72). Goh Han Teck, from the Centre for Leadership Development, describes important generational differences that could redefine the nature and practice of leadership in the public sector (page 87).

I wish you a productive read.

Alvin Pang  
Editor, ETHOS





Peter Ong

# Public Governance: Challenges in a Changing Landscape

**Policymaking should involve public perspectives and citizen efforts while staying focused on the long term, argues Singapore's Head of Civil Service.**

**M**any will agree with me that 2011 has been anything but business as usual in Singapore. After our two elections this year, it is clear that we have a public that is more vocal and expect a more engaged and responsive relationship with the Government. Many public officers are wondering how the tone and style of governance might change, and what the

way ahead might be for policymaking and service delivery.

In his 2011 National Day Rally, the Prime Minister (PM) noted that Singapore must remain exceptional as a country. At the same time, as a small country with an open economy, Singapore continues to face an increasingly challenging global operating environment, which constricts the number and range of

policy options available to us. What we do know is that our Public Service must constantly evolve and adapt so as to rise to meet the key challenges in this changing landscape.

## BEING EXCEPTIONAL

In various ways, our Public Service has indeed been exceptional. Our outstanding track record is built on strong fundamentals in policy formulation and a continuous investment in people. We have the ability and space to think long-term, and to do what is right rather than what is popular. We also make sure we bring in and retain good people in the Public Service, and we ensure that we invest resources in developing them.

If there is one word that people commonly use to describe the Singapore Public Service, it is “efficient”. We deliver public value through high quality service, and have organised our policies, processes and delivery based on concepts of efficiency and resource optimisation. But this “efficiency” now needs to be coupled with a softer touch.

To ensure that the Public Service can continue to meet the aspirations of our people and to deliver public value at a higher level, there are three areas to focus on:

The first is **policymaking with more heart**, the second is **public engagement**,

and the third is to continue to **prepare for the future**. These are not totally new concepts to us, and we have had some successes in these areas. However, they are areas to which we can pay more attention and in which we can do better.

## POLICYMAKING WITH MORE HEART

There is room for us to formulate and implement policies with more heart, or more from the citizen’s perspective, rather than from the perspective of the implementing agency.

The essence of a good Public Service is that it is trustworthy and there is consistency and transparency in implementation. Rules are implemented without fear or favour. However, a “one size fits all” approach, while impartial and fair, may unwittingly convey rigidity and a lack of care, if applied inflexibly and without regard to the genuine needs and circumstances of individuals.

There is room for us to formulate and implement policies more from the citizen’s perspective, rather than from the perspective of the implementing agency.

Instead, we need to start adopting a more “user-centric” approach, and we can begin by putting ourselves in the shoes of the citizen and customer. While

we have some way to go, we have seen some interesting successes in terms of service experience when our agencies try to see things from citizens and customers' points of view.

The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) and its partners on the ground – the Community Development Councils (CDCs) and Family Services Centres (FSCs) – operate in a complex network with many players, in alignment with Singapore's "Many Helping Hands" philosophy of social assistance. Increasingly, they are encountering more chronic and complicated cases of families who face multifaceted issues, in which financial aid alone is insufficient. In response, MCYS and its partners are reviewing how social assistance could be delivered in a more holistic and user-centric manner. They walked through the customer journey, and conducted ethnographic interviews with their customers to gain in-depth insights into the experience and emotions of end-users. These insights would be used to prototype ideas for MCYS and its partners.

One learning point from the MCYS project is that we need to overcome our own cognitive biases in policy formulation and implementation. Listening to the stories of our citizens can help to ameliorate such biases, and

enrich the range of perspectives from which we eventually craft our policies.

## **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

In his National Day Rally, PM said that he was very encouraged that Singaporeans are becoming more engaged, going beyond simply providing their views. Instead, many are now coming forward to work with one another and the Government on projects that matter to them and serve a greater national good.

As the Public Service, we should think about how to engage the public more. In the long term, this will prove beneficial for Singapore for several reasons.

We need to overcome our own cognitive biases in policy formulation and implementation.

First, the Government does not have a monopoly on good ideas. The challenges we face as a nation are becoming more complex and will require different perspectives and approaches. Some of these can come from the public.

Second, trade-offs become sharper and harder to make as we approach the frontiers and boundaries of policymaking. Up till today, the Government has typically decided how to make these trade-offs on behalf of citizens. By involving citizens in co-

creating solutions to some problems, the public could come to better understand the considerations that the Government has to bear in mind, and appreciate why certain trade-offs must be made.

Third, engagement deepens citizens' stake in the country and in their fellow countrymen's well-being. It gives citizens the opportunity to "own" policies that affect their lives on a daily basis.

### MAINTAINING BALANCE

More and better public engagement does not mean that all issues should be put up for grabs, and there are issues about engagement that require further reflection. First, engagement must be done with sincerity. We have a sophisticated public, one that will pick up very quickly if we are just paying lip service to an engagement exercise.

More and better public engagement does not mean that all issues should be put up for grabs.

Second, the appropriate mode of engagement is contextual. Engagement can be upstream at the policy design stage, or downstream at the implementation stage. In some cases, the public wants to be involved upstream to be co-creators of the policy. In other areas, we will not have the luxury of time to undertake

too much engagement, for example, when there is a crisis.

Third, engagement requires public officers to have an acute sense of citizen sentiments. Not all public officers will be comfortable with or ready for public engagement, and we will need to invest in building up these skills and capabilities.

### PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE


In this new operating environment where change is a constant, it is important that we continue to think about and anticipate the future. Anticipating and preparing for emerging risks and opportunities that stem from both global forces and local trends is important, even as we tackle current challenges.

Policy options need to be developed in advance, so that we can move decisively and effectively when we need to. If we want to continue to be exceptional, we must not neglect this important role or we will always be chasing our own tails and be forced into adopting sub-optimal policy options.

Many civil services around the world envy us for having the capabilities and the space to plan ahead. This is not something that we built up overnight, and is not something we should take for granted.

## STAYING EXCEPTIONAL: THE JOURNEY FORWARD

As the Public Service, we should take pride in the fact that we have done well and have been a key institution behind the success of Singapore.

Going forward, the Public Service must continue anticipating and preparing for the future. We also need to formulate and implement policies with greater empathy and heart, as well as engage the public sincerely. An exceptional Singapore is our common goal, and the journey ahead is one that we must embark on together with our people. 

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Peter Ong is the Head of Singapore's Civil Service and concurrently Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Finance and Permanent Secretary (Special Duties) at the Prime Minister's Office. This article is an adaptation of a speech delivered at the Public Service Staff Conference 2011.



Jocelyne Bourgon

# The New Synthesis: Preparing Government for the Challenges of the 21st Century

The New Synthesis Framework expands the concept and practice of governance beyond traditional boundaries of public administration.

## THE NEW SYNTHESIS PROJECT

The New Synthesis Project<sup>1</sup> was initiated in 2009 to support public sector practitioners who, in our time, are called upon to serve the public good and the collective interest, in the face of increasing complexity, uncertainty and volatility. It attempts to provide practitioners with an intellectual framework that would help to integrate,

in a meaningful way, past practices of enduring value, lessons learned over the last 30 years of public sector reform, and the reality of practice in a post-industrial era.

Over the course of the project, close to 200 participants from academia and the world of public sector practice shared ideas about how to prepare government for the challenges of the

21st century. International roundtables and exploratory discussions took us to The Hague, Ottawa, Singapore, Rio de Janeiro and London.<sup>2</sup> The project also brought us to Auckland, Wellington, Perth, Melbourne and Canberra, and we reached out to colleagues in Finland and the United States. We searched for and found powerful initiatives and promising practices from many countries. The insights from these deliberations pave the way for a *New Synthesis of Public Administration*, or if you prefer, a new narrative that can help to move public administration forward as a discipline and domain of practice beyond the concepts and practices inherited from the Industrial Age.<sup>3</sup>

The New Synthesis Framework presents public administration as a dynamic system with the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and to co-evolve with society.

Despite differences in circumstances and diversity of background and perspectives, the project's participants achieved consensus on several key issues:

- **The nature of governance is changing.** There are substantial differences about serving in the
- **Past practices will not be enough.** Public administration systems and approaches inherited from the past will be insufficient to prepare government for the challenges of the 21st century. Public servants serving today are facing an increasing number of complex public policy issues,<sup>5</sup> and must contend with an environment characterised by uncertainties, volatility and cascading global crises.<sup>6</sup> There are reasons to believe that the number and magnitude of disturbances will continue to increase.
- **Virtual communities have real influence.** They are the first generation of public servants to serve in a world where *virtual communities* transform the shape of public policy issues,<sup>7</sup> as well as the context within which these challenges must be met and where people are all at once members of their communities, citizens of their country and citizens of the world.
- **Governments cannot go it alone.** An increasing number of public policy issues exceed the capacity of

21st century.<sup>4</sup> These differences transform the role of government, the role of public servants and the relationship between public institutions, public organisations and citizens.

government working alone; they require the active contribution of people, families and multiple actors. Public results are a *shared responsibility* requiring a *collective effort*.<sup>8</sup> A government-centric approach focused on efficiency and productivity must give way to a broader focus where the role of government is also to lever the *collective capacity* to achieve results of higher public value and at a lower overall cost for society.

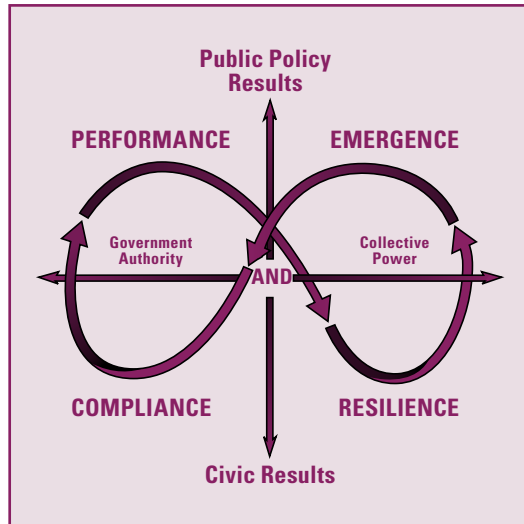
New ideas, new capacities and new ways of doing things are needed to address complex issues and to find peaceful solutions to the intractable problems of our times.<sup>9</sup> The industrial age promoted multiple separations, fragmentations and divisions to provide stability, improve efficiency and increase productivity. The 21st century will require multiple integrations, interactions and relationships to forge emergent solutions to our most daunting challenges.

## A NEW NARRATIVE

A new narrative is needed to guide the actions and decisions of practitioners: one that integrates the role of government, people and society. The New Synthesis Framework aims to address this need. It presents public

administration as a dynamic system with the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and to co-evolve with society: government transforms society and is transformed by it.<sup>10</sup>

**FIGURE 1. AN ADAPTIVE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT**



© 2010 J. Bourgon

The New Synthesis Framework is an *enabling framework*; it does not provide answers but helps to frame the questions. It facilitates the exploration in practice of a broad range of possibilities open to government, and it helps to reveal the consequences that various choices entail. The framework helps practitioners to explore a *space of possibilities*.<sup>11</sup>

Delineated by four vectors, the framework (see Figure 1) argues that public results are a combination of public policy results and civic results, and that the role of public servants is



to mediate and move the contribution of their organisations along both value added chains (the vertical vectors). It argues that the role of government extends beyond what government can do on its own. Instead, public servants need to work to leverage its collective capacity for better results (the horizontal vectors). This gives particular importance to the stewardship role of government to promote and defend the collective interest in all circumstances – both predictable and unpredictable – and in particular when the costs of failures would be borne by society as a whole.

The framework helps practitioners to explore a *space of possibilities*.

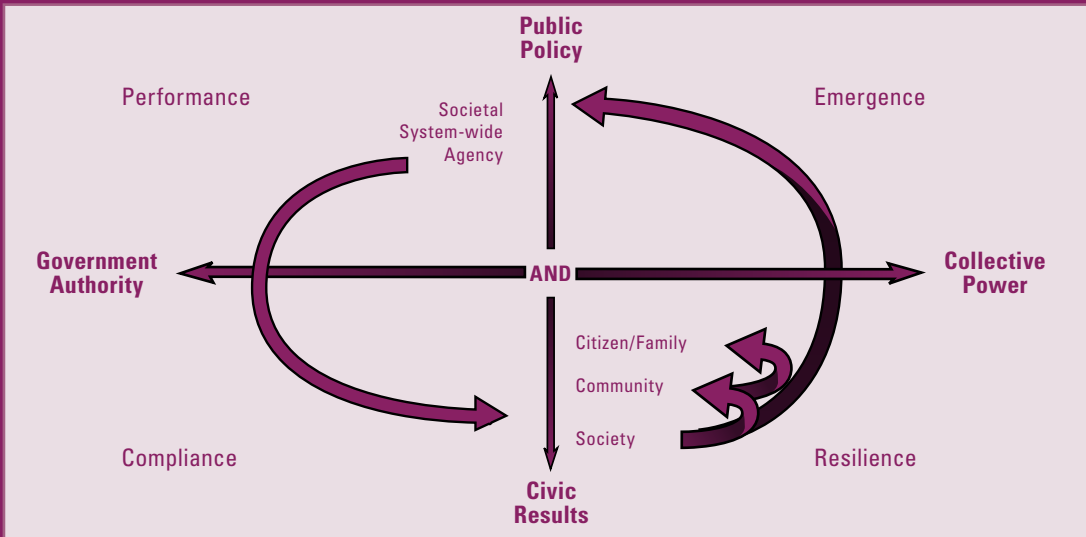
There are multiple tensions at the intersection of these vectors but this is also where the greatest potential for innovation is to be found, and where a new synergistic sharing of roles and responsibilities between people, government and society may be forged. Such a synthesis would represent a shift from a relatively closed concept of government, where public organisations are the primary provider of public services, to an open concept of governance, where public organisations constantly exchange and are part of

their environment, and where the public, private and civic spheres co-evolve in a manner that supports the overall performance of society. It would require:

There are multiple tensions at the intersection of these vectors but this is also where the greatest potential for innovation is to be found.


- a strong *emergence function* to anticipate what might be, with the ability to take proactive action and tap collective intelligence so as to shape emergent solutions and co-create responses to complex policy issues;
- an efficient *compliance function* to set priorities, help forge societal and political consensus and conserve energy within a context of constrained actions and behaviours;
- an effective *performance function* to think across systems and work across boundaries, sectors and disciplines;
- a powerful *resilience function* to co-produce public results, encourage the active participation of citizens, families, communities as value creators, and to build the adaptive capacity of society to prosper and adapt in all circumstances.

# The Singapore Prison System Case — The Power of an Inclusive Mental Map



© 2010 J. Bourgon

The transformation of the Singapore Prison System (SPS) illustrates aspects of the New Synthesis framework in action. Confronted with overcrowding, high recidivism, increasing costs, staff shortages, low morale and poor public perception, the SPS transformed itself from “custodians” of prisoners to “captains in the lives” of the offenders they served. They did this by working with families, employers and other stakeholders to reintegrate former offenders into society successfully.<sup>1</sup> In essence, they shifted from focusing on agency results to societal results.

Today, the prisons of Singapore are some of the most cost-effective corrections facilities in the world. Between 1998 and 2007, recidivism decreased from 44.4% to 26.5%. By leveraging the capacity of the community, the SPS achieved far more than it could on its own.<sup>2</sup> 

## NOTES

1. Leong, Lena, “The Story of Singapore Prison Service: From Custodians of Prisoners to Captains of Life”, Paper presented at the NS6 International Roundtable, Ottawa, Canada, 4-5 May 2010.
2. Ibid.

## PREPARING PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERS FOR THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

The New Synthesis is a work in progress.<sup>12</sup> To realise the potential of its insights in practice, our public sector leaders will need to develop several capacities:

- As *public servants*, they must have a commitment to serve, be firmly grounded in public sector values and have a deep philosophical understanding of the importance of serving the public good and collective interests.<sup>13</sup>
- As *public administrators*, they must be keepers of a public trust, exercising their duty under the rule of law and fulfilling their mission to the fullest by marshalling all the resources, resourcefulness and the power vested in them and their organisations.<sup>14</sup>
- As *public sector managers*, they should possess the same level of skills, knowledge and know-how required of their counterparts in other sectors. They need this to connect with, leverage, work across, co-create and co-produce public results of increasing value and at a lower overall cost for society.
- As *public sector leaders*, they must envision and anticipate what others have not yet seen, to give


coherence to seemingly disparate elements and to give meaning to ambitious trajectories.<sup>15</sup> They need to give voice to aspirations and help frame a narrative of hope deserving of support and conducive to collective actions.

A government-centric approach focused on efficiency and productivity must give way to a broader focus where the role of government is also to lever the *collective capacity* to achieve results of higher public value and at a lower overall cost for society.

## CONCLUSION

Public administration embodies a concept about the relationship between government, people and society. As new ideas and new ways of doing things emerge, the old ways become unstuck. This provides an opportunity to modernise public administration and to propel our societies forward.

This transformation starts with people and, in particular, with those who have the very special responsibility of serving the public good and the collective interest. Over the coming months, efforts will be made to deepen the international conversation

with those who participated in the project so far, and to broaden it to reach practitioners beyond the initial participating countries...and thus the journey continues.<sup>16</sup> 

As a Senior Visiting Fellow at the Civil Service College, Singapore, the Honourable Jocelyne Bourgon spoke on "Governance in an Expanding Public Space" in October 2011. Madame Bourgon is President of Public Governance International (PGI), President Emeritus of the Canada School of Public Service, and is leading the New Synthesis Project which is exploring the challenges of public administration in the 21st century.

Madame Bourgon has led ambitious public sector reforms as Secretary to Cabinet for Canada and as an international public servant. She was a key architect of deficit reduction in Canada and is a leading public administration thinker and writer. She is author of the book *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century*.

#### NOTES

1. A book describing the project findings has recently been published: Bourgon, Jocelyne, *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011)
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5. Klijn, Erik-Hans, "Complexity Theory and Public Administration: What's New?", *Public Management Review*, 10 (3) (2008), pp299-317
6. NSG Network, *Preparing Government to Serve Beyond the Predictable: Singapore Roundtable Report*, edited by Jocelyne Bourgon, (Ottawa: Public Governance International, 2010)
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10. The author previously introduced some of the concepts behind the New Synthesis Framework in two articles for *ETHOS*. They are: Bourgon, Jocelyne, "Reclaiming Public Administration," *ETHOS* no. 4 (April 2008), <http://www.cscollege.gov.sg/cgl/page.asp?id=112&iurl=2>; Bourgon, Jocelyne, "Serving Beyond the Predictable," *ETHOS* no. 7 (January 2010), <http://www.cscollege.gov.sg/cgl/page.asp?id=112&iurl=2>
11. Bourgon, Jocelyne, "Exploring New Frontiers of Public Administration: The New Synthesis Project," *Canadian Government Executive*, 17 (3) (March 11), pp16-18
12. Readers interested in the topic may wish to consult *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press). A lecture at the Civil Service College on 24 October 2011, "Governance in an Expanding Public Space", also expands on these ideas.
13. Bourgon, Jocelyne, "Understanding the Public Leadership Environment: Preparing People to Serve People in the 21st Century", Keynote speech, Annual Conference of the Commonwealth Association of Public Administration and Management, Kemaman, Malaysia, 22 June 2009.
14. Ibid.
15. Ho, Peter, "Thinking About the Future: What the Public Service Can Do," *ETHOS* no. 7 (January 2010), <http://www.cscollege.gov.sg/cgl/page.asp?id=112&iurl=2>
16. More information on the project can be found at [www.nsworld.org](http://www.nsworld.org)



Charles Ng

## National Resilience: Developing a Whole-of- Society Response

A more robust society begins with clarity about shared priorities, risks, constraints and capabilities.

### CONTEXT OF COMPLEXITY

Security is often said to begin with threat assessment. In a professional game of football, the opponent's best offensive players are identified and entire defence strategies are then built around restricting their movement. Likewise, given scarce resources, government agencies identify, prioritise and develop defences against the most probable threats to national well-being.

Underpinning this risk assessment approach to security is the assumption that we can actually “know the enemy” well enough to gauge the extent of threat to our way of life.

The problem of course is that we cannot truly do so. Good security professionals are masters of improvisation. Plans often change at the point of execution simply because threats do not manifest themselves

along expected trajectories. Risk and threat assessments are useful but at best arbitrary guides. Furthermore, in an interconnected world where local conditions can potentially trigger off events/movements with global ramifications, it is difficult to accurately assess the threats we face. Beyond merely grappling with when and how a threat or any modern day phenomenon would manifest, modern day societies struggle even to identify *what* challenges there are in the horizon.

The Arab Spring of 2011 is a particularly instructive example. The desperation of Mohammed Bouazizi, a Tunisian food peddler angered by the confiscation of his wares, led to his self immolation (January 2011) and launched a wave of revolutions in the region. Spurred on by social media, it rapidly caught on across North Africa and the Middle East. Its influence gained a global resonance quickly and sparked copycat riots in the Far East. Not only were these events largely unforeseen, it was the speed and reach of the riots that demonstrated how 21st century economic, technological and social mediums, and tools had radically transformed the way security challenges manifest.

So why is it so difficult to “know the enemy” in our time? Our dilemma is often explained with the term *complexity*.<sup>1</sup>

As the world becomes increasingly interdependent, the threats we face adopt the attendant characteristics we have come to associate with globalisation and the information and technological revolution: particularly two key traits known very well to complexity theorists — broad inter-linkages across domains and rapidity of manifestation. It was impossible, a century ago, for political revolutions in the Middle East to have caused nervousness in China. With the Internet and social media, *this is the “new normal” — an interconnected world with tight linkages, where threats are difficult to assess and where events in one area can be rapidly modelled in another.*

### **GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE — RESILIENCE**

Traditional security doctrines advocate resistance and robustness: where there is a potential of security risks, governments should invest resources to prevent its manifestation; governments should develop robust defensive measures at the point of prevention and response. However, in the event that a threat successfully breaches the defences under these circumstances, consequences tend to be catastrophic. Given the complexity we face, such a resistance strategy is no longer tenable. A new strategy of resilience that encompasses a full gamut of responses — *prevention, response and recovery* — is

needed. Compared to a resistance strategy, the doctrine of resilience accepts that some threats will eventually come to fruition, but society must absorb the stress and recover rapidly. Allocating resources for rapid recovery (instead of solely prevention) becomes essential.

A strategy of resilience is not new and has long gained credence in academic literature dealing with disaster prevention, emergency preparedness, environmental sciences and even social psychology. Security professionals only began to consider it seriously after 9/11, when the developed world realised the threats to national security had become multifaceted, amorphous and essentially complex. Since then, a number of countries have infused resilience into their broader national security strategies. For example, resilience was made a key strategic pillar of Obama's National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2010. Subsequently, a resilience directorate was established in the White House. In Singapore, the National Security Coordination Secretariat (NSCS) coordinates security resilience across the whole-of-government. Guided by the Strategic Framework for National Security, enacted in 2004, resilience is placed at the heart of Singapore's strategic response to national security threats. This greater emphasis on resilience

has a number of advantages. For one, resilience is an effective deterrent. Nations which are able to respond rapidly to a terrorist attack and recover quickly tend to dissuade terrorists from mounting another attack due to low psychological payoffs. Furthermore, resilience has also become a "competitive differentiator for companies and countries alike, (as) advancing resilience almost always provides a positive return on a relatively smaller investment."<sup>2</sup>

The doctrine of resilience accepts that some threats will eventually come to fruition, but society must absorb the stress and recover rapidly.

### CHALLENGES IN BUILDING RESILIENCE

Beyond this broad acceptance of resilience among policymakers, a number of challenges remain. First, there is no common lexicon for resilience<sup>3</sup> amongst governments. In Israel, resilience is understood to be the ability of the populace to deal with day-to-day harassment from terrorist groups and the existential threat of military invasion. In Australia, resilience is used in reference to the ability of communities to recover after an environmental disaster. Given the variety of thought in understanding resilience, each country

must then be left to develop its own resilience mantra – based on its own domestic conditions.

Second, resilience is faced with the difficulties of measurement and assessment. To date, there is almost no way to assess how resilient a society is. This is compounded by the reality that resilience is often threat specific. A society may be resilient to a terrorist attack but not against a pandemic. In addition, the institutional capabilities required for inculcating resilience against any of these threats are dissimilar. Certainly there is a distinction between “evergreen resilience virtues” and “threat specific” resilience virtues. For example, regardless of threat type, leadership is often cited as a necessary condiment against any threat. However, even these virtues are notoriously hard to measure, what more inculcate. Resilience can only be properly assessed once it is actually tested.

Finally, resilience requires structural and conceptual shifts that are difficult for governments to execute. There were historical roots to this. In the Cold War era, the threat of nuclear war diminished any sense of ownership one had for one’s own security as the spectre of total annihilation made any individual effort meaningless. Security became the purview of the government.

This led to the professionalisation of security work within vast national bureaucracies, diminishing the need for citizens to take responsibility for the security of their own communities. However, 21st century threats are of far lower intensity and greater unpredictability. One of the reasons why resilience is apt for our time is because it represents a whole-of-society approach to security: blending government, local communities, the media, religious organisations and NGOs. Yet given that government bureaucracies were woven and built in response to Cold War related threats, structural and conceptual challenges of expanding its reach to include all of society remains challenging.

Resilience is often threat specific. A society may be resilient to a terrorist attack but not against a pandemic.

### **BUILDING RESILIENCE AS A CONCEPT**

Given that governments face these challenges in constructing resilience, how should resilience be developed strategically? I would argue that this has to be accomplished on two levels: first, the conceptual/intellectual level and second, the capabilities level.



Conceptually, each country needs to build its own indigenous lexicon of resilience and expand it into other spheres beyond the traditional realms of security and emergency preparedness. This is premised on the fact that the threats facing each country and the traits that determine resilience in each society are rarely similar. Furthermore, resilience is grossly incomplete without engaging the complex social and economic realities that affect the outcomes of a crisis. Resilience as such should not be seen as an outcome that is affected by a series of policies, but a doctrine of governance that encompasses a wide variety of socio-economic and security policies which undergird a society both in peacetime and in crisis. Positioning resilience as such provides the philosophy with a number of advantages.

**Resilience represents a whole-of-society approach to security.**

First, governments will have to move beyond mere operational exigencies during a crisis to consider the society's unique social-political values that may serve to build resilience in the face of unexpected change. This carries resilience further than just *crisis management* to *change management*, a crucial paradigm for resilience to work. For example, countries like the US and UK, in a bid to build resilience, have

established emergency preparedness clubs within local communities to respond to threats. However, during the occurrence of threats, these have proven to be less successful than previously envisaged. Resilience measures in such explicitly organised forms tend to be problematic. Experience has shown that local communities are likely to band around established organisations of interest, like community clubs, business associations, religious organisations and other places towards which they have a clear affective inclination. Proximity of affection – in organisations where friends and family have built strong ties – has been demonstrated to be more important, since people look first to communities they have found historical resonance with for leadership, aid and resources in the face of change. Such realities require conceptual shifts in government thinking. Instead of building social institutions to provide crisis-response, governments can harness existing community organisations, whose values and resources can support change management.

Second, a broad conception of resilience imbues government policies with relevant principles of change management. For example, if a society were to be resilient, it might need to hedge against overspecialisation and

overconcentration of resources. In international trade, efficiency is gained when a nation produces the products in which it has comparative advantage in. Certainly that would maximise productivity. However, if resilience were to be incorporated as part of the overall philosophy, a balance would need to be struck between diversification and specialisation to protect a country from unexpected changes in the global economy. A broad conception of resilience acknowledges the trade-offs that need to be made (e.g. from loss of efficiency) in order to generate sufficient latency as a buffer against any uncertainty that might arise from the prevailing risk landscape.

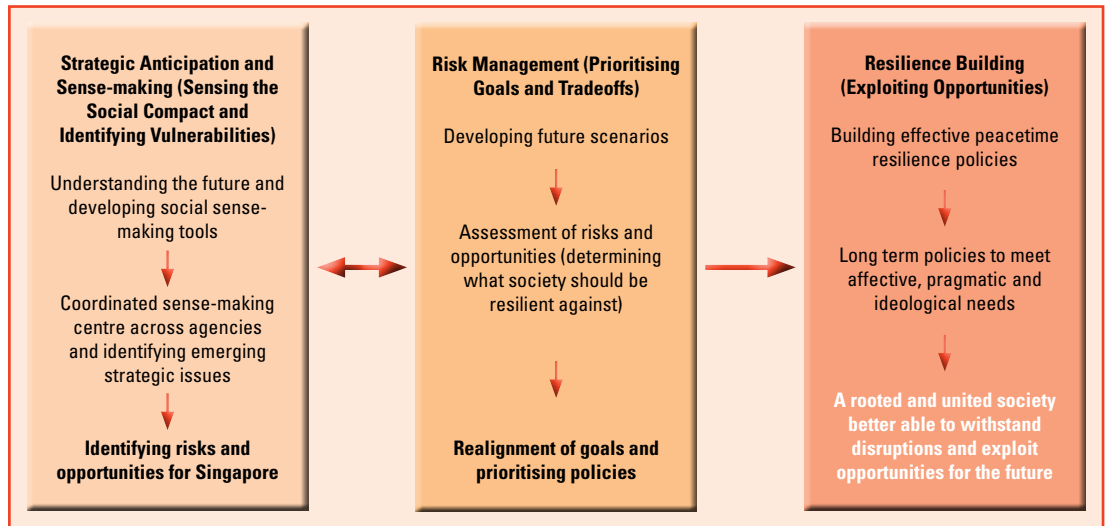
**Resilience, a doctrine of governance that encompasses a wide variety of socio-economic and security policies which undergird a society both in peacetime and in crisis.**

Finally, going through the process of devising a broad and national definition of resilience pushes public servants to identify the intangible values and principles that form the national psyche of the country. Typically, public servants have been more accustomed to quantitative measurements of a

country's economic and social well-being. However, to build resilience, we need to question and identify the fundamental and often intangible traits of society that allow it to falter or survive, or even thrive in the face of a crisis. As in the seminal book, *Built to Last*, such intangible values, once enunciated and built upon, have the powerful effect of bringing a country to "greatness", even in the face of broad sweeping change.

### **BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SINGAPORE**

In Singapore, we face the twin challenges of a rapidly evolving external threat environment as well as an "Age of Social Angst" — where tensions from globalisation and the IT revolution are manifesting themselves as challenges to our social compact. Given this, resilience for Singapore is about safeguarding society while navigating through the rough waters of our regional and global environment. To strengthen the unity and retain the trust of the populace in the face of growing income divides, immigration, increased pluralism and the rise of social media, the tone of governance as well as the social levers employed need to be considered carefully. At the heart of Singapore's resilience is whether the populace's affective and pragmatic needs, as well as their values/beliefs, are aligned to the wider vision of Singapore.

**FIGURE 1: RESILIENCE AS PART OF A BROADER STRATEGIC PROCESS**

Source: MHA-MICA-NSCS Whole-of-Government Resilience Review

In that light, the Government needs to ensure that resilience is firmly embedded within the broader process of policymaking and matched with the underlying capabilities so as to harness it (see Figure 1).

As part of the broader policy process, resilience is the natural strategic response that arises from good strategic anticipation and risk management. Also, building resilience in Singapore requires effective sense-making of our social compact. Both are needed to determine what the challenges are or broad forces that might catalyse change in the horizon, as well as the concerns of Singapore society. That can then be translated into a risk assessment map to prioritise the risks that a country faces. From there, resilience might be

regarded as the strategic response to change — where government harnesses the national strengths of the populace and existing institutions, both government and non-government, to overcome adversity and thrive in the face of these challenges.

**A broad conception of resilience acknowledges the trade-offs that need to be made in order to generate sufficient latency as a buffer against any uncertainty.**

To support this process, four capabilities need to be established in any government — Policy Coordination, Strategic Engagement, Research, and Crisis Management. For Singapore, we

have built sophisticated and effective crisis management capabilities and as such, our concerns are enhancing our capabilities in policy coordination and research. Briefly, these are the functions associated with each of these capabilities.

**Policy Coordination** — For resilience to be imbued into the psyche of policymaking and the society, policy has to be coordinated from the centre to ensure coherence. More and more, as resilience gains ascendancy in governance, a centre to direct and synchronise aims as well as the lexicon of resilience is needed. This does not negate the ground-up and organic process by which resilience is often nurtured, but instead ensures that government agencies have clarity and coherence at the heart of resilience policymaking. Currently in Singapore, there is yet to be a central node to coordinate resilience policy on a cross sector basis (Security, Economic and Social).

**Strategic Engagement** — Governments have to move beyond strategic communications to strategic engagement. Communications have the connotation of speaking to the populace, whereas engagement is about partnering the populace. This is particularly crucial in resilience building as resilience is about building

networks between government, the general populace, businesses, non-government organisations and religious organisations.


**Research and Sense-making** — In every society, resilience needs to be studied and measured. In particular, research teases out the traits that make up a resilient society and informs policy options. Measurement tools, though often arbitrary, provide useful guides to policymakers. Given the complex make-up of society, traditional survey tools are insufficient and a more complex suite of tools is needed to understand the social compact.

**Resilience is not about resisting change but instead harnessing it to allow a country to thrive.**

**Crisis Management** — Part of building resilience is ensuring that the government has strong crisis management systems. Strong crisis resilience builds strong peacetime resilience and vice versa.

## **CONCLUSION**

Governments today need to build resilience more systematically in the face of the tremendous changes taking place in the world. Having gained ascendancy in the security and emergency preparedness circles, resilience should

move beyond these realms and inform the broader philosophy of governance. Its applications may reach into social, economic and political spaces, and aid in a nation's management of change. At its heart, resilience is not resistance. It is not about resisting change but instead harnessing it to allow a country to thrive. In order to accomplish that, governments need to have the right capabilities and appropriate levers to build resilience. Only then are we able to know ourselves, face up to an amorphous enemy and increase the chances of victory. 

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#### NOTES

1. Broadly, complexity is often tied to the concept of an ecosystem — where a set of parts or elements that have relationships among them are differentiated from relationships with other elements outside the relational regime.
2. US Department of Homeland Security, *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report* (Washington: February 2010), pp15, pp61
3. In a study on the confluence between Risk and Resilience concepts, the Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute (HSI) discovered 119 different definitions for resilience. From the resilience of a child's psychology in educational theory to the resilience of metallic elements in physics, there is rarely any convergence in the use of the term.



Opinion

Laurence Lien

## Singapore's Non-Profit Sector: What Should its Role Be?

Civil society needs to step up and do much more to help meet the increasingly complex needs of the Singaporean community.

In the four-and-a-half decades since Independence, Singapore's progress — including its social development as measured by key social indicators — has been nothing short of dramatic. The State has been the dominant authority in bringing this about. While civil society and the non-profit sector<sup>1</sup> have also contributed to this progress, they have mostly played a supporting role in state-directed programmes.

### THE CHALLENGE

Civil society in Singapore can and should learn to do more in Singapore. In particular, non-profit organisations (NPOs) need to play a complementary role in society, and be innovative in their own right. They need to develop a sense of at-stake-ness, that is, the responsibility and purpose that will drive them to take risks, experiment and innovate to tackle the most pressing issues in our society.

They have unique opportunities today to work in partnership with the public and private to create new societal value, and to help create an environment where Singaporeans feel empowered to start new ground-up endeavours.

I would argue for this, for three reasons. First, civil society is able to do things that the Government *cannot* do. Second, the non-profit sector is able to do some things *better*. Third, the State *should* not do everything.

### DOING THINGS THAT THE STATE *CANNOT* DO

It may not be self-evident in a State where the government is so dominant that there are indeed areas of social and community interventions that the government simply cannot take on. It cannot provide everything to everybody, and these limitations can be wide-ranging.

First, civil society can cater to diverse, holistic needs. The Government, instead, can focus on meeting the material and physical needs of its citizens. It is indeed in the best position to conduct large-scale wealth redistribution, because of its ability to tax. It also has a critical role in regulating services and ensuring minimum standards. But the human person is more than a material being. NPOs can provide for social, spiritual and emotional needs better. An example are halfway houses (a majority of which are religion-based) which treat recovering drug addicts in Singapore. The use of religion for rehabilitation in these institutions – which would be prohibited in State-run establishments – is widely recognised as an effective resource in treating addictions.

Second, civil society organisations (CSOs) can serve needs that go beyond national policy and prevailing government priorities. No matter how pragmatic a government is, certain groups of citizens will be under-served by current programmes and remain genuinely in need of help. For instance, when the Government promotes the intact family, policies may discriminate against single and divorced parents, and their children. Yet these parents and children often require help to break out of their poverty trap. This is again an area where NPOs can and do step in.

Third, NPOs are better placed to provide niche, customised solutions to heterogeneous needs. Government programmes are like big stones filling a container, while NPO programmes, with their closeness to the ground and residents, are like small stones filling the remaining gaps. The gaps left by the Government are necessary, as government subsidy and income redistribution schemes can neither be too individualised to meet precisely the unique needs of each recipient, nor too broadly generous in its payout so as to cater to the worst cases. Otherwise, programmes, particularly those involving financial assistance, would be too administratively costly, inefficient and unsustainable to operate.

Let us say, hypothetically, we have 100 potential recipients of aid, ranked 1 to 100 in priority of need, with 1 being the least needy and 100, the most needy; then let us say we can only design one scheme for them. The scheme would not be designed to meet the needs of the 100th person. Moreover, government schemes tend to provide subsidies to individuals based on criteria related to income (e.g. per capital income) or implied wealth (e.g. type of dwelling); they are not typically based on actual needs. Yet we know there are many who are not in the bottom quintile in income, but are needy and fall through

the cracks: such as those who may have incurred unavoidably high household expenses, taking care of a sickly parent or a disabled child, for example. This is where the NPOs on the ground can fill in the gaps and cater to the difficult exceptions.

### **DOING SOME THINGS *BETTER***

Even if the non-profit sector is arguably significantly less mature than the public sector in Singapore, it still has the potential to do some things better than the State.

NPOs can be a rich source of innovation and experimentation, as they can take risks that the Government cannot take. The State is sometimes not in the best position to develop new policies and services, or to drive innovation. In social policy, it is difficult for the Government to experiment because government programmes, once adopted, tend to have to be deployed nationally. Citizens would not take kindly to beneficiaries being a narrow pilot group. Moreover, once implemented, there can be heavy political costs in withdrawing a programme even if it proves ineffective. Hence, governments would typically be conservative in implementing new interventions. There may be a tendency in policymaking to value stability over radical innovation. On

the other hand, the non-profit sector can attract the contributions of people, including private sector entrepreneurs and philanthropists, who can deploy their entrepreneurial know-how, long term focus, initiative and instinct for risk-taking. Being in touch with the ground, NPOs may also be better able to identify opportunities for innovative intervention. The public sector should hence welcome and even encourage the proliferation of new ideas from the non-profit sector: competition can lead to better approaches and models for Singapore.

**NPOs can cater to the  
difficult exceptions.**

Finally, there is power in CSOs that governments do not have. CSOs have more moral authority in dealing with one another and with beneficiaries than government agencies may have. In government programmes, entitlement sets in more quickly. For example, philanthropic organisations can have a higher degree of convening power in bringing NPOs together to work collaboratively towards a common cause, as they are seen as more neutral and having less of a specific agenda than government agencies. If the government gives a dollar, there is little appreciation from the recipients, as they would



consider it their right to receive that benefit, as citizens and taxpayers; if a neighbour helps out and gives a dollar, there is deep gratitude, and even shame, as it is voluntarily donated out of goodwill and compassion. Similarly, a volunteer might succeed with a difficult patient where a professional nurse might not, through diversionary therapy efforts. Appreciated as a compassionate person rather than someone who is only doing their job, the volunteer may be better able to offer reassurance and comfort, or convince the patient to comply with their medication or therapeutic regimens. The prescription may be the same, but the results achieved can be starkly different.

**NPOs can take risks that the Government cannot take.**

### **THE STATE SHOULD NOT DO EVERYTHING**

Even if State agencies can be more efficient than CSOs, it should not provide everything for everyone. The Government should refrain from undertaking activities that the community, the family and the individuals can take on. Instead, the State should only step in when the initiatives clearly exceed the capacity of individuals or private groups acting independently. Other than these critical interventions, the government can play

the important primary role of helping, supporting, developing and empowering civil society efforts to fulfil these needs in the community.

This approach recognises the autonomy and dignity of each human individual, and that the work of the State should always be at the service of human individuals, who are by nature social beings. We need to emphasise the importance of smaller communities or institutions, such as the family, religious organisations and voluntary associations, as mediating structures which empower individual action and link the individual to society as a whole. Each of these social groups has something unique to offer to the community.

It is only when individuals are able to exercise self-determination and contribute meaningfully to the communities they live in, that they feel they are fully human, and fully citizens of this country. This is when a place to stay becomes a home.

### **WHAT IS THE REALITY IN SINGAPORE?**

In Singapore, the Government plays a strong role in supporting NPOs by substantially funding many community-based services. But government policy is not to fund NPOs fully so that they have to raise funds from the public. This is known as

the “many helping hands” approach, where the Government’s philosophy is that it is only through community participation that community bonds are strengthened.

The reality in Singapore is that NPOs have in most cases become subcontractors, delivering social services on behalf of the Government. The brains and heart of social intervention remain with the State, while NPOs often simply follow the piper’s tune. NPOs trying to effect change through competing models of intervention are often viewed as threats. Hence, many NPOs lose their own sense of aspiration, and contribute insufficiently to support necessary social change. Some NPOs, for example, would typically not take on new programmes – no matter how socially beneficial – if they do not get the green light and funding from a government agency to do so. To illustrate, family service centres (FSCs) are run as part of a national system running mostly core, homogeneous, funded programmes.

We are severely under-delivering on the promise of civil society. Civil society will only truly thrive when it serves a complementary function, not when NPOs are vendors and substitutes for government funding and provisioning. We urgently need to encourage more

civic-minded individuals to express their values, interests and visions of the public good, and inject energies and creativity into how society solves its problems.

### **WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO TO REACH A MATURE CIVIL SOCIETY?**

So what can we do to build up the non-profit sector?

First, we need to expand the organisational capacity of NPOs. In this area, nurturing leadership and talent are key. Effective, committed and passionate leadership – both at the board and management levels – can transform the sector and their organisations. Talented young people need to see the non-profit sector as a viable career. NPOs also need to make the conditions conducive to attract talent. For example, while individuals entering the sector expect to take a significant discount against private sector salaries, this “passion” discount cannot be so large as to grossly disadvantage the individual and his family.


There is also a need for NPOs to move upstream to tackle root causes rather than the symptoms of social problems; to pursue justice, not just charity; to be impact-driven, and not output-driven; be willing to take risks and adopt new business models, rather than look to

the Government for solutions. NPOs should strengthen their organisations by being clear on their strategies, institutionalising processes, seeking strategic relationships, mobilising community resources and improving their productivity through technology.

The Government, on the other hand, needs to focus more on enabling and empowering the sector. Enabling means building capability, particularly in developing leadership and soft infrastructure, such as technology development and process improvements. Empowering means a real ceding of power, decision-making and ownership of projects, with a tolerance for a degree of messiness and inefficiency.

NPOs should be equal partners and co-creators at the table. Hence, for example, information and knowledge from the government's vast database of administrative and survey data need to be made more readily available to NPOs. Apart from letting NPOs do their own strategic planning and research, and to interpret their own sense of reality, it is a concrete demonstration of co-ownership. Additionally, instead of leaving many small gaps across the funding spectrum, the Government should plug the gaps in their retained areas of priority and fund those areas more generously.

## CONCLUSION

The civil society is certainly a growth sector in Singapore. As Singapore matures, civil society too must mature. For this to happen, the Government should, rather than being omnipresent, be prepared to cede control in some areas – particularly where new thinking is required – while allowing the sector to experiment and flourish. Civil society must, naturally, step up to the plate. 

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## NOTE

1. The terms "civil society" and "non-profit sector" are used interchangeably in this article. Generally, "civil society" refers to voluntary civic and social associations, organisations and institutions, and are strictly non-governmental and non-commercial entities. "Non-profit sector" refers to all civic and social organisations and institutions, some of which are not strictly non-governmental (e.g. our universities). I have deliberately used both "civil society" and "civil society organisations", because in Singapore's context, the former term is uncommonly used and connotes something more political and adversarial, which need not be the case.



Jairus Yip

## Open Government and Public Crowdsourcing in Practice

Government efforts to engage citizens in collaborative public initiatives are still in their early stages, but there have been some successes.

Advances in technological capability and widespread adoption mean that the Internet has become a cost-effective medium, both for disseminating information and for collecting ideas from an informed public that is no longer content to be passive recipients of government policy. Some developed societies have explored open government approaches, where government data is released to the public through the

Internet and other channels, both to enhance public sector transparency and accountability, and to empower the public to develop useful applications that make innovative use of the data to improve civic life.

Such crowdsourcing strategies, pioneered by the private sector to tap the collective intelligence of their public user base, were first explored by governments in engaging their business communities. Open government and

crowdsourcing have since become part of the evolution of government-citizen interactions that have been enabled by technological advances. Nevertheless, these approaches both depend on and help to nurture an evolving culture of greater transparency, trust, participation and open collaboration between government and citizens, unlocking collective resources beyond those available to the public sector.

### PRINCIPLES AND CHALLENGES

Open government and public crowdsourcing approaches have numerous benefits: they engage citizens, enable social innovation and enhance institutional legitimacy. They can significantly improve the quality of public outcomes without necessarily incurring higher costs, as citizens participate in the determination and delivery of results (both at the government-citizen and citizen-citizen levels) towards shared priorities. Data transparency and rapid feedback can make public service systems more robust. Over time, these benefits may accrue towards a more resilient society, with citizens more directly involved in the collective concerns of their community.

However, these approaches also present their own challenges. First, there is the task of selecting what to

release from the vast store of data held by the government; there are legitimate concerns over data quality, security and privacy. Second, the risk of the released data and information being misconstrued and misused by citizens might result in citizen-developed applications that do not accurately reflect actual conditions. This means that the government has to be clear on how the data is intended to be used, with appropriate caveats. Third, there is a need to frame public issues in ways that promote broad collaboration, and to sieve the signals from the noise so that crowdsourced initiatives are not captured by narrow interests. Last, equal representation needs to be ensured so that the concerns of groups who do not participate in social media channels or Internet platforms (due to the lack of digital access or other social factors) are not excluded.

The success of open government and crowdsourcing efforts also depends critically on public involvement. Citizens have to see themselves as active participants rather than individual consumers of public policies and services. At the same time, they need to appreciate that the business of government is complex, with inevitable trade-offs and compromises.

# Open Government and Crowdsourcing Initiatives in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada

## UNITED STATES (US)

The *Open Government Directive* was initiated by the Obama administration in December 2009 to increase civic participation and engagement<sup>1</sup> and create a culture of transparency, participation and collaboration across US Federal agencies. It stipulates four broad guidelines:

1. Make government information available online and in open formats.
2. Ensure that government information that is published is of a high quality.
3. Establish an open culture of transparency, participation and collaboration in every government agency.
4. Create an enabling policy framework for open government that is up to date with changing technological trends.

- **Data.gov**

An integral component of the US Open Government initiative, *Data.gov* aims “to increase public

access to high value, machine readable datasets generated by the Executive Branch of the Federal Government”. A centralised website for government data offers 389,730 raw<sup>2</sup> and geospatial<sup>3</sup> datasets from a myriad of federal agencies. A “Developers’ Corner”<sup>4</sup> teaches users to develop applications making use of the available data; as of June 2011, *Data.gov* had 236 citizen-developed applications. Notable member applications are featured in their “Apps Showcase”<sup>5</sup> site.<sup>6</sup> A “*Data.gov* Communities”<sup>7</sup> section attempts to “bridge policy makers, technologists, data owners, and citizens”, by inviting them to recommend data to be shared, create applications to make the data more user-friendly, share views on the policies to improve government transparency, and exchange ideas with each other. Citizen feedback from citizens is an integral component of *Data.gov*, with various channels for users to rate and

comment on the datasets released, as well as to request datasets they want to see in the future.

- **Reboot.FCC.gov**

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) provides easy-to-search databases with over 150 downloadable datasets, and connects with citizens over a variety of online and social media channels. *Reboot.fcc.gov*<sup>8</sup> is dedicated to ideas for transforming the organisation into “a model of excellence”. Using the social media tool *IdeaScale*, citizens can submit, comment and vote on ideas. IdeaScale sieves through the multitude of ideas received and floats the ones which have garnered the most votes and comments to the top of the list, giving decision-makers a better sense of the concerns felt on the ground.

- **HUD Ideas in Action**

*HUD Ideas in Action*<sup>9</sup> is a discussion forum powered by a tool called *UserVoice*. It is jointly operated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in partnership with non-profit National Academy of Public Administration. HUD employees and citizens can share and discuss ideas, and vote the best ones for follow-up action. Forums

are topic specific and moderators are assigned to respond to off-topic or misplaced contributions. HUD is using this platform to solicit ideas for their 2010–2015 Strategic Plan.

- **cityofboston.gov**

A number of open government projects at *cityofboston.gov*<sup>10</sup> tap on citizen ideas and expertise, and offer social networking sites for the community to connect and interact.<sup>11</sup> *GIS Data Hub*<sup>12</sup> maps different types of information about the Boston government by location. **Solar Boston**<sup>13</sup> is a two-year programme to increase the amount of solar energy in the city from one-half megawatt to 25 megawatts by 2015, with a dynamic map tracking solar energy use in the city. **Data Dashboard**<sup>14</sup> offers municipal datasets and aims to build a “larger, easier to use and more data-rich” site with citizen feedback. *Citizens Connect*<sup>15</sup> is an iPhone application with which citizens can take pictures of municipal issues such as potholes and graffiti and report them to the City Council.

## UNITED KINGDOM (UK)

The UK has set up *www.data.gov.uk*<sup>16</sup> to consolidate government data in a single searchable website. The goal is to “help

people understand how government works and how policies are made.” To date, there are over 5,400 datasets searchable through the website, from across government departments and local authorities. Citizen developers can download “raw datasets” to create and share applications for public use. Feedback, comments, recommendations, suggestions and requests are also actively solicited.

- **Citizen-developed applications**

*CycleStreets*<sup>17</sup> is a citizen-led non-profit initiative that lets cyclists plan their routes throughout the UK, made possible with the release of Ordnance Survey maps under the open government initiative. *FixMyStreet*<sup>18</sup> is a one-stop website that reduces the hassle of reporting local problems such as broken streetlights and graffiti. To notify the council, citizens only need to enter the postal code or street name and area, locate the problem on the map and describe the problem. Citizens can also view updates on reports submitted by others. The website was developed by mySociety,<sup>19</sup> a registered charity comprising volunteers who seek “to build Internet projects which give people simple, tangible benefits”.

- **Encouraging public crowdsourcing**

Not content with simply releasing data, the UK Government’s project “Making A Difference with Data” or *MADwDATA*<sup>20</sup> seeks to “spread understanding about open data and transparency in local public services”. The initiative demonstrates how government information can be used by citizens to “raise issues, campaign and otherwise influence things that affect local communities”. Projects promoted through the site include gathering of feedback from citizens on the data they would like to access, publishing of good data visualisation and application examples, and guidance material for citizens planning to campaign on various local issues.

- **Cultivating an open government approach within the civil service**


The UK Civil Service has adopted a range of tools to encourage discussion and crowdsourcing among civil servants. The portal [www.communities.idea.gov.uk](http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk)<sup>21</sup> is a safe platform for knowledge sharing across the public sector where users can set up or join communities around specific issues. The intranet-only *Civil Wiki*<sup>22</sup> is a secure knowledge



sharing and collaboration tool for civil servants. The content generated is moderated by its users.

## CANADA

Unlike the US and UK, Canada lacks a government-led centralised open data website. However, some citizens have taken the lead in pushing for more open and accessible government.

- The citizen-developed *datatogc.ca*<sup>23</sup> collates and makes available public government data on a single website for easier access.
- Open government efforts have also taken off at the city level. Toronto's "Open Data Framework"<sup>24</sup> supports open initiatives by improving "data standards, terms of use agreements and open data website design."
- Currently under development, *www.datato.org/app*<sup>25</sup> will let citizens request for the release of specific datasets. The site lets government agencies review data requests and needs from citizens, and will eventually include details from publishers on "known and existing data sources, so that community members can rate them for prioritisation". 

## NOTES

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3. <http://www.data.gov/catalog/geodata>
4. <http://www.data.gov/developers>
5. <http://www.data.gov/developers/showcase>
6. Examples of crowdsourced apps on Data.gov include: FlyOnTime.US (<http://flyontime.us/about/>), a free resource for air travellers to track the performance of the commercial air system in the US, and Employment Market explorer (<http://pujaplicaciones.javeriana.edu.co/Employment/>) that helps users compare and analyse local, regional and state unemployment markets.
7. <http://www.data.gov/communities/>
8. <http://reboot.fcc.gov/data/>
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24. <http://www.toronto.ca/open/>
25. <http://www.datato.org/app/>


## Data.gov.sg

Singapore's data.gov.sg was launched in June 2011 as a "first-stop portal to search and access publicly-available data".

It currently offers over 5,000 datasets from 50 government ministries and agencies. 

Singapore's technical infrastructure, small size and high internet adoption rates suggest promising conditions for considering open government and crowdsourcing approaches. Such initiatives and their working processes should be carefully structured to meaningfully engage citizens and harness their contributions in ways that translate into better decision-making and perceptibly improved outcomes. Initial efforts to generate awareness, gather support and encourage participation from the public will be critical.

For governments and citizens to truly create public value by building on each other's contributions, a climate of mutual respect and a sense of shared ownership are vital. The good news is that these initiatives, when managed well, can help deepen the confidence and trust necessary for future efforts. New ways of framing roles, new skill sets and aptitudes of Singapore public

officers and citizens, as well as new rules of engagement, may need to be developed, before the full potential of these approaches can be unlocked. 

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Lena Leong

## Developing Our Approach to Public Engagement

**Clear goals, thoughtful processes and mutual trust are key to constructive engagement with the public.**

**S**ingapore's success to date — despite being an open economy vulnerable to global shifts and a multi-cultural society susceptible to social divisions — has been predicated on a governance approach characterised by a strong government presence, with heavy reliance on good policy design, legislative tools and tightly managed execution to drive public outcomes. In the course of the nation's progress, however, new realities have arisen. The

tightly-contested General Elections in May and Presidential Elections in August 2011 are indications that a more sophisticated and vocal citizenry desires not merely to be governed, but to be heard, informed and engaged, and to participate in the business of the nation. New technological tools are facilitating these aspirations, with or without the Government's intervention, and changing the way society interacts and relates. Newly-elected President Tony

Tan has called this a “new normal”.<sup>1</sup> Professor Simon Tay has called for “a new compact” between the Government and people.<sup>2</sup>

These developments are transforming the work of government. The Public Service is re-examining how the changing aspirations of citizens and the complexities of its operating environment will reshape its role and the way it relates with the public. How can such engagement lead to better decisions, outcomes and relationships? What new capabilities might be needed of public leaders and officers, citizens and society? What can we learn that could go towards building a more accountable public service, active citizenry and resilient society?

### WHY ENGAGE?

In his 2011 National Day Really Speech, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong pointed out that the nation needs to “harness diverse views and ideas, put aside personal interests, and forge common goals”.<sup>3</sup> Experiences in Singapore and elsewhere have shown that tapping on the public for ideas and energies can guard against group-think, optimise resources and *improve public policy results and productivity*. Such efforts also *fulfill citizens’ aspirations and engender greater ownership of outcomes*. If done well, public engagement “broadens the

base of support, reduces the political risks and increases the legitimacy of outcomes”.<sup>4</sup> Opportunities for people to work together and interact create social networks which can have positive impact on individuals and spin-offs to the community at large.<sup>5</sup> This can lead to *more robust solutions, as well as more resilient communities and society*.

Public engagement efforts are not new to Singapore. Nonetheless, it is useful to re-examine the broad range of engagement strategies so that we can be more intentional about what we want public engagement to achieve, and why. At present, the public is involved in a spectrum of activities: from providing input towards **decision-making in policy formulation** to actively participating in **policy implementation**. Agencies connect with the public through various channels and across different levels and groups.

Modes of public engagement can be categorised as four broad approaches: **inform, consult, build consensus** and **co-create**. The choice of mode, rules of engagement and process design vary with context and intent. In the long run, the aim of engaging the public is not only to resolve immediate issues at hand (what are the best solutions), but also to build capacity for the future (how to do this in a way that would help society achieve better results over

time). The focus therefore is not only on output but *process* — galvanising people through shared values, a compelling vision and a sense of larger purpose; reframing positions from “I” to “We”; from “Me and my interest” to encompass “Us and the larger community”. Besides performance-based objectives, engagement initiatives should also pay attention to experiential and learning goals. A purposeful approach and clarity about longer term outcomes will enhance the capability of all participants to listen, anticipate and engage constructively.

The choice of mode, rules of engagement and process design vary with context and intent.

## MODES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

### **INFORM**

*Providing objective information in a clear and succinct way that helps the public understand the context, alternatives and choices.*

The traditional channels for this include fact sheets, websites, open houses and press releases. It calls for good communication skills, such as sharing concise, specific and relevant information in a timely manner. As contexts, expectations and technologies

evolve, other considerations come into play. First, public issues are becoming more multidimensional and complex. Second, communication needs to reach a more diverse populace. Third, a more educated and connected public expects greater openness and transparency from government. “Government knows best” responses are likely to alienate the public; and in an environment where no one agent has all the answers, neither can it always hold true. Finally, mobile technologies now allow busy but tech-savvy citizenry to stay connected even while on the move, anytime and anywhere. Efforts to inform the public will need to take into account these new developments and social behaviours in order to maximise their reach and impact.

### *Approaches*

- Understand the operating environment, as well as the needs and priorities of different groups of people. Establish rapport, and explain complex policies in a way that connects with different segments of the public. Reach out through a range of media, e.g. public enquiries, on-line platforms, grassroots community programmes and other networks.
- Develop expertise in info-communication technologies and capabilities to present complex information in new ways that can be readily understood.

- Tap on the work of experts from the academia, research institutes and think-tanks to inform public discourse on the issue.
- Balance advocacy with inquiry – explain and help others understand the reasoning behind the policy. At the same time be open and listen well, in order to respond more appropriately.

The aim of engaging the public is not only to resolve immediate issues at hand, but also to build capacity for the future. The focus therefore is not only on output but *process*.

### **CONSULT**

*Gathering ideas and feedback from the public on analysis or proposals by the government so that the public's perspectives, concerns and aspirations are taken into consideration.*

Over the years, a number of channels have been established for public consultation in Singapore. The Feedback Unit organises focus group dialogues. Agencies conduct their own consultation exercises and website surveys to solicit the public's inputs on proposed policy amendments, or seek ideas on service design. Society is now more diverse in

terms of culture, values and attitudes. However, social media, crowdsourcing tools and other collaborative platforms now allow the public to easily propose, consolidate, comment on and express preference for new ideas. In order to effectively harness collective wisdom and build shared perspectives, the design and management of the consultation process will be as important as the substance of the issue at hand.

### **The Ministry of Health's (MOH) Means-testing Experience**

- MOH was prepared to delay the implementation if they felt the ground was not ready for it.
- MOH officers distilled and used the learning from each dialogue to refine the policy, and then tested this out at the next session.
- Dialogues to seek citizens' views on the pegging of subsidy rates were reported in the media.
- As more understood the rationale for change, support for it grew. Conversations shifted from "*me versus the government*" ("I get less, the government gets more") to "*me and the community*" ("I get less, the community gets more").

### **Approaches**

- Determine who, when and what to consult, as well as *how* to include an appropriate plurality of voices.

- Manage expectations and differing views; acknowledge and synthesise inputs, as well as close loops.
- Empower stakeholders by anticipating their needs and giving them appropriate information, roles and choices.
- Make collective contribution visible to dispel misperception that decisions were made prior to consultation. Collaborative platforms and other technological tools can be powerful enablers.
- Build capabilities in dialogue, negotiation, conflict resolution, facilitation and process design, as well as a new mindset and culture of operating in a more open and dynamic environment.

### **BUILD CONSENSUS**

*Partnering the public in framing issues, developing alternatives and coming to a consensus on the preferred solution.*

Consensus is achieved through deliberation and dialogue that help to deepen understanding, reframe and define issues, promote clarity and reach agreement. Decision-making could be jointly made by the government and the public, or devolved to the public. Consensus-building in Singapore has been enhanced both by a strong government, able to galvanise different

constituents of the system on shared interests, and good ties between stakeholder institutions. Examples include interfaith and tripartite labour dialogues, where potentially divisive issues are debated and deliberated behind closed doors and an alignment of positions is sought before a unified stand is announced to the public. Public agencies have also worked with the public at the municipal level to resolve issues through collective agreement.

With greater social diversity, increased complexity and demands for transparency, more public issues may become contentious in future. More conversations may need to be selectively extended into the public space to deepen collective understanding, and build society's capacity to deliberate issues rationally in a safe environment.

#### **The Land Transport Authority's (LTA) Legalising Road Side Parking by Changing Traffic Scheme**

- Limited parking spaces and indiscriminate parking caused friction among residents in a private estate.
- LTA worked with grassroots leaders to facilitate a dialogue so that residents could voice their concerns. Together, they agreed on a traffic scheme to optimise road side parking spaces in the estate.
- Residents then helped to enforce the scheme by reporting infringements.

### Approaches

- Focus on understanding (not judging) – this establishes a safe, orderly and objective environment in which to explore options, assess evidence and weigh trade-offs.
- Use scenarios to set context, frame challenges and sequence questions. Good conversations, especially difficult ones, need thoughtful process design in order to move group conversations from a position of “I and my interest” to a more encompassing “We and the larger community”.
- Since shared ownership of the final outcome is a critical goal, include all representative voices and uncover different perspectives. Resist the temptation to gloss over differences or to let the most dominant or vocal groups capture the agenda in order to reach a resolution.

### CO-CREATE

*Facilitating broad collective action to engender greater ownership of outcomes and increase overall public value beyond what any one sector can achieve on its own.*

In Singapore, the Community in Bloom programme, initiated by the National Parks Board and People’s Association to foster a love for gardening and promote community bonding, is an example of

collaboration between the Government and people. Other stories of co-creation include rehabilitating and reintegrating ex-offenders into society, promoting environmental awareness and protection, and neighbourhood policing.

Technological advances now allow near-instantaneous interaction between large groups of people. Co-creation extends appropriate data, tools, platforms and competencies to the public, encouraging them to self-regulate, self-organise and generate their own best solutions. This increases the government’s transparency and accountability, and also encourages social innovation and the creation of new public value. Singapore’s data.gov.sg project, which opens up over 5,000 datasets from 50 government ministries and agencies, is a further example of “open government” efforts (see page 36 of this issue) that make useful public data available so that the community can co-create new solutions on their own initiative.

### Approaches

- Begin with small prototypes in “safe-to-fail” environments and grow them, as positive results attract supporters and volunteers.
- Help promising ideas to succeed more widely. “Government can take an idea and make it bigger (scale up)



or it can take an idea and encourage lots of those ideas to grow in many places (spread)".<sup>6</sup> Promote promising ideas through the network, and provide supporting infrastructure such as platforms, training and tools.

- Pay attention to people as much as to the programme. Public efforts are usually driven by a compelling sense of purpose, vision or values. Success is often dependent on the ground leadership, strength of networks and relationships.
- Convene participants and resources, and facilitate the growth by pulling multiple, disparate small-scale initiatives together, where appropriate.

### NorthLight School

- The school was established in 2007 to experiment with approaches to help students (mostly from lower income families), who persistently fail the Primary School Leaving Examination.
- A bakery shop delivers free buns every morning. A neighbourhood doctor gives free medical consultation. A group of taxi-drivers offer free rides home to students who are unwell. Others provide internships and varied forms of support.
- The growth and motivation of NorthLight students have surpassed the expectation of the fraternity, and its innovative strategies have been replicated in many primary schools elsewhere in Singapore.

- Cultivate “start-up skills” such as experimentation, prototyping and learning on-the-go, as well as more long-term, sustainable capabilities such as risk assessment, management, relationship building and leadership.

### ENGAGEMENT HAS LIMITS, BUT IT MATTERS

Public engagement in practice has limitations. Engagement efforts consume government resources and in the short term, can appear less efficient than decision-making by fiat. Public outcomes realised through co-creation can be inconsistent in service standards and outcomes, since the government is no longer in direct control of delivery.

The public sector will have to negotiate the transition from a stable and predictable operating environment to one that is more open and dynamic.

Additionally, public involvement in policy deliberations or execution could significantly constrain the manoeuvring space available to the government, possibly hindering its ability to plan and act decisively for the long term. Finally, a more organic, decentralised operating environment, with multiple

# A Framework For Public Engagement

More Robust Solutions · More Resilient Society

## GUIDING IDEAS

### Why engage?

- Improve public policy results and productivity by harnessing community resources.
- Meet citizens' aspirations, engender ownership and increase legitimacy of outcomes.
- Build social capital and strengthen Singaporeans' sense of belonging.

### What matters?

- Galvanise collective contribution through sense of larger purpose, vision and shared values.
- Move conversations from “Me and my interest” to “Us and the larger community”.
- Capacity-building for the future, not just solving what is immediate.

### Longer term outcomes:

#### A public that is

- More informed, better able to appreciate context for change and anticipate the future.
- More attuned to challenges of governing, better able to manage trade-offs and more difficult conversations in the future.
- Better equipped to tackle challenges as a community, withstand threats, respond and recover from crisis.

**DECISION-MAKING AND POLICY FORMULATION** **POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**



	<b>INFORM</b>	<b>CONSULT</b>	<b>BUILD CONSENSUS</b>	<b>CO-CREATE</b>
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	Provide objective information to help the public understand the context, alternatives and choices.	Gather ideas and feedback from the public on analysis or proposals by the government so that the public’s perspectives, concerns and aspirations are taken into consideration.	Partner the public in framing issues, developing alternatives and coming to a consensus on the preferred solution.	Facilitate broad collective action to engender greater ownership of outcomes and increase overall public value beyond what any one sector can achieve on its own.
<b>WHEN TO USE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The intent is to share information and explain rationale of choices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The issue is relatively well-defined with little disagreement on the fundamentals.</li> <li>The government is able and prepared to incorporate the public’s inputs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The issue is complex or disagreements are deep or views polarised.</li> <li>The government has difficulty framing it in a way that the majority would easily accept.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doing so encourages social innovation, bonds community and improves outcomes.</li> <li>The levers for change lie with the individual, community and society.</li> </ul>
<b>EXAMPLES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Singapore Budget <a href="http://www.singaporebudget.gov.sg">www.singaporebudget.gov.sg</a></li> <li>Singapore Police Force <a href="http://www.spf.gov.sg">www.spf.gov.sg</a> and Facebook page <a href="https://facebook.com/singaporepoliceforce">facebook.com/singaporepoliceforce</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry of Health (MOH) Means-testing and Human Organ Transplant Act (HOTA)</li> <li>Ministry of Finance (MOF) Economic Strategies Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Closed door interfaith or tripartite partners — the Ministry of Manpower, National Trades Union Congress and Singapore National Employers Federation (MOM-NTUC-SNEF) dialogues</li> <li>Municipal issues; e.g. Land Transport Authority (LTA) Legalising Road Side Parking by Changing Traffic Scheme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Environmental Agency (NEA) Dengue Prevention Volunteer Groups, and Litter-Free Ambassador Programme</li> <li>Singapore Prison Service (SPS) Yellow Ribbon Project</li> <li>Health Promotion Board (HPB) Healthier Hawker Programme at Yuhua Hawker Centre</li> </ul>


simultaneous activities and a variety of players, can appear inchoate and difficult to manage, evaluate or account for.

Furthermore, the challenges of effective public engagement are significant: the competing interests and expectations of multiple stakeholders have to be balanced and aligned, while also trying to convey the intricacies of government work, complex policy options and trade-offs. There is the need to make sense of simultaneous public input from multiple channels and players without allowing narrower interests or more vocal groups from cornering the agenda, while at the same time maintaining focus on strategic long-term objectives. The public sector will have to negotiate the inevitable transition from a stable and predictable operating environment to one that is more open and dynamic, where the government no longer enjoys an unchallenged legitimacy to act alone in the national interest.

Engagement is not a  
one-off event.

Not every issue needs to be consulted on, have consensus sought or be co-created; knowing when to use or not use appropriate engagement strategies in

particular contexts will be a key to their success. The other side of the equation is the maturity and commitment of the public: all stakeholders, within and outside government, have a part to play in cultivating a constructive working relationship that can enhance national outcomes.

Engagement is not a one-off event. Its quality ultimately depends on the quality of relationship and trust stemming from the agency's record at engagement and delivery, as well as day-to-day interactions with public officers, leaders and fellow citizens. Change involves more than levelling up the competencies of those on the front lines. It has to be embedded into an organisation's mission, vision, values culture, systems and processes. There has to be a change in the mindset of governance: a "shift from a production or delivery state to a relational state, one that does things to or for people to one that more often does things with them".<sup>7</sup> 

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David Chan

## Perceptions of Fairness

The perceived fairness of process and treatment is as significant as outcomes when engaging employees, stakeholders or the public.

**H**uman beings are sensitive to the fairness of decisions made or treatment given in virtually every domain of life. Many situations in organisational life provide opportunities to evaluate and experience fairness, and these assessments influence the perceptions of and reactions to these situations.

Not surprisingly, *fairness perception* (also known as *justice perception*), a central concept in organisational psychology, has been shown in research to be important in

contexts as diverse as personnel selection and staffing, performance appraisal, compensation and benefits, resource allocation, conflict resolution, layoffs, and other human resource functions. Fairness perceptions also play important roles in public policy implementation and public engagement efforts, as well as employee engagement and organisational development efforts relating to issues of attitudes, climate and behaviour.

While the vast majority of managers and leaders want to be fair and believe

that they are, it is nevertheless not uncommon that employees or members of public often think and feel that they have not been treated fairly. Given the importance of the value of fairness and the potential consequences that perceptions of fairness have on employee or public reactions, it is important that we develop a better appreciation of fairness perception and its practical implications.

### **SOCIAL COMPARISONS**

Fairness perception is rooted in social comparison. Specifically, when we react to a situation, we take into account not only our own situation but also the situations of others whom we use as references to compare ourselves with. Research shows that the choice of reference is influenced by similarity with oneself, so we tend to compare ourselves with our co-workers performing comparable jobs rather than our supervisors. In addition to similarity, the choice of reference is also influenced by proximity, accessibility and saliency. Hence, a Singaporean will readily compare himself with his co-worker or fellow student who is a foreigner despite differences such as nationality and cultural background. When social identities (e.g. nationality, sex) and intergroup relationships (e.g. locals versus foreigners, male versus

female) are involved, the effects of social comparison can be very powerful and complex because additional variables correlated with group membership, which (regardless of whether they are objectively relevant or irrelevant to the situation) will be factored into the comparison process and thereby affecting perceptions of fairness.

The negative effects of unfairness are substantially stronger than the positive effects of fairness.

### **FAIRNESS/UNFAIRNESS ASYMMETRY**

Studies show that perceptions of fairness are associated with positive emotions and attitudes, such as higher organisational commitment, and with positive behaviours such as strong organisational citizenship (e.g. helping others). Conversely, perceptions of unfairness are associated with negative emotions and attitudes, such as organisational cynicism, and with negative behaviours such as withdrawal and antisocial acts. However, the negative effects of unfairness are substantially stronger than the positive effects of fairness. This asymmetry of impact is consistent with the well-established power of negativity bias in human perception and judgement, which has been robustly

demonstrated in many diverse fields of research.

## TYPES OF FAIRNESS PERCEPTION

Fairness perception is multidimensional; the research literature distinguishes between two major categories of fairness: **outcome fairness** (or distributive justice) and **process fairness** (or procedural justice).

**Outcome fairness** refers to the extent to which we perceive that the distributions of outcomes are fair. These outcomes may be pay, benefits, promotions, scholarships, subsidies and other tangible outcomes, but they may also refer to less tangible outcomes such as praise and other forms of social recognition. In general, outcome fairness is high when we perceive that the outcomes we receive, relative to those received by others whom we compare with, are equitable in terms of the proportion of inputs to outputs. It is important to correctly identify the referents to whom comparisons are being made, since they may vary over context and time.

Outcome fairness has also been shown to be influenced by expectations of the distribution of outcomes, based on knowledge of and prior experience with the situation, organisation or policymakers. Hence, moderating expectations is a typical pre-emptive

action by managers or policymakers to mitigate anticipated outcome unfairness perceived by employees or members of the public.

However, outcome fairness is also affected by what we think we deserve. Hence, even if I expect a relatively poor pay raise, which I then receive, I am likely to consider the outcome as distributively unfair if I think I deserved a higher pay raise. Consequently, while it is important to be equitable when distributing outcomes among employees, managers also need to provide regular, accurate and constructive feedback to employees on their strengths and weaknesses as well as the overall organisational situation, so that employees' expectations of outcomes and feelings of what they deserve are realistic and accurate. Similarly, policymakers need to invest significant efforts to establish realistic and accurate public expectations with regard to the distribution of policy outcomes.

Over the past three decades, research has clearly indicated that people are concerned not only about the fairness of outcomes, but also the fairness of the process that determines or leads to these outcomes. **Process fairness** is somewhat more complex than outcome fairness, with a range of different aspects contributing to



the overall perception of fairness of process. Early research in the mid-1970s on process fairness perception (in the context of legal disputes) focused on the extent to which one had control over the process or procedures used to determine outcomes. Much of the research on process control has shown that having a voice in the process – regarded as a capacity to influence but not necessarily determine the outcome – will increase perceptions of process fairness.

People are concerned not only about the fairness of outcomes, but also the fairness of the process that determines or leads to these outcomes.

Subsequent research has examined the broader structural characteristics of a fair procedure or process. Specifically, a process is more likely to be considered fair (or unfair) to the extent that the procedures satisfy (or violate) the following procedural rules:

- (1) *Accuracy*. Procedures are based on accurate and valid information;
- (2) *Bias suppression*. Procedures are not affected by personal bias, preconception or self-interest;
- (3) *Consistency*. Procedures are consistently applied across people and time;
- (4) *Correctability*. Procedures provide opportunities to modify or reverse decisions such as allowing appeals and grievances to be considered;
- (5) *Ethicality*. Procedures are congruent with the moral and ethical values held by the people affected; and
- (6) *Representativeness*. Procedures are representative in reflecting the basic concerns of the people affected.

It would be a gross mistake to think that only the distributive fairness of outcomes matters. Research has shown that process fairness predict work outcomes such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment and discretionary extra-role behaviours that benefit the organisation (e.g. suggesting improvements) or other individuals (e.g. helping others), *independent* of the effects of outcome fairness. There is also evidence that process fairness is a stronger predictor than outcome fairness in people's evaluation of the fairness of their leaders. It is also well-established that process fairness mitigates negative reactions to outcome unfairness. Finally, research has shown that the effects of process fairness become stronger when outcome fairness decreases. In other words, when outcomes are perceived as unfair, we tend to be even more highly concerned about the fairness of procedures,

probably in part because we do not want the negative outcomes to be repeated.

Recent studies have also highlighted an important form of fairness known as **interactional fairness** (or interactional justice).<sup>1</sup> Interactional fairness may be further subdivided into *informational fairness* and *interpersonal fairness*. Informational fairness is about people's expectation that they should receive adequate information on and explanation of the process and its outcomes. Interpersonal fairness is about people's expectation that they should be treated in a respectful, honest and interpersonally sensitive manner. Violations of these informational and interpersonal expectations lead to feelings of outrage and sometimes retaliatory behaviours against the perceived source of the violation (e.g. supervisor, organisation, government).

Informational and interpersonal fairness are conceptually distinct but empirically highly correlated: both are likely to correlate with each other to affect the quality of social interactions. It is difficult to feel respected if we do not receive adequate information and explanation; conversely, it is difficult to evaluate any information or explanation provided if we feel that we are not being treated sincerely or with honesty. Interactional fairness has a direct impact on fairness perceptions, but it

has also been shown to mitigate the negative effects of outcome unfairness and even process unfairness arising from violations of some of the rules of procedural fairness. Hence, given the positive effects of interactional fairness, as well as the control that we have over the social interaction process — compared with the relative lack of control over outcomes and structural aspects of process — managers and leaders should pay more attention and effort to increasing the favourability of social interactions so as to contribute to overall perceptions of fairness.

It is difficult to feel respected if we do not receive adequate information and explanation; conversely, it is difficult to evaluate any information or explanation provided if we feel that we are not being treated sincerely or with honesty.

### CONTAGION AND DISCRETION

Two additional research findings in fairness perception are noteworthy. First, *our perceptions of fairness are influenced by how we see or believe our fellow employees or citizens are treated*. In practical terms, fairness perceptions are contagious: an individual's fairness perception is likely to have multiplier effects on the fairness

perceptions of other individuals. Given that negative effects are stronger, it is important to bear in mind the potential widespread and lasting negative effects that unfairness perceptions would have in the organisation or society.

### Fairness perceptions are contagious.

Second, research has shown that *fairness effects are stronger when the decisions are perceived as discretionary rather than non-discretionary*. In other words, people do take into account the context of the fair (or unfair) treatment that they receive. A fair outcome or process that is achieved only after being made mandatory by a successful appeal or grievance process is likely to reduce the positive effects of the individual's fairness perceptions, because the decision to fairly distribute the outcome or implement the process would be perceived by the individual as based on legal or regulatory obligation (i.e. non-discretionary) as opposed to being based on discretion – which would signal sincerity and a genuinely favourable assessment of the individual.


### CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Fairness perception is fundamental, be it at the workplace or in society

at large, since it affects emotions, attitudes, judgements, decisions and behaviours. If fairness perception is low and not adequately addressed, it is difficult to enhance the favourability of more complex experiences such as perceived support, met expectations and employee/public engagement and other established ingredients of a positive experience that will in turn enhance well-being and performance, for both the employee and the organisation, as well as for government institutions and the public they serve.

The good news is that there exists a robust body of research to help us adopt evidence-based approaches to enhancing fairness perception.<sup>2</sup> We know that fairness in distributing outcomes is certainly important but so is the fairness of the process leading to the outcomes, as well as the quality of social interaction in this process. We should pay more attention to our choice of words, manner of communication, timing and other elements of engagement as we interact with employees, members of public and other stakeholders regarding decisions and other information relevant to outcomes and processes.

The basic principles of good leadership and management, such as accountability, transparency, objectivity, meritocracy, integrity,

trustworthiness and compassion, will help cultivate a climate of fairness. In addition, we should distribute incentives when people are deserving, give people reasonable process control, apply procedures consistently and explain exceptional cases, obtain issue-relevant and accurate information from multiple sources before arriving at decisions to prevent perception of biased decisions, take people's values and concerns into consideration, disclose and explain information accurately as far as possible, and treat people with respect, honesty and sensitivity. These positive management and leadership behaviours, many of which would be perceived as discretionary, will reduce cynicism, increase perceived organisational/institutional sincerity and develop a climate of trust, with reciprocal positive effects on respect, morale, well-being, performance, productivity and commitment. 

David Chan is Director of the Behavioural Sciences Institute and Professor of Psychology at the Singapore Management University. He has served as Editor and member on the boards of several journals, as well as on various councils and international advisory panels. Together with Nobel Laureate in Economics Professor Daniel Kahneman and world-renowned psychologist Professor Ed Diener, Professor Chan served on an international committee (2005–2010) supported by various international associations of psychology, which submitted to the United Nations a report on developing measures of national well-being across countries. A frequently cited scholar, he is the first non-American to receive the Distinguished Early Career Contributions Award to I-O psychology. For his contributions to psychology, he was elected Fellow of the Association for Psychological Science, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, the International Association of Applied Psychology, and the American Psychological Association.

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#### NOTES

1. Interactional fairness is sometimes subsumed under process fairness as part of the elements of social interaction associated with processes and procedures.
2. For a review, refer to Gilliland, Stephen, & Chan, David, Justice in Organizations: Theory, Methods, and Applications (2001). In N. Anderson, D. S. Ones, H. K. Sinangil, & C. Viswesvaran (Eds.), *Handbook of Industrial, Work, and Organizational Psychology*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage), pp 143-165



## The ETHOS Roundtable

# Adaptive Government

In this session of the ETHOS Roundtable, three eminent participants from Singapore's 4th Leaders in Governance Programme reflect on the changing roles and responsibilities of public servants in a dynamic world.

**Participants:** **DR ADEEB AL AFIFI**, Director, Foreign Trade And Exports, Department of Economic Development, Abu Dhabi, UAE  
**DR DO LE CHAU**, Director, Training Institute, Ministry of Public Security, Vietnam  
**MR PUNEET KUMAR**, Director (Highways), Ministry of Road Highways and Transport, India

### ON THE KEY CHALLENGES CONFRONTING GOVERNMENTS IN THE NEXT DECADE

**ADEEB:** We have never seen such sweeping changes as we have experienced in the last year or so in the Middle East. On the one hand, we are seeing the effects of bad government; on the other hand, many of the communities involved are not mature enough to understand politics or how governments are run, and what their own commitments are. What they want is the privilege of new services or subsidies, and if they don't get them, they take to the streets. It is worrying for the future.

For a society to develop, the whole community has to be involved. Everyone has to understand, believe and play a part in the national vision for it to have

fruitful outcomes. Take our efforts to diversify from the oil sector and grow a stronger private sector. We are a very small country of 1.2 million citizens and one of the top five oil producers in the world. Yet even though we have the financial resources, open budgets and ability to employ the best talent from anywhere in the world, it does not mean it is easy to implement reforms. You cannot set the agenda at the top and assume everything will automatically fall into place, even with the best written strategy or policy. Much more needs to be done to make things happen.

**PUNEET:** Gone are the days when political power used to be concentrated in certain blocs, with little accountability for whether or not they delivered. With globalisation and a knowledge-based

society and economy, this can no longer be the case: what has happened in the Middle East demonstrates this. Yet despite their present difficulties, many countries possess intrinsic strengths that can still be developed. So the biggest challenge is still that of leadership. If a country's leadership is unable to provide solutions to the needs of its population, unrest is only going to increase.

So the onus is now on political leaders and public servants to respond in time to the expectations of their citizens. This will require initiative and anticipation of future needs. India, for example, is investing almost US\$1 trillion<sup>1</sup> in infrastructure. About half of this is expected to come from the private sector in all the infrastructure sectors, which are right now developing rapidly. Investments are also being made in sectors such as education, healthcare, telecommunications and IT, all at a very fast pace.

**CHAU:** The world faces a serious depletion of energy and other material resources, including water, which could potentially lead to shortages serious enough to ignite war. Security – both internal and cross-border – will continue to be a concern. At the same time, we have rapid economic growth, with every country trying to develop as quickly as it can, and life expectancies

are getting longer, which means an ageing population and pressure for more services. Vietnam has one of the fastest ageing populations in the world today even though 65% of our population is still under 35.

The challenge for governments everywhere will be to find fresh or alternative resources to continue economic growth, and even increase it for social development and services. Countries will have to work closely together, for instance, on security issues as scarce resources are depleted. We have to work together to find new alternatives and also to maintain stability while trying to make the best, coordinated use of what we have left.

### **ON FUTURE SKILLS PUBLIC SERVANTS WILL NEED**

**PUNEET:** We will have to go beyond safe and tried measures in order to respond to the needs of our people. We will need people who are more willing to take on challenges and innovate; at the same time, it will also be the responsibility of a stable political leadership to encourage and empower such civil servants. They should not be hounded for attempting the right sort of initiatives even if some of them may fail. Unless this kind of enabling environment is provided, public servants will find no room to innovate, and they will be unable to

develop the capability needed to handle the complex and unknown challenges to come. The element of trust is important: both within the public service and between government and the people.

**CHAU:** Public servants will need to serve a bridging function: they have to stay connected with the ground in order to understand their needs and making sure government policies are responsive and relevant to the people. Also, the important challenges ahead will cut across political and national boundaries. Public servants will therefore need to work in close cooperation with one another and even with their counterparts in different countries. They will have to be globally aware and culturally literate, able to relate across different regions.

Nevertheless, there will not be straightforward, single solutions to the challenges of our time. In many areas, international cooperation by cross-border teams within related sectors such as healthcare and energy could be the most effective way forward.

**ADEEB:** We have found that it is important to be able to cascade our vision of development all the way down to the individual citizen in the community. We hold open dialogues and discussions with people on the

ground in order to build mutual understanding that certain new developments or policies are in the interest of their families, and will have a positive impact on future generations. Although it is very time consuming, it is also important to engage our private sector companies individually and regularly, to understand what they do, even to the extent of trying to know their management on a personal level. If people and businesses do not perceive the benefits of public policies, it is a waste of time no matter how much we spend. Whatever our priorities, we are dealing with human beings, not machines that can be overlooked or put aside if they don't fit into the new ideal.

This has required a new mindset in government. The old way of government thinking was centred on processes and authority — a senior public servant in this system was aloof, inaccessible and did not need to account for his policies or decisions; he had no key performance indicators (KPIs), targets or goals, and was there to play a role or provide a service as he saw fit. The new thinking looks at society as customers and partners; the government official is there to serve the people. We have had to convince the community that we are doing our best to support them.

Tremendous changes have already taken place in our countries, but deep

transformation will take much longer. We cannot simply cut and paste what other parts of the world are doing, nor can we forecast an exact outcome for the future. So we must try out things and assess the impact, adapting ideas and policies for ourselves as we go along. We have to have a general strategy, but not too detailed long-term plans; instead we should be able to try out short-term plans, and be prepared to stop, change direction or push forward as we go along. What happens when people are afraid to apply new policies, or change or drop existing ones? Things are fine today, everything seems to be developing at a slow and steady pace, and there are no riots or strikes, so why try a new initiative? Then the status quo rigidifies, the facts on the ground change, and the boat starts sinking. This was the lesson in the Middle East and other parts of the world.

### **ON THE VALUES THAT SHOULD ENDURE**


**PUNEET:** It is common, perhaps even inevitable, for complacency to set in when basic needs are met and survival is not at stake. It takes visionary leadership to be able to anticipate a better future and provide motivation to forge ahead even when things are comfortable now.

**CHAU:** What's striking about Singapore is the sense of a common, relentless push for economic development. As a result — perhaps of your vulnerability — there is a strong zeal for survival and success. In Vietnam, as in other countries, a programme might be pushed out to the provinces but the outcomes would be mixed because there is no sense of urgency nor a shared priority in making the implementation work.

**ADEEB:** Your sense of common purpose is an asset. Other countries can afford not to agree: if an idea reaches an impasse, they pack up and try again in six months. In many other systems, there are often long debates between officials in different agencies with different priorities, and key projects often stagnate as a result. In Singapore, because of your constraints, you cannot afford *not* to agree — all parties have to sit down, compromise and come up with a win-win solution. This is not something you should take for granted.

Luck has also played some part in Singapore's development, in that certain policies you took a gamble on have paid off, but also that you had the right people at the right time in the beginning; that competent people, even those who have studied or worked abroad, chose to stay instead of leaving the country, as has frequently happened elsewhere.



The loyalty of your people is part of your good fortune. But surely it is also how you handle the package that you are given. This is what differentiates Singapore from the rest of Asia. 

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The ETHOS Roundtable was conducted by ETHOS Editor Alvin Pang in July 2011. Mr Puneet Kumar, Dr Adeeb Al Afifi and Dr Do Le Chau were participants in the 4th Leaders in Governance Programme (LGP) organised by the Singapore Civil Service College from 4 to 12 July 2011. Drawing from Singapore's developmental experience, the LGP offers foreign delegates practical insights into the fundamentals of good governance and effective policy implementation for sustainable economic development and social cohesion. Over the eight-day programme, participants interact with senior government officials and thought leaders, and visit key government agencies to understand their operating philosophies and values.

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#### NOTE

1. As reported in *The Economist*, 22 November 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/17493351>



Opinion

Aaron Maniam

## Preparing Public Officers for New Modes of Governance

Public service training and development should evolve in tandem with the dynamic, relational modes of governance that are emerging.

Government in Singapore has experienced several transformative shifts since independence in 1965, broadly categorised by the following stages, each building on the previous phases of development:

- I. Providing **basic services** to citizens, and dealing with fundamental security imperatives.
- II. Becoming **cost-efficient** in a world of scarcity.
- III. Establishing **enduring, long-run institutions** that maintain efficiency beyond the short term, in response to internal and external volatility.
- IV. Cultivating and sustaining institutions that are **adaptive, innovative and change-ready**, in order to navigate the growing complexity and uncertainty that has arisen from globalisation and accelerating change.

V. Moving beyond impersonal institutions to curate **governance that is relational, empathetic and engaging** in dealing with diversity of citizen and stakeholder expectations and interests. This diversity predates, but has been uniquely enabled by, the growth of social media.

These stages are not mutually exclusive. Instead, each encompasses and extends on the previous. With each transformation, the demands on and expectations of government grow in magnitude, diversity and complexity.

Singapore moved from Stage I to Stage II relatively quickly during the industrialisation drive of the 1970s. The transition to Stage III occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in response to the prospect of internal political change after Lee Kuan Yew stepped down as Prime Minister, as well as international volatility arising from the collapse

of the Eastern bloc. In the mid-1990s, the building of long-run institutions dovetailed with the early stages of the PS21 movement.

Government in Stages I to III required efficient, efficacious and effective meeting of public needs, adopting what economists would call “optimisation” measures to carry out the functions of government at the least possible cost. Particularly from Stage II onwards, “lean” government was very much in vogue and outsourcing of ostensibly secondary services became more prevalent.

### NEW FRONTIERS...

Government currently operates somewhere between Stages IV and V. This involves several key roles:

- Operating at the **frontiers of trade-offs** and making difficult prioritisations. The double-digit growth of our early years, and of recent post-recession times, cannot be sustained indefinitely. We are operating on, rather than within, our production possibility frontier, and the opportunity costs of our policy choices will be felt more acutely, until and unless we can shift the frontier outward through technological transformation. Increasingly, we will make policy under assumptions of

some level of austerity, rather than resource abundance.

- Being **creative** and finding new sources of ideas, innovation and productivity, rather than relying on tried-and-tested policy options. This may require shielding small groups of officers to conduct such work, akin to “skunk work” groups or the growing number of futures units in the government who are given the freedom to consider out-of-the-box issues, without being bogged down in daily routines.
- Working with and harnessing the potential of the **private and people sectors** to deliver “governance”, a concept beyond the exclusive remit of the public sector. Governance is less of an “elite” endeavour than traditional “government”. Instead, it involves a spectrum of cooperative modalities, from consulting outside government on a range of policy options generated by policymakers; coordinating amongst different groups that each have interests in particular aspects of a policy area; co-creating policy with non-government entities when appropriate; or even community-ownership of policy areas where there are no particular public good functions to be met by government provision.

- Navigating a state of **constant adaptation and innovation** rather than having the comfort of any stable “equilibrium”. Instead of seeking elusive “right” answers from the inception of a policy, policymakers will find themselves leaning towards more iterative and experimental approaches, which emphasise the *process* of governance as much as the final *product*. Incremental improvements on initial prototypes, rather than pre-packaged policy that is “ready upon delivery”, will become more common.
- Working **beyond “hard” policy options** and embracing the need for “softer” aspects like effective engagement of citizens, resonant communication and making policy that connects emotively, not just analytically; with the “heart”, not just the “head”. This will involve policymakers seeing the public not just as taxpayers and customers or service-receivers in transactional relationships, but more as citizens with a stake and role in Singapore’s collective future.

### ...AND NEW CAPABILITIES

The current stages of governance will require capabilities that are qualitatively different from those required earlier. In particular,

efficiency-focused approaches will need to evolve to allow spare capacity for officers to deal with complex and often untidy situations.

It is likely that the exact capability set required for such governance will not be static. Instead, it will be dynamic and kaleidoscopic, shifting and evolving as governance acquires new facets and dimensions. Nonetheless, several key ideas can already be discerned:

- As uncertainty grows in what Anthony Giddens has called our “runaway world”,<sup>1</sup> policy work will increasingly be less direct and less amenable to clear solutions that can be determined ahead of time. Instead, policymaking will be characterised more by indirect approaches or “obliquity”, a term popularised by the *Financial Times* journalist John Kay in his 2010 book.<sup>2</sup> Instead of attempting to tackle policy challenges “head on”, practitioners of governance may find it more useful to address the systems surrounding a particular policy experience and the root causes therein. Implementing obliquity will be challenging; it will call for significant lateral thinking from policymakers who may be more familiar with optimising approaches. Time-constrained decision-makers will also have to

reframe their perceptions of policy, and exercise a measure of suspension of disbelief, if oblique approaches are to be allowed to take their course.

Efficiency-focused approaches will need to evolve to allow spare capacity for officers to deal with complex and often untidy situations.

- Policymakers will probably have to better understand the soft, emergent, non-linear qualities of complex systems, which operate far more like biological ecosystems than mechanical systems (which are based on immutable input-output relationships). Such quasi-biological characteristics, with major consequences sometimes resulting from minor perturbations, are evident in many governance challenges today, from climate change and falling fertility rates to the impact of social media. An appreciation of these traits – what former president of the Institute of the Future Bob Johansen terms “bio-empathy”<sup>3</sup> – will help policymakers accept that they might not be able to predict all the changes in a complex system, many of which arise from self-reinforcing feedback loops and multiple variables.
- Perhaps most fundamental to governance of the future will be the need to constantly remake policy, reinvent ideas and re-perceive the world. It is likely to involve engaging in acts of *creation* and not just the maintenance or sustaining of existing systems. In many ways, this will give expression to latent “maker instincts” in all of us – our inclinations to be what Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown have called “homo farens”, the doer, not just “homo sapiens”, the thinker.<sup>4</sup> Brown extends this argument to include the need for some of us to be “homo ludens”, engaging in *creative play* geared towards innovation. This ability to participate in strategically-directed play will be key if our innate maker instincts are to operate obliquely and in a bio-empathetic way.

### CAPABILITY BUILDING AND TRAINING

How do we ensure that policymakers are given the appropriate training and experience-building to meet the rigours of being playful, creative makers who employ oblique approaches and who appreciate the non-linear rhythms of complex systems? In keeping with the evolving demands of governance, the very process of training will have to employ more oblique, bio-empathetic

and play-related approaches, and many training techniques will be experiments in themselves.

The exact capability set required for such governance will be dynamic and kaleidoscopic.

At the Civil Service College, some of the ongoing experiments in these directions include:

- *Sessions where training and “sense-making” functions are combined.* Instead of seeing training as a one-way communication from trainers to trainees, some sessions are structured much more as “facilitated” discussions, where facilitators learn as much as course participants about the subject being explored. Such platforms for dialogue are critical sources of new ideas: the majority of our programmes involve participants from multiple agencies, whose experiences of different adjacent possibilities can provide rich new insights to their colleagues. These sessions require facilitators with both depth of experience in curating such discussions, as well as breadth of policy exposure, who can draw connections between the work of different ministries to

illuminate both their commonalities and contrasts.

- *Sessions involving policy gaming and simulations.* While the military has had a long tradition of “wargaming”, such techniques have been less widely used in the civilian sector. Current small-scale experiments involve exploring how to craft such exercises, where participants can be immersed in a realistic, if not totally life-like, set of circumstances that hone their instincts to make decisions under dilemma-ridden conditions of complexity, incomplete information and unpredictability. These are not always comfortable exercises, but the expansion of participants’ comfort zones is in fact a key aim.

Complementing these experiments is a set of *fundamentals* in our training philosophy that we believe will continue to be useful, even as the nature of governance evolves.


First, training must continue to be systematic and regular. As the demands on policymakers, our development programmes must grow more intentional and purposeful. We currently conduct leadership programmes for new entrants; for those taking on supervisory roles for the first time; for those first taking on Director or Head of Department positions; and for

new entrants into senior Public Sector Leadership/agency head positions.

Governance of the future will involve engaging in acts of *creation* and not just the maintenance or sustaining of existing systems.

Second, the Whole-of-Government nature of many training programmes, particularly those geared towards future leaders, will be key. The value of such interactions across agencies is both analytical, in inculcating understanding among future leaders of how government operates as a system, not just discrete silos; as well as in the formation of social capital, through networks and bonds of trust developed over the various leadership programmes, which can last from two to nine weeks.


Third, we continue to adopt a “practitioner-based” teaching/facilitation model, where more senior officers return to the College to share experiences and insights with their junior colleagues. Some invited practitioners come from the private, non-profit and academic sectors, who provide useful non-government perspectives on the effects of current public policies. In a changing world, each sharing could legitimately encompass good practices as well as learning points from policies

that did not pan out as anticipated. Both cases offer useful ways of nurturing a deep awareness of the Public Service’s shared history, which can inform the thought processes of future generations of public officers as they navigate evolving trends in governance. 

Aaron Maniam is Director of the Institute of Policy Development at the Civil Service College. The Institute is responsible for organising leadership training for public sector leaders at various stages of their careers. He is concurrently Associate Fellow at the Centre for Strategic Futures in the Prime Minister’s Office, where he works with a team analysing issues with long-term implications for Singapore’s future. He began his career in public service at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The views expressed in this article are his own.

#### NOTES

1. Giddens, Anthony, *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives* (London: Routledge, 1999)
2. Kay, John, *Obliquity: Why Our Goals are Best Achieved Indirectly* (Great Britain: Profile Books, 2011)
3. Johansen, Bob, *Leaders Make the Future* (San Francisco, California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009). Bio-empathy is on Johansen’s list of ten leadership qualities for a “VUCA” world (one that is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous).
4. Thomas, Douglas, and Brown, John Seely, *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change* (2011)

 Opinion

Bertrand de La Chapelle

## Frontiers, Sovereignty and Cyberspace

Should social media platforms be governed as  
cross-border digital jurisdictions?

**BORDERLESS INTERNET  
VERSUS NATIONAL FRONTIERS**

The technically borderless nature of the Internet has enabled “globalisation” and exemplifies the vision of a unified world, where frontiers would become less relevant. Hailed as a tool for cultural, political and economic convergence, the Internet is often presented as a single transnational space, governed by principles of democracy and freedom, even able to positively impact the territories of repressive regimes. More recently, major platforms for social networking, global content hosting or micro-blogging have transformed the Internet into a full social and political space, a “global polity” in the eyes of some.

In parallel, however, growing security concerns and differing national perspectives regarding freedom of expression, copyright or privacy protection on social media have triggered a worldwide reaffirmation

by governments of national boundaries and jurisdictions. Indeed, national governments have struggled to adapt older laws to the new digital environment. They also face difficulties enforcing their rules and court decisions on actors located out of their borders and, at the same time, worry about the impact of other countries’ legislations on their own citizens and corporations.

While understandable, this trend of hardening national boundaries in the digital environment brings risks of censorship and surveillance, conflicts of jurisdiction and difficult enforceability of national laws in the absence of transnational cooperation, as well as a possible fragmentation of the Internet with a consequent loss of the benefits of its borderless nature.

**A “FRACTALISATION” OF SOVEREIGNTY**

Global social media platforms may be accessible in all countries of the world, and therefore potentially subject



to all national laws. However, their headquarters and data centres are located in specific countries. Any user, whatever their physical location, is therefore directly or indirectly bound by the laws of that country. Furthermore, the Terms of Service (ToS) established by the said platform usually specify the applicable jurisdiction in case of dispute.

If sovereignty is the exercise of legal authority over a physical territory, this amounts to a “fractalisation”<sup>1</sup> of sovereignty: the jurisdiction and legal framework of one country becomes de facto applicable on the territory of another one, extending the reach of the former and reducing the sovereignty of the latter.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AS DIGITAL TERRITORIES?**

Beyond defining the ultimate jurisdiction, social media ToS represent the de facto “internal law” of the corresponding social space, allowing the management of the company to specify privacy, freedom of expression and copyright rules. Interestingly enough, although the current major platforms are American companies and their content mostly hosted on US territory, their ToS are more restrictive in terms of the content they accept than what is allowed under the First Amendment (yet less than what certain countries

impose) and their privacy protection stronger than what is allowed under American law (yet less than what Europe or Canada require). This reflects a desire to establish unified community rules, satisfying the most vocal users, and deemed acceptable in most territories.

In a way, as long as they remain on the servers, accessible through, say, [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), the more than 600 million members of that social platform are effectively in “the digital territory of Facebook”. This is likewise the case for the user-generated content hosted on global platforms such as YouTube. More generally, through the Domain Name System (DNS),<sup>2</sup> cyberspace is organised into “digital domains”, each subject to specific rules contained in the ToS of the site operator: following a link to [youtube.com](http://youtube.com) from a page on [baidu.cn](http://baidu.cn)<sup>3</sup> is equivalent to crossing a digital frontier and potentially changing the applicable rules of accepted behaviour as well as the relevant jurisdiction. Could this notion of digital frontiers point to the emergence of a specific, new geography for cyberspace, based on such “digital territories”?

### **TOWARDS GLOBAL TERMS OF SERVICE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA?**

Instead of trying to harmonise disparate ad hoc national legislations that global platforms have difficulty respecting,

or fantasise about future Internet treaties, could it be possible to start from the existence of these virtual communities and encourage such social media to adopt global ToS that would be acceptable by the countries in which they want to operate? An important component of such regimes would be the availability of internal dispute resolution procedures to address in a first instance the potential conflicts, before they are brought in front of national courts.

The development of such global ToS should not only involve the users of these services but also the relevant governments and the other business entities connected to such platforms via Application Programming Interfaces,<sup>4</sup> in conformity with the multi-stakeholder governance principle established by the World Summit on the Information Society.<sup>5</sup> Currently, emerging discussions in the OECD regarding a possible regime for cloud computing<sup>6</sup> are an illustration of such an approach.

This paradigm shift (starting from the virtual communities rather than from the national level) is not a limitation of national sovereignty – quite the contrary. It would not suppress the ultimate competence of national legal systems, but simply recognise an intermediary level of governance, fully involving public authorities (and civil

society actors) in the elaboration of social media ToS.


The Internet is technically conceived as inherently borderless. Our international system, however, is based on physical frontiers defining national jurisdictions. How can the human family resolve this dynamic tension and define governance mechanisms for a common global Cyberspace and its sub-domains? The development of the Internet places the relationship between physical territories and applicable jurisdiction under a new light. The concept of digital territories may be a path to explore.

Waiting for traditional multilateral processes to produce a universal regime for the Internet is a delusion. Notwithstanding unavoidable delays, it is neither the right format nor the right procedure. Likewise, multiplying incompatible national legislations in a context of low enforcement capacity is a sure recipe for destroying the benefits of the first truly global communication medium.

In this context, it may be time to ask a key question: can physical frontiers remain the sole criteria for the determination of applicable jurisdiction in Internet-related activities, or does Cyberspace prefigure a new geography, including the concept of Digital Territories and a global, multi-stakeholder cooperation to

define acceptable ToS for social media platforms?

Waiting for traditional multilateral processes to produce a universal regime for the Internet is a delusion.

New challenges require innovative approaches to reframe and successfully address the intractable issues we are currently facing. All public servants in the Digital Age need to develop new skills: to manage regular interactions with businesses and civil society at the national level (the multi-stakeholder approach) but also to understand how national regulations can impact other countries. The pan-jurisdiction reality of social media creates an intermediary space between the national level and treaty-based international arrangements. What will be needed are public servants who can combine technical competence and traditional diplomatic skills, and are willing to engage in new global discussions where the size of the country matters less than the capacity of its representatives to contribute to effective solutions. 

Bertrand de La Chapelle is Director of the Governance Program of the International Diplomatic Academy in Paris and a member of the Board of Directors of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). He was the Thematic Ambassador and Special Envoy for the Information Society of the French Foreign and European Affairs Ministry between 2006 and 2010.

#### NOTES

1. The term “fractalisation” is used as a reference to complex mathematical objects called fractals (discovered by French scientist Benoît Mandelbrot) that help describe self-similar and dendritic structures, such as the surface resulting from the interpenetration of two substances.
2. The Domain Name System is the hierarchical set of identifiers including generic domains (such as .com, .org, .net) and country-codes (like .fr for France) used in the address bar of browsers.
3. Baidu is the dominant Chinese search engine.
4. Application Programming Interfaces are a set of protocols that allow third-party applications to plug into the database of major platforms to enable value-added services.
5. The World Summit on the Information Society was a four-year UN Summit (2002–2005) that established the principle of associating governments, businesses, civil society and international organisations in the development and application of regimes related to the evolution and use of the Internet.
6. Cloud computing, describes the use of distributed and remote computing, and storage capacity using large data centres for one or several online platforms.



## Book Review

Tan Peng Ting

## Triumph of the Lion City

**Book Title** : Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier

**Author** : Edward Glaeser

**Published by** : The Penguin Press, 2011

For those of us living in the land-scarce, high-density city state of Singapore, where human capital is often lauded as the only resource, Edward Glaeser's latest book may be preaching to a most pious choir. The Harvard Professor of Economics paints a brightly positive picture of cities as a powerful driver of wealth and development: the book champions cities as the greatest human invention of all time, no less. In Glaeser's analysis, cities are incubators and transmitters of ideas; natural engines of growth that can generate happiness for a population – but only if they have applied the right formula for success.

Presenting itself as a guide to creating a successful city, the book recommends strategies for cities to stay relevant in the age of globalisation. Analysing the success and failure of cities throughout history, Glaeser advocates high-density urban centres

that nurture creative and innovative people as the way forward for healthy and sustained growth. He argues that a city's success depends on its ability to innovate and reinvent itself to produce *ideas* and not things. At the very heart of cities are its people – it is through density and concentration of talent that cities are able to incubate innovation by connecting their inhabitants and serving as a gateway for ideas. Urban density confers the advantage of not just a large, accessible catchment of population, but also the connectivity which is conducive to the spread and propagation of ideas. The denser the city, the higher the productivity tends to be, which in turn supports higher wages. Glaeser offers examples of how cities can prevent decline and continuously rejuvenate its economy by creating a climate favourable to innovation through urban density, industrial diversity and education.

Not dissimilar to Richard Florida's idea of the Creative Class,<sup>1</sup> Glaeser stresses the importance of small firms, skilled citizens and small-scale interconnected creative communities. In support of this view, he attributes the decline of Detroit in the United States (US) to the loss of its creative class and small firms. The previously innovative city, he argues, had been replaced by a monoculture of ideas — a juggernaut company which drew fewer and fewer educated workers into massive factories that were disconnected from the city.

A city's success depends on its ability to innovate and reinvent itself to produce *ideas* and not things.

Of particular resonance is Glaeser's emphasis on the importance of helping poor *people* and not poor places. Rather than indulging in more infrastructure projects to boost the economy, the author suggests that it would be more effective instead to nurture a city's inhabitants and stoke its innovative and creative spirit. Investing in people, Glaeser argues, is more valuable than investing in real estate, because fundamentally "cities aren't buildings; cities are people".

Glaeser's book is aimed primarily at an American audience, often

addressing the Detroit Mayor to suggest solutions for the "Rust Belt" cities in the US. He goes further to debunk what he regards as a misguided American "environmentalist" ideology that denounces high-density urban development as the epitome of vile living conditions. Being an environmentalist does not mean that one must live in nature — on the contrary, Glaeser seems to suggest that such ideas have ironically resulted in the encroachment of suburban developments into wilderness areas and the loss of natural habitats and agricultural land. Coupled with the American dream of home ownership with a quarter-acre home and garden for every family, the preference for a low-density lifestyle has led to urban sprawl across major metropolitan areas in the US. So an urban dweller who lives, say, in a Singapore high-rise apartment and commutes via public transport, may in fact be more "environmentally friendly" than a person who lives by the forest, away from the urban jungle, but has to drive everywhere.

Cities aren't buildings; cities are people.

### SINGAPORE — POSTER CHILD FOR SUCCESS

Unsurprisingly, a few pages of his book are devoted to Singapore, which appears

to be something of a poster child for Glaeser's formula for a successful city. While the author has taken pains to uncover the common urban properties conducive to the creation of human wealth and happiness, he also points out that every successful city "defines its own idiosyncratic space". In the case of Singapore, he (perhaps predictably) highlights the investment in education and cultivation of its human capital as one of the city state's key successful factors. Singapore's resource and land scarcity have served as the impetus for various policies, which in Glaeser's view have resulted in positive urban growth: the attraction of international capital, a broad and effective education system, and careful industrial planning. He argues that unlike Japan, where the government plays the role of venture capitalist in investing in its local companies, Singapore has supported the innovation and growth of firms largely through market mechanisms, supported by excellent infrastructure and the rule of law. Whereas Tokyo attracts the nation's talent through a concentration of political power and associated wealth, Singapore attracts global talent and capital through a high quality of life and strong urban governance.


Glaeser also offers insights into what *not* to do in the pursuit of urban growth. Detroit is held up as an example

Beyond immigration and integration, the building of communities will be fundamental to Singapore's continued success.


of over-reliance on large corporations at the expense of supportive conditions for individual innovators; overdependence on the private sector to drive development is also to be avoided. It begs the question of whether Singapore's population — which continues to grow largely through non-resident immigration, which in turn is partly cost-driven — risks inheriting a less-skilled migrant population (as Detroit eventually did) even as more highly-educated and mobile Singaporeans flow to other global cities. If this is the case, then signs such as the 2011–2012 World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report,<sup>2</sup> which cited an "inadequately educated workforce" as one of the top concerns for doing business in Singapore, may signal cause for concern. If small firms and creative individuals are at the heart of Glaeser's innovative city, it makes one wonder if our reliance on large multinational firms will, like Detroit's experience, eventually become detrimental to the health of our urban ecosystem and economy.

# Was Gandhi an Anti-Urbanist?

While cities look to be the dominant human landscape of the future, it is important not to be overly deterministic about the role of cities and urban development as engines of growth, at the expense of rural development. As the rural-urban divide starts to blur, it is important to bear in mind that cities depend very much on their hinterlands for sustenance and growth. Singapore is no exception, especially since we import up to 90% of our food consumption. Glaeser, as an economist, appears rather one-sided about the overriding merits of urban development. While cities are

certainly powerful engines of growth, Glaeser seems to have overlooked certain basic developmental elements, such as food production. For instance, Glaeser unfairly pegs Gandhi as an anti-urbanist for his support of rural development in villages scattered across India. Could the solution to rural poverty and world hunger really be to move all the world's populations into cities? It might give city dwellers cause to consider where our future food supplies are going to come from if the entire world's population were to live in cities. 

Glaeser emphasises that it is the *continued* investment in a population's capabilities that allows cities to be truly flexible and resilient in uncertain global economic conditions. Taken together, his investigations into the long-term health of urban centres suggest that Singapore should build on its success as an urban centre, taking advantage of its high density, by cultivating an

environment where ideas can spread and thrive, developing networks of individual innovators and nurturing home-grown creative communities that can anchor and support vital talent. Beyond immigration and integration, the building of communities will be fundamental to Singapore's continued success. 

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#### NOTES

1. Florida, Richard, *The Rise of the Creative Class: and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (USA: Basic Books, 2002)
2. The same report ranked Singapore as the second most competitive economy in the world. See <http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-competitiveness-report-2011-2012>





Opinion

Riel Miller

# Futures Literacy — Embracing Complexity and Using the Future

If policymakers want to address complexity, they must define and then use the future more effectively, argues futurist Riel Miller.

## WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE? GETTING THE QUESTION RIGHT

The world is not more complicated or complex today than yesterday; when it comes to seeing and acting in any specific situation it is capacity that makes the difference, not the absolute number of permutations or even unfamiliarity. What seems complicated to a child may seem like child's play to an adult. In particular, what matters is the sophistication of our sense-making: our ability to discover, invent and construct the world around us.

To date, considerable effort has been made to improve sense-making capabilities. Policymakers call on familiar and intuitive methods of everyday experience (preparation and planning), as well as techniques (such as forecasting, horizon scanning, scenarios, expert opinions) considered

adequate based on past perceptions of our needs and capacities. Nevertheless, the perceived proliferation of so-called “wicked problems” in recent times has added to a mounting sense of uncertainty, and called into question both the decision-making value of these business-as-usual approaches as well as their sufficiency in accounting for complexity in practice.

Recent advances in understanding complexity, uncertainty and emergence have opened up new ways of defining and using the future. The question is therefore not how to cope with a universe that seems to be getting more complex, but how to improve our ability to take advantage of the novel emergence that has always surrounded us.<sup>1</sup> We need to bring our capacity to use the future into alignment with both our perceptions of the complex, emergent reality around us, and our aspirations.

## ANTICIPATORY SYSTEMS AND THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE FUTURE IN THE PRESENT<sup>2</sup>

In practical terms, embracing complexity means, at a minimum,<sup>3</sup> thinking about the future in terms of *anticipatory systems*, and being able to distinguish three types of future. It is failure to do so appropriately that more often than not muddles the sense-making processes supporting policy formation and implementation.

Since we live in an anticipatory universe,<sup>4</sup> characterised by time and motion, it is not surprising that many phenomena and organisations exhibit or contain anticipatory systems. Thus trees lose their leaves in anticipation of winter and humans plant crops in anticipation of hunger. Understanding the future from an anticipatory systems perspective takes into account animate and inanimate, conscious and unconscious mechanisms for integrating the non-existent future into the present.

Once the diversity of these “futures in the present” can be uncovered, the next step is to distinguish the three dimensions of such futures.

### **Contingency**

Contingency futures are phenomena expressed within a system that emerge due to the intervention of an extra-

systemic event. One can prepare for or pre-empt a contingency future, but when it happens, it arises from an exogenous force. This potential of the present rests on the threats or opportunities posed by external forces. Threats can take the form of predators or disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes, pandemics or other wildcard events. Contingency futures can also be positive such as winning the lottery or having resources beneath desert sands suddenly become valuable.

Contingency futures can be imagined and even calculated probabilistically. Although statistics and odds are just informed guesses and “black swans” can pop up at any time, human beings have become fairly good at preparing for contingent futures. We use simulation and rehearsals (emergency drills) to generate adaptive capacities (open minds, transparency, good communications) that allow us to react to contingency futures that emerge from outside forces.

### **Optimisation**

Optimisation futures are things we believe can be “caused” to happen in the future through premeditation and planning, generally in circumstances where the rules and resources are assumed to be fixed. The idea is to impose our will on the future —

imagining, if “all goes well”, that we can “colonise” tomorrow so that it conforms to our desires and expectations. Here, the potential of the present is like a chess game, with many possible permutations and alternative paths, but the ends, means and rules of play are given. Farmers plant seeds with the expectation of a future crop, knowing full well that many factors can intervene in the meantime: from locusts and war to good weather and enough “hands” to bring in the harvest.

As with contingency futures, humans have become pretty good at managing optimisation futures. Even when efforts to shape the future may only be partially successful, we have generally offered the rationale that the end (e.g. having food to eat later in the year) justifies the means (imposing a plan).

### ***Exploration-Discovery***

However, the potential of the present goes beyond contingency and optimisation futures. A top-notch plan to improve the product line and beat the competition may be rendered entirely obsolete as novelty emerges. Toyota may beat GM because the way it plans its production of cars is better than that of GM, but the decline of the automotive era can leave both high and dry. Of course, emergence-driven systemic transformation need not be fatal, but

the question is how to perceive it and use it. The first step is to recognise this distinctive category of the future.

Exploratory futures are those aspects of the present that need to be discovered. Exploration is about “seeing” the present differently; novelty and discontinuity are hallmarks. Exploratory futures are about identifying and making sense of phenomena that emerge like the Big Bang: part inspiration, part legacy, part chance, and part mystery. Exploring this dimension of the potential of the present is a delicate and ephemeral balancing act when compared to optimisation or contingency, and depends on the paradoxical, even contradictory task of building scaffolding that enables “rigorous imagining”.

The danger is that formal, preconceived sources of inspiration, intended to enable discovery, are all too often exactly what snuffs it out. By insisting and imposing the patterns, words, and ideas of the past on the present, the new and not-yet-meaningful cannot be invented and brought into our sense-making processes. Exploration is not about the paths not taken — which are only the possibilities of the past brought to life by the present. Instead, it is about futures unimagined and hence a present that does not *yet* make sense.

Until recently, most deliberate systems for anticipating the future

have only addressed the first two dimensions of the future: both of which can be understood in ways that largely ignore complexity. It takes all three, incorporated into our anticipatory systems, to see the rich potential of the present.<sup>5</sup>

### **MAKING EXPLICIT OUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE**

There is nothing unusual about making explicit the “assumptions” underlying policy choices: this is just best practice. In general terms, a “good” policy process will have explicitly considered the nature of the model(s) being used (and hence its assumptions — including ones about the future), although the details of such an analysis may be in the background documentation rather than in the main text.

However, all too often the assumptions that underlie a model used to conduct a policy analysis are constrained (for a variety of reasons) to either:

- (i) simple presentations of why the assumptions are considered “reasonable” simplifying depictions/predictions of “reality” in the present and future, or
- (ii) descriptions of “givens” that are considered exogenous to the model — imposed by an outside force of some sort and usually assumed to apply in the future.

Such limitations do not pose much of a problem when it comes to “contingency” and “optimisation” futures, since in such cases the subject is already constrained by specific operational or current configurations of the system — no changes in the conditions of change need to be taken into account.

Such is *not* the case when trying to address complex phenomena rife with emergent novelty. These problems pose a design challenge — how to live with and use the creative novelty of the universe. The challenge is to find practical ways to use the future as part of the process of discovering and creating the present.

This is different than meeting the implicitly optimisation-oriented challenge posed by Douglass North when he pointed out that most of the models being used for policy analysis are ergodic,<sup>6</sup> failing to incorporate changes in the conditions of change. North was highlighting the fact that most policy analyses, rooted in attempts to estimate what will happen in the future, still fail to consider how the policy goal might change or be achieved differently under different conditions or when looked at in the light of other models.

Instead, we should abandon the effort to try to be so clever that we can choose the right model, find the right data, or make the best guess. There

is no way to outsmart the complexity of reality; unforeseeable novelty is a certainty. Instead, the approach should be to try and develop the capacity to use the future in a range of different ways, and not be limited by prediction or by narrow conceptions of a desired future. It is about being Futures Literate.

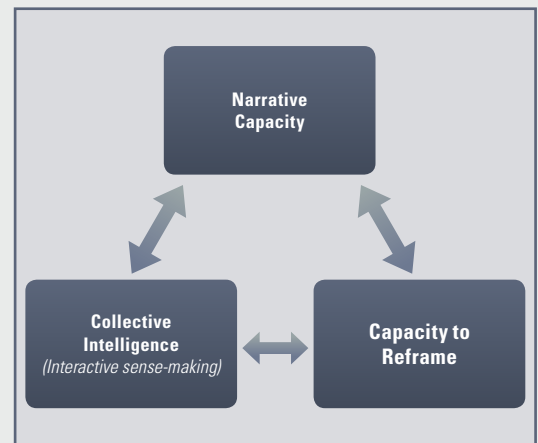
### FUTURES LITERACY AS THE CAPACITY FOR IMPROVISATION

A Futures Literate policymaker is able to identify and distinguish different forms of the “potential of the present”; to use the future in the same way that an accomplished reader can distinguish and invent (co-create) many meanings from a given text. As a specific approach, Futures Literacy<sup>7</sup> (FL) focuses on the capacity to discover and invent anticipatory assumptions. FL enhances the sophistication of our anticipatory systems.

Working through structured conversations that treat the future as an explicit part of shared sense-making, FL approaches complexity not by abandoning assumptions about the future, but by better understanding the different kinds of futures we use when we make decisions and enhancing the richness of each. FL encompasses traditional techniques for discovering what might happen in the future — contingency and optimisation futures

that are depicted with the help of a vast range of familiar predictive and probabilistic methods. However, what makes FL distinctive is the integration of anticipatory systems and the different categories of the future into each phase of the action-research processes of sense-making and making sense.

**FIGURE 1. FUTURES LITERACY AS A LEARNING PROCESS**




As indicated in Figure 1, the foresight process must be designed using a threefold framework that pays equal attention to:

1. **Narrative** — developing sense-making frameworks and stories that are meaningful to the participants in the process and “targets” decision makers relevant to the process;
2. **Collective intelligence** — generating evidence through action research that uses imaginary futures to invent and create collaborative maps,

enabling all participants to bring their deep and specific knowledge into the “story”;

3. **Reframing** — using “rigorous imagining” to develop and question the theories and models that define the variables and relationships, metrics and definitions being used to make sense of the present (note: pattern recognition/data mining is insufficient).

The point of FL is to become more adept at inventing imaginary futures: to use these futures to discern system boundaries, relationships and emergence; to invent and detect changes in the conditions of change; to rethink the assumptions we use to understand the present. The emphasis is on the imaginary: since the point is not to test present assumptions against some predictive future, but to use the future to question, unpack, invent what is going on and what is doable now.

By increasing our capacity to improvise and be spontaneous, live with permanent ambiguity and novelty, FL frees us up to go beyond the predictable, and enables us to embrace complexity. 

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Professional Futurists, and a Fellow of the World Futures Studies Federation. He has worked in the Ontario Civil Service and the OECD, and is widely published on topics ranging from the future of the global economy, the financial sector, the Internet, education systems, to social equity. Riel holds a PhD in Economics from the New School for Social Research, New York and can be reached at [www.rielmiller.com](http://www.rielmiller.com)

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#### NOTES

1. Reality is not more or less emergent from one moment to the next, even if the dominance and stability of systems and hence degrees of openness and adaptation vary over time and context.
2. Adapted from: Miller, Riel, “Which Anticipatory System for University Foresight,” Chapter 6 in *The For-Uni Blueprint: A Blueprint for Organizing Foresight in Universities, Executive Agency for Higher Education and Research Funding*, (Romania, 2010).
3. In the author's view, there are three necessary components to being able to effectively “use the future” for decision-making. Understanding all three is what he calls being Futures Literate and entails a practical grasp of a) anticipatory systems, b) the three ontological aspects of the future, and c) scientific sense-making capabilities. As a capacity, Futures Literacy provides a command of the “design principles” that can be applied constantly in order to use the future to embrace complexity.
4. For an exploration of this topic, and a discussion of “what is the future”, see Special Issue: Anticipatory Systems and the Philosophical Foundations of Futures Studies, *Foresight*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Emerald, 2010.
5. This is a way of connecting a multi-ontology reality with a multi-epistemology design for action. See Aaltonen M., *The Third Lens: Multi-ontology Sense Making and Strategic Decision Making*, (Ashgate, 2007).
6. “Ergodic” describes a model or system that remains stable over time. To use the terminology of Karl Popper, an ergodic system is one in which there is no “change in the conditions of change”.
7. Riel Miller, “Futures Literacy: A Hybrid Strategic Scenario Method”, *Futures: The Journal of Policy, Planning and Future Studies*, 39 (Elsevier, May 2007), pp341-362, and “From Trends to Futures Literacy: Reclaiming the Future”, *Centre for Strategic Education, Seminar Series Papers, No. 160* (Melbourne, Australia, December 2006).



Goh Han Teck

# Leadership Across Generations

**Generational differences may transform the way we identify, develop and practise leadership in the Public Service.**

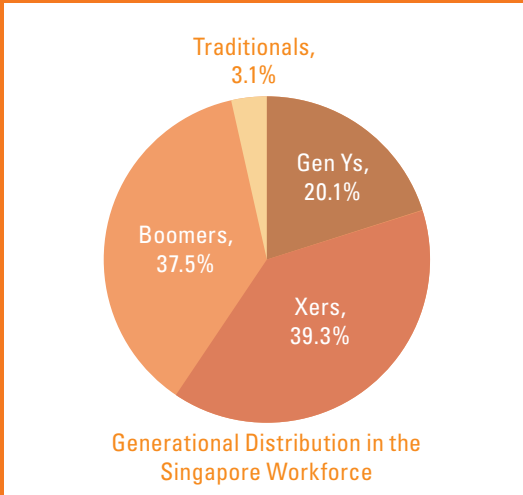
## INTRODUCTION

In recognising workforce diversity, social scientists have not only emphasised cultural diversity but also generational differences. The current workforce comprises several generations and at least four cohorts have been identified, each possessing different characteristics from the next. For the first time, the multi-generational workplace is a reality, and the age range of employees in many organisations is widening as people retire later and work for longer.

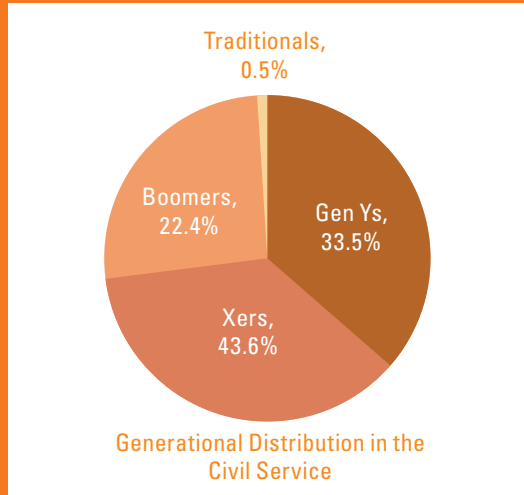
While social scientists have recognised generational differences as an important aspect of workforce diversity, the literature in the field have tended to focus on how best to manage so-called Gen-Ys. At the same time, the multi-generational workplace raises questions about the changing nature of leadership itself.<sup>1</sup> What implications will generational differences have on the practice of leadership, and what will they mean for the development of future leaders? These were some of

# Singapore's Multi-Generational Workforce

**FIGURE 1: GENERATIONAL DISTRIBUTION IN THE SINGAPORE WORKFORCE**



**FIGURE 2: GENERATIONAL DISTRIBUTION IN THE SINGAPORE CIVIL SERVICE**



While the precise time-frames may vary, experts generally agree that there are four distinct generations at present:

- Traditionals (*Matures*) — born between 1909 and 1945
- Boomers — born between 1946 and 1964
- Generation X (*Xers*) — born between 1965 and 1979
- Generation Y (*Gen Y*, *Millennials* or *Nexters*) — born after 1979

Of the approximately 3 million in the Singapore workforce today, approximately 3% are Traditionals, 38% Boomers, 39% Xers, and 20% Generation Ys.

Of the 74,000 employees in the Singapore Civil Service, 0.5% are Traditionals, 22% Boomers, 44% Xers, and 33.5% Generation Ys.



the questions our recent study sought to answer.<sup>2</sup>

## GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN LEADERSHIP

If different generations might be regarded as cultural sub-groups, and leadership theory suggests that culture shapes how people view and practise leadership, then it follows that generational differences in leadership might reasonably be expected. Our research suggests five shifts in leadership style that could be related to generational differences.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Individualistic versus Collective.

Newer generations appear to have more of an individualistic focus compared to the more collective orientation of the older generations. It seems that newer generation leaders tend to be more competitive and assertive, compared to older generation leaders who tend to adopt a more communal form of leadership. In our focus groups, Gen Ys described themselves as more self-interested and ambitious. This is manifest in their relative reluctance to take up their share of team tasks, their weighing up of personal gain before accepting roles or responsibilities and their impatience to see immediate returns

for themselves. The argument that newer generations have a more individualistic leadership style seems to contradict popular literature that refers to Gen Y as being more team-oriented. They may engage in teamwork but are they good team players? Our focus group data seems to indicate that the newer generation of Singapore leaders are very accustomed to working in teams as a result of their education, but may tend to interpret things through the lens of personal gain rather than the common good.

“...my generation has low emphasis on values... maybe 70% to 80% of those who want to be leaders [do so] because of the rewards... They are more impatient about things and try to gain personal recognition more than to share rewards with their team mates.”

— Gen Y Public Service Employee

### 2. Conservative versus Risk Orientated.

Newer generation leaders, having grown up in a world of rapid change and technological revolutions, appear more comfortable with fast changing environments and are more willing to take risks and consider novel approaches in

their leadership. In contrast, older generation leaders tend to be more conservative, relying more on predictability and maintaining the status quo. With a lower concern for social norms and greater levels of self-esteem, newer generations may be more equipped to generate out-of-the-box suggestions that they are confident of promoting.

“I was really struck by the difference in her worldview and the willingness to question and challenge assumptions a lot more rather than just take things as a given... this whole openness to new ideas with less concern that the decisions taken now are going to impact my organisation or my country... The older ones amongst us would be weighing [these] more heavily.”

— *Boomer on Gen Y*

emphasis on interpersonal impact. Compared to the older generation’s world of steady progression and paced achievement, those of the newer generation are accustomed to a world of immediate access, instant feedback and rapid outcomes. While it is possible that the younger generation in the workplace is not any more achievement-oriented than young adults of past generations, they seem to be more demanding for the immediacy of outcomes, and this often manifests as impatience or abruptness in leadership. This “leadership impatience” could stem from generational differences in work values, personality and other factors. There is an indication that the newer generations are more competitive, ambitious and results driven, more self-assured and more opportunistic. Status matters to them and they are eager to seize opportunities.

“I suppose that she’s a lot faster, absorbs ideas a lot faster than maybe the Boomer generation and some in the X generation, she moves a lot faster, [is] able to whip up things very quickly, highly energetic...”

— *Gen X on Gen Y*

### 3. Increasing Intensity and Pace.

Given their openness to risk, the newer generations seem to be more fast-paced and intense in their exercise of leadership. They tend to be perceived as operating with more energy, intensity and passion, while older generations are seen as more likely to maintain a calmer, lower-key, understated stance — with more

#### 4. Big-Picture Capabilities but Short-Term Focus.

Whilst the younger generations are supposedly more inclined towards broader-level thinking, they also seem to operate on shorter timescales. This apparent contradiction might be the function of a difference between capability and preference. This is conceivable, given that the newer generations grew up in a more globalised world of not just interacting systems and diverse views, but also one that has a high rate of change, high product design turnover, and a strong emphasis on speed. The new generations might be able to see more quickly and grasp a more complex inter-related world – expressed as an aptitude for bigger-picture and even longer-term thinking. Yet, they have not seen things last for very long and are used to instant results. The younger generation's short-term focus could also reflect their view

“They are very impatient, or have a very short attention span. So they might start on one project and be very excited about it and then they realise ‘Maybe we can’t do this sort of thing’ and then they’ll move onto the next thing and be very excited about that.”

– Gen Y on Gen Y leaders

of organisational commitment – compared to the older generations, they have a more short-term view of their time with an organisation.

#### 5. Sources of Authority.

Generations appear to vary in their sources of authority with some real consequences for how they lead. Older generations have a higher respect for those in authority as compared to new generations who are less concerned with authority and hierarchy. The younger generations have grown up in a climate where it is culturally more acceptable to question authority. Their developmental context has been one dominated by post-modern and pluralistic worldviews, with no one seen to possess absolute “right” answers. Many organisations are becoming flatter and younger leaders may perceive influence as deriving primarily from competence and knowledge. Given these differing sources of authority, the older generation leaders can be seen to exercise leadership along lines of hierarchy, viewing leadership influence as generally positional. On the other hand, the newer generations are more likely to respect and also exercise leadership based on capability, competency and expertise, rather than rank.

“[My experience of] all the Boomer bosses I’ve reported to [is that] it’s more formal, in terms of the relationship... and it’s a bit more directive rather than discursive.”

“There is an unspoken expectation that you must respect me, because I’m your boss... and I didn’t get to this position for nothing.”

– Gen Y on Boomer boss

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE LEADERS

If leadership styles are shifting along generational lines, what can we do to bring out the best in leaders of different generations? Our research suggests a few key priorities:

- **Developing the moral dimension of leadership.**

With the shift towards a more individualistic leadership stance, there is the danger that forms of narcissistic leadership<sup>4</sup> could become more evident in newer generations. Over the past decade, there has been growing attention on this issue of the narcissistic leader. Moccoby<sup>5</sup> proposes that through development, leaders with narcissistic inclinations can capitalise on their strengths, and

learn to manage the darker side of leadership. Leadership programmes, emphasising deeper understanding and the moral responsibility of leadership, can combat narcissism and help develop future leaders.

In his seminal book, *Leadership*, Burns<sup>6</sup> speaks of responsibility of leadership – to elevate others to a higher sense of performance, fulfilment, autonomy and purpose. Leadership development has to expand a leader’s concept of leadership: to include the moral dimension, to move leaders beyond a focus on self, to a focus on contributing to others and a wider purpose. In effect, leadership development should help individuals embrace the social and moral dimensions of “good” leadership.

- **Increasing self-awareness in leaders.**

Studies have associated the newer generations with higher self-esteem, assertiveness and lower need for social approval. These characteristics enable a sense of leadership confidence, but could also affect their ability or willingness to acquire a realistic picture of themselves. In contrast, effective leaders must be able to appreciate their true capabilities and weaknesses, as well as their impact on the organisation

and the people they are leading. Thus, leadership development may need to focus on cultivating a greater understanding of self in the context of leadership.<sup>7</sup>

With hierarchy- or position-based authority becoming less accepted by the newer generation of employees, leaders of all generations will have to understand what gives legitimacy to their leadership. They will have to develop a keen appreciation of their strengths (i.e. knowledge, abilities, skills, values, beliefs) and limitations, and take them into consideration when influencing others.

- **Watchfulness and mindfulness in leadership.**

If the newer generation prefers to exercise a more intense, quick-paced and immediacy-focused leadership, development interventions may need to provide the needed space and time for leaders to slow down and reflect on their influence. In its unmanaged state, a quick-paced leadership style tends to favour *action* over *reflection*, whereas both are needed for the exercise of effective leadership. Leaders may need to cultivate the ability to reflect while in the midst of action. As an intervention, leadership coaching

can help to build this capacity by modelling the process of reflection and action – individuals can learn to be more mindful of their leadership in the moment, rather than falling back on instinctive behaviours.

- **Communicating respect, value and inclusion.**

There is a fair degree of empirical agreement between the generations when it comes to what they expect from their leaders. At the top of the list, all generations seek leaders that are able to empathise and care, and who are able to engage them in a vision of the future. Communication that inspires and engages usually contains two elements, one relating to boldness of vision and the other relating to how much the listener is included and involved in that vision. While boldness and confidence can put newer generation leaders in good stead to inspire, the more individualistic and impatient side of their leadership could lead to the exclusion of others. Learning to frame goals and messages in ways that communicate respect and value for others enables leaders to better inspire and engage. For leaders, leadership development should help build awareness in framing interactions, helping them

communicate and interact in ways that include the goals, needs and empowerment of others.

- **Developing leaders as coaches.**

Our research suggests that older generation leaders are keen to develop their staff and younger generation leaders are keen to learn. However, we also found that the preferred learning styles differ across generations. Older generation leaders adopt a more didactic style of development that does not match the more questioning and experimenting learning style of the younger generations — who are used to a more learner-centred experience, like to experiment, are impatient to put learning into practice, and have the self-confidence to come up with some of the answers themselves. Senior and middle management may want to cultivate coaching skills, which can offer their younger counterparts a facilitated way of finding their own solutions to work-based challenges and developing capabilities to work independently and effectively.

- **Building leaders that enable leadership.**


While narcissistic leadership is reluctant to share focus and power with others, hierarchy-based

leadership concentrates leadership power at the top. Both styles tend to disempower others. Yet leadership that enables others to lead is needed in a complex world where no one can know nor act across the full picture.<sup>8</sup> Leadership development needs to help leaders embrace a model of leadership that de-emphasises the “heroic” mode of leadership, where vision is monopolised, and focuses instead on harnessing the diverse perspectives, experiences and strengths of others. Leaders who can learn to feel comfortable with not being in the centre, but are open to let others take the lead, will be more successful at creating yet more generations that are capable and equipped to lead.

## THE GENERATIONAL CHALLENGE

Both our focus group research and current literature on the workplace have given us a better appreciation of how the different generations lead and what they expect of leadership. From this, we have begun to make conjectures about the developmental needs of leaders from different generations, both now and in the future. We are mindful of the limitations of our study — more research is required for us to be confident that these are generalisable findings.

Nevertheless, the generational phenomenon is one that leaders and

leadership development practitioners should take note of. Social scientists theorise that due to the increasing rate of change, generational cycles are becoming shorter and shorter. In the past, distinct generational traits would take 20 or so years to emerge in the workforce, but the present generations have emerged in around 10 to 15 years. If this trend is true, then we may possibly see more than four different generations making up the workplace of the future. Inevitably, generational differences will continue to affect how leadership is conceived of, identified, developed and practised, and by extension, the impact it will have on organisational and societal outcomes. 

*This article is based on a research report co-written with Jo Hennessy of Roffey Park Institute.*

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## NOTES

1. In a Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge article in 2007, Jim Heskett posed the question: "How Will Millennials Manage?", <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/5736html>
2. This article is based on the findings of a research study undertaken in 2011 by Goh Han Teck of the Centre for Leadership Development, Civil Service College, and Jo Hennessy of Roffey Park Institute. The full research report can be accessed at [www.cld.gov.sg](http://www.cld.gov.sg)
3. Scholarship exploring the relationship between generations and leadership is sparse. However, we were able to draw on available studies as well as findings from a focus group study that we had conducted. We also extrapolated from research on generational differences in values, work perception and personality. Our findings are exploratory and indicative rather than conclusive, but provide a useful way of navigating and interpreting inter-generational work interactions.
4. With regard to organisational leadership, narcissism has been defined as a "nonpathological (i.e. normal) personality dimension that involves a self-centered perspective, feelings of superiority, and a drive for personal power and glory" (Galvin et al., 2010). See Galvin, B. Waldman, D and Balthazard, P., "Visionary Communication Qualities as Mediators of the Relationship between Narcissism and Attributions of Leader Charisma", *Personnel Psychology*, 63 (2010), pp509–537
5. Maccoby (2004) in the Harvard Business Review, states that "many leaders dominating business today have... a narcissistic personality. That's good news for companies that need passion and daring to break new ground... but can be dangerous for organisations". See Maccoby M., "Narcissistic Leaders: The Incredible Pros, the Inevitable Cons", *Harvard Business Review*, 82 (2004), pp92–101
6. Burns, J. M., *Leadership* (NY: Harper & Row, 1978)
7. Recent leadership development programmes already incorporate tools such as 360 degree feedback, personality assessments, and action-feedback modules to provide the platform for leaders to detach from themselves, gain perspective, and develop the humility needed for continuous learning.
8. Follett (1924) has argued that "the most essential work of the leader is to create more leaders." In her book, *Creative Experience*, she states that "leadership is not defined by the exercise of power but by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those led". See Follett, M. P., *Creative Experience* (New York: Peter Smith, 1924). 1951 reprint with permission by Longmans, Green and Co.

## FURTHER READING

*For the complete list of references, please refer to the full research report at [www.cld.gov.sg](http://www.cld.gov.sg)*

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