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The mission of the Civil Service College (CSC) Singapore is to develop people for a first-class Public Service. CSC was inaugurated as a statutory board under the Public Service Division, Prime Minister's Office, in October 2001. As the public sector's core institution for training, learning, research and staff development, CSC builds strategic capacity in governance, leadership, public administration and management for a networked government in Singapore.

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In an address to the Public Service Staff Conference in early April this year, Head Civil Service Peter Ong put forward a vision of a transformed, trusted Public Service that is citizen-centric, collaborative and cohesive. This is not in itself ground-breaking — the Public Service for the 21st Century (PS21) movement called for a forward-looking, adaptive, service-oriented Public Service two decades ago. But times have changed. In recent years, a much more diverse and dynamic citizenry, accustomed to the quick-fire discourse of social media and keen to have a more direct say in national affairs, has begun to challenge the public sector's own long-standing, assured stewardship over many public issues, in increasingly vociferous ways.

What was remarkable about Mr Ong's proposition is how it recasts this potentially fractious context as an opportunity to develop new, more relational modes of governance. At this critical inflection point in Singapore's development, the Public Service need not be on the defensive, but can instead use its considerable resources and influence in ways which not only accommodate the varied, restless energies emerging in society, but actively harness them towards the public good.

In this spirit, Our Singapore Conversation — the wide-ranging national conversation initiated by Prime Minister Lee in 2012 — has yielded many useful insights *(p. 7)*. An unprecedented effort to connect with Singaporeans from all walks of life regarding their ideas and aspirations for the nation's future, it has not been without its challenges, nor its sceptics. Some observers are concerned that the process itself, instead of bringing people together, may have lent further credence to the many divergent narratives and competing priorities already at work in society *(p. 18)*. But the acceptance of ambiguity and difference is also a necessary step towards socio-political maturity. What seems clear is that the sincerity, passion and energy that the many participants, facilitators and volunteers brought to the process have generated a real momentum and camaraderie of their own. This sense of trust and purpose, grounded by hands-on experience, could well be a more enduring legacy of the Singapore Conversation than its immediate policy outcomes. They could serve as a powerful

foundation for collective reflection and action in future.

In order to effect such broad change in constructive and credible ways, the Public Service, which remains the leading convener, aggregator and facilitator of national efforts, will need to strengthen competencies that may fall outside the conventional scope of its technical expertise, or indeed, outside the purview of any one agency. It may have to become much more comfortable with ambiguity in roles and outcomes, and learn to regard discomfort and uncertainty as a spur towards deeper change. Adam Kahane, former head of Scenarios at Shell, believes that only a committed team of stakeholders from across the whole system, drawn together not by any consensus except a shared belief in the urgency and importance of pressing issues at hand, can effect transformative change — he has developed processes to facilitate these creative, often difficult conversations *(p. 24)*. Douglas O'Loughlin, principal consultant at the Institute of Leadership and Organisation Development, argues that it takes courageous leadership to embrace the diversity and potential conflict that is likely to arise from such broad engagement *(p. 35)*; Graham Leicester, Director of the International Futures Forum, believes institutional changes in culture are needed *(p. 40)*. They suggest ways in which such qualities could be nurtured in the public sector.

A recurrent theme in discussions of public sector transformation is confidence that the necessary competencies and attitudes are already inherent in the agencies themselves: but these have to be recognised, shared, and strengthened. Exploring different models for organisation change, researchers Aurora de Souza Watters and Lena Leong highlight the importance of clarifying desired futures, so that institutions can galvanise and motivate their people *(p. 53)*. It is a matter, it seems, of orienting human energies and systemic resources toward compelling ends.

For the Public Service, these ends are defined not by profit but by national interests and non-negotiable values that need to be reaffirmed and upheld — not just in terms of what is pursued, but also how it goes about its work *(p. 69)*. Values and culture that are perceived to be in practice, rather than those merely espoused, come to define public institutions and engender (or erode) trust.

The challenge of holding fast to honourable goals, while maintaining credibility and effectiveness in the face of rapid change, complexity and competing agendas, is one shared not just by Singapore but many countries around the world. Canada's Jocelyne Bourgon has pioneered an international laboratory, based on her New Synthesis framework, for veteran practitioners to explore and share ideas

on how public administration should
evolve in this new milieu *(p. 88)*. The
answers have yet to be fully determined,
but some of the radical questions are
now being considered in earnest.

Other contributions to this issue
include a critical survey of ways
to nurture ethical behaviour in
organisations *(p. 78)* and a discussion
on the effective design of public-private
partnerships *(p. 96)*.

I wish you an insightful read.

Alvin Pang
Editor-in-Chief
ETHOS

Redefining Engagement: Lessons for the Public Service from Our Singapore Conversation

Through collective learning-by-doing and investment in strong relationships, Our Singapore Conversation has pioneered new possibilities for public engagement and governance.

BY

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AND

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A Shared, Learning Experience Outside Our Comfort Zones

As an approach to national-level engagement, Our Singapore Conversation (OSC) was designed[1] to be more inclusive, authentic and to strengthen trust — markedly different from past national consultative engagements such as Singapore 21[2] and Remaking Singapore.[3] OSC, in engaging with the complexities of choice and aspirations of a more diverse and mature society, was a learning journey for both the Government and Singaporeans. By engaging groups from the public service, political leadership and wider community in dialogue on Singapore's future,[4] OSC served as a shared experience that took participants out of their comfort zones in a way that — from an organisational development perspective — is conducive to bringing about transformative learning.

For the Public Service, the key learning insights from the OSC experience may be summarised through four broad themes: Context, Connection, Capacity, and Capability.

Context

Context is about recognising the growing diversity in society in terms of profile and needs, and a dynamic external environment marked by greater uncertainty and complexity.

Collective Wisdom

As Singapore society becomes more diverse and citizens' needs more multi-dimensional, the challenges faced by the public sector will also grow in magnitude and complexity. As a Public Service, we must acknowledge that we do not necessarily have all the answers, nor will we be able to predict every future challenge. The Government must expand its mindshare for problem solving, and tap the collective wisdom of a broader range of stakeholders in order to tackle national challenges more comprehensively.

Collective Action

The public sector is not always best placed to solve every problem. Instead, it can create capacity for collective action by involving society. Governance will become increasingly relational, shifting from a mode in which policies and services are delivered for the public, to one in which they are delivered with the public.

CONTEXT	CONNECTION
Collective Wisdom Collective Action Shared Ownership	Clarity of Intent Inclusiveness Authenticity
CAPACITY	**CAPABILITY**
Citizens Community Partners Public Service	Individual Level Collective Level Leadership Level

Shared Ownership

Increasingly, citizens expect a greater voice in policymaking and a partnership role with public agencies. OSC benefitted from citizen volunteers, especially private sector facilitators and community partners, who were involved in the design and delivery of the facilitation process, and who often provided candid feedback and suggestions. Their constructive involvement illustrates the principle that people develop shared ownership over a process or product that they help to create.

Connection

As a conversation among Singaporeans, OSC was about peer-to-peer connections, and expanding common space, through dialogues that focused on important priorities. This called for clarity of intent, inclusiveness and authenticity in the engagement design.

Clarity of Intent

Being clear about the intent of engagement at the outset shapes the design of the entire engagement experience. In Phase 1 of OSC, conversations were deliberately kept open-ended in order to generate a diversity of views and ideas.

In Phase 2, dialogue topics were tightly linked to the top priorities that emerged from the OSC survey, as well as policy areas the Ministries were reviewing or planning to review at that time.

Inclusiveness

A national conversation has to be inclusive. Language was an important element to consider in reaching out to certain stakeholders, such as the elderly who were more comfortable in the mother-tongue languages or Chinese dialects. That the OSC central dialogues were conducted primarily in English was a limitation: hence, the Secretariat actively supported community partners who organised ground-up dialogues in different languages and in different formats. In Phase 2, media partners such as the Chinese daily newspaper *Lianhe Zaobao* and the Malay daily newspaper *Berita Harian* reached out to readers in their respective languages. Newspaper "info-advertorials" in *Lianhe Zaobao*, *Berita Minggu* and *Tamil Murasu* summarising the OSC Reflections report[5] also helped to broaden outreach across Singapore's multiracial and multilingual communities.

Authenticity

Citizen volunteers were invaluable partners in co-creating national engagement. As neutral facilitators, they exemplified the authentic and sincere spirit that they hoped for among other participants. The format of small group-facilitated dialogue allowed everyone to speak and be heard, while the large group plenary at the open and close of each dialogue gave participants a sense of the whole. A key intent was

Key Engagement Questions in Phase 1

- What sort of Singapore do we most want to have in 2030?
- What kind of society and what kind of people do we want to be?
  › What are our ideals and values?
  › What are the attributes that will get us there?
  › What are the choices that we want to make as a society?
- What can "I" do, and who can "I" work with, to achieve this future?

BACKGROUND ON OUR SINGAPORE CONVERSATION

What was OSC?

Our Singapore Conversation, or OSC,[1] was initiated in September 2012 by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong[2] as a national conversation among Singaporeans. Its aim was to engage Singaporeans on their desired future for the nation and to establish a broad consensus on the key issues that should be addressed.

A 26-member committee led by Education Minister Heng Swee Keat was appointed as convenors and moderators, tapping on a wide range of perspectives and networks to seed and build conversations.

The committee comprised Singaporeans from different backgrounds, including grassroots, the private sector, unions, voluntary organisations, academia, the sports and arts communities, and political office-holders. In addition, an open call drew about 100 volunteers from both the private and public sectors who came forward to serve as facilitators and note-takers at OSC dialogues.

Concurrently, the Our Singapore Conversation Programme Office, formed under the Public Service Division, staffed a whole-of-government OSC Secretariat. The Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) and the Ministry of Finance were institutional partners of the OSC Secretariat, overseeing media engagement and a parallel policy review process respectively.

OSC in Action

OSC was organised into two phases:

- Phase 1 (October 2012 to February 2013): Open-ended group conversations to generate a diversity of views and ideas on the kind of Singapore that Singaporeans want to see in the future.
- Phase 2 (March 2013 to June 2013): A mix of public dialogues and thematic dialogues on topics related to housing, education, healthcare and jobs, led by the pertinent Ministries.

The design of the OSC dialogues was inclusive and multi-sectoral. In addition to dialogues organised by the OSC Committee and its Secretariat, the broader community, including the labour movement, grassroots and volunteer welfare organisations as well as other interest groups, took the initiative to organise their own ground-up dialogues in a variety of formats, such as "Kopi-Talks", sessions held at food centres, dialect-speaking sessions and an exhibition where school children used art to express their hopes for Singapore. These helped to broaden the reach of the OSC effort across Singapore's multiracial and multilingual communities. To involve Singaporeans residing overseas, the Overseas Singaporean Unit[3] facilitated a series of overseas dialogues in cities such as

London, Warwick, San Francisco, Beijing and Shanghai.

In parallel, online engagement took place on social media platforms including Facebook, the OSC website and YouTube. A dedicated OSC Web Team in MCI hosted these platforms, posting line-ups, photographs, video clips and summary points of OSC dialogues. The Web Team posted updates and questions to encourage the public to share their views online. OSC Committee members also wrote personal reflections on the dialogues. The Ministry of Health partnered REACH, the Singapore Government's e-engagement platform, to organise two live webchats in conjunction with the dialogues on healthcare. The Ministry of National Development set up a microsite where members of the public who did not have the opportunity to participate in the public dialogues could join in the conversation online.

A concurrent face-to-face OSC survey[4] was conducted nationally in all four official languages over December 2012 and January 2013. The survey data,[5] gathered from a demographically representative sample of 4,000 citizens, supplemented the views and ideas gathered from Singaporeans through dialogues and online channels. The survey identified housing, healthcare and job security among the priorities Singaporeans hoped would be addressed. These informed the thematic dialogues in Phase 2 of OSC.

The approach to media engagement, led by MCI, was a significant feature of the OSC effort. This aimed to sustain interest throughout the year, and to demonstrate the sincerity of the OSC process. Reporters were included at OSC dialogues as participants, and experienced the conversations first hand. OSC Committee members, volunteer facilitators and community partners also spoke about OSC in media interviews, radio and TV platforms. The media was also a community partner, with *Lianhe Zaobao* and *Berita Harian* organising dialogues for their readers and forum contributors.

Inclusive Conversations, National Aspirations

The OSC exercise saw over 47,000 Singaporeans participate in over 660 dialogue sessions. Out of this yearlong effort, five core national aspirations have emerged[6]: Opportunities, Purpose, Assurance, Spirit and Trust. The perspectives articulated by Singaporeans have since come to inform the shaping of important policy directions. Prime Minister Lee, in his 2013 National Day Message and National Day Rally speech,[7] highlighted the Government's response to Singaporeans' concerns and aspirations through key changes in housing, healthcare and education. He also acknowledged the significance of OSC in helping to "crystallise the aspirations of Singaporeans" and as a "shared basis to plan our future".

NOTES

1. See: http://www.reach.gov.sg/Microsite/osc/index.html and https://www.facebook.com/OurSGConversation

2. "National Day Message 2012", http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews/
    primeminister/2012/August/national_day_message2012english.html

3. The Overseas Singaporean Unit (http://www.overseassingaporean.sg/) is a directorate under the National Population and
    Talent Division of the Prime Minister's Office, and is part of the Singapore Government's overall efforts to engage its
    citizens overseas.

4. The survey was administered with the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) in conjunction with the OSC Secretariat. See:
    "Report on OSC Survey", http://www.reach.gov.sg/Portals/0/Microsite/osc/OSC-Survey.pdf

5. The OSC Survey asked Singaporeans about the values they considered important for the Singapore they would like to see
    in 2030 as well as their opinions on key issues.

6. OSC Reflections is a newsletter report that captured the five core aspirations and diverse views of Singaporeans who
    participated in the OSC dialogues. "OSC Reflections", http://www.reach.gov.sg/Portals/0/Microsite/osc/OSC_Reflection.pdf

7. "National Day Rally 2013 (Speech in English)", http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/
    speechesninterviews/primeminister/2013/August/prime-minister-lee-hsien-loong-s-national-day-rally-2013--speech.
    html#.Utz9RXv2P4g

"I found it instructive listening to different opinions expressed and found myself adjusting my own expectations."

OSC Participant

that people should leave the dialogue feeling that they had been heard, and had benefitted from hearing the views of fellow Singaporeans. Even if a particular conversation did not generate substantive ideas, the very process of engagement and exchanging of perspectives built mutual understanding and trust.

Capacity
Capacity in the OSC context reflects the potential that people have to contribute towards a larger purpose and shared future.

Citizens
OSC was a process of envisioning Singapore's shared future. This sense of common purpose helped attract more than 100 volunteer facilitators and note-

takers, including citizens and public officers, over the year long exercise. Significantly, the pool of facilitators has since evolved into an informal community, bonded by a desire to sustain such engagement through conversation.

From the perspective of citizen participants, the OSC process expanded the common space for Singaporeans from across all walks of life to come together and talk about issues that matter to their shared future. Small group dialogues were organised to ensure a diverse mix of participants in terms of gender, age and occupation. This meant that core issues (e.g. definitions of success, affordability, identity) were viewed from the perspectives of young and old; singles and the married; employers

MINISTRY-LED OSC SESSIONS

Housing

The Ministry of National Development's sessions revisited the fundamentals of Singapore's public housing programme. Dialogues were structured around four topics of concern to Singaporeans: home ownership, public housing types, housing affordability and monetisation options for the elderly.

Education

The dialogues led by the Ministry of Education broadly discussed the traits of an education system that would bring about a desired future for Singapore, before narrowing down to key topics such as stress, excessive focus on examinations and grades, and social mobility. They then moved on to specific policy areas under review, such as the Primary School Leaving Examinations and Secondary School Streaming and Posting.

Manpower

The Ministry of Manpower dialogues addressed ideas regarding fair consideration for locals, a hot button topic among Singaporeans. They also sought to build consensus on the importance of lifelong learning, in the context of the longer-term Continuing Education and Training Masterplan.

Healthcare

The Ministry of Health's dialogues centred on two topics: enhancing affordability and accessibility to quality healthcare, and building a healthy nation — themes aligned with the Healthcare 2020 Masterplan.

and employees; new citizens and those born and bred in Singapore. Face-to-face platforms had the advantage of forging a sense of community and interpersonal connection as participants listened to one another. The dialogues made participants more aware of the diversity of perspectives and concerns across different segments of our society. At the same time, they helped reveal and clarify the values and aspirations that Singaporeans hold in common.

Community Partners

Community partners[6] played an integral role in the national conversation as they gave voice to their stakeholders, including the less articulate, through a variety of means[7] over time. Different approaches were needed to reach out to different segments of society; partnership with the community helped to multiply outreach. A key question for Government going forward is to find ways to continue to engage in a way

that builds trust and engenders a sense of shared ownership over Singapore's future. How do we identify more opportunities to partner citizens? How do we equip our community partners and citizen volunteers with tools for meaningful engagement?

Even if a particular conversation did not generate substantive ideas, the very process of engagement and exchanging of perspectives built mutual understanding and trust.

Public Service

The OSC Secretariat, with broad representation from across the Public Service,[8] formed the nucleus of the OSC movement. Initially, there was apprehension over how Singaporeans would respond to a seemingly messy and open process. By partnering with volunteers to prototype and refine the process, and in learning-by-doing, the team developed greater confidence along the way. They also experienced for themselves the spirit of openness and authenticity that OSC embodied.

Capability

Capability, in the OSC context, refers to the institutional capacity in Public Service to achieve joined outcomes. This encompasses people's competencies and experiences, organisational structures, systems and information resources.

Bourgon[9] and Ryan et al.[10] have pointed out that public sector governance worldwide is trending towards more horizontal forms of collaboration that draw upon networks both within and outside government. Mutual engagement and learning become crucial to success. Such collective learning entails "experimentation" and "continual reframing" of the way complex issues are perceived and approached.

The OSC experience highlighted the importance of how we learn, not just what we learn. While training courses are conventionally regarded as essential for developing individual competencies, the OSC experience underscored another dimension of developing capability: collective learning in a collaborative setting.

Few officers in the OSC Secretariat had attended formal training on facilitation or public engagement; fewer still had had experience applying theory to actual engagement. The OSC process became a crucible of experiential learning in a social setting, where officers learned by doing, by observing others, through feedback and mutual coaching. A diverse mix of personalities and experience was also an asset: the OSC Secretariat included a former journalist, officers with operational experience from the Ministry of Home Affairs and policy officers with background in social work.

The OSC effort facilitated the development of new learning, mind-

sets and competencies along three broad levels.

Individual

OSC was an emergent movement; the OSC Secretariat and participating agencies had to prototype new processes and learn on the fly. Officers had to deal with uncertainty (e.g. how the public might respond to the facilitation format) and try out new ideas. Having to engage multiple parties, including community partners, the media, vendors and citizen volunteers, required investment in relationship building. The horizontal forms of collaboration that characterised OSC pointed to the importance of *interpersonal competencies*, in particular the ability to influence others without formal authority.

Collective

The nature of OSC called for a wide range of officers with different talents and expertise to perform different roles — from event and participant management, engagement design and facilitation to community partnerships and media engagement. There were no standard operating manuals or precedence to fall back on; collective learning took place through prototyping, action and adaptation, with insights frequently exchanged through bi-weekly coordination meetings. It was important for *protected time and space* to be created so that team members could reflect on and share their learnings with others.

Collective level capabilities such as *sensemaking, experimentation and red-teaming*[11] require officers to rise above their individual roles to see how their work is connected to the other work streams in delivering desired outcomes. In the OSC context, sensemaking involved interpreting ground sentiments and feedback to make necessary course corrections and anticipate next steps as a team. Experimentation included rapid prototyping and testing of ideas (e.g. facilitation methods) across teams, and with volunteers and partners both within and outside the core team.

Leadership

What stood out in the leadership of the OSC process was the value of "sense-giving": when leaders look at issues from a higher vantage point and provide others with a sense of meaning or a different way of seeing. During the OSC process, guidance from senior civil servants and the political leadership was crucial for moving forward through junctures of uncertainty. For example, timing the release of OSC Reflections to coincide with the National Day Rally 2013 was a key decision that helped close the loop on key concerns raised such as housing, healthcare and education.

Enabling leadership, which creates the conditions for others to contribute, was also vital to OSC. There was a conscious effort to maintain a strong culture of trust within the OSC Secretariat. Officers, regardless of rank,

"I must say that my experience of the conversation opened my eyes to other Singaporeans."

OSC Participant

could feel comfortable speaking up if they had ideas to share or concerns to raise. It was an acknowledgement that leaders do not necessarily have all the answers, and that officers working directly with stakeholders ought to be able to exercise their judgment and surface alternative options.

Conclusion

The OSC marked a pivotal point in redefining public engagement in Singapore. It is also the start of a much longer journey, in which the Government must continue to engage citizens in a manner that builds genuine trust.

The Public Service should therefore continue to deepen its expertise in pertinent areas such as facilitation and engagement design, and to recognise that authentic engagement has proven its value in nurturing mutual trust and understanding with the public.

In playing a central role in the OSC movement, the Public Service has gained insights into the value of Context, Connection, Capacity and Capability. What will take us forward in making public engagement a game changer for Singapore may be a fifth C: Conviction.

NOTES

1. By design, OSC featured a multimodal, multi-sectoral approach to encourage outreach, with conversations self-organised by various community groups. The process also saw the prototyping of *small-group facilitated dialogue* which encouraged peer-to-peer interactions between Singaporeans. Citizen volunteers were the key partners who co-created the engagement process with the organising team.

2. "Singapore 21", 1999, http://eresources.nlb. gov.sg/webarchives/details/www.singapore21. org.sg.html

3. "Remaking Singapore", 2002, http://was.nl.sg/ details/www.remakingsingapore.gov.sg.html; https://vivianbalakrishnan.files.wordpress. com/2012/03/remaking_singapore_2003.pdf

4. Antonie van Nistelrooij, and Harry Sminia, "Organisation Development: What's Actually Happening?", *Journal of Change Management* 10 (2010): 409. Dialogue is defined as "an interpersonal process to exchange individual frames," serving as a powerful "vehicle for change".

5. http://www.reach.gov.sg/Portals/0/Microsite/ osc/OSC_Reflection.pdf

6. Examples of community partners include Lions Befrienders, Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore, RSVP Singapore, Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association, The Salvation Army, Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, Green Community, Agency for Animal Welfare, KPMG and Philips.

7. Apart from the NTUC's labour movement series and the People's Association's grassroots series, most other ground-up dialogues took months to gain momentum, being a new form of engagement to most citizens. Awareness built up slowly, fanning out through connections with OSC Committee members. A range of self-organised dialogues gradually developed: the National Taxi Associations' "Kopi-Talks"; sessions held at food centres such as NTUC Foodfare; dialect-speaking sessions convened and facilitated by volunteer welfare organisations, and so on.

8. The OSC Secretariat comprised officers from the Public Service Division, Civil Service College, and the Ministries of Home Affairs, Finance, and Communications and Information partnering the Ministries of Education, Health, National Development and Manpower.

9. Jocelyne Bourgon, "The Future of Public Service: A Search for a New Balance", *The Australian Journal of Public Administration* 67 (2008): 390–404.

10. Bill Ryan, et al., "Managing for Joint Outcomes: Connecting up the Horizontal and the Vertical" *Policy Quarterly*, 4 (2008) 14–21.

11. Red-teaming is a form of ritualised dissent, or playing the "devil's advocate" (e.g. in the process of reviewing products, processes and message testing), to ensure robustness.

After Our Singapore Conversation: The Futures of Governance

Two analysts from the Public Service Division reflect on Our Singapore Conversation's radical implications for the nation and its public policy enterprise.

BY

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This article was adapted from a fuller paper presented at the International Foresight Academy Seminar at ZHAW Technopark, in Winterthur, Zurich, 16–19 September 2013.

Our Singapore Conversation (OSC)[1] is formally over, with the publication and release of *Reflections of Our Singapore Conversation* in August 2013. *Reflections* is markedly different from the proposal-laden technocratic reports produced by previous national engagements such as The Next Lap, Singapore 21 and Remaking Singapore. Minister Heng Swee Keat, in his Chairman's Foreword, takes pains to emphasise that *Reflections* "does not look quite like the usual official report". Elsewhere, the publication reiterates that OSC is "not a policy document that outlines government responses to Singaporeans' contributions to OSC."[2]

That *Reflections* should highlight this in order to manage the expectations, not only of the Singaporean public but also of the policy establishment, speaks to the uncharted territory that Singapore finds itself in with OSC. This unfamiliarity, even discomfiture, stems from three factors. One, that the OSC concept is driven by the still-developing idea of "co-creation": a partnership between those who govern and those who are governed. Public policy conducted through the participatory foresight

praxis becomes very much a collective enterprise, and less so the elite-driven phenomenon it typically is. Two, insofar as it is a dialogue, an often messy and dynamic process of articulations, negotiations, compromises, persuasions and concessions, it suggests that OSC may be valued more as a process, rather than the outcomes that it generates. Indeed, recall that OSC was designed "with no specific preset topics or areas for discussion ... to provide as much open space as possible for Singaporeans to voice their opinions."[3]

Finally, and most importantly, the very term "conversation" suggests the power of speech acts, of "talking" the future into existence.[4] In the context of Singaporean public discourse, OSC has seen a discernible shift in focus from threats to aspirations, resulting in a new vocabulary built on terms such as "narrative", "myth", "values", "identity" and so forth.[5] To borrow from Joseph Campbell, the late authority on mythology, myths speak to us in terms we cannot deny; they are the stories, even lies, that we tell in order to justify ourselves to ourselves. The language of these myths constitutes a person's "final vocabulary" as defined by the philosopher Richard Rorty:

It is "final" in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse. Those words are as far as he

can go with language; beyond them there is only helpless passivity or a resort to violence.[6]

OSC, at a deeper level, was therefore an effort to rediscover and redefine a "final vocabulary" for the nation.

OSC has seen a discernible shift in focus from threats to aspirations, resulting in a new vocabulary built on terms such as "narrative", "myth", "values", "identity" and so forth.

For policymakers, both the process and outcome of OSC are potentially disconcerting, particularly if it is to be taken as a model for the public policy enterprise in future. Public officials function in accordance with causality understood in linear, mechanistic terms; typically, they search for points at which leverage can be applied in order to cause change throughout a system. Such a definition of causality — in terms of uni-directional, linear determinism — has tended to resonate very well with policymakers in general, and those in Singapore particularly, for whom "policy lever" is a key term in the working vocabulary. The problematising, complex and emergent nature of participatory futures calls this stability into question. It does so by moving away from the assumption of linear cause-

and-effect — and the quest for neat, deterministic solutions to problems — towards an emphasis (and celebration) of the subjectivity and messiness that characterise social reality. Participatory foresight exercises such as OSC create space for alternative futures that are the outcome not of objective determinism, but of subjective multi-causality.

The OSC process may simply have exposed our notions of identity, history, and values as the contested narratives that they are, prone to unravelling.

In a sense, Singapore has come full circle, albeit having done things back-to-front. Singapore's strategic foresight enterprise had its roots in the military-security milieu, in which the question of the day was: "How do we secure 'us'?"[7] It is only belatedly that Singapore, both the Government and the governed, has begun to address the more fundamental question of "Who is 'us'?" through the praxis of participatory futures. Bell points out that members of groups — societies, organisations, and nations — find meaning and purpose in their charter or founding myths, which form the basis for their societal identity and values. He further argues that the "charter myths of a particular group or society [are] a standard by which to evaluate the desirability of alternative images of the future".[8]

There is an irony in realising that charting the way(s) ahead for Singapore rests on revisiting its charter myths. In one sense, OSC has turned out to be an attempt to address "where we are going" by way of "who we are and where we come from". This is clearly demonstrated in how participants reminisced about the "kampong spirit" (literally, "village spirit", referring to the spirit of community), whether real or imagined, of yesteryear. OSC participants have expressed sentiments that hint at a wistful longing for the past:

> *I pray that our country will be more caring towards the old and have the kampong spirit to help each other.*

> *Nobody appears to really care for one another's wellbeing as well. There is a loss of kampong spirit, that sense of neighbourliness.*[9]

Thus, the road to the future appears to run through the past.

Past, present and future are inextricably intertwined. The past continues to cast its shadow on an ephemeral present. Furthermore, far from being immutable, the ever-present past is subject to constant revisions and reinterpretations; the past — or rather, its significance — can be changed. Similarly, our present assumptions and images of the future shape our current actions, which in turn produce the future "present". The growing

importance of aspirations and the new modality of both state and society co-creating desirable futures suggests that Singapore's foresight policies, far from being the straightforward application of tools and techniques, will have to be guided by the Aristotelian trinity of *logos* (the "how" of things), *ethos* (the questions of values and ethics), and *pathos* (how well we identify with each other). After all, participatory foresight is at heart an attempt to articulate and attain "the good life" — a fundamental philosophical question.

Reflections, Refractions and Diffractions
Mr Heng's foreword to *Reflections* concludes on an optimistic note:

> *Our Singapore Conversation does not end here. The spirit of speaking up constructively and hearing each other out sincerely and respectfully continues, just as making Singapore our best home is a continuing work in progress.*

It is hoped that the myriad conversations will continue. Indeed, in his critique of OSC within *Reflections*, Kenneth Paul Tan, a local academic and an OSC committee member, writes:

> *Instituting the habit of public participation and nurturing the skills to do this well are, in my view, a more important contribution of OSC than recording the aspirations that will feature in the final report.*

In a similar fashion, the OSC Secretariat held the view that Singaporeans are developing "conversational muscles" and that they are not afraid to use them. Has OSC, in providing the valve by which Singaporeans' existential angst and anxiety about the future might be released, led to an irreversible *refraction* of Singaporean society into a spectrum of distinct colours, competing values and diverging aspirations?

Participatory foresight is at heart an attempt to articulate and attain "the good life" — a fundamental philosophical question.

The OSC process may simply have exposed our notions of identity, history, and values as the contested narratives that they are, prone to unravelling. It remains unclear if these growing instabilities and emerging challenges, borne simultaneously of contestation between and co-creation by state and society, will result in a *diffraction* of established and familiar policy paradigms. The postmodern thinker Foucault defines "heterotopia" as "capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible."[10]

OSC, SINGAPORE AND THE POSTMODERN CONDITION

The rationale, design, conduct and experience of OSC recalls Max Weber's vision of an age marked by a contestation of ideas, in which no one single idea attains the monopoly status of a "grand narrative".[1] It is no coincidence that emergence, contestation and messiness — trends evident in both the experience of OSC and the social climate in which it took place — have manifested at particularly this advanced stage in Singapore's economic and urban development. Postmodernism — informed by plurality and difference, with a suspicion or even hostility towards the notion that there are universal and eternal truths — has been argued to be an advanced phenomenon of the "city":

Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form around you. Decide what it is, and your own identity will be revealed, like a map fixed by triangulation. Cities, unlike villages, and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our personal form on them. In this sense, it seems to me that living in the city is an art, and we need the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe the peculiar relation between man and material that exists in the continual creative play of urban living. The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate in maps and statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture.[2]

NOTES

1. "… general views of life and the universe can never be the products of increasing empirical knowledge, and that the highest ideals, which move us most forcefully, are always formed only in the struggle with other ideals which are just as sacred to others as ours are to us." From Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, translated by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (Illinois: The Free Press, 1949).

2. Jonathan Raban, *Soft City* (London: The Harvill Press, 1974): 9–10.

Has post-OSC Singapore become a proto-heterotopia, an ambiguous place in which Singaporeans are forced to continually ask "What world is this and what do I do in it?" Or, indeed, have these tensions always been part of Singapore's existential challenge? Now that would be worthy of a conversation of its own.

NOTES

1. Initiated in August 2012, Our Singapore Conversation was a year-long national conversation effort, characterised by broad-based, free-ranging dialogue, between the Government and citizens, and among citizens from all walks of life, on every aspect of the Singaporean condition. An OSC Committee, chaired by Education Minister Heng Swee Keat, led it. See: http://www.reach.gov.sg/Microsite/osc/index.html

2. *Reflections of Our Singapore Conversation*, p. 2. http://www.reach.gov.sg/Portals/0/Microsite/osc/OSC_Reflection.pdf

3. Our SG Conversation website http://www.oursgconversation.sg, accessed September 5, 2013

4. For a fuller discussion, see http://www.zhaw.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/engineering/_Institute_und_Zentren/INE/veranstaltungen/Papers_IFA/Kuah_Adrian.pdf

5. Adrian W. J. Kuah, "Facing up to Identity, Myths and Politics in S'pore," *Today*, 6 March 2013, accessed September 5, 2013, http://www.todayonline.com/print/78261

6. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 89.

7. Adrian W. J. Kuah, "Foresight (and) Policy: Thinking about Singapore's Future(s)", in *Social Space 2013/14* (Singapore: Lien Centre for Social Innovation, Singapore Management University, 2013): 106.

8. Wendell Bell, *Foundations of Futures Studies: Values, Objectivity, and the Good Society. Human Science for a New Era, Volume 2* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2003b): 141–2.

9. Quotes from OSC Participants, taken from OSC newsletter *Perspectives Arising From Our SG Conversation*, p. 17. http:www.reach.gov.sg/portals/0/microsite/osc/osc_newsletter.pdf

10. Michel Foucault, (translated by Jay Miskoweic) "Of Other Spaces", *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 26.

Transformative Alliance

To resolve complex problems, we must cooperate across conventional boundaries to co-create the future, not just adapt to it, argues the foresight veteran.

ADAM KAHANE

Adam Kahane is the Chairman of Reos North America, a social enterprise that helps businesses, governments, and civil society organisations address complex social challenges. A leading organiser, designer and facilitator of processes through which business, government, and civil society leaders can work together to address their toughest challenges, Adam facilitated the Mont Fleur Scenario Exercise in 1991 and 1992, in which a diverse group of South Africans worked together to effect the transition to democracy. Since then, he has led many such seminal cross-sectoral dialogue-and-action processes throughout the world. He is the author of *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities* (Berrett-Koehler, 2004), *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change* (Berrett-Koehler, 2010) and *Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future* (Berrett-Koehler, 2012).

What is the difference between transformative scenario planning and conventional scenario planning as commonly practised?

The conventional way in which scenarios are used (which is a subject of 99% of the literature) has a basic assumption that we cannot predict or control what will happen, and therefore what we have to do is try to understand and adapt to what might happen. This is the basic premise for scenario planning as practised at Shell. I always understood that Singapore takes the Shell methodology very seriously because of this. More than any other country in the world, Singapore sees itself as subject to forces that it cannot control or predict.

Futures work in general, and scenario work in particular, such as in Singapore, have mostly been based on this adaptive approach. However, the work I have been doing for the last 20 years takes adaptive scenario planning and turns it on its head. I start with the entirely different assumption that we cannot or are not willing to simply adapt to whatever happens: it is unacceptable and unsustainable. Therefore, we have to find a way not simply to adapt to whatever happens, but to influence what happens. The objective is not to adapt to the future, but also to transform it. This is something we often cannot do alone, only in alliance with others. Conversations move into a realm where

there are very subtle or ambiguous grey areas, situations that we cannot control but that we can influence. This is the domain of transformative scenario planning — a different species of futures work, with its own paradoxes and challenges.

The paradox, or the grey zone in this work, is that there are two simple cases and a confusing middle ground. One simple case is when I have no influence on what is happening, and all I can do is think, look, try to see what is coming down and adapt; I cannot predict nor control what is going on. The other is the opposite: not only can I predict what's going on, I can make it happen as I want it to happen. So these are the two extreme cases.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the reality of life — and particularly with democratic governance in most parts of the world — is that we are in the grey zone where the government is an actor but it cannot control everything. It may not want to or be able to, or citizens won't accept it. It is a phenomenon very much like what is discussed in Singapore. It is a middle ground full of ambiguity and paradox.

How can transformative scenario planning help to address these challenges?

I and Reos Partners,[1] the organisation of which I am a member, work in many contexts all over the world with all kinds of subjects (ranging from aboriginal health in Australia, climate change in Canada, judiciary reform in Argentina, sustainable finance in the UK and child malnutrition in India to mining safety in South Africa), but with one very specific approach — we work with teams of leaders from across a given social system (whether a city or a region or country or hemisphere) who are all concerned about what is happening and want to deal with it.

We have to find a way not simply to adapt to whatever happens, but to influence what happens. The objective is not to adapt to the future, but to transform the future.

When I say they are concerned about what is happening, that doesn't mean they agree on what needs to be done, nor do they even necessarily agree on what the problem is. Typically, they agree neither on the solution nor the problem, but they share a strongly held belief that a situation is problematic — perhaps for different reasons.

These are actors from across the system, from all the three sectors: the public sector, the private sector and the social sector. These teams are made up of people who see a problematic situation that they want to address and have already figured out that they can neither do so directly nor do so alone, whether it is by themselves, with their organisations or even within their

sector. That is the key assumption. They are obliged — generally with great unhappiness — to work not just with friends and colleagues but with strangers and opponents.

When there is agreement on neither the solution nor on the problem, we have to take an indirect approach: to start with figuring out what is really going on, how we can understand the problematic situation, how it might unfold and what we can do about it. That is the specific work that we do.

These are actors from across the system who see a problematic situation that they want to address and have already figured out that they cannot do so directly, nor do so alone. They are obliged to work not just with friends and colleagues but with strangers and opponents.

Does this suggest a more inclusive approach that is radically different from traditional structures of governance, which tend to be fairly centralised and top-down, with a clearer hierarchy of agency?

If you have authority, whether it is centralised or decentralised, and a capacity to deal with an issue, then you should just do it. The problem is the number of cases where this is possible is diminishing. One of the main reasons

for this is that people won't put up with it. I am reminded of a project in India with the national planning commission, and V. S. Naipaul's book on political activism, *India: A Million Mutinies Now.* As a friend there remarked, the situation now is a million bottlenecks — everybody has an opinion, a voice, an interest, so the notion that they will just do whatever the Government or the planning commission tells them ought to be done is no longer feasible.

What my colleagues and I do is to approach these situations with a particular process that involves three essential elements that are rarely used together.

The first is to work with actors from across the whole system — the people whose understanding, agency and commitment is needed to effect change in the area that you are working in, and who conversely, if they don't agree, can stop change happening and create a million bottlenecks. To work with a *whole system team* is already pretty unusual.

Secondly, we are very deliberate about the *container* within which that team works. The term container refers to the physical, political and psychosocial space in which the work is done. It is not obvious to most people that the container matters; it matters enormously and these days, a good bit of our work is actually in building the container. The word container has two aspects that

are both important. On the one hand, it means a space that is protected and safe, but its other contrary meaning is equally important — it needs to also be sufficiently confined to create the pressure that allows the work to happen.

So you have the whole system team, a strong container and lastly *a rigorous process*, which means that there is a sequence of things to be done, with more or less effective ways of carrying them out. There is pressure to produce results, and it is not just a matter of everyone getting together to just chat and figure it out.

We call this combination of the three key elements a social lab — the social equivalent of a scientific laboratory.[2] A laboratory is a space with the equipment you need and staff you need to be able to try things out and try to create something new; what is crucial is these are not only spaces to chat and to talk, although that is important, but spaces to experiment together, to act together to address the problematic situation and to learn, through doing, what works and what doesn't work.

If you have authority and a capacity to deal with an issue, then you should just do it. The problem is the number of cases where this is possible is diminishing.

Does your lab process face pressure to generate a solid, useable outcome at the end?
Yes. Practically, this is only interesting to do if there is a situation that many people view as problematic and they are willing to enter the lab space because they think it is possible to find a workable way forward. There absolutely is pressure to succeed, but one of the many paradoxes is that we don't know at the beginning what will come out at the end.

This is obvious in a creative process, but it is very challenging for most organisations, especially control-oriented institutions, who want to know in advance what the result is going to be, how they are going to measure it, what the deliverables are, what the budget is and so on. We say: well, we want to work on this, we are all committed to it and we will take this amount of time, but it is a creative process and therefore, by definition, I cannot tell you at the beginning what the end is.

Half of our work is in putting together — convening, building and organising — these labs; not that it is the hardest part, but it is the first step and therefore the one that by definition is not yet formed. The ones who initiate this process with us can be different people: government, businesses or civil society actors. In most cases it is an alliance. But it is always somebody or, more usefully, some coalition that is concerned

about a problematic situation and has not succeeded through established methods, who leads us to think that the lab or transformative scenario planning approach can be useful.

If you have been successful, it is very easy to fall on your face, because you cannot see that what you are doing won't work anymore. It may take a crisis to realise that it is not going to work.

Are there conditions that suggest that a particular group or society is in a good position to benefit from such a process? I used to think that there was no way to assess *a priori* what is possible, and that the fact that the conditions don't yet exist doesn't mean they cannot be created. I now think that there are objective conditions in which it is much more difficult, if not impossible, to proceed. The main flashing red light is where one or several key actors are unwilling to participate.

So then you have the choice to go ahead without those actors, since it is possible they may come in later. However, if they are key actors, then by definition you cannot get very far without them, or it could even be dangerous to proceed in opposition, and you have to wait until they are ready. It can mean waiting for a long time. We have been working with a group in Venezuela to undertake an effort of

this sort for the last 12 years and the conditions have not been right. The political actors have been absolutely unwilling to come together; they have a rigidly polarised system and nothing can be achieved.

But it is not necessary to start with an agreement on the solution, nor even on the problem, and it is not necessary to start with trusting each other. All of those things are built through the work. All that is necessary is that we all agree, even though perhaps from very different perspectives, that a situation is not good enough the way it is and we cannot fix it separately, so let's hold our noses and work together.

Working with strangers and opponents is nobody's preferred way of working. So why do it? Because I have no choice, because I cannot get where I am trying to go just with friends and colleagues. This requires me, in a certain sense, to have given up — and very specifically to have given up on the belief that I can do this on my own, that I can control the situation. For people who are used to being in control, either individuals or institutions, this is very painful. Somebody said to me once: nothing fails like success. If you have been successful, it is very easy to fall on your face, because you cannot see that what you are doing won't work anymore. It may take a crisis to realise that it is not going to work.

I think it is a hard transition to make, and it is easy to try to go partway

and say, "Well, I am still going to be in control but I am going to ask them for their opinion, and I take their opinion into account but I will still make the decisions." There is a big difference between *"I am in control, I will ask your opinion"* and *"Actually we have to do this together"*.

It is important to be pretty clear about whether you are consulting or co-creating. These are two entirely different modes. It is not that one is right and one is wrong, but that they require entirely

It is not necessary to start with an agreement on the solution, nor even on the problem, and it is not necessary to start with trusting each other. All of those things are built through the work.

different conditions. Transformative scenario planning, employing social labs, is co-creative work.

NOTES

1. See reospartners.com

2. Zaid Hassan, *The Social Labs Revolution: A New Approach to Solving Our Most Complex Challenges* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2014)

From Futures "Thinking" to Futures "Doing"

BOOK DETAILS

Transformative Scenario Planning
By Adam Kahane
Berrett–Koehler Publishing, Inc. (paperback published in October 2012); 168 pp.

REVIEWED BY

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Reading Adam Kahane is like listening to the movements of a symphony. All his books explore common themes: how to tackle tough, thorny, complex challenges — what some might call "wicked problems" — in ever-increasing analytic spirals, each echoing its predecessors, but also incorporating new ground and new insight.

To understand *Transformative Scenario Planning*, therefore, we also have to understand Kahane's previous work. His first book, *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening and Creating New Realities*,[1] explores how to navigate the nuances of multifaceted, adaptive problems with no simple optimising solutions. The sequel,

Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change,[2] argues for a dynamic and oscillating balance between power ("the drive towards self-realisation") and love ("the drive to unite the separated") in tackling intractable issues. The focus is still on how to solve tough problems, but Kahane now proposes a wider methodological toolkit.

The toolkit expands again with *Transformative Scenario Planning*, where Kahane identifies five steps that allow participants in a scenarios exercise not just to understand the future, but to influence it:

1. Convene a Team From Across the Whole System

2. Observe What Is Happening

3. Construct Stories About What Could Happen

4. Discover What Can and Must Be Done

5. Act to Transform the System

The first three steps will be familiar to anyone who has undertaken a scenarios exercise, like the growing community of futures thinking practitioners in the Singapore public sector, which has used scenarios as a tool for strategic planning since the late 1980s. Convening a system-wide team is analogous to the concept of whole-of-government thinking in Singapore, where system-level insights are sought to tackle challenges that transcend the jurisdiction of any single agency. "Observ[ing] what is happening" is similar to the horizon scanning and emerging issue analysis currently undertaken by the National Security Coordination Secretariat (NSCS) and the Strategic Policy Office in the Public Service Division (PSD). This involves discerning and detecting today's weak signals of tomorrow's game-changers.

"Construct[ing] stories" is the step from which the art of scenarios originally took its name. The plural "stories" is critical here, since crafting several narratives with both complementary and competing elements allows decision-makers to question the possible truths in each of them, and thereby examine their own deeply-held mental models

and assumptions. Stories and narratives, as opposed to more dispassionate analysis, are also more memorable for decision-makers and help foster a common language for planning. Many civil servants and, indeed, Singaporeans more broadly, will recall the catchy names of the first National Scenarios from 1997: "Hotel Singapore" and "A Home Divided". Kahane quotes a similar sentiment from Trevor Manuel, a participant in the famous Mont Fleur scenarios[3] that envisioned post-apartheid futures for South Africa. Manuel, who was head of the African National Congress' Department of Economic Policy at the time, and is currently Head of South Africa's National Planning Commission, said of the Mont Fleur scenarios: "I've internalized them, and if you have internalized something, then you probably carry it for life".

Kahane gets into really interesting ground with step four: Discover what can and must be done. Practitioners of traditional scenario planning approaches, most famously at Royal Dutch Shell, will detect many echoes of what they might call moving from "Scenarios to Strategies". This is a notoriously difficult part of any scenarios process; it involves not only exploring conceptual possibilities, but actual commitment of time, finances, energy and other scarce resources to whatever needs to be done. The returns are often uncertain, long-term, abstract and diffuse over the entire system; the costs are definite,

short-term, concrete and concentrated in a specific agency.

More than any other step, this requires "small-p" political imagination, will, discipline and stamina. At times, without participants even realising it, discussions at this stage can degenerate into blame ping-pong and other commitment avoidance techniques. This doesn't make participants in the process nefarious or even ignorant; it is simply easier to hide behind excuses than squarely face the prospect of having to change established ways of working in a team or in an entire institution. That Kahane does not offer simple steps to solve this problem is not a failing on his part; the challenges of political buy-in at this stage are probably not amenable to simple solutions, and instead need leadership willing to invest in patient, deliberate efforts with an eye on the long-run dividends.

In step five — Act to Transform the System — Kahane breaks into new territory for many scenario planners. He draws a distinction between two approaches to the future: an *adaptive* one, which takes the future as an exogenously determined "given" to which we can only react, and an *activist* approach that starts from the belief that we have some level of agency in determining the future we want (or not), and can work towards (or away from) it. There are parallels here to the psychological concept of the "locus

of control". People with internal loci tend to see their destinies as primarily the result of choices they make; they exercise agency and are often described by others as acting in "empowered" ways. In contrast, people with external loci tend to ascribe responsibility for their fates to factors outside themselves — "the system", "my environment", "my boss". Activist approaches, because they require risky normative judgements about what future might be desirable, call for a strong internal locus, whereas adaptive approaches tend to coincide with an external locus of control.

The reality is that we need both adaptive and activist approaches. Activist, internal-locus approaches alone can lead to recklessness and arrogance. In Singapore's case, awareness of our status as a small, price-taking economy on the global arena has — mostly rightly — meant a primarily humble and adaptive approach in our futures thinking.

On their own, however, adaptive approaches can be disempowering and lack galvanising force. One might argue, for instance, that the powerful vision of Singapore's founding fathers came out of a deeply activist approach to the future: we had to create our fate, not just be satisfied with the future we seemed to have been dealt with as we separated from Malaysia.

Singapore has seen more recent examples of activist futuring too. At the 2013 National Day Rally, Prime Minister

Lee Hsien Loong quoted almost directly from a scenario planner's handbook when he observed: "Very few countries or cities can think or plan over such a long-term. But Singapore has been able to do it. In a deeper sense, these are not merely plans; these are acts of faith in Singapore and in ourselves".[4] Tellingly, one of the most frequent pieces of feedback that other facilitators and I received at citizen dialogues during the recent Our Singapore Conversation[5] was how much people appreciated being asked about the kind of future they wanted to see in Singapore. Activist approaches to the future are clearly more than just a planning technique; they speak to a deep and latent human need to feel some measure of control over our destinies, and not just be victims of a whimsical fate.

Needless to say, activist futuring is not easy. Kahane acknowledges this in the many examples he cites of how difficult, protracted and non-linear such work can be. Progress happens in fits and starts, often without much pattern or predictability. Such work involves not just intellectual persuasion, but also the generation of emotive resonance. It asks both the creators and consumers of scenarios to acknowledge that creating the future is deeply terrifying. Questions like "What if we get it wrong?" are legitimate sources of anxiety, and there are no solutions to them, only risk management approaches that allow for

some level of decision to be taken, even if current information is imperfect and incomplete. The book would probably have been more complete with an even more detailed exploration of how these difficulties can be overcome. The change management literature, for instance, could have been a useful source of ideas on how to address the inevitable fears and other emotions in transformative scenario processes. One such idea may have included building up the personal resilience of scenario teams' leaders.

Activist futuring involves not just intellectual persuasion but also the generation of emotive resonance.

This is a minor cavil in the context of a book that successfully elaborates, extends and enhances a familiar idea. In a world where citizens are increasingly empowered and keen to have active roles in governance, Kahane's ideas could provide interesting fodder on how activist energy can be harnessed for a more inclusive and participatory public policy process. Anyone who cares about governance, social change and how we run organisations of any size should look forward to the next movement in Kahane's emerging symphony.

NOTES

1. Adam Kahane, *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2007).

2. Adam Kahane, *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010).

3. Pieter le Roux et al., "The Mont Fleur Scenarios," *The Weekly Mail & The Guardian Weekly,* July 1992, http://reospartners.com/publication-view/46

4. Lee Hsien Loong, "National Day Rally 2013 Speech" (speech, Singapore, August 21, 2013), Prime Minister's Office, http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews/primeminister/2013/August/prime-minister-lee-hsien-loong-s-national-day-rally-2013--speech.html

5. "Our Singapore Conversation," http://www.oursgconversation.sg

Managing Complexity with Courage, Conflict and Engagement

ILOD Principal Consultant Douglas O'Loughlin outlines four key leadership competencies to cultivate in a world of greater complexity and uncertainty.

BY

DOUGLAS O'LOUGHLIN

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Introduction

In the early 1990s, Management Professor Peter Vaill introduced leaders to the term "permanent white water change", indicating that we had transitioned from a world of managing changes one at a time, to one where changes were flowing through organisations all the time.[1]

Now there is a new term to describe the environment we live in, coined by the US military: VUCA — Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity.

If the external environment is in such a state, how then do we transform ourselves to be agile enough to respond in these times? We need to assess the way we think, make decisions and act, to ensure all are aligned with the realities we face in society today. Decision-making on policy and organisation changes by small groups of people has lost much of its utility. Even the best thought-through policies and change initiatives will fail to live up to expectations without wider levels of engagement.

There are practices that can support success in such a world and enhance transformational capacity for leaders: **be courageous, embrace diversity, engage in healthy conflict** and **bring more voices into the room**. Here are some ways to bring these practices to life in organisations.

Be Courageous

Social science experiments, such as ones conducted by Solomon Asch on

conformity,[2] and Stanley Milgram on obedience to authority,[3] have revealed the underlying lateral and hierarchical social pressures that exist in organisations.

In social systems, it can be challenging to speak up with differing opinions in front of peers and those of a higher level. If we are going to nurture a Public Service and society at large that actively engages on the challenges we face, we need people who are courageous enough to speak up for what they believe in, perhaps on behalf of some of the voices that are not in the room. One of the definitions of integrity is being the same person you are both on the inside and outside. If you are a leader or in a position to be heard, express your inner voice with compassion when it may serve a higher purpose.

As a leader, be sure to also acknowledge courage when you see it. Whether you agree or disagree with the point being made, you can recognise those willing to share their opinions.

Reflection:
How willing are you to share your feedback and opinions with peers and those higher up in the hierarchy, when they are different than the rest and perhaps challenge the status quo? How much do you celebrate those who exhibit courage in meetings and town halls?

Embrace Diversity

There are many types of diversity, such as nationality, ethnicity, age, gender, personality type and position in the organisation's hierarchy, to name just a few.

How often are you reaching out to have a conversation with people who might have a different perspective from you? Engagement can start small, through short conversations before a meeting, in the hall, perhaps even in a lift. Or you can follow the example of Mr Liak Teng Lit, CEO of Singapore's Alexandra Health Systems, who has for many years made it a habit to invite his most irate customers for tea.

Even the best thought-through policies and change initiatives will fail to live up to expectations without wider levels of engagement.

Perhaps a difference of opinion can arise from personality differences. For example, you may like structure and closure, whereas one of your colleagues may appreciate flexibility and openness. In these VUCA times, holding off on making a decision is often a more effective approach, because new information may arise to help inform the way forward.

Another example of how to use diversity as leverage and do things differently: It is a commonly held stereotype that a mentor is an older person providing wisdom and guidance to a younger person. However, these

days, there is a growing trend of senior leaders with young mentors. These young mentors can offer insight into the younger generation, and senior leaders can get tips on the latest technologies and cultures that are shaping the world.

Engage in Healthy Conflict

A good indicator of the health of any team or organisation is the amount of healthy conflict that occurs during a meeting, whether it is a weekly staff meeting or an annual strategic planning retreat. Management author Patrick Lencioni[4] suggests that healthy conflict in a team can create higher levels of commitment and accountability, and that this leads to better results.

The research is clear on what conflict means for any human system. Whether it is a marriage or a management team, the manner in which people disagree is a telling sign of the quality of the relationship(s). Healthy conflict is not personal; it is disagreeing on approaches and strategies. A tip from John Gottman,[5] a scientist who studies marriages, is to show some level of agreement and appreciation, even when in conflict. After all, it is possible to disagree without being disagreeable.

Sometimes people do not invite certain people to meetings on setting policies, because they do not want to deal with differences, or are concerned that the meeting is likely to take longer if there are disagreements. In the short term, this may save some time, but in the long term, it leads to lower levels of trust and less-than-robust decisions. How would you feel if you find out a policy from your agency, one that impacts your division, was announced and you had no chance to give input? Remember the IKEA effect, which is that people support and feel more ownership with things they have helped to create. So spend the extra time and hear all the opinions. With a little effort, you can tap into what Tom Crum calls "The Magic of Conflict".[6]

Bring More Voices into the Room

These days having a few people who are good at "systems thinking" may not be enough to create powerful engagement and smart policies. John Scherer and Roland Sullivan[7] have argued "there is great power in thinking whole system, and in being a whole system as you think". When people with diverse views but a shared stake in the health of the whole system get to talk about issues in a well-designed process, common ground, not conflict, can emerge.

Years ago, the Singapore Police Force brought 800 officers together for two days of Strategic Planning. Rather than the senior team creating a plan and selling it down through the organisation,

the idea was to co-create the plan. More recently, the Ministry of Communications and Information brought together about 230 Communications Officers from around the Public Service to talk about transforming Government Communications. The Land Transport Authority took the opportunity to refresh its mission and values with approximately 180 people thinking together, rather than through small focus groups. In both of these interventions, the community was engaged, members got to hear diverse perspectives and the mission of the initiative was accelerated.

More is also being done to engage the public, as we reach out and get individuals and organisations involved earlier in the policymaking process. Our Singapore Conversation was a good start to this type of engagement, and provided evidence that our citizens are willing to engage with us, and that we can all handle differences of opinion for the sake of co-creating more robust policies and better shared outcomes.

Reflection:
How willing are you to engage a wider range of stakeholders in your sense making, policymaking, and decision making?

Continue to Build your Capacity

Becoming a courageous leader who embraces diversity and conflict while creating whole system engagement is not usually an overnight shift for most people. Think of yourself as a martial artist; you know most of the moves, now you are working on moving more smoothly, quickly and in more complex situations. Here are some tips on getting your black belt:

Be Courageous: If you haven't pushed your own boundaries of late, choose an issue that you are passionate about, and reach out to a trusted colleague on how to best bring it up in a larger setting. If you are already rather outspoken, get feedback on how you can make sure your messages have maximum impact.

Engage Diversity: Start with small informal chats, be curious and ask questions to which you don't know the answers.

Engage in Healthy Conflict: Dialogue skills are crucial when differences arise. Stay focused on the issue at hand, balance advocacy and inquiry, and continue to look at how the issue is being framed. During or after a healthy conflict, be sure to acknowledge and celebrate that

Becoming a courageous leader, who embraces diversity and conflict while creating whole system engagement, is not usually an overnight shift for most people.

you all have cared enough to disagree openly and skilfully enough to disagree in such an agreeable manner.

Bring More Voices into the Room: You can start small, by adding more people to the meetings you chair, and run your meetings in an engaging, effective style. If you want to run a large meeting with hundreds of people, but are not sure how to do this effectively, find a facilitator who has this expertise and plan something together.

Conclusion

These principles are not wholesale substitutes for traditional leadership qualities. Instead, they build upon and expand these proven competencies in ways that, over time, help nurture personal and institutional capacity to cope with complex situations that call for shared ownership and effort. The desired outcome is the growth of stronger organisational cultures in and across our agencies, and an even more resilient and engaged society.

NOTES

1. Peter Vaill, *Learning as a Way of Being: Strategies for Survival in a World of Permanent White Water* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1996).

2. Solomon E. Asch, "Effects of group pressure upon the modification and distortion of judgment," in H. Guetzkow, ed., *Groups, Leadership and Men* (Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Press, 1951).

3. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper, 2009).

4. Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organisational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

5. John Gottman, *Making Relationships Work* (Harvard Business Review, December 2007).

6. Thomas F. Crum, *The Magic of Conflict: Turning a Life of Work into a Work of Art,* 2nd ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1998).

7. William Rothwell and Roland Sullivan, *Practicing OD: A Guide for Consultants* (San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2005).

Transformative Innovation and the Policymaker of the Future

The competencies needed to transform governance are already innate in the policymaking community — but a deliberate cultural shift may be necessary to bring them to the fore.

BY

GRAHAM LEICESTER

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A Sense of Cultural Unease

A world of boundless complexity, radical interconnectedness and rapid change: it has become commonplace to talk of these as the operating conditions of the early 21st century. They describe an environment — for which the American military has coined the acronym VUCA — characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

Less appreciated are the cultural implications of living in such a world. It is the volatility we notice, the day-to-day whirl of superficial change. But, as the environmentalist Stewart Brand reminds us, change is also occurring at a slower pace deeper in our environmental and social systems.[1] As Brand says, while "fast grabs all the attention, slow has all the power."

Brand identifies distinct "pace layers" of change. Fashion and commerce change quickly. They are "always on", innovating, looking for the next new thing. Infrastructure is under pressure to keep up, with governments criticised for not upgrading fast enough. The culture and values of a society change more slowly. Nature moves slowest of all — but is now starting to get itself noticed with the looming crisis of climate change.

Our systems of governance sit in the tension between these layers:

mediating between the fast-moving demands of technology, commerce and the market, and the bedrock culture that lends a society its coherence and sense of identity.

Cultural psychologist Richard Shweder argues that every society needs a set of core storylines to account for what he calls the "existential facts of life".[2] They tell us how the world works, what to expect in life, what success looks like and so on. In stable societies and quieter times, these storylines are transmitted tacitly and deliberately through each and every cultural act. They provide the often taken-for-granted symbols and metaphors, conceptual understandings and cultural habits that allow people to go about their lives with a secure sense of the wider patterns that hold them.

In a VUCA world, those cultural patterns are everywhere in flux. The Harvard psychologist Robert Kegan pointed out back in the early 1990s that the world has become too complex and fast-moving for us to comprehend. All understanding is provisional. The old storylines no longer ring true. We are, Kegan concluded, "in over our heads".[3]

The Singapore Context

It should come as no surprise that disturbance at this deeper level of culture is now showing up in the data in Singapore, as it is elsewhere in the world. While a rise in the number of complaints about public services and a fall in "user trust", for example, might be seen as indicators of a more demanding and discerning citizenry, other signals (such as statistics reflecting growing anti-foreigner sentiment) suggest symptoms of a deeper cultural unease.[4]

Such unease also shows up in questions raised in the recent "Our Singapore Conversation" process and elsewhere about the continued relevance of Singapore's founding narrative as well as its core storyline, of "Security, Survival and Success". The security narrative is tested by the proliferation of global threats in a profoundly interconnected world. Survival seems to have been purchased at a high price in terms of quality of life. The link between success and merit, and even what it really means to live a "successful" life in today's world, is no longer as clear-cut as it used to be.

The Technical Response

These stirrings have not gone unnoticed in policy circles. The question is how to respond.

The most obvious response is to look for newer and more sophisticated tools of analysis. Singapore's Centre for Strategic Futures, for example, recently used the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) foresight method to try to probe these deeper layers of change.[5] CLA explicitly investigates four levels of sense-making: litany ("lived experience"), social systems and structures, worldview and myth/metaphor. The exercise provided a space for participants to give expression to

the sense of incoherence and unease I have described above.

The process also reinforced the need for diverse voices in the policy process in order for there to be true richness and depth of context that allows our hopes as well as our fears to be explored. The final report[6] of the exercise stressed the need to cover all four levels: "the social activist locates her agency at the level of worldview, the poet at the level of myth, the business owner at the level of litany, even as the policymaker defines her power at the level of social causation".

Our systems of governance sit in the tension between these layers: mediating between the fast-moving demands of technology, commerce and the market, and the bedrock culture that lends a society its coherence and sense of identity.

While for the purposes of analysis or data gathering we can break society into causal layers and any number of different expert domains and categories, our "lived experience" as humans is one of wholeness. We live simultaneously in all of these layers, all of these dimensions, and we would notice that something was wrong if we didn't.

VUCA is not a threat but a condition of life that is primarily a process of growth, change and uncertainty.

The opposite scenario is stasis and predictability, with all change ground to a halt. As the humanist physician and former President of the Royal College of General Practitioners Iona Heath puts it: "Only because we do not understand everything, and because we do not control the future, is it possible to live and be human."[7]

The Human Response

The good news is that the competencies required to live well and thrive in the VUCA world are innate to us all — they are evoked in response to our environment. The same goes for the capacities needed to devise effective policy responses for a world where the challenges are not just technical but cultural and existential.

First, we must recognise that competence is culturally determined. The range of what we are able or willing to express of our innate competencies is conditioned by the culture of the professional setting we find ourselves in. We carry in our heads and hearts an implicit view of the competent policymaker — for example, someone who makes few mistakes, is seen as a "safe pair of hands", does not ruffle too many feathers — which thereby limits the expression of the human capacities we need to respond effectively to the VUCA world.

My experience seeking to develop a "policymaker of the future" programme with the Scottish Government in 2008/9

TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATION IN ACTION

In a workshop I ran in Singapore,[1] the example was raised of the annual wave of dissatisfaction with the Primary 1 school registration process. Getting into the "right" primary school is seen to be an important step on the path to a successful life, so many schools are oversubscribed and many parents are disappointed. We brainstormed policy ideas that might address the problem, in order to appreciate the distinction between technocratic fixes (change the algorithm, experiment with different admissions criteria, allocate places by lot, etc.) and transformative innovation rooted in culture and values.

In the latter case, we see the problem not as a technical flaw but as an indicator of a culture under strain. We must therefore design innovations that will lead the culture back to health; how, for example, might we move towards a world in which this pressure on registration no longer exists, because Primary 1 placement no longer determines a person's fate, or because society has come to realise that (as one participant put it) "success has many faces"? And how might we successfully pursue such an innovation as part of a longer-term transition strategy, even as existing systems need to continue delivering goods and services?

NOTE

1. Workshop on "Dancing at the Edge: Policymaker of the Future", June 11, 2013, organised by the Civil Service College Singapore.

provides a useful example. We started with a series of high level workshops with senior officials to discover what the competencies of the policymaker of the future might be.

The competencies identified in this inquiry broadly fell into three categories. There was a range of skills and competencies that did not seem to be about either policymaking or about the future — basic professional attributes like integrity, good project management and so on. Then there was a set of policy-specific skills like political acumen and knowledge of policy instruments. Finally there was a third category which read more like the skills needed for the emerging VUCA world: handling complexity, being comfortable with ambiguity, acknowledging ignorance, orchestrating without power and so on.

The immediate impulse was to take this third list and organise a training

TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATION: 10 CRITICAL CHARACTERISTICS

These can be taken as both design criteria for interventions and a practical guide for the kind of action needed to develop 21st century competencies.

Transformative innovation is:

1. *Balanced: paying skilful attention to the twin requirements to be hospice workers for the dying culture and midwives for the new, consciously operating in both worlds at the same time.* This is the critical skillset, mastering the skills of tact, timing and titration that allow us to keep the old culture on board even as we introduce radical innovation.

2. *Inspiring and hopeful for the participants and for others who come to know or hear about it.* It has this quality because it effectively acknowledges the broader cultural unease, and is not just another "patch" on the system.

3. *Informed by a longer term perspective, taking the future into account.* We cannot be midwives to better future outcomes without this perspective.

4. *Pioneering; trying something new and counter-cultural; starting small; rooted in discovery and learning rather than the application of tried and tested procedures.* If we are going to shift the culture then we must do something that will be seen as "counter-cultural" in today's terms. And if so we should start small: anything bigger would be seen as too threatening or resource-intensive and may be suppressed.

5. *Grounded; facing up to reality; generated from a clear-sighted view of the evidence but not hidebound by it; taking knowledge gained from lived experience as seriously as abstract data.* The initiative will be based on a long-term aspiration, but must take its place in the messy reality of the now. We ignore that at our peril.

6. *Based on personal commitment "beyond reason", with the individuals involved stepping out of their formal roles and into themselves.* Stepping into ourselves gives us access to capacities, resources and stories we usually keep in the background in our professional lives — our own passions and aspirations, for example. We will need all of this to carry out transformative innovation successfully.

7. *Responsible; honouring the principle of "first do no harm"; sensitive to the pressures involved on people pushing the boundaries and not pushing too far too fast.* While this kind of work is invigorating and fulfilling, it will also demand a lot from us. It can start to ask too much. We must look after ourselves and each other. The catalyst has failed if it burns up in the experiment.

8. *Revealing hidden resources — by freeing up resources locked into the existing system and by configuring new sources of abundance.* It is scarcity that is undermining the effectiveness of our present systems. The trajectory needs to be towards sources of support that are abundant and away from

reliance on those that are scarce. But this kind of work is attractive — people will want to get involved. Hidden resources will emerge.

9. *Maintaining integrity, coherence, wholeness at all scales and from all perspectives, with words and deeds, being and doing in alignment.* Every action carries an implicit culture with it that can and will be inferred both from what is done and how it is pursued. Authenticity is vital, and attractive. It is not that the means determine the ends. The means are the ends.

10. *Maintaining a pioneering spirit even in the face of success, preferring to be followed by rather than swallowed by the mainstream system.* It can be very difficult to resist siren calls to "mainstream" any innovation that does well. The overwhelming instinct of a system in decline is to search around for innovations that will save it. But propping up the old system will not hasten the arrival of the new — and may make its eventual appearance all the more costly and painful. The ultimate aim here is to transform the culture to free up resources sunk into maintaining today's system so that they can be rechannelled towards a system fit for tomorrow.

module for each, thus "future proofing" the skills of our government officials. I suggested this might be a waste of time, effort and money.

What if these skills and competencies are innate and present already in abundance in our government officials, but go unexpressed? Because in our present culture and our present policy process, demanding as it is of firm leadership, rapid response, authoritative expertise and rigorous and conclusive analytical evidence, these attributes are more likely to be regarded as incompetence. These 21st century competencies are rarely rewarded in a 20th century culture.

Transformative Innovation

These new competencies cannot be trained in the abstract, but they can be encouraged, supported and nurtured through action. To express them we need to take on challenging policy issues that will require us to express a wider range of competence than is usual at present, probing the edge of our knowledge and capacity. Hence my own organisation in Scotland, International Futures Forum, has established not a training programme but a supported community of practice — and the core practice is transformative innovation.

The term requires some explanation. I have written extensively elsewhere

about the concept of "cultural leadership" and the skills and capacities required to engage at the level of a culture in transition to guide it towards something more life affirming and sustainable.[8] California Senator John Vasconcellos has expressed this double task strikingly: "we must be hospice workers for the dying culture and midwives for the new".

These 21st century competencies are rarely rewarded in a 20th century culture.

That is at the grand scale. At the level of individual initiative, it will be expressed in the practice of innovation that is not simply about fixing or repairing the systems that are failing, but that is deliberately designed to make the space for something very different and more in tune with our long-term aspirations for the future.

Getting Into Practice

How might we put these insights into practice? The trigger is usually an individual who recognises the need to try a new approach and is willing to take that on. The next move would typically be to find a supportive colleague or team: transformative innovation is difficult to pursue alone. Next, it is useful, at the right time, to seek support from those in authority — not for permission, but simply for acknowledgement that what is being undertaken is developmental, with a long term transition in mind. The 10 characteristics listed then

provide valuable clues about how to proceed — learning by doing, addressing challenges as they arise.

Extensive experience suggests it is also possible to foresee many of those challenges — particularly the resistance that is likely from the dominant culture — and to prepare people to encounter them and policy to avoid them. We now know enough to introduce and support a dedicated programme of transformative innovation in government, running alongside and complementing other programmes.[9]

Building on this, International Futures Forum is now establishing a more general platform to support such work and the people pursuing it — a "National Infrastructure for Transformative Innovation" (NIFTI). This brings together tools, processes, artefacts, theory, insight, information, supervision, skilled practitioners, ongoing inquiry, networking events, formal action learning sets, strategic relationships and so on. These provide a dedicated structure of support, online and in person, for those engaged in transformative innovation.

I believe some such system will increasingly come to be seen as an essential component for any government in the 21st century that wishes to take its dual task seriously, acting at a cultural level as both hospice worker and midwife and with the operational competencies required to "redesign the plane whilst flying it".

NOTES

1. Stewart Brand, *The Clock of the Long Now: Time and Responsibility* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

2. Richard A. Shweder, *Thinking through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

3. Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

4. This data is assembled from interviews conducted during my visit and from a number of sources included in briefings provided in advance of my visit.

5. *Causal Layered Analysis Project: An inter-agency project to explore the socio-economic aspirations of Singaporeans*, led by the Centre for Strategic Futures, Public Service Division, July 2013.

6. http://www.psd.gov.sg/content/dam/psd_web/csf_web/resources/Causal%20Layered%20Analysis%20Project%20Report%20(final).pdf

7. Iona Heath, "Love's Labours Lost: Why Society is Straitjacketing its Professionals and How We Might Release Them", The Michael Shea Memorial Lecture, organised by International Futures Forum and the Royal Society of Edinburgh, September 10, 2012, http://www.internationalfuturesforum.com/u/cms/Iona_Heath_Lecture2012.pdf

8. See for example "Rising to the Occasion: Cultural Leadership in Powerful Times" written for the UK's Mission Models Money in 2007 and "Real Cultural Leadership: Leading the Culture in a Time of Cultural Crisis" in *A Cultural Leadership Reader*, eds. Sue Kay and Katie Venner, for the Cultural Leadership Programme, UK. Both available for download from http://www.internationalfuturesforum.com/projects.php?pid=44, accessed December 21, 2013

9. My experience helping to establish a programme to support transformative innovation in school education in Scotland has been encouraging. Using a simple set of resources as prompts and challenges, schools are first encouraged to express small-scale innovations that might help shift the system towards their aspirations and then supported to put them into practice. This approach is described in detail in Graham Leicester et al., *Transformative Innovation in Education: A Playbook for Pragmatic Visionaries* (UK: Triarchy Press, 2013) and at www.iffpraxis.com/transformative-innovation-in-education

Public Sector Transformation — Six Small Ways to Make a Big Impact

The Singapore Public Service can ready itself for a more challenging environment with more thoughtful communication, collaboration and creative use of resources.

BY

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So we have heard the Prime Minister urge the public sector to be more responsive to the needs of the citizenry.[1] The Government has to operate as one, be fully committed to improving the lives of the people, and its policies must keep pace with the changing aspirations and needs of Singaporeans. At the same time, it must build trust and uphold the highest standards of integrity. This is quite a tall but necessary order indeed.

The big question is: where do we begin? Self-realisation would be a good place to start. It is a different world we live in today: this includes Singapore. The far-sighted policies of our founding generation of leaders have served us well by most measures,

but this is not to say they will meet the needs of future generations. As we plan ahead for the next 20 or 30 years, it is clear Singaporeans want a bigger say in the policies that will affect their lives, from roads, housing and healthcare to education, and they are not afraid to voice their views.

The public sector will have to adapt to these changing circumstances. Of course, adaptation doesn't mean compromising on the basics. The Government still has a duty to safeguard the interests of the state, uphold the interests of the community, and balance the competing demands on our scarce resources. But we have more interest groups to manage and

issues are now more easily amplified through the new social media.

It is in this context that public sector transformation has been in the news lately. Many public servants must be daunted by the prospect of having to embrace the impending changes, much less initiate them. Anticipating this, the Public Service Division and the Civil Service College have been repositioning themselves to help the public sector cope with these changes by facilitating civil service-wide dialogue, fostering inter-agency collaboration and investing in capacity building. Senior public sector leaders have also stepped in to guide the change effort by identifying areas within their organisations, as well as across agencies, that can be improved in order to deliver better citizen-centric services. This is a good start.

Six Ways to Spark Change
What can the rest of the civil service do? We should certainly not wait for change to come. Each and every public officer can and should be a powerful agent of change. From the Permanent Secretary and Chief Executive down to the counter staff and ground officers, there is much we can do to facilitate the overall effort. And there is no need to pay an arm and a leg to a consultant to help you do this. Here are six ways to kick it off:

1. Leaders must set the right tone, starting from the top — but not only from the top. Any line manager or supervisor is in a powerful position to bring about change in his or her department or unit. Revisit assumptions from time to time. Policies should not be cast in stone but reflect changing realities. Create a positive and enabling environment where ideas and suggestions are welcomed. Encourage ground-up feedback as those closest to the issues are usually the most well-informed yet paradoxically, feel powerless to change things.

2. Create platforms for officers to share their challenges — and forge a common vision and narrative for change. Officers should meet and interact regularly with one another and arrive at a consensual world view, particularly in times of uncertainty and complexity. This is especially important in large organisations where many officers may not even have met their fellow colleagues. A shared sense of purpose is absolutely critical for any major change effort. Develop a compelling narrative that is relevant to your agency: one that galvanises everyone's efforts and fires up the imagination.

3. Allow for "ideas test-bedding" — by encouraging officers to create problem solving teams to tackle the challenges they face, and to identify problem areas or pain points that

A LIBRARY BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE: BUILDING A LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP BASED ON ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST

Customer-centric experience and community engagement are not new to the National Library Board (NLB), which has been reinventing the concept of public libraries in Singapore for over a decade. One of the ways in which it has done so is by rethinking the relationship between the library as an institution and the people it serves. In recent years, NLB has increasingly empowered customers, partners and volunteers to lead, initiate, develop and manage libraries on their own. **library@ chinatown** is its latest experiment.

Located in Chinatown Point in Chinatown, library@chinatown is a public library managed by the community, for the community. The mall owner, CP1 Pte Ltd, proposed that NLB set up a public library on its premises and sponsored the rental and fit-out costs. The concept was co-developed by NLB and an advisory team of twelve experts on Chinese culture, including educators, academics, media professionals as well as representatives from the Ministry of Education, local universities, an arts school and a Chinese business council. The operation and organisation of activities to promote Chinese art and culture have been sponsored by a non-profit organisation, Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple, for five years.

The day-to-day operations of library@ chinatown are managed by a pool of volunteers drawn from the community. They conduct shelf-reading, assist in the shelving of books, provide programme logistics, and clear the Bookdrop. Clad in volunteer t-shirts, they are also the library's custodians and ambassadors, reminding users to pick up after themselves.

NLB hopes that this initiative may inspire others to volunteer in libraries and to make libraries their own.

NOTE

1. This excerpt was adapted by the editorial team in consultation with the first author. From June Gwee and Neo Boon Siong, *"A Library for the People: A Case Study of the National Library Board"*, March 2013, http://www.cscollege.gov. sg/knowledge/pages/a-library-for-the-people-a-case-study-of-the-national-library-board.aspx

should be addressed. Sometimes the solution may be simple, such as simplifying forms by removing unnecessary fields, cutting down on the red tape for approvals or redesigning processes around people as human beings, rather than as digits. At other times, a more fundamental policy review may be called for, which will require further deliberations with the Ministry HQ. Start with the quick wins, recognise every small effort, and you'll be surprised how quickly others in the organisation will catch on.

4. Promote a greater sense of empathy, both within and without the organisation — and put yourself in the shoes of your employee or member of public. This can be done in a great number of ways. Start with having empathy within the organisation. What this means is that leaders and supervisors should pay attention to their staff's needs if they expect their officers to project similar care for the public. At the same time, those working in front line agencies should walk the ground regularly, and meet up with the grassroots leaders and the local community to garner feedback and suggestions.

5. Be more deliberate about public engagement, not as an afterthought but as an integral part of the policy formulation and review process. Engage both in good times and bad — not only when there is a need to. Engage regularly as a way to communicate policy intent, shifts and trade-offs and to build a long-term relationship based on mutual trust, respect and authenticity. Engagement can take various forms, from simple dialogue sessions to organising activities that provide a more relaxed and conducive environment for dialogue. If we are prepared to look, we might be surprised how many capable, well-meaning Singaporeans — from individuals to businesses and organisations — are prepared to work with us on national endeavours.

6. Make the most of the data within your organisation. Public agencies collect data, lots of it. Unfortunately, much of this data is not used to its full potential. Much has been said of data analytics: there are helpful tools to collate, analyse and make sense of data. But we need not always rely on such elaborate tools to be effective. Customer feedback, which is basic data that many public service agencies already have, combined with the intuition of your front-line employees, is a good place to start mining for information. What works or does not work usually provides useful clues to improving service quality more broadly. Asking the right questions, drilling deeper into

the data, and assigning good people to the front desks, where interaction with the public actually occurs, can inspire vast improvements in service delivery.

Doing More With Less — Creating Bandwidth for Success

Finding sufficient bandwidth for management and line managers is a common challenge faced by organisations contemplating change. Indeed, this poses a far greater challenge than the lack of resources. Resources can always be provided, but an organisation that is inadequately prepared or poorly structured to implement change efforts can do more harm with additional resources allocated to it. Precious time, energy and resources can be wasted, and widespread scepticism could undermine the larger civil service-wide change effort. For this effort to succeed, some slack and spare capacity should be given to agencies to strengthen their organisational capabilities.

Sustaining these efforts will require a culture of continuous improvement. This is the hardest part of the change effort. It is often not possible to change large organisations overnight — unless of course, they face an existential threat, by which time its fate may already be sealed. Change can be just as effective in smaller doses when done in a way that is sustained and scalable. Some departments, especially those in the forefront of change efforts, can lead the way by test-piloting new concepts or approaches and replicating the successes across the rest of the organisation.

Singapore stands at an important crossroads in its development. Will we be a run-of-the-mill country, or continue to be exceptional? This is not mere rhetoric. Our success has hinged as much on exceptional leadership as on an exceptional civil service that has stayed true to the nation's interests and secured the public's trust. The public sector transformation effort is too important to be left to chance. It is also too important to be left to the few who oversee the civil service. It has to be everyone's job. It is up to us — people like you and me — to believe that we can make a difference, and to make change happen today.

NOTE

1. Speech by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at Public Service Leadership Advance on 30 September 2013, http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews/primeminister/2013/September/speech-by-prime-minister-lee-hsien-loong-at-the-public-service-l.html

Enabling Organisational Transformation: Possibilities and Practice

Two public agencies illustrate transformational strategies that could help organisations rethink and reinvent themselves for the future.

BY

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AND

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What is Transformation and What is Not?

The context within which the public sector operates has changed. Public agencies today seek the capacity to transform their organisations and navigate the dynamic environments in which they must serve. More and more of the issues they face have become trans-boundary, multidimensional, interconnected and prone to surprises. Public agencies increasingly have to juggle traditional roles as public service provider, regulator and law enforcer as well as new, relational ones as arbiter, facilitator and convener — all within the constraints of allocated budgets and manpower.

The exercise of leadership, in providing coherence, connection and commitment to the whole, confers meaning and sustains excellence.

Yet organisational transformations are challenging. Research suggests that only one third of organisations that try to transform do so successfully.[1] Organisational transformation is not about tweaking parts of the system. Instead, it involves a whole-system shift in the way an organisation thinks, operates and relates with others. It is not just about raising standards, working faster or tightening controls, but redefining an organisation's desired outcomes. It requires a shift from the problem-solving mode to a focus on a vision of the desired future the organisation wants to create. The process is complex, because transformation is an emergent phenomenon, comprising many moving parts and interdependent agents, and requiring individuals to change mind-sets and behaviours.

Fixing the System or Creating a New One?

Organisational change begins with the organisation's mission and vision of the future, and the nature of the change that is called for. It may be that deeper and more sustainable change comes not from trying to fix the existing system, but by creating a new one. This may call for a fundamental re-think of the organisation's purpose and desired outcomes.

Becoming more aware of the different levels of perspective on which we operate — and the inter-relationships of change variables involved — helps us better determine the most effective levers for change. It will also be easier to connect the pieces if we perceive the bigger picture of the system. It allows organisations to attend to the immediate while working in concert, at multiple levels in multiple action modes, towards larger shared goals.

If the nature of most organisational change is complex and our goal is also to grow the capacity to anticipate and adapt to change over time, then there is merit in broadening conversations. This means widening the circle of involvement by engaging more people: across levels and

roles, and even outside the organisation. It means taking time to help people see the larger scheme of things and their collective contribution, by reframing mental models, building a clearer and shared view of the future through new experiences of coming together. If transformation is emergent, then there is a need to structure processes for experimenting, learning and course-correcting — through conversations at different levels that enable all stakeholders to seek meaningful patterns and understand collectively.

Leadership sponsorship and modelling at all levels are crucial for change. Leaders are in a unique position to shape the context in which people and systems come together to achieve outcomes. They identify the issues and larger purpose, and engage people in new conversations. They build the collective capacity of groups and their whole organisation to create new realities by managing relationships across, and by empowering through, the design of organisational systems. The exercise of leadership, in providing coherence, connection and commitment to the whole, confers meaning and sustains excellence.

Organisational Transformation in Action: Two Public Agencies in Singapore

Singapore Customs (SC) and the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS), both agencies under the purview of Singapore's Ministry of Finance, navigated significant changes in their mission, vision and organisation. They were able to do so successfully while sustaining performance and retaining committed public officers.[2]

To tighten border control following September 11, border enforcement roles under the former Customs & Excise Department, a government department under the Ministry of Finance, were transferred to the new Immigration & Checkpoints Authority in 2003. The remaining trade documentation and revenue enforcement roles of the Customs & Excise Department and the trade facilitation function of International Enterprise Singapore, a statutory board under the Ministry of Trade and Industry, were merged to form Singapore Customs, which would become the single agency to look after all the functions along the trade chain. In the decade that followed, SC's role rapidly expanded and its staff strength almost doubled to take on a diversity of trade facilitation and security functions in a period of tremendous volatility in global trade.

When IRAS became a statutory board in 1992, 50% of tax returns were not assessed, employee morale was low and the attrition rate at 11% was four times the Civil Service's average. Over two decades, IRAS went through three major transformations, shifting from a focus on tax administration efficiency to partnership with taxpayers in nation building and economic development.

ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: DIFFERENT MODELS, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

There are many models for understanding organisational transformation.

The Burke-Litwin model of organisational change and performance (Figure 1)[1] suggests that an organisation's mission and strategy, organisational culture and leadership are transformational factors that can create organisation-wide impact. The organisation's structure, systems and management practices are regarded as transactional factors that may not impact the whole organisation when changed. Changes in transformational and transactional factors impact individuals' values, needs, motivation, job roles, skills and therefore performance that in turn affect organisation performance.

» Insight: To transform an organisation, we need to work at its mission and strategy, organisational culture, and leadership. To sustain results, transformational and transactional factors need to be aligned.
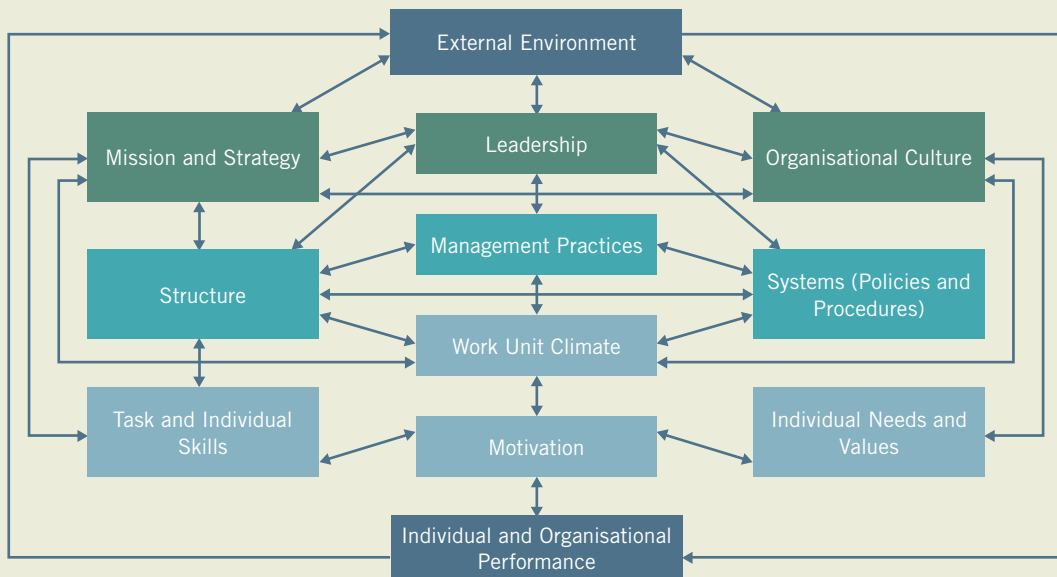
Figure 1. Burke-Litwin model (1992). Reproduced with permission.

Daniel H. Kim's Levels of Perspective Framework, applying ideas from the field of Systems Thinking, distinguishes five levels that can be used to perceive the world — events, patterns of behaviour over time, systemic structures, mental models and vision (Figure 2)[2].

Levels of Understanding	Action Mode	Time Orientation	Typical Questions
Vision ↓	Generative	Future ↑	What are the stated or unstated visions that generate the mental model?
Mental Models ↓	Reflective		What are the theories and beliefs that generate the structures?
Systemic Structures ↓	Creative		What are the mental models or organisational structures that create the patterns?
Patterns of Behaviour Over Time ↓	Adaptive		What trends or patterns of events seem to be recurring?
Events	Reactive	Present	What is the fastest way to react to this event NOW?

Figure 2. Daniel H. Kim's Levels of Perspective Framework. Reproduced with permission.

While high-leverage actions can happen at any level depending on the context, actions at the higher levels have greater impact on future outcomes. Analysing an issue from multiple levels can give us a fuller understanding of the system at work. It also prevents us from reacting with quick-fixes only at the events level.

» Insight: To bring about more effective change, we need to consider intervening at multiple levels, rather than working at only one or two. If transformation is creating a new future rather than tweaking parts of the old, then we need to move beyond tackling events to engaging vision.

There is also a body of work that views all transformation as linguistic. For instance, author Peter Block argues that transformation "hinges on changing the structure of how we engage each other".[3] Our conversations and the way we relate reflect our mental models that in turn determine our actions. One way to facilitate change is therefore to reframe mental models by changing the nature of conversations within an organisation. We start with a small group, which is the unit of transformation. Large-scale transformation happens when enough small groups shift in unison towards a common goal. Every gathering is an opportunity to reinforce and deepen individuals' accountability and commitment towards the desired collective outcome.

» **Insight:** To transform organisations, we need to look at the nature of conversations in our organisations. If necessary, reframe contexts by changing the conversations and the ways people interact, such that the prevailing organisational mental models support the collective outcomes we want to create.

Ralph Stacey, one of the early thinkers to bridge complexity science with organisation theory, mapped organisational challenges into a continuum: simple, complicated, complex and chaos, based on their proximity from agreement and certainty. Plexus Institute, a US-based non-profit organisation that applies complexity science concepts to problems in organisations and communities, has been using Stacey's continuum to address a range of issues in health care. It added to the model by defining change strategies for different parts of Stacey's continuum (Figure 3). Its work suggests that, in practice, all four zones are present all the time in most change situations. For example, checklists can be useful reminders, but they are insufficient to address the complexity of challenges individuals face as new scenarios emerge.
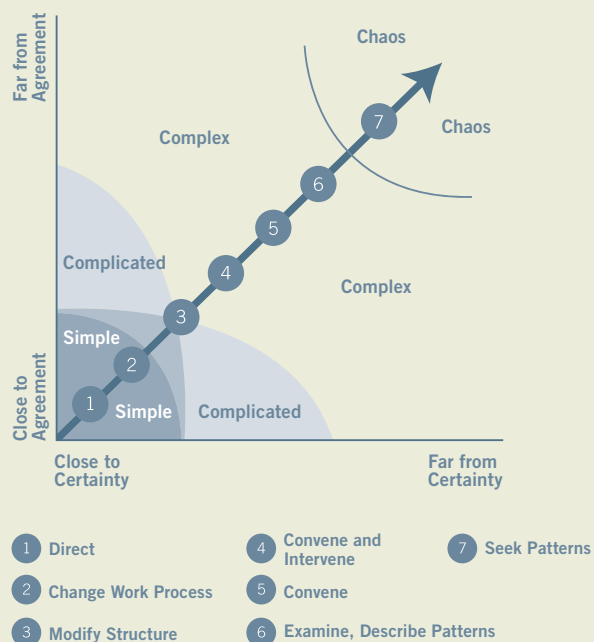

Figure 3. Amalgamation of Ralph Stacey's Agreement-Uncertainty Diagram and Plexus' Change Strategies for Different parts of the continuum Diagram.[4] Reproduced with permission.

» Insight: Recognising organisational change and not just organisational transformation as complex, the better strategy may be to engage all stakeholders in conversations and harness collective perspectives to sense-make and find new solutions.

NOTES

1. W. Warner Burke and George H. Litwin, "A Causal Model of Organisational Performance and Change," *Journal of Management* 8 (1992): 523–546.

2. Daniel H. Kim, *Organizing for Learning: Strategies for Knowledge Creation and Enduring Change* (Massachusetts: Pegasus Communications, 2001).

3. Peter Block, Community: *The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2008): 25.

4. Adapted from diagram of "Change Strategies for Different parts of the Continuum" from the Plexus Institute (http://www.plexusinstitute.org) and "Stacey's Agreement–Uncertainty" in Brenda Zimmerman, Curt Lindberg, and Paul Plsek, *Edgeware*: *Lessons from Complexity Science for Health Care Leaders* (Irving, TX: VHA, Inc., 2008), as cited in Lisa Kimball, "A Powerful Distinction: How the Simple-Complicated-Complex Continuum Contributes to OD Practice," *OD Practitioner* 45 (2013): 43–48.

What can we learn from their organisational transformation journeys? The transformations in SC and IRAS began with a fundamental rethink of their respective missions. Both transformations were emergent and spanned years. Both comprised concurrent interventions at multiple levels of perspective. They attended to immediate concerns at the event level such as streamlining operations, reducing backlogs, improving service quality and raising productivity, while simultaneously envisioning their organisations' future, which subsequently gave shape and direction to their strategies. New mental models of their roles — as custodians of trade, and as partners of taxpayers in nation building and economic development — emerged in the process, leading to new solutions and partnerships, and generating new patterns of behaviours and capabilities.

First, SC and IRAS management used their **corporate mission and vision to align systems and galvanise people.** They helped their employees understand the larger purpose of their organisations, and how their individual efforts collectively contributed to the whole. They emphasised "whole-of-organisation" priorities over divisional interests, and promoted "think trade" and "think IRAS" mind-sets. To facilitate shifts in behaviours, they contextualised high-level aspirations with specific examples and achievable goals that their employees could act on. Practice was supported by process design. Both agencies:

"I first tried to establish that the Singapore Customs enterprise is a worthwhile one to set the context and big picture …. I do not have a five-year plan, at most it is two years. It is like climbing a mountain. If you look up from the bottom, everything is formidable. But once you ascend 100 metres, your vantage point is better, and you see more possibilities … the key thing is you need to start, make progress, leverage and build on your achievements."

Fong Yong Kian, Director-General (2008-2013), SC

- framed deliberations and decisions in the context of *organisation-wide goals,* for example, in developing corporate strategy, designing organisational structures and processes, and deliberating HR issues such as succession planning and posting.

- designed work to *accentuate inter-dependence and encourage collaboration* through cross-divisional project teams, interbranch enforcement exercises, interdivisional manpower sharing during tax-filing peaks, and by celebrating organisational (rather than divisional) success.

- instituted mandatory job postings to *broaden and deepen employees' understanding of organisational challenges,* and to enable them to forge networks across the organisation.

- created *multiple channels to share information and knowledge* — across the organisation, with other public agency partners and with stakeholders, such as the trading community, tax professionals, companies and overseas counterparts — to expand staff's perspective of their operating environment and mission.

Second, both SC and IRAS used **conversation as a capacity enabler.** Conversation was used to shape corporate culture. Conversations at every level, from boardrooms and town halls to team interactions, helped to surface and correct misalignments in thinking and practice, such as reframing positions from "my and my division's interests" to "our and Singapore's interests". This refocused energies on the need to steward the collective enterprise, and to work as a team. Conversation was also used to strengthen the agencies' capacity to anticipate and adapt to change — to take the pulse on the ground, connect diverse perspectives, sense-make and correct course. It also improved employees' awareness of agency-wide challenges, primed employees for priority shifts, and promoted ownership of organisational issues. SC and IRAS institutionalised conversations as an organisational practice and both agencies:

- *designed conversation into their change and work plan processes.* Leaders catalysed rather than dictated change. They led conversations to give direction, model change and enlist participation. Middle management refined and translated ideas to action with their teams, and ground feedback was used to inform planning and decision-making.

- *invited employees to volunteer* on taskforces that worked on inputs from dialogues. Staff could influence changes that affected them, and those who volunteered were more committed to act.

- equipped their employees with *necessary skills.* All SC supervisors went on coaching programmes. Senior and middle management in IRAS were trained in Learning Organisation (LO) tools and concepts. These tools expanded their capacity to hold difficult conversations and be more open as a group.

- recognised that *relationship and trust create safe environments* for conversations. A variety of staff well-being and team-building opportunities helped officers across each organisation to bond, and reassured employees that the organisation cares for them.

Third, **leaders contributed through connecting and capacity building.** SC and IRAS leaders encouraged dialogue and participation, connected people to their shared purpose and to each other, and nurtured community. A positive experience of leadership engendered trust and drew followers. The following stood out in both organisations:

- *Cohesiveness of the leadership team.* Top leaders, who were Administrative Service officers posted from other agencies in the Public Service, introduced new perspectives and networks. They were supported by a strong core management team, most of whom rose from within the ranks, who provided stability.

Regular job rotations deepened the core team's understanding of organisational issues, broadened their social networks and helped them build shared perspectives. This enabled them to better anticipate the impact of their actions on the rest of the organisation, and to engage fruitfully with other partners and stakeholders.

Both agencies addressed immediate needs, while at the same time promoting alignment of goals, and building up the capacity of their people and systems to achieve better results over time.

- *Extensive involvement of leaders in organisational life.* SC and IRAS leaders invested time in engaging employees. The Director-General of SC had tea with different Customs officers at least once a week, and the IRAS Quality Service Chairman met with officers who received outstanding compliments monthly. Senior management leaders led cross-functional committees, shared at induction programmes, mentored young officers, evaluated staff suggestions and participated in employee wellbeing activities. This gave them many opportunities to gather feedback, understand the ground and influence thinking.

"If officers are prepared to give input … they also have a stake in it. The chances of success are higher."

Teo Siew Lan, Assistant Director-General, SC

"Values are passed on through conversations, especially when these are on difficult issues, conflicts and ambiguities. Conversations help us reflect on our values; who we are and where we are going. Slowly but surely it impacts the way we think and behave, and it becomes practice — culture."

Chin Li Fen

• Both organisations designed *structures and systems to enable the practice of leadership at all levels.* Frequent and open communication reduced the power–distance gap and empowered employees to act. Ground and frontline staff were entrusted with leadership roles and responsibilities. For example, non-graduate officers made presentations to senior management, led teams and oversaw operations. A checkpoints team lead shared with pride how his presentation on his job responsibilities resulted in the creation of a promotional grade for his scheme. Change agents were at work at all levels.

Transformation is About Our Choice of Future

SC and IRAS were relentless in pursuing their agency visions, but their management also invested heavily in the health of their organisations and cultivated a sense of shared identity. They addressed immediate needs, while at the same time promoting alignment of goals, and building up the capacity of their people and systems to achieve better results over time.

At their respective levels, leaders reframed organisational challenges as opportunities for growth, used conversation as a tool to influence thinking and facilitate team learning, and empowered people by anticipating needs, giving them information, roles and choices, and by investing in relationships, building trust and learning. Consequently, employees were engaged, better able to anticipate change as priorities shifted, better able to understand the context for change, and more ready to adapt as shifts emerged.

SC and IRAS demonstrate the powerful possibilities of organisational transformation over time. If our objective for public sector transformation is to build institutions that can anticipate, adapt and prosper over the years, how do the ways in which we frame transformation and design our organisations serve the future we want to create?

NOTES

1. McKinsey Company, "What Successful Transformations Share: McKinsey Global Survey Results," *McKinsey Quarterly* 2010.

2. For more information, please see: Lena Leong, "IRAS: From Regulator to Service Provider to Partner of Taxpayers in Nation Building and Economic Development", Civil Service College (2013), https://www.cscollege.gov. sg/knowledge/pages/iras-from-regulator-to-service-provider-to-partner-of-taxpayers-in-nation-building--economic-development.aspx, and Lena Leong, "Singapore Customs: The Journey from Good to Great", Civil Service College (2014), https://www.cscollege.gov. sg/knowledge/pages/singapore-customs-the-journey-from-good-to-great.aspx

Nudging Towards The Good:
In Conversation

The former Head of the Home Civil Service in the UK discusses behavioural approaches to public engagement, policymaking and sound values for the civil service.

GUS O'DONNELL

Lord Augustine O'Donnell has been non-Executive Chairman of Frontier (Europe) since October 2013. After joining the Treasury in 1979, Lord Gus held various positions at the British Embassy in Washington, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. From 2002 to 2005, he was Permanent Secretary at the Treasury and in 2005 became Cabinet Secretary. He held this position until 2011, serving three Prime Ministers. Lord Gus studied economics at the University of Warwick and an MPhil in Economics from Nuffield College, Oxford. He lectured in economics at the University of Glasgow.

In his second visit as CSC Senior Visiting Fellow in November 2013, Lord Gus shared these views in conversation with ETHOS Editor-in-Chief Alvin Pang, CSC Senior Researcher Vernie Oliveiro, futurist and Deputy Director in the Futures & Strategy Division Lee Chor Pharn from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and Jonathan Ng, Senior Assistant Director from the Strategic Policy Office, Public Service Division.

On Social Media, Sense-making and Getting a Feel for Ground Sentiment

There are various people now starting to monitor public sentiment. The private sector was the first to do a semantic analysis of social media, for example, linking certain trends in Twitter sentiment to movements in the stock exchange. The Bank of England tried to analyse all of their reports running up to the financial crisis to see if they could pick up any clues from the tone: interestingly there was an increase in worry but nothing was translated into action. Unless someone is watching these trends and doing something about them, it makes no difference. Nowadays of course, once you put something out there, everyone starts looking at it, which distorts things and can be manipulated, so you have to be quite careful. So far this has been pretty limited for government use. Some political parties, for instance, may use social data analysis, taking a cue from the Obama elections and what we can learn based on behavioural sciences, in order to target communications to certain groups.

I think it could be useful as another way to pick up indications about some of the concerns that citizens have. You may have to wonder about how representative social media is, but it seems like it could be much more representative in Singapore than in

the UK. The question is how to get the views of those who are not as well represented.

The hardest thing, I found, was for the government to get money to carry out proper evaluations for implemented policies — you're doing well if you get to pilot something. So how do you found out whether your policy is working? Quite often there is going to be an enormous lag between a policy implementation, say a change to the benefits system, and before you get any useable data. So how do you get a more immediate sense?

In the UK, there is a Citizens Advice Bureau: basically a free walk-in agency where someone can come in for advice on legal, financial and other issues. It is an independent organisation, but they work with government. The Bureau sees more people who have difficulties or are upset, and is able to compile real data on policies and people's reactions to them across the country, and identify things that are not working well. So you get a kind of live measure of what the issues are, for those people affected by these policies.

If you are trying to get people's honest feedback, you should make sure that the one asking for the feedback is perceived as completely neutral. Behaviourally, we find that people don't tend to give honest feedback to someone who is in a position of authority relative to themselves. We find that individuals, who are quite good at giving honest

feedback to people working for them, are terrible at giving honest feedback to their boss. They feel that if they criticised their boss, this would be held against them and you can understand why. So you have to find alternative channels and incentives. You could ask whether certain things should continue or not — something most people would give feedback on. You explore different ways to find out what people are generally prepared to give you an answer about, and then you work with that information.

If you are trying to get people's honest feedback, you should make sure that the one asking for the feedback is perceived as completely neutral.

The number one behavioural principle in all of this is to keep it simple. If you build feedback mechanisms into a service system by default, as a prompted choice, you are more likely to get accurate, immediate and comprehensive results rather than ones that are mainly from those who have strong views one way or another.

On Using Big Data and Behavioural Methods as Policy Levers
The idea behind behavioural levers is that you nudge people in the right

direction without having to put in place regulations to do so.

For example, giving people immediate contextual information — a little help at the point at which they make decisions — turns out to be more useful than offering abstract information, such as from a course on financial planning. A new book, *Behavioural Public Policy*,[1] examines this sort of phenomena, such as how people can become psychologically numb to large numbers.

We can crunch big data sets to look at the needs of individuals across different government services and offer it to them at the relevant time. If the data is in the aggregate, it is to everyone's advantage and there is no privacy problem. But for personalised information, privacy remains an issue. The UK has many of the same privacy laws that prevent the sharing of data. However, there is an idea in the UK about making any machine data on individuals, but held by companies, available to the former on request. Now, that's not much use to them individually, but what we are hoping is that this will enable a market.

So for instance you go to a supermarket and your trolley has an app that allows you to put in your own private information, such as your preferences, your budget, your diet, your health data, your allergies, whether you want to reduce your calories or avoid certain products and so on. And then as you zip around, the app on the trolley

can keep track of your shopping and give you reminders or advice based on your needs — whether you really want the non-vegetarian or high cholesterol item and so on.

Then looking at the public sector, you can imagine data sets from different areas being put together to tell you how your financial planning is going, and what recommendations can be made based on your needs. For example, the one thing that seems to work is when you can help people make comparisons between similar products and services, such as insurance or energy companies, when they are making purchase decisions.

The number one behavioural principle is to keep it simple. The idea behind behavioural levers is that you nudge people in the right direction without having to put in place regulations to do so.

We could also use this data to nudge citizens towards behaviours that represent better outcomes. For instance, we could encourage car owners to switch to a more fuel-efficient, lower emissions car than what they've got, and save money in the process. This sort of cross-selling is very underdeveloped in the public sector.

The flip in paradigm is that instead of being told what to do, you decide on your long-term goals and how your own data is going to be used to

help you achieve your own goals — lose weight or save money and so on. You give citizens their own data back in ways that they can use to make informed decisions. This also gets around the privacy issues surrounding personal data, which people can be very suspicious about. Once people see the advantage in doing this, hopefully it can become a norm. The public sector can help overcome the obstacles that prevent these tools and services from being developed, or to lower switching costs between providers.

Private sector financial services in particular are starting to use behavioural insights on customers. In the UK, the Financial Conduct Authority is looking into whether they are exploiting these to the detriment of customers, particularly those who are less financially literate. So if they are making very clever behavioural nudges to get customers to buy what they don't need or cannot afford, we need to nudge them back. However, you have to be incredibly careful not to starve innovation that can leave people better off. Instead, the government should look out for areas where there is potential for abuse and address those.

On the Need for Civil Services to be More Politically Savvy and Sensitive to the Public

Civil servants have to be very good at explaining and giving their political masters the raw material they need. So for most of the policies we make, we need to have the distributional numbers. Economists are very bad at this because they do cost-benefit analysis with the tendency to assume that the benefits can all be added up irrespective of who they go to, and that cost can all be added up irrespective of who bears it. But diminishing marginal utility means things do not add up that way.

You have to be incredibly careful not to starve innovation that can leave people better off.

What good public servants should do is to work out who the winners and the losers are. We can expect some groups to be more vocal than others and so on. Can we do something in advance? What can we say to those who will be worse off after the policy?

I think it goes back to your communication style. People mostly get upset when their expectations have been confounded. So if you warn people in advance that they may be adversely affected, together with the reasons why you need to do this and what you are trying to do, you give people a better chance to think. You probably need to explain in terms of stories what is going to happen to them and why, or have the families themselves — rather than the government — tell the stories, which would be much more powerful.

There are times when politics trumps good economics. In the UK, there was a policy on winter fuel payments where everyone above a certain age got money from the government for winter fuel. It wasn't related to the amount of fuel they used or to their income. The policy was expensive and indiscriminate but politically the government thought it was doing the right thing in helping the aged. Although it would have only taken a fraction of the cost to help the poorest who needed it, the politicians were committed to keeping the policy come election time. I call this history as policy: once you introduce a poor policy, it's hard to get rid of it later.

So what could the civil servants have done? I think we should have come up with a better package which would have targeted the needy old. Instead of just saying that it's a terrible policy and we shouldn't do it, we should have persuaded the politicians that we understand they want to help the aged but there are better solutions. In this case, we didn't have enough time to come up with a good alternative. Part of the problem is that the civil service mindset is often not proactive enough on policy: this wasn't a public issue we had thought about.

On Nurturing Healthy Values Within the Civil Service

For the top level of the civil service, say among the top 200 employees, there is a lot of reflection on values, particularly when it is coming up to the elections. For the UK, a change in government is a real option with every election, and we need to think about how we might cope with changes in administration, particularly for those who have not seen a transition for a long time.

The civil service mindset is often not proactive enough on policy.

We also sort for values at recruitment. One aspect of the UK Civil Service Fast Stream is what is called an e-Tray exercise: a timed set of scenario-based questions. It might be a flu epidemic and you have a limited supply of flu medicine and so on. A question is posed on how you might approach the problem, with four possible answers. One of the answers might be that the optimal way to do this is to sell off the flu vaccine, because the people who want them the most will pay the most. Another might be that you distribute it according to those groups who benefit most from the vaccine. Another answer might be that you can't make any of these judgements because the underlying data is not good enough so you have to give it out first come, first served. Values are implicit in each of these options, and you have to pick the best and worst options out of the four.

The answers get marked based on our assessment of the options and how we think we would want our civil

servants to answer such questions. Interestingly, the e-Tray exercise is probably the biggest differentiator for recruitment: it's not grades, because they all have good grades. So values are at the centre of identifying the civil service leadership of the future. We are saying: here's what you do, you lead. Here's how you do it: by using our values.

The way we do things today evolved in a different age, and are geared to an older model based on theoretical economics, not human beings.

What would I say to bright young civil servants coming in today? I would want them to challenge. There are so many aspects of what we do that have just developed historically. The way we do things today evolved in a different age, geared to an older model based on theoretical economics, not human beings. I want them to understand the power of behavioural insights and understand that it is possible to change things. The world is changing so let's use all this new data and new tools, and try new ideas. We need to be more innovative and take some risks, and try to build a system that will allow for more failure. If I were a young civil servant coming in, I would want to think that even if I try something new and fail, it is not going to be the end of me. 🖋

NOTE

1. *Behavioural Public Policy*, edited by Adam Oliver (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), http://www.cambridge.org/it/academic/subjects/economics/public-economics-andpublic-policy/behavioural-public-policy

The Value of Values in the Singapore Public Service

The transformation of the Public Service must also involve thoughtful reinvigoration of the values it stands for.

BY

KEITH TAN

AND

GHALPANAH THANGARAJU

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Ghalpanah Thangaraju is currently Manager in the PS21 Office, Public Service Division. She holds a Master's Degree in International Relations from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.

Why Values Matter in Public Service
As individuals, we all have our own personal values that guide our decisions and shape the way we live our lives. Organisations have values as well: core beliefs and principles that serve to guide standards of behaviour, and reflect their identity and culture.

The core purpose of the Singapore Public Service is defined by service to the nation and its people. It follows that the practice of good governance calls for the right set of values to be cultivated and upheld across the Service. Our core values of Integrity, Service and Excellence were distilled and espoused in 2003, after an extensive service-wide process.[1] They provide a compass for our standards of behaviour as public servants, and inform the way we think about our day-to-day work, such as policy analysis and design, service delivery, or public engagement. Our values prompt us to do our duty honestly without fear or favour, to go the extra mile to help fellow citizens, and to be the best that we can be. To be part of an organisation that prizes

these values is also a source of pride and belonging for our public officers. Our commitment to these values has also undoubtedly contributed to the Singapore Public Service's international reputation for good governance.[2]

We serve a public that is more diverse than before. They are more educated, with more complex needs and higher expectations of government, in an operating environment that is also becoming more dynamic. To meet these and other new challenges, the Public Service must enhance its effectiveness, public value, citizen-centric service delivery, policy design and public engagement. But just as critically, public officers need to be steeped in the right set of values that will underpin the responsibilities we have to the citizens we serve, and provide a basis for us to make the difficult and complex decisions we sometimes have to make in order to serve the common good. Our core values help us manage trade-offs across different interest groups, interpret policies and make judgement calls on grey areas — decisions that frontline

« Values are not just words; values are what we live by. They are about the causes that we champion and the people we fight for. »

US Secretary of State John Kerry

officers are increasingly expected to make. Without clear values to guide these decisions, our jobs risk becoming mechanical and rule-bound, and we may seize up when faced with ambiguous situations that call for tough choices based not only on rational calculations but on what we stand for as a Public Service.

Where the Singapore Public Service Stands

Like many other countries, the Singapore Public Service has thus far sought to enforce its values through a compliance-based approach: prescribing rules and guidelines that outline acceptable behaviour, along with the consequences for flouting these rules. Hence, our Public Service values are embedded in Government Instruction Manuals (IMs) as well as the recently updated Civil Service Code of Conduct which lays down the behaviour expected of officers.

But inculcating and strengthening values goes far beyond rules and guidelines. Values cannot become entrenched in our public officers and agencies by fiat alone — they must be brought to life to function as more than rules, a statement, mission or words on a wall. It is not enough for officers to be able to regurgitate what our core values are or mean. Instead, we need to ensure that operating mind-sets, practices and daily work habits throughout the organisation are consistent with these values. This takes systematic, deliberate effort.

Over the past year, the Public Service Division (PSD) has studied how best to guide our agencies in their efforts to communicate and inculcate their values, and to help leaders at every level build a stronger work culture oriented to these values. Research by PSD[3] reveals several insights into the state of values in the Singapore Public Service:

1. The latest survey of the values and attitudes of public officers shows strong endorsement and acknowledgement of the Public Service's core values. This indicates that our three core values continue to remain relevant in today's governance context.

2. There is no dissonance between the core Public Service values of Integrity, Service and Excellence, and agencies' more specific sets of values, which take into consideration each agency's unique challenges. In fact, our agencies have very effectively integrated the overarching core values into their own agency-specific sets of values.

3. Some agencies are clearly ahead of others in their efforts to instill values in their officers. These agencies, including the Singapore Prison Service, the Ministry of Education and the Singapore Armed Forces, have much to teach other agencies. As a central agency, PSD is well

placed to consolidate, facilitate and disseminate the best practices of these agencies to build a strong values-based culture across the public sector.

Upholding Values: Some Approaches
What are some of the best practices in building a values-based Public Service culture? PSD's research so far suggests four organisational building blocks to strengthening values.

Step 1: Define and Articulate Values
Values are more effectively instilled in an organisation when they are clearly articulated and well accepted. New values are nurtured, or existing ones refreshed, by involving staff in processes that help build shared understanding, consensus and ownership of these values. Staff are much more likely to live out values that they can grasp and embrace, and that are meaningful to them, on a day-to-day basis.

Conversations between staff about the things that really matter to them lie at the heart of defining and articulating values. There is no one right way to structure such conversations:

FOUR STEPS TO BUILD VALUES-DRIVEN ORGANISATIONS

Leadership at all levels		
	Define and Articulate Values	Build ownership and agreement for the values that are important to staff, organisation and the work that we do, through **dialogue and conversations.**
	Translate Values into Expected Behaviours and Actions	Create awareness of expected behaviours and actions through **behavioural statements, case studies, stories and other communications platforms** to ensure staff are equipped to behave in line with the values.
	Weave Values into Organisational Processes	Reinforce expected behaviours and actions by integrating them into organisational processes like **recruitment, induction and performance management.**
	Sustain Values Implementation	Build **structures and mechanisms to assess and recognise values alignment and identify areas for improvement** or intervention when necessary. Leaders at all levels must be **role models.**

*From "Implementing a Values-based Culture," Cultural Leadership Council

a variety of platforms ranging from townhall sessions, road-shows, random conversations, surveys, tea sessions and even online platforms can be used to engage staff.[4]

Step 2: Translate Values into Expected Behaviours and Actions
Simply spelling out our values is not enough. They have to be expressed and embodied in practical, visible ways, in behaviours and actions. It is important to help staff translate each value into expected or unacceptable behaviours, and to create awareness of these behaviours through different means. This helps to ensure that officers at every level not only understand the organisation's values, but are equipped to behave consistently with those values in every aspect of work.

There are many ways to bring values to life: from simple behavioural statements, videos and case studies to more interactive platforms like games and role-playing. Stories or vignettes that reflect real, agency-specific values are especially effective: they can create a sense of connection to values by reflecting real dilemmas rather than abstract concepts. Stories are also useful as a means of demonstrating "negative" examples, such as when officers are not "living out" the organisation's values, by highlighting wrong behaviours in a manner that is not overly patronising or moralistic. Storytelling also encourages staff to reflect on their own experiences,

helping them to understand how their attitudes and behaviours may contribute to a values-driven culture in their workplace.

Successful organisations often use a combination of these approaches. However, it is important that the communication platforms used are the most appropriate and effective for the organisation. Communication on values cannot be one-off or one-way. Any communication on values should be consistent, regular and constantly refreshed, so that espoused values continue to resonate with staff.

Inculcating and strengthening values goes far beyond rules and guidelines. Values cannot become entrenched in our public officers and agencies by fiat alone — they must be brought to life.

Step 3: Weave Values into Organisational Processes
Values should be well integrated into organisational processes, particularly HR processes such as recruitment, induction and performance management. These milestones are critical opportunities to strengthen and sustain values by recognising and reinforcing expected behaviours.

The Singapore Public Service already includes values as part of its performance appraisal system: public officers' career prospects depend

WHAT CAN MANAGERS DO TO CULTIVATE A VALUES-BASED WORK CULTURE?

Here are some practical ways to live out the organisation's values:

1. Set the tone from the top and model values by:

   • Having a clear understanding of what your agency's values mean, so that you are conscious of your behaviour;

   • Regularly reviewing how you are acting to understand the signals you are sending to staff.

2. Create a safe space and engage staff in two-way conversations to:

   • Help staff understand the value of values and raise awareness of values;

   • Understand staff's concerns and doubts, and relay them upwards to management;

   • Discuss ethically ambiguous situations.

3. Contextualise values to staff's job roles with practical examples of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours to:

   • Get staff to agree on what behaviours are and are not supporting your agency's values;

   • Identify practices and processes that support values;

   • Identify barriers to values and brainstorm ways to remove these obstacles.

4. Recognise and praise good behaviour and actions. Challenge and correct bad ones.

   • Managers and supervisors have a special duty to "champion" agency values.

   • Openly congratulate individuals who exhibit the values, pointing out the specific behaviours or actions in question so that others can learn from them.

   • Celebrate and reward staff who treat others in accordance with values.

   • Challenge and correct staff who do not exhibit values, in an open and transparent manner.

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in part on their ability to demonstrate personal integrity, commitment to the values of Public Service and a sense of national interest. Scholarship applicants are also screened for clear evidence that candidates identify with and are motivated by Public Service core values.

More can still be done. For recruitment, job advertisements could emphasise the importance of values-fit, beyond the specific skills required for the position. Scenario-based interview questions could also help assess a potential hire's value system. For example, candidates could be asked to discuss a time when their integrity was challenged. There are other less conventional approaches: US retail

firm Zappos is known to offer new hires an additional US$2,000, on top of their salary, if the employee quits in the first week of work. Only 2 to 3 per cent of new hires have ever taken up this offer — which is the CEO's way of sieving out new employees who may be motivated by the wrong set of values.

Induction is an important way to engage new hires, although many agencies may not be making the most of the opportunity to engage new staff on values. In fact, induction courses typically focus much more on cognitive content ("What are the facts and figures, and who are the people you need to know, in order to get your job done well?") than on "softer" issues such as the organisation's values. In the absence of stronger interventions, new hires may gravitate quickly towards other norms of behaviour — which may not necessarily reflect the organisation's desired values.

Organisations that place a high emphasis on values take their induction (or "onboarding") efforts seriously. Such activities may include tea sessions for new hires to discuss what their organisations stand for, or video presentations on appropriate ways to deal with issues in line with stated values. Still others provide formal induction curriculum packages which include information on organisational values and how they relate to the individual employee.

Critically, appraisal and performance-management processes should be aligned to espoused values. Computer firm Dell, for instance, holds employees accountable for acting according to the values codified in the "Soul of Dell" — with half of their performance based on 360-degree feedback.

Stories create a sense of connection to values by reflecting real dilemmas rather than abstract concepts.

Step 4: Sustain Values Implementation
To ensure that organisations abide by their values in the long term, it is also important to build structures and mechanisms to periodically assess and recognise values alignment and identify areas for improvement or intervention where necessary. Organisations like Danish pharmaceutical Novo Nordisk even designate facilitators to conduct "values audits" of various business units, reporting semi-annually to the CEO on the state of values across the company.

Some best practices relating to values alignment include recognising and celebrating values-aligned behaviours at the individual, work-unit or corporate levels. Values-in-action awards can help to reinforce desired behaviours, while regular feedback, organisational surveys (such as the bi-annual Values and Attitudes survey administered by PSD), exit surveys and compliance indicators (e.g. disciplinary cases) could all be used to assess the level of alignment to values on a regular basis.

HOW DO OUR PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES CULTIVATE VALUES?

The PSD study suggests that Singapore's public sector agencies use a wide variety of approaches to instill organisational values:

- Most agencies do not have structured training programmes centred around values, although some include values-related modules in their induction courses.

- Many agencies use a range of channels such as townhall sessions to engage staff on values; some are even using such conversations to re-examine their current values.

- A wide variety of engagement strategies are used: from videos, games, role-playing, case studies and seminars, to anonymised sharing of actual cases of misconduct.

- The leaders of some agencies actively talk about values on their respective intranet websites.

- Few agencies employ a structured formalised process to assess potential hires on values, as they feel these are difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, a small number of agencies use scenario-based interview questions to do so.

- Many agencies give awards to recognise staff who exemplify the organisation's values. A few have attempted to measure values-alignment through employee engagement surveys.

Leadership is Fundamental

Leadership is fundamental to developing a strong culture of values in any organisation. Leaders who embody organisational values have a huge positive impact on whether the rest of the organisation lives out those values. As organisational role models, the actions of leaders send a more powerful message about acceptable behaviours than any published policies or statements. Conversely, leaders who demonstrate behaviours that run counter to espoused values breed cynicism, resentment, alienation and may even encourage staff to follow suit, to the detriment of the organisation.

While the commitment by top management to articulate values and endorse policies and programmes throughout the organisation is vital, leaders and managers at all levels of the organisation must "walk the talk" to model exemplary conduct and practices aligned to values, and to encourage these in their staff. While this often means recognising or rewarding activity that is consistent with values, it also means that they must be ready to challenge behaviours and actions that

are not aligned to values, with clear processes in place to do this firmly, fairly and transparently.

The Public Service is set to become more diverse with time, as officers from different generations, backgrounds, worldviews and norms join the service. While this diversity can be a strength, since it should better reflect a dynamic and expanding Singaporean society, the need to inculcate a shared set of meaningful core values becomes all the more vital. Without strong, consistently values-oriented workplaces across government, we risk eroding the Public Service's focus on its core purpose, in the process alienating both our officers and the public we serve. 🎏

NOTES

1. The culmination of an effort to develop the Public Service identity and a sense of shared ethos, the tagline "The Singapore Public Service: Integrity, Service, Excellence" and its associated values were identified in 2003 after a series of service-wide surveys, focus group discussions with public officers, interviews with senior and retired officers, and a study of agency-specific values. The core values are reflected on all Public Service cards and government websites as well as the Public Service Pledge, recited at the annual Public Service Week since 2008.

2. Singapore ranks highly for governance effectiveness and regulatory quality in the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators. Singapore is also ranked among the five least corrupt nations in Transparency International Report.

3. Two separate rounds of focus group discussions have been conducted thus far. The first round of 16 focus group discussions conducted between November 2011 and January 2012 involved 118 participants from 48 agencies. These were conducted as part of milestone programmes and were used to explore what our Public Service values of Integrity, Service and Excellence meant to members of the Public Service and how these values were manifested. A second round of six focus group discussions was conducted with human resources and organisational development representatives from 37 agencies, to find out about the values practices of the various agencies.

4. In 2003, IBM successfully initiated values conversations with its staff through a global ValuesJam as part of its efforts to review and refresh its corporate values. Conducted over 3 days, IBM's ValuesJam saw 50,000 IBMers from all over the world participate, with 10,000 comments posted online. Although the online conversation was dominated by overwhelmingly negative comments in the initial phase, it eventually led to constructive comments that ultimately resulted in a new set of values for IBM. Through it all, committed and visible leadership by CEO Sam Palmisano was critical in ensuring the success of the ValuesJam.

Ethics in Public Administration: Are We Teaching What Can't be Taught?

CSC researcher Celia Lee makes a case for the systematic cultivation of ethical thinking and moral development in public administration.

BY

CELIA LEE

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Introduction

The elimination of corruption has been at the top of the government agenda, and a strategic tenet of governance in Singapore[1] since its independence. Singapore's stringent and comprehensive anti-corruption framework, highly regarded worldwide, has paid off: it has been ranked as the least corrupt of the 13 Asian Countries on Transparency International's corruption perception index, and is consistently among the top five least corrupt countries.[2]

Unfortunately, recent cases involving senior civil service officers and the misuse of public funds[3] have led to fresh concerns over the long-cherished integrity of the Public Service. Were these failures of procedure and administrative compliance, or the outcome of a more fundamental cultural change? Some have even theorised that the advent of New Public Management since the 1980s, which led to a paradigm shift from the traditional bureaucratic form of government towards entrepreneurial government,[4] may have created new tensions between private sector values and the traditional roles, responsibilities and standards in the public sector.[5] Could these new conditions have prompted ethical challenges in public administration?[6] Are there ways in which the ethical foundation of public administration can be reinforced to help preserve the integrity of public service, and address mounting calls for greater public accountability?

ETHICS MANAGEMENT IN THE SINGAPORE PUBLIC SERVICE

Like many developed countries, the Singapore Civil Service has largely adopted a compliance-based approach to ethics management: it lays down a set of principles — through its service-wide Instruction Manual (IM) — that guides the conduct of civil servants and establishes internal control procedures on financial control, procurement, staff matters, asset management and other matters. The IM also empowers central agencies to perform compliance checks and audits.

New and in-service officers are given many opportunities, through extensive induction programmes and other training to be familiar with the appropriate procedures pertaining to their work, although such courses tend to focus on the application of prescribed guidelines and procedures.

Ethics is covered in key milestone programmes[1] designed for managers and those being groomed for leadership positions — these segments encompass lectures, story-telling and vignette discussions on a variety of contexts, but do not do not necessarily address issues of moral character and ethical judgement in specific dilemmas, e.g. in procurement. There may be room to consider including ethics education in specific domain areas such as procurement, HR management and public engagement, all of which can present quite different ethical challenges.

NOTE

1. These are run by Singapore's Civil Service College and include the Manager LEAD and Strategic LEAD programmes for new first line managers and middle managers respectively.

Ethics Management: The Low and High Roads

The literature offers two broad approaches to the systematic management of ethics in public sector organisations: compliance-based and integrity-based,[7-9] also referred to as the low-road and high-road approaches respectively.

The compliance or low-road approach emphasises the importance of external controls on the behaviour of civil servants. Formal and detailed rules and procedures are formulated to guide the decision-making process so that "the individual ethical choice is limited to choosing to follow the rules (ethical thing to do) or to violate them by commission or omission (unethical acts)".[10] Instruments typical to this approach include legislation, codes of conduct and ethics, extensive control mechanisms, and centralised control institutions with extensive powers.[11]

The integrity or high-road approach focuses on internal self-control exercised by individual civil servants, and is based on two components: moral judgement and moral character. Hejka-Ekins[12] suggests that the moral judgement of an individual civil servant can be strengthened by cultivating the necessary values and norms, as well as by developing the skills in ethical decision-making needed to apply those values in daily work situations. Moral

CRITICAL GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR ETHICS TRAINING

The Walton, Sterns and Crespy Framework[1] sets out three critical goals and three desired learning outcomes in the teaching of ethics.

Critical Goals

1. Develop an awareness of ethical issues and problems in the field;
2. Build analytical skills that can address those problems when they arise; and
3. Cultivate an attitude of moral obligation and personal responsibility as part of public service.

Learning Outcomes

1. Develop an understanding of the diverse perspectives of moral philosophers;
2. Understand how to frame the ethical dilemma in a model that allows discussion from diverse perspectives; and
3. Develop the skills necessary for playing out the conflicts that arise so that trainees can measure the extent to which they have fulfilled the manifold and conflicting moral obligations they have identified.

Since approaches to ethics teaching and training vary widely, different goals could be addressed. Other researchers have suggested alternative goals such as "understand regime values",[2] "develop an operational ethics"[3] or "reasoning of values underlying decisions with public impact".[4]

NOTES

1. Based on a survey of 64 ethics instructors from National Association of Schools of Public Affairs & Administration-accredited schools in the US. See J. R. Walton, J. M. Stearns and C. T. Crespy. "Integrating Ethics into the Public Administration Curriculum: A Three-Step Process," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 16 (1997): 470–483.

2. J. Rohr, *Ethics for Bureacrats: An Essay on Law and Values* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1989).

3. T. Cooper, *The Responsible Administrator: An Approach to Ethics for the Administrative Role* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

4. P. Sheeran, *Ethics in Public Administration* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).

character, defined as the intrinsic will to act upon judgements reached through ethical decision-making,[12] could be stimulated and improved through interactive training sessions, workshops and individual coaching.[11]

While these two approaches may seem to belong to opposite poles of management, they need not contradict each other, and in practice best ought to be used in combination, complementing and reinforcing desired behaviours.[13]

Can Ethics Be Taught?

Ethical decision-making and moral development have long been central themes in the exploration of administrative ethics.[14, 15] While morality is often associated with personal beliefs and values (prompting some contention about which values ought to be taught through formal curricula), Kohlberg[16] argues that moral development is a process of maturation that arises from thinking about moral issues. Scholars such as Churchill also make a useful distinction between "morals" and "ethics" — he defines "morals as the behaviours of a human and ethics as a systematic rational reflection upon that behaviour."[17]

If ethics can be regarded as a form of critical thinking about moral dilemmas, then it can plausibly be taught. Ethical teaching would therefore be the means by which to cultivate "a method of moral reasoning through complex ethical issues … the primary function is to teach ethical systems of analysis, not moral standards of behaviour."[18]

Indeed, there is general scholarly consensus[19] that ethics training should be an important and integrated part of the training of civil servants, particularly to develop in leaders an understanding of ethics and a moral reasoning that demonstrates stability, empathy and integrity. Research interest in ethical decision-making and moral development, particularly in the context of officeholders and corporate whistleblowers, has grown in recent years.[20]

Approaches to Ethical Training and Moral Development

Approaches to ethical teaching vary widely across institutions that feature it,[21] and there is no clear consensus in the literature on which is the most effective.

Live instruction is a common approach: "reality-based and practical, involving hypothetical scenarios, case materials, or role-plays or short exercises — methods consistent with most descriptions of best training practices".[22] Among the more frequently used methods are small-group discussions, case studies, research papers and lectures.

In the teaching of business ethics, case studies have been recognised as a promising pedagogical tool to "build a halfway house between abstract concepts and real life experience".[23] Case studies provide real decision scenarios in which students apply moral values and principles, explore

conflicting dilemmas and subsequently move from doctrine to judgement.[24,25] Cases may also illustrate the complex and ambiguous information and myriad of stakeholder pressures that are part of the decision-making environment.

Conclusion

An important aspect of ethics education in our public administration is communicating how the standards and instructions inherent in the Code of Conduct and Instruction Manuals should be applied in real-life workplaces. Since last year, the Civil Service College (CSC), in collaboration with lead agencies such as the Public Service Division and the Ministry of Finance, has launched numerous initiatives to support ethics education in the Singapore public sector. For example, easy-to-use handbooks on procurement and the Code of Conduct have been developed: important principles are simplified and brought to life with illustrations that highlight key issues and potential pitfalls. In addition, researchers documenting cases from across the Public Service that demonstrate how officers' poor judgement have led to major lapses, misconduct and fraud. These cases will be used in CSC's training programmes to raise awareness of ethical issues and to facilitate classroom discussions. In the longer term, CSC hopes to establish a common curriculum to embed values and ethics in milestone programmes and other relevant courses for officers at different levels and in different roles.

NOTES

1. T. Koh, "Corruption Control in Singapore," *Resource Material Series* 83 (2011): 122–131.

2. Corruption Perceptions Index, 1996–2012, accessed April 17, 2013, http://www. transparency.org/research/overview.

3. "Former SLA officers jailed for $12m fraud case", *AsiaOne News*, November 4, 2011; "Singapore Civil Servant facing 455 fraud charges", *Yahoo! News*, December 22, 2011; "Sex-for-business case", *AsiaOne News*, June 7, 2012.

4. D. Osborne and T. Gaebler, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector* (New York: PLUME, 1992).

5. A. Doig and J. Wilson, "The Effectiveness of Codes of Conduct," *Business Ethics* 7 (1998): 140–149.

6. See G. B. Adams and D. L. Balfour, "Market-Based Government and the Decline of Organisational Ethics," *Administration and Society* 42 (2010): 615–637; D. Radhika, "Ethics in Public Administration," *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research* 4 (2012): 23–31.

7. OECD, *Ethics in the Public Service: Current Issues and Practices* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1996).

8. OECD, *Trust in Government: Ethics Measures in OECD Countries* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2000).

9. L. Paine, "Managing for Organisational Integrity," *Harvard Business* 2 (1994): 106–117.

10. C. Fox, "The Use of Philosophy in Administrative Ethics," in ed. T. L. Cooper, *Handbook of Administrative Ethics* (New York: Marcel Dekker, 2001): 105–130.

11. J. Maesschalck, "Approaches to Ethics Management in the Public Sector: A Proposed Extension of the Compliance-Integrity Continuum," *Public Integrity* 7 (2004): 21–41.

12. A. Hejka-Ekins, "Ethics in In-service Training," in T. L. Cooper, *Handbook of Administrative Ethics* (New York: Marcel Dekker, 2001): 79–104.

13. S. Gilman, "Public Sector Ethics and Government Reinvention: Realigning Systems to Meet Organisational Change," *Public Integrity* 1 (1999): 175–192.

14. L. Kolberg, *Essays on Moral Development: The Philosophy of Moral Development Volume 1* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).

15. D. Thompson, "The Possibility of Administrative Ethics," *Public Administration Review* 45 (1985): 555–561.

16. Kohlberg's theory was also adopted by Stewart and Sprinthall's survey research on American students and local government managers that later branched out to include Polish and Russian local government officials (Steward et al.), Wittmer's experimental research to explore ethical decision-making, Jurkiewicz and Brown (2000)'s study that examined the link between leadership and ethics, and White's study on the effect of gender upon moral development based on Rest's Defining Issues Test. See D. W. Stewart and N. A. Sprinthall, "The Impact of Demographic, Professional and Organisational Variables on the Moral Reasoning of Public Adminsitration," in *Ethics and Public Administration*, ed. H G Federickson, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993): 205–219; D. W. Stewart, N. Sprinthall and J. D. Kem, "Moral Reasoning in the Context of Reform: A Study of Russian Officials," *Public Administration Review* 62 (2002): 282–297; D. Wittmer, "Individual Moral Development: An Empirical Exploration of Public and Private-Sector Differences," *Public Integrity* 2 (2000): 181–194; C. L. Jurkiewicz and R. G. Brown, "Power Does Not Corrupt Absolutely: An Empirical Study," *Public Integrity* 3 (2000): 195–210; R. White, "Are Women More Ethical? Recent Findings on the Effects of Gender Upon Moral Development," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 9 (1999): 459–471; J. Rest, *Moral Development: Advances in Research and Theory* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

17. L. R. Churchill, "The Teaching of Ethics and Moral Values in Teachers: Some Contemporary Confusions," *The Journal of Higher Education* 53 (1992): 296–306.

18. W. Cragg, "Teaching Business Ethics: The Role of Ethics in Business and in Business Education," *Journal of Business Ethics* 16 (1997): 231–245.

19. Scholars of philosophical ethics at the 1991 National Conference on Government Ethics Research concurred on the importance of ethics education for public administrators — see H. G. Frederickson and J. D. Walling, "Editor's Introduction: Ethics in Contemporary Human Resources Management," *Public Personnel Management* 28 (1999): 501–504. Since then, several authors have reaffirmed the importance of ethics training [see OECD, *Ethics Training for Public Officials* (Paris: OECD Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern and Central Europe, 2013)]; S. S. Kennedy and D. Malatesta, "Safeguarding the Public Trust: Can Administrative Ethics be Taught?" *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 16 (2010): 161–180; D. C. Menzel, *Ethics Management for Public Administrators* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006); N. Preston, *Ethics for the Public Sector: Education and Training* (NSW, Australia: Federation Press, 1994); A. Hejka-Ekins, "Ethics in In-service Training," in ed. T. L. Cooper, *Handbook of Administrative* (New York: Marcel Dekker, 2001)] in public administration and schools of public administration, with the opinion that aspiring civil servants should be taught to be ethical and encourage the integration of ethics into the curriculum (see NASPAA, *Code of Good Practice* 2009, accessed April 17, 2013, http://www.naspaa.org/codeofgoodpractice/).

20. See J. Perry, "The Consequences of Speaking Out: Processes of Hostility and Issue Resolution Involving Federal Whistle-Blowers," *Academy of Management Proceedings* 1993: 311–315; D. C. Menzel, "Research on Ethics and Integrity in Governance," *Public Integrity* 7 (2005): 147–168; R. Shareef, "Teaching Public Sector Ethics to Graduate Students: The Public Values/Public Failure Decision-making Model," *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 14 (2009): 385–395; S. S. Kennedy and D. Malatesta, "Safeguarding the Public Trust: Can Administrative Ethics be Taught?" *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 16 (2010): 161–180.

21. The teaching of ethics in the public sector has been included in the curricula of schools of public administration (University of Virginia, the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, Indiana University, Harvard Kennedy School). Menzel has found that 40% of the schools of public administration and public affairs integrated ethics across their curricular and 60% offered some type of standalone ethics course. See D. C. Menzel, "Teaching Ethics and Values: A Survey of Graduate Public Affairs and Administration Programs in the U.S.," *Political Science and Politics* 30 (1997): 518–524.

22. J. West and E. Berman, "Ethics Training Efforts in U.S Cities: Content, Pedagogy and Impact," *Public Integrity* 6 (2004): 189–206.

23. B. Richardson, "Why We Need to Teach Crisis Management and to Use Case Studies to Do it," *Management Education and Development* 24 (1993): 138–148.

24. J. Cagle and M. Baucus, "Case Studies of Ethics Scandals: Effects on Ethical Perceptions of Finance Students," *Journal of Business Ethics* 64 (2006): 213–229.

25. V. McWilliams and A. Nahavandi, "Using Live Cases to Teach Ethics," *Journal of Business Ethics* 67 (2006): 421–433.

Inclusive and Iterative Governance

Two distinguished participants from Singapore's 6th Leaders in Governance Programme discuss income inequality, talent and governance which balances the needs of the public with the challenges of the future.

The ETHOS Roundtable was conducted by CSC Researcher Dr Vernie Oliveiro in September 2013. Mr Bui The Giang and Mr Abdul Mutalib Pehin Dato Yusof were participants in the 6th Leaders in Governance Programme (LGP) organised by the Singapore Civil Service College from 26 August to 3 September 2013. Drawing from Singapore's development experience, the LGP offered 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 interacted with senior government officials and thought leaders, and visited key government agencies to understand their operating philosophies and values.

PARTICIPANTS **Mr Bui The Giang**, Director-General, Department for West Europe & North Americas, Commission for External Relations, Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee, Vietnam
Mr Abdul Mutalib Pehin Dato Yusof, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Communications, Brunei Darussalam

On Income Inequality and the Implications for Good Governance

Bui: Theorists have argued that there is a global trend towards smaller government, with the state acting as a service provider rather than as the classical ruling authority. In reality, there are relatively few countries where the government is able to become smaller. For the majority of countries, the classical situation still applies, but when we talk about a smaller government or service provision, the ultimate goal is, in fact, efficiency.

A government may choose to accept a widening gap between the rich and the poor if it means that a portion of the population moves ahead faster, becomes richer, and pulls the rest along on the path of development. Twenty-seven years ago, when Vietnam began its renewal process in 1986, 73% of the population was below the poverty line by international standards. Millions suffered from famine and hunger, but the gap between the so-called rich and so-called poor then was minimal. Today, poverty in Vietnam is 9.2%, after

only a quarter of a century. So I think in Vietnam the choice of policy was correct. At the same time, we should not depend on this sort of growth for good, because it can reduce incentives for effort and lead to social instability, with political and economic effects that can bring the whole system to stagnation, or even worse, collapse.

Mutalib: Income and other disparities may be symptoms that public or private institutions are not working as well as they could be. A good institution is one that will implement its functions efficiently. This calls for good governance; good governance requires good leadership. This is the main challenge in government.

We need both dynamic people and dynamic leaders, but at the same time, we need to look at the system and its impact as a whole. Staff well-being, and instilling passion and a sense of responsibility in all employees, is of utmost importance: Are they motivated? Have they been matched to the right job? Are they being treated fairly? How long have they been doing the same job while in service? Have they performed? What makes them tick? You need competency, motivation and incentive, and the right personalities. You need well-rounded leaders looking after a well-rounded team. These are just some of the prerequisites of good governance.

On Nurturing Talent for the Future

Bui: There is a Vietnamese proverb that says that "leakage comes from the roof." Leadership is of prime importance: it determines whether a government is good or bad. Meritocracy and zero tolerance for corruption are vital. The recruitment process needs to be based on qualifications, not on whether you come from a rich family or have a big company behind you. Placement and promotion need to be based on the best use of a person's abilities and talents and effective contributions. In the final analysis, we are working with human beings, but that should not be a pretext for keeping an incompetent person for too long a time in a position, preventing others from engaging and contributing, and ultimately leading an organisation or country to failure. People should be placed where they deserve to be, and enjoy only the rewards they deserve to receive.

Mutalib: Change, or in this particular context, public sector transformation, does not happen overnight. Apart from the importance of having the right planning and implementation, the public sector will have to adopt a mindset of lifelong learning. The change must come from 'within'. Generally, any good government will put their young leaders through processes and programmes to help build up their range of competencies. At the leadership or senior management level, we cannot

afford to be pure specialists anymore; we must be generalists. Having to experience both the corporate and public sectors generally gives an individual an edge: the ability to see both 'worlds' in perspective. There's a cross-multiplier effect when we bring our skills from one organisation to the next that can result in more positive outcomes.

The new generation of public sector leaders will have to get down to the ground, know people, what the real functions of institutions are, and what the policy big picture is. They will have to learn to respect the opinions and views of the others, and look at policy issues from different perspectives. They will have to learn to manage diverse groups, including people older or more senior than them, taking into consideration their different attributes, attitudes and views.

On Public Sector Transformation and National Alignment
Mutalib: Public policy is an iterative process. It must always be two-way: seeking alignment between national and stakeholders' perspectives. Consultation, communication and public engagement are important processes that can help make sure that stakeholders are not overlooked. Before you introduce a policy, the people need to know about it. Through piloting exercises, where you allow for trial and error and plenty of feedback, you reduce the risk of public resistance to new policies.

One of the obvious indicators of how well your policy will work out is how well the public embraces the policy. But in fact, there are no straightforward KPIs. For instance, tracking the number of complaints that have gone down does not really tell you anything. It could mean that the public has given up. Of course, you also need a mitigation plan in case things go wrong. Accidents happen in real life. Tools such as scenario planning and risk management can assist in decision-making, but ultimately when a policy is already out there, you have to get engaged with the real stakeholders: the public.

Bui: When you decide to aim for efficiency, there is a tendency to narrow down the margin for manoeuvre. But in many cases, it is still important to make room for flexibility, to have a sense of readiness for risk. There is always a risk when you decide to devolve power and responsibility. At the same time, as a leader, you tend to want safe solutions. So how far are you ready to go in devolving your authority, and delegating to your subordinates to work on their own? That is a question that leaders everywhere need to address.

What I have seen here in Singapore is that despite the diversity of people and scarcity of resources, there is a unity of mind and action, all the way from the top leadership down through the civil service to the population. And that will enable you to move forward, as has been shown for the past several decades. ⚡

The First New Synthesis Laboratory for Master Practitioners

A groundbreaking lab for practitioners demonstrates the robustness and applicability of the New Synthesis Framework in transforming ideas about public administration and public value for the future.

BY

JOCELYNE BOURGON

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How the New Synthesis (NS) Framework Came About

Serving in the 21st century is more challenging than ever:

- Issues are inter-connected and more prone to shocks
- Social media transforms the issues and contexts
- Public servants deal with volatility and complexity
- An increasing number of public policy issues exceed the capacity of government acting alone.

These changes are transforming the role of governments and their relationship with citizens and society. Public servants feel the tensions but most public organisations are not yet ready for the challenges that lie ahead. As a result, governments are frequently left in a reactive position. There is a need to re-think public administration as a discipline and as a domain of practice. This is why the NS Project was conceived.[1]

Public institutions and public organisations must adapt to changing needs and circumstances in order to sustain the trust between government and citizens. There is a need to preserve practices of enduring values, learn from reform efforts and acquire new capabilities. In the end, old and new capabilities must blend in a manner that takes into account the circumstances unique to each country.[2]

Part of the difficulty facing public organisations today comes from the industrial-era concepts that conventional public administration is rooted in. These are derived from scientific management, with solutions based on narrowing down and "fixing" parts of the system. As a result, public administration has internalised many forms of segregation (between politics and policy, policy decision and implementation, policy development and service delivery, etc.). Public administration relies on analysis. It values productivity and efficiency.

NS is an invitation to go beyond these conventional approaches. It values the effectiveness of the whole rather than the efficiency of its parts. It focuses on societal results. It proposes that the solutions to complex issues can only come about as a result of synthesis — the capacity to recombine in new ways the roles of government, citizens and society, and the relationships that bind them together.

The NS Framework appears simple at first glance. However, it has several layers of meaning that are uncovered progressively.

In 2010 and 2011, Singapore's Civil Service College (CSC) participated in the NS Project, a multi-country research project that initially involved six countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Netherlands, Singapore and the United Kingdom)[3]. In Singapore, this work informed public sector dialogues on pertinent issues, including public engagement and co-

- Is not a course in the traditional sense, but a laboratory designed for interaction-based learning among experienced practitioners.

- Is a discovery process; a collective learning experience; an encounter among master practitioners and the NS Project Leader.

- Is rooted in practice. The conversations are centred on real-life challenges and issues that participants bring forth.

The NS Lab seeks to build capacity at two levels

- Individual: practitioners are better equipped for achieving complex results and for addressing their real-life case challenge.

- Institutional (system-wide): participants share a commitment to a collective effort for advancing public sector reforms in their own country.

creation. Acknowledging the need to test the NS Framework in a diversity of domains of practice, the NS Lab was born from a shared commitment to expand the conversation and test the ideas in practice. And so the design work began.

Programme Design

The first NS Lab was designed to encourage open exchange, experimentation and learning. It challenged participants to continually move between exploring concepts, learning from practice and integrating findings.

A gap week between sessions was intentionally included to allow participants to test ideas in practice, reflect on what was relevant in each respective context and integrate what they learnt in their search for solutions in their live case before returning for the next session.

In practice, the one-week break allowed participants time to consolidate and integrate their learning.

Master Practitioners

Seventeen director- and senior director-level public officers — the Master Practitioners — attended the first NS Lab, held in Singapore in early 2013. Some were from central ministries, while others were from line ministries and statutory boards supporting the ministries.[4] This mix brought a diversity of perspectives to the NS Lab sessions, and helped to ensure that the relevance

of the NS Framework was tested across a broad range of domains.

The dynamic capacity of the New Synthesis Framework becomes most apparent when key concepts are integrated with practical challenges.

Apart from their skills and experience, each participant also came to the NS Lab with a real-life case — a challenging and unresolved issue that the participant was committed to addressing in his current position. Participants were encouraged to return to their cases after each session, changing and refining their proposed approaches as the conversation progressed.

This approach proved to be a very powerful element of the NS Lab design. As the cases evolved, participants quickly became very skillful at using the NS Framework, which helped them to look at their challenges in new ways and through different lenses. They were able to re-position their issues on a broader level, and each one of them identified other stakeholders who needed to be brought in as partners. Most of them discovered that it was possible to encourage the contributions of citizens, users of government services, their families and their communities while

preserving and even enhancing the stewardship role of government.

Master Weaver

Playing the role of Master Weaver, I drew lessons learned from other countries from the NS key findings. The collective wealth of experience was used to tease out solutions from the participants. The key assets for an NS Lab are in the room.

As Master Weaver, my role was to:

1. Help participants weave the key threads to create a powerful tapestry: a "new synthesis" of public administration adapted to a particular (in this case, Singapore's) context and circumstances.

2. Summarise key findings after each session, laying the foundation for the next session while allowing for different approaches. In Singapore, each session was unique and specifically designed to support the needs of the participants at that time.

3. Enrich the exploratory discussion by sharing ideas and insights about what is being done elsewhere, or what could be done to broaden the range of choices open to government. There is no one right way, but instead multiple ways of achieving public policy outcomes. Often, different approaches must operate

concurrently in order to bring about desired outcomes.

Post-NS Lab feedback by participants indicated that the role of the Master Weaver was a key factor in the success of the sessions.

Growing Towards A New Synthesis

The first NS Lab was designed with practitioners in mind. It was learner-centric, with improvements throughout the process to ensure that each session met the needs of the group. It brought senior practitioners from many fields of public sector practice into conversation and, together with me, they examined how the NS Framework can be used to open up a broader space of possibility with which to face the complex issues of the day, and to solve problems that conventional approaches could not. They shared experiences and acquired new insights about what is being done and what can be done to prepare public institutions and organisations to be fit for the time and to build a resilient society able to adapt to the changing landscape of the 21st century. In the process, they crafted an emerging narrative of change to provide coherence to their transformation efforts. They framed a New Synthesis for Singapore.

The success of the NS Lab was first and foremost due to the commitment of the Master Practitioners, who were not only active contributors during each session, but invested time and

The first three sessions were designed to explore the implications of some of the key underlying concepts of the NS Framework in practice. This was done by drawing from international examples, inviting local resource people who had led ambitious, transformative reforms, and working as a group to explore solutions to the cases.

Session 1: Positioning

This session explored the importance of "positioning" public policy issues in a broader context. Participants discovered how this could help them to uncover the multi-dimensional nature of complex issues and the need for cooperation across governments and systems. As one of our invited resource persons said, "We are all part of a bigger cause."

A key challenge is to frame public policy issues and challenges in a way that invites and allows others to contribute. Changing the way one thinks about the mission of public agency changes the way one shapes policy responses and services, how an agency relates to others and engages citizens.

Participants explored and shared ideas about how to use the concept of "positioning" to domains as varied as open data, "City in a Garden", social and family development, and education.

The participants discovered the power of a broader mental map to open up new avenues and encourage cooperation, through the process of constructively questioning each other and sharing insights to improve the likelihood of success in addressing each others' cases – a key feature of the NS Lab.[1]

In the late-1990s, the National Library Board and the Singapore Prison Service successfully repositioned their mission in the broader context of system-wide and societal results. This meant a focus on nation and community building for the former and the reintegration of ex-offenders for the latter. In so doing, they reinvented their respective professions and their roles as public agencies, resulting in better outcomes and improving the lives of users and those of the people providing the services.

Session 2: Leveraging

Leveraging is about the Power of Others. It is the coming together of the authority of the state and the power of society to achieve better public results. Participants explored the importance of working across multiple boundaries inside government and across sectors to achieve results of higher value for society.

Leveraging recognises that an increasing number of issues exceed the capacity of government working alone.[2] It calls for an understanding of the perspectives of others and the key factors that encourage them to join a collective effort.

Participants identified some factors that would enhance government capacity to build

on contributions from others, learning from both successful and failed attempts.

Participants examined the reasons behind the success of the Singapore Health Promotion Board in working with hawkers and food manufacturers to achieve better public health outcomes. They also explored possibilities for applying leveraging in the work of agencies such as the Land Transport Authority and the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority.

Session 3: Engaging

Even when working together, public agencies may not be able to achieve some complex results or find solutions to intractable problems. This session explored how public policies and programmes can be shaped to engage users and beneficiaries as value creators.

Successful citizen engagement requires clarity of purpose from the agency in question. Participants discussed the importance of establishing clarity on when the government is best positioned to engage citizens, when it would be unwise to do so, and when the desired outcomes can only be achieved with the contribution of users and beneficiaries as value creators.

A case study from Sweden Clinic of Internal Medicine provided key insights into co-production.[3] Important distinctions were drawn between various forms of engagement including information, consultation, co-creation, co-production and enabled self-organisation.[4]

Integrating and applying NS concepts

By the end of the first three sessions, participants had learned and applied some of the key findings from the NS Framework, and become skillful in their use of:

- Positioning that shifts the focus of analysis from an agency's results to that of societal outcomes
- Leveraging that shifts the balance between a government-centric approach to governance
- Engaging users and beneficiaries of public services to shift the relationship between the government and citizens from one of dependency to one of mutuality and shared responsibility.

Participants improved their search for solutions in the context of their cases by using all three lenses.

Through community engagement efforts, the Ministry of Home Affairs was able to reconcile its stewardship role under the law while expanding public involvement in achieving public policy results.

Sessions 4–6: A New Synthesis for Singapore

The subsequent sessions marked a shift in focus from key concepts applied to individual cases to an overall transformation agenda for Singapore's public service. Sessions 4-6 reached beyond particular initiatives to identify and explore the capacities needed to build public institutions and organisations capable

of adapting to changing circumstances and of evolving alongside society.

During these sessions, participants heard from resource persons about the changing landscape in Singapore from an internal and an external perspective. The participants drew insights from the early findings of "Our Singapore Conversation". They engaged with political, academic and public sector leaders, heard from central agencies about current initiatives, and discussed how these agencies could help build the capacity of government to adapt to changing needs and circumstances. A series of international examples were used to help participants learn what others were doing to build adaptive and resilient societies.

Over the course of the NS Lab sessions, participants co-created a powerful narrative that speaks to Singapore's context and to their aspirations. They articulated the special role and responsibility of government to nurture adaptive public institutions fit for the time, and a resilient society fit for the challenges of the future. They also highlighted guiding principles and promising approaches to support these efforts.[5] The document they produced amounts to an ambitious reform agenda that warrants careful consideration.[6] It is available on the CSC website at: https://www.cscollege.gov.sg/Knowledge/Pages/New-Synthesis-Laboratory-for-Master-Practitioners-Moving-Ideas-to-Action-Key-Findings.aspx

NOTES

1. Jocelyne Bourgon, "New Synthesis Laboratory for Master Practitioners: Moving Ideas into Action-Key Findings", 4–5, May 2013, CSC working paper.

2. Jocelyne Bourgon, "New Synthesis Laboratory for Master Practitioners: Moving Ideas into Action-Key Findings", 6–8, May 2013, CSC working paper.

3. Jörgen Tholstrup, "Empower Patients to Need Less Care and Do Better in Highland Hospital, South Sweden", *Making Health and Social Care Personal and Local: Moving from Mass Production to Co-Production*, eds. E. Loeffler et al. (UK: Governance International, 2012), 7–11.

4. Jocelyne Bourgon, "New Synthesis Laboratory for Master Practitioners: Moving Ideas into Action-Key Findings", 6–8, May 2013, CSC working paper.

5. Jocelyne Bourgon, "New Synthesis Laboratory for Master Practitioners: Moving Ideas into Action-Key Findings", 9–12, May 2013, CSC working paper.

6. Jocelyne Bourgon, "New Synthesis Laboratory for Master Practitioners: Moving Ideas into Action-Key Findings", 13–17, May 2013, CSC working paper.

effort in updating their cases during the gap week. Many of them took the extra step to share what they learned on their return to their agencies.

NS is an ongoing journey of discovery. No institution is fit for all

It will be important to provide ongoing support to this cohort and to tap into their experiences when other NS initiatives are conducted.

time. The ongoing development of each institution involves adapting to changing circumstances and evolving with the society that they have a mission to serve. Countries with public institutions able to meet the needs of their time have a greater capacity for adaptation. They will be best positioned to influence events in their favour and to prosper under all circumstances. There is every reason to believe that Singapore will be among them.

And so the journey continues.

NS Lab: The Journey Continues

For the next phase of the NS Project, new tools developed from the first Lab in 2013 were tested; the conversations were also brought to different levels of public officers. In the first quarter of 2014, we conducted 2 new NS Labs for Singapore public service officers, one at the Middle Manager level and the other for people at the most senior levels. Both workshops generated new discoveries and possibilities.

The NS Labs conducted in 2013 and 2014 are a powerful reminder of the need to continue to explore the New Frontiers of Public Administration, to prepare government fit for the challenges of its time and to build public organisations and public institutions with the capacity to adapt to changing needs, circumstances and citizens expectations. The Civil Service College plans to continue to explore the ideas generated from the 2013 and 2014 NS Labs as the New Synthesis Journey continues, for there is no end to our search for good government and good governance.

NOTES

1. Jocelyne Bourgon, *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century*, (Montreal, Quebec and Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).

2. Jocelyne Bourgon, "New Synthesis Laboratory for Master Practitioners: Moving Ideas into Action-Key Findings", May 2013, CSC working paper, http://www.cscollege.gov.sg/Knowledge/Pages/New-Synthesis-Laboratory-for-Master-Practitioners-Moving-Ideas-to-Action-Key-Findings.aspx

3. The key findings resulting from the NS Project were captured in the book *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century* which was launched in Singapore in October 2011.

4. Participating agencies included the Public Service Division, Ministry of Finance; the ministries of Communications and Information, Education, Home Affairs, Social and Family Development, and the Environment and Water Resources; and statutory boards the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority, National Environment Agency, Urban Redevelopment Authority, Public Utilities Board, National Parks Board, Land Transport Authority, and the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority.

Making Public-Private Partnerships Work: Implications for Singapore and the Region

Can cross-sectoral collaborations be structured to deliver public value more effectively on a large scale?

BY

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AND

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Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) are collaborative organisational structures supported by public, private or even non-profit partners who agree to share risks, resources and decisions in building and implementing certain projects. PPPs have been used by many governments as collaborative models to attract private sector financing or bring in private sector operational capacity, for medium to large-scale projects. This has typically resulted in governments ceding operational control over key assets while sharing some financial risks.

Singapore's Experience

PPPs are not new to Singapore. Singapore has utilised PPPs as vehicles for various projects, including water treatment plants, waste disposal plants and education infrastructure. The largest PPP to date is the Sports Hub, which brings together private bank financing for the Sports Hub Consortium to build and manage Singapore's key national sporting facilities, with an annual payment by the Government for use of these facilities.

While the Sports Hub PPP won several international awards, it also prompted a re-assessment of how PPPs should be structured. This was in part due to the financial crisis in the late 2000s. Even though the private sector had ostensibly taken over the construction of the Sports Hub, further loan support from the government was

required during the crisis. Singapore's experience with the Sports Hub is not unique. Taiwan's high-speed rail system, also a PPP, required government support when there was a reduction in passenger use during the crisis, and the PPP could not meet debt service payments. This underscores the point that private sector financing can be quite tenuous, and that the private sector does not always have as much capacity as the government does to undertake the higher level of funding risks associated with these large-scale infrastructure projects, or absorb risks associated with uncertain future revenue streams.

The private sector does not always have as much capacity as the government does to undertake the funding risks associated with large-scale infrastructure projects.

Furthermore, unlike some developed economies with large public deficits, Singapore has often run budget surpluses. There is adequate fiscal space for the construction of the sports facilities. With its strong fiscal balance sheet, the Singapore government is also able to raise funds from the market easily, at lower interest rates compared to the private sector. This would have made more economic sense than requiring private firms to raise finances. Arguably, under these circumstances,

a more straightforward model would be for the Government to finance the construction of these facilities, and contract them to a managing agent upon completion instead.

Finally, the construction of the Sports Hub was also much delayed due to a variety of reasons, including cost overruns. The case for PPPs in Singapore thus appears further weakened.[1]

The common denominator of a successful PPP is a partnering government employee with multi-sector experience.

Fresh Perspectives for PPPs
Nevertheless, new perspectives are emerging. Governments may have the financial strengths, but may still want to engage the private sector for the purpose of fostering innovation and competitiveness. Importantly, PPPs offer opportunities for the state to co-create with the non-state sector, sometimes even converting liabilities for the state into valuable social assets.

Another important and emerging perspective is that the state should not view ex post facto negotiations or re-negotiations of a PPP as a failure. No amount of prior contractual negotiations can possibly cover all scenarios over the long lifespan of a project. In fact, problems associated with PPPs — delays, financing re-negotiations, subsidies, etc — are also present in state-owned projects. Internal government bureaucracy re-negotiates resources, responsibilities and outcomes all the time. It is unrealistic to expect otherwise when dealing with private sector players.

Thus, a successful PPP needs to be developed as a flexible organisational and financial model along a risk curve (project complexity and risks over time). There should not be a "template mentality"; one should be thinking about a PPP toolkit instead. It is important for the PPP model to be flexible enough to evolve over time, while ensuring sufficient certainty for private sector partners and governments alike. This calls for a different set of skills for public sector officials.

What Skills, Resources and Capacities are Needed?
There are at least four skills required to develop PPPs: political management, negotiation, financial structuring and innovation.

First and foremost, we have to recognise that PPP decisions are based on necessity as well as political considerations. By necessity we refer to the need to improve or expand the government's financial or operational capacity to deal with a public policy problem. This is the problem statement. The government will then have to decide if it is worth the resulting political risks when the private sector is brought in to help solve a public problem.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PPPs

New York's Central Park Conservancy and Bryant Park Restoration Corporation are great examples of how PPPs created and managed by the private sector can introduce innovation and competitiveness to public assets through collaboration with the public sector.

In the 1970s, New York's Central Park[1] and Bryant Park[2] had become liabilities to the city. They were relatively unsafe, their facilities deteriorated, and the surrounding residential real estate and economic activity were in decline.

These very different public spaces were converted from liabilities into major tourist, real estate and community assets through two different types of PPPs. The city retained ownership of the parks but transferred operations to the privately financed and managed non-profit Conservancy and Corporation. The results have been startling increases in the assessed value of the areas surrounding the parks, one primarily residential, the other commercial.

NOTES

1. http://www.centralparknyc.org/about/

2. http://www.bryantpark.org/about-us/management.html

Second, good negotiation skills are necessary. Public sector officials need to properly communicate with stakeholders, and have a good appreciation of the motivations and incentives of various parties. The common denominator of a successful PPP is a partnering government employee with multi-sector experience (public and private). A civil service with only lifelong career officials may have more challenges creating and implementing successful PPPs.

Through innovation and creativity, government can reduce the need for private sector financing, thus reducing risks. The financial structuring of PPPs is more about assumptions than models. In selecting and evaluating PPP projects, the emphasis is too often on the successful completion of the design and construction phase as defined by an on-time and on-budget outcome. Rather, it is more important to test out financing assumptions, and enter into a PPP knowing what the worst-case scenarios are for the state. Similarly, select and manage projects whose programming of public activities minimises, if not avoids, the soft cost of an annuity of liabilities/subsidies.

Finally, enter into a PPP only when there is a genuine potential for non-state innovation, instead of just depending on promised efficiency gains.

Framing PPPs Towards More Complex Issues

There are three key concepts associated with the formation of PPPs. The most important is to properly frame the problem. The second is the identification, analysis and organisation of the partnership's stakeholders. The third is the use of a set of PPP tools rather than a template to complete the formation of the partnership. Such a toolkit would include financial structuring skills such as the development of key assumptions that will impact use and revenue projections, motivations and incentives of stakeholders, and negotiation issues.

Governments may have the financial strengths, but may still want to engage the private sector for the purpose of fostering innovation and competitiveness.

The best way to realistically approach the formation of a PPP is by understanding the type of asset and public-policy problem that is the focus of the PPP. Essentially, all PPPs are best understood as either fundamental or complex assets. Fundamental assets can have either simple or complex structures.

The best example of a fundamental asset is water — a simple, essential asset. Water desalination in Singapore, as a PPP, is a more straightforward construct since outcomes like quality and quantity are easily measured. The nation's high-income level also ensures that most will find water affordable. Of course, the same water in other countries could also involve very complex PPPs; it may be necessary for the water to be treated, protected, distributed and accessed by huge populations.

The challenges associated with improving public health outcomes are typically more complex than providing adequate and safe supplies of drinking water. Healthcare requires a system or network of assets: facilities for prevention, diagnosis, treatment and long-term care. Maximising the outcomes associated with these assets may not necessarily be a function of cost and investment. The innovation may be in terms of the public and private configuration of these assets. Even when resources and interests become aligned to support improved public health, behaviour and culture may present serious obstacles.

It may be therefore better to frame the problem as delivering superior healthcare outcomes, rather than one of the Government purchasing services. As healthcare often reflects complex underlying social challenges, it becomes useful to bring in different perspectives. Ideally, the framing of

PPPs must shift from one where the state co-opts the private sector to provide financing and solutions (another form of outsourcing), to one where state and non-state actors come together to solve complex social problems.

An example can help illustrate this point. A traditional form of PPP might involve a design-build-finance model, where the private sector builds a hospital to meet the demand of a public authority. However, this would create incentives for the operator to increase demand for hospitalisation. If the PPP contract does not allow the operator to charge for the increase in demand, there would be incentives to cut back on services.

A different form of healthcare PPP could instead create incentives for the operator to meet healthcare outcomes; for example, to reduce the incidence of non-communicable diseases like obesity or diabetes amongst the population. Once the problem is framed differently, other potential stakeholders could emerge. This will then change the operator's incentives towards finding solutions for public education, early screening and monitoring. Again, the key is to frame the challenge properly.

A number of countries are evaluating changes to their use of PPPs, focusing on an amalgamation of economic and social PPP structures. These changes will require a more explicit recognition of subsidies and risks by the public

sector. It will be the public manager's primary responsibility to allocate the opportunities associated with a PPP (revenue, efficiency, capacity) against the risks (financial shortfalls, under-served populations, environmental changes and political decisions).

Internal government bureaucracy re-negotiates resources, responsibilities and outcomes all the time. It is unrealistic to expect otherwise with private sector players.

Conclusion

PPPs have worked well in many countries but have also attracted critics. Too often, critics charge that governments have entered into PPP agreements that lead to pressure to re-negotiate financial terms when financing conditions deteriorate, when revenue streams do not materialise or when costs overrun. However, this line of criticism conveniently ignores the fact that government-owned projects often also face cost overruns and poor management, resulting in additional project subsidies. The key difference here is that PPPs, involving private sector actors, often result in these subsidies being made very explicit. This may attract greater political controversies, but it does not necessarily imply weaker governance.

In all likelihood, PPPs will become a permanent part of the public sector landscape. There are financial and non-financial reasons driving this. Even in Singapore, a fiscally healthy country, there could be greater reliance on PPPs in the future. The population is ageing, and trend economic growth is slowing as a result. Fiscal space will become tighter in the future. Coinciding with this, there will also be more ageing infrastructure (economic or social) that would need to be replaced. PPPs offer opportunities to introduce innovation into the financing and management of government assets and services.

As Singapore works to improve its evaluation and strategic use of, and expertise in PPPs, it can also become a valuable PPP hub for the region where there is a great financing need for infrastructure. As a potential partner, Singapore brings distinctive strengths.

Its access to capital, expertise and experience in the development process are well known.

The framing of PPPs must shift from one where the state co-opts the private sector to provide financing and solutions, to one where state and non-state actors come together to solve complex social problems.

Singapore should build PPP capacity while it still does not really require it from the fiscal standpoint, and when it still has luxury to experiment and learn. It may stand to reap good rewards in the future.

NOTE

1. Pamela Qiu, "Can Public-Private Partnerships Deliver Better Public Services? Annex 3: Singapore Sports Hub: Why the Delay?" https://www.cscollege.gov.sg/Knowledge/Documents/EP042010_Annex%203.pdf

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