

## A less hyper-competitive society can help youth feel less weary about future: IPS panel

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- The earth's warming climate and Singapore's ageing population are some of the existential questions facing young people here
- Singaporeans need to be willing to question long-held beliefs and practices so these issues can be tackled, experts said
- On eldercare, panellists at Singapore Perspectives 2024 organised by the Institute of Policy Studies suggested co-living arrangements for seniors and expanding the definition of "family"
- In the workplace, addressing AI challenges will involve understanding the future worker's psychology and creating meaningful roles
- The threat of climate change has prompted governance changes, with young people being given more opportunities to be involved in policy-making, they said

SINGAPORE — As young people face a more volatile and uncertain future, Singaporeans should start questioning long-held beliefs and practices, whether about how to best care for seniors in a rapidly ageing society or how to make a real difference in a changing climate.

This proposition was raised on Monday (Jan 22) by experts who spoke during a panel discussion at the Singapore Perspectives 2024 conference, titled "The Terrain Ahead".

At the event, organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), the panel comprised:

- Ms Farah Sanwari, head of partnerships at media consultancy SpudnikLab
- Dr Menusha De Silva, geography lecturer at the National University of Singapore
- Associate Professor Trevor Yu, who specialises in organisational behaviour at Nanyang Technological University

Ms Farah spoke about climate change and the role young people have in making a difference, while Dr De Silva touched on the alternatives to caregiving for seniors. Assoc Prof Yu, on the other hand, talked about the future of work.

Although they specialise in different fields, all three agreed that the best way to help the youth navigate an increasingly uncertain and complex future is by having difficult conversations today.

Some examples of what these conversations should be about are:

- Will growing heat stress caused by climate change create more indoor jobs in the future?
- Is there a broader definition for "family" to cover childhood friends and co-workers?
- Are there alternative ways to look after elders other than nursing care?

Also, given the volatile and uncertain future, what can workers expect from their workplaces, and how can employers better engage them?

The panel was live-streamed to more than 800 virtual attendees.

### **ALTERNATIVE ELDERCARE ARRANGEMENTS**

On eldercare, Dr De Silva highlighted two key trends from nationwide studies that need to be considered — a higher rate of singlehood among Singaporeans and greater level of independence among seniors.

“One example we can consider is co-living with people who are not family,” she said, adding that this arrangement is popular in the United States and some European countries.

Dr De Silva said that the idea can also take on different permutations such as an informal arrangement with a tenant.

“A room can be rented out to a stranger with the understanding that they will keep an eye out for the older person in case of emergencies... and maybe even accompany them for a doctor’s visit,” she added.

Singapore has co-living arrangements offered by private firms as a replacement for nursing care, where seniors rent out their flats and share the caregivers who rent the place.

CNA reported on one such arrangement by care provider Red Crowns Senior Living, where a 79-year-old senior shares her four-room flat in Woodlands with two housemates who look after her.

This assisted-living model is part of the Government’s goal to have more seniors age well in the comfort of their own homes.

Although this initiative may have challenges, given Singapore’s rising housing prices, Dr De Silva said that it is increasingly seen as an alternative to nursing care.

Judging by these trends, especially more singles, Dr De Silva said that there would also be a need to rethink the definition of “family”, as young people will learn to question this when they grow older.

“(The trends) make us question how do young Singaporeans think of family not only in the legal sense but also who they turn to in times of need?”

“Is it their childhood friend? Co-worker? Or a paid caregiver? Could this person actually become their closest family member?” she asked, adding that these questions may prompt the broadening of the definition of “family”.

### **WORKPLACE CHANGES FOR A VOLATILE FUTURE**

Shedding light on the future of jobs with the rise of artificial intelligence technology, Assoc Prof Yu said that employers will need to tackle issues presented by an increasingly volatile and uncertain “new reality”.

To thrive in an environment that is becoming more global and virtual, he stressed that employers will need to understand the psychology of future workers in order to motivate and engage them.

At the same time, employers will also have to look into creating a workplace that makes employees feel that working there is worthwhile.

Assoc Prof Yu said research has identified four primary motivations that future workers will be driven to fulfil:

- Acquire — not just material wealth, but also respect, self-esteem, social status, and compensation benefits
- Bond — the desire to form meaningful connections with people at work
- Comprehend — to satisfy their own curiosity and achieve mastery of job skills
- Defend — being motivated to fight against external threats, and stand up for fairness and transparency

Correspondingly, employers must empower employees to boost confidence and competence, helping workers see the meaning and impact of their jobs.

One such example, Assoc Prof Yu said, was job crafting, which takes existing expectations and roles, and expands them to suit one's desire to make a difference.

“A huge part of job crafting involves looking at how our work affects others. So, for teachers, job crafting is when they see themselves not just imparting skills and abilities to their students, but also helping to move the future of a nation.

“Similarly, when prison officers job craft, they see themselves as helping to rehabilitate people who want to make a positive change in their lives,” he explained.

Assoc Prof Yu also highlighted the importance of psychological safety and mental health support at work, as future workers will expect employers to step up in these aspects.

## **CHANGE IN GOVERNANCE TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE**

In a question-and-answer segment, Ms Farah said that environmentalists today are beyond the stage of “greenwashing people into thinking we can make a better world by recycling”.

People, even those as young as 14, she said, have started to look at issues more deeply, thanks to environmental programmes held in schools and universities.

Issues such as the recent Long Island reclamation project off East Coast have also prompted many people to question policies such as sand procurement and the role of oil companies in contributing to climate change.

“The younger generation, maybe even Gen Zers... are starting to question things like, ‘Why do we have so many oil refineries in Singapore?’ They’re well aware of how the world works and how it’s problematic to them,” Ms Farah said.

Given how environmental policies have become more significant today than they were 10 years ago, she said that the state has begun to change its ways of governance by involving the youth in policy-making.

“We are seeing opportunities for young people to step up. Then we can have a more collaborative approach where civil society can contribute, where we can have the Government listen to us, to see (how these changes can be implemented).”

### **COMMUNICATE, HAVE EMPATHY**

The terrain ahead is not without challenges, but Ms Farah assured attendees that she does not think Singapore is at a “helpless stage”.

Separately, Dr De Silva urged Singaporeans to communicate with one another, especially when they feel demoralised.

“Maybe we won’t find a solution in sharing, but you know that you’re not alone in feeling (a certain way), and I think that... is a good starting point.”

Assoc Prof Yu encouraged empathy. “When you have empathy, we (can) achieve a common ground, and when we have common ground, we have collaboration. Great things are possible when people collaborate.”