



Ang Hak Seng

# Social Entrepreneurship

## Building The Next Generation Of The People Sector



- For the People sector, the future of work will be changed in three ways, comprising exponential change, changes in expectations, and the rise of the unknown.
- To be future-ready, workers would need three core skills and three mental strengths, namely strategic thinking, strategic execution and strategic relevance; and resilience, optimism and confidence.
- Lifelong learning is a must for the People sector, to enable workers to seize the many opportunities arising.

**ABOUT THREE YEARS AGO, THE WORLD WAS IRREVOCABLY CHANGED** when COVID-19 swept across nations, leaving behind a devastated global economy and a weary people.

For those in the People and Social sectors, there is no doubt that this is one of the biggest hurdles to date. As Singapore encouraged its people to stay at home, the demand for help surged as individuals who were once independent had to rely on assistance. Unfortunately, the supply of help was also affected. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), specifically those which ran eateries, saw a drop in sales and, coupled with the rising costs of running them, several businesses folded. This would be but the first of many challenges the People sector would face.

To better prepare Singapore's People sector for the future, I conducted some research via two methods – first, by interviewing selected social service agencies (SSAs), and second, by reviewing the best practices of the People sector. From this applied research, I have narrowed down the needs of the People sector, to produce a viable theory of success.

### DISRUPTION: A WAY OF LIFE

Disruptions will be the way of life moving forward. I see two main drivers that will impact the People sector – Industrialisation 4.0 and Socialisation 4.0.

Industrialisation 4.0 is characterised by technologies that blur the line between the

physical and digital worlds. In this era of artificial intelligence (AI), economic and social environments are reshaped. The emergence of new technologies like quantum computing has spawned ripples of disruptions across industries.

Aside from Industrialisation 4.0, another driver of disruption is Socialisation 4.0. I define this term as the evolution of the people's aspirations. According to Singapore's Department of Statistics, the percentage of Singapore residents who are university graduates had increased from 4.5% 1990 to 12% in 2000<sup>1</sup>, and from 23.7% in 2010 to 33% in 2020<sup>2</sup>.

With an increasingly educated population, the needs of Singapore's residents have evolved. Jobseekers in Singapore today prize meaningful jobs with work-life balance over one with a high salary – a distinct step away from earlier studies such as the 2015 survey by recruitment specialist Hudson, where salary and benefits outranked work-life balance<sup>3</sup>.

As disruptions like Industrialisation 4.0 and Socialisation 4.0 continue to persist, it is inevitable that the future of work in the People sector will change.

### CHANGES TO THE FUTURE OF WORK

In the context of the People sector, the future of work will be changed in the following three ways – exponential change, changes in expectations, and the rise of the unknown (Figure 1).



### Change: Beyond linear, towards exponential

Today, exponential change is experienced by everyone. Change used to be more linear, more gradual. However, with the emergence of disruptive technology, changes are becoming more frequent and unstable. For example, as AI develops, the adoption of such technology would challenge traditional organisational structures.

### Expectation: Beyond help, towards dignity

The evolution of Singapore's demographics has also left its mark on those in the People sector as the expectations of volunteers, beneficiaries and donors alike have changed. Beyond receiving handouts, beneficiaries today want to be taught sustainable strategies to resolve their issues. They want to take charge of their own situation and resolve their own problems instead of having someone else solve said problems for them.

### Unknown: Beyond COVID-19, towards Disease X

Even after battling COVID-19 for over three years, the virus continues to persist, with new variants appearing. However, as the future of a post-COVID-19 world remains uncertain, there is yet another threat that we will need to be prepared for – Disease X. A code name given to the next pandemic-inducing microbe,

FIGURE 1 THREE CHANGES TO THE FUTURE OF WORK



Source: Social Entrepreneurship webinar by Centre of Excellence for Social Good (CESG), Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS)



- Two main drivers that will impact the People sector:
- Industrialisation 4.0
  - Socialisation 4.0



<sup>1</sup> Singapore Department of Statistics. Census of Population 2000. Statistics Release 2: Education, Language and Religion: Highlights. [https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2000/census\\_2000\\_release2/highlights.ashx](https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2000/census_2000_release2/highlights.ashx)

<sup>2</sup> Singapore Department of Statistics. Census of Population 2020. Statistics Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion. <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.ashx>

<sup>3</sup> Williams, A. (20 Jan 2016). What Do Singapore Job Seekers Want? Here's What a Hudson Survey Says. <https://www.straitstimes.com/business/what-do-singapore-job-seekers-want-heres-what-a-hudson-survey-says>

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

To remain relevant, Singapore’s People sector will need to develop the “7 Elements of Social Entrepreneurship” – a theory of success adapted from the business excellence model.

the unknown illness is a prime example of the types of uncertainties we will need to be comfortable with moving forward. In fact, beyond our current COVID-19 situation, another disease of concern to us is monkey pox, and Singapore already has several unlinked local cases.

Taking reference from COVID-19, Disease X would not only impact our healthcare and economy sectors, it will also have a big impact on our social needs and the People sector. We must continue to remain cautious and have a system in place as it is a matter of time before another global pandemic occurs.

**THE FUTURE OF WORK FOR THE PEOPLE SECTOR**

In a world full of disruptions, the future of work for the People sector is filled with opportunities for those who are prepared for it. In a recent report, SkillsFuture highlighted the need to adopt several core skills for Singapore to be future-ready. I have also identified three mental strengths that would supplement these three core skills. The three core skills and three mental strengths are: strategic thinking, strategic execution and strategic relevance; and resilience, optimism and confidence (Figure 2).

**Core Skills**

**Strategic thinking**

Strategic thinking, in the context of the People sector, refers to value creation. As the People sector is in the business of creating desirable social values, it is vital that we can know what said values are. We will also need to be on the lookout for the value curve and, if there are no value curves, we will need to create them.

**Strategic execution**

Beyond achieving good performance, the organisations of today are expected to attain stellar results with minimal resources due to the resource-scarcity mindset many agencies possess. For stellar results to be possible, greater importance must be placed on productivity as high productivity results in affordable, excellent, and quick outcomes.

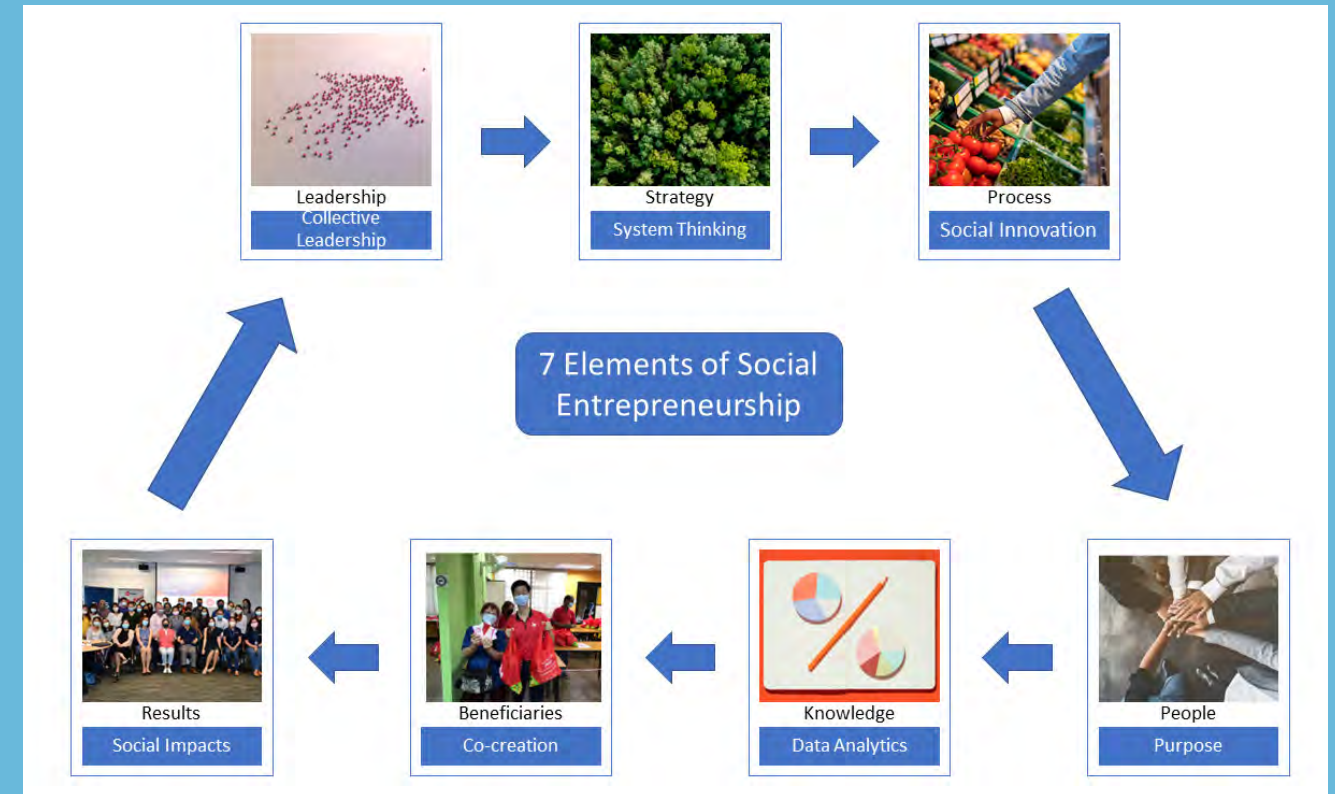
**Strategic relevancy**

To address the complex problems of today, the People sector needs to constantly update itself by adapting new strategies. However, with limited resources, the sector cannot be expected to adopt all emergent strategies. Instead, organisations should be agile, and quickly adaptable to new and proven strategies to catch up with new sector norms.

FIGURE 2 THREE CORE SKILLS AND THREE MINDSET SHIFTS



FIGURE 3 7 ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Other than the new hard skills, soft skills such as empathy would also be required to help build trust within the sector.

**Mental Strengths**

**Resilience**

In creating a resilient society, Singapore will be prepared for the incoming era of disruption where some failure cannot be avoided. Resilience refers to the individual’s ability to bounce back from failure, being able to learn and grow from mistakes, and quickly rising up to new challenges. For instance, after weathering the initial waves of COVID-19, Singapore was able to leverage the “digital awakening” experienced by many sectors to further the nation’s Smart Nation Singapore initiative – a vital movement for Singapore to remain competitive on the global stage.

**Optimism**

Being able to see the cup as half full allows one to find opportunities and thrive – not just survive – during times of crisis and hardship. For instance, during the “circuit breaker” period, an unexpected positive was the increase in the number of individuals who wished to give back to society through donations.

While the boom has proven to be helpful, it is crucial that we continue to harness and maintain this momentum for the purposes of community building to ensure that SSAs will have a sustainable source of support in the long run.

**Confidence**

“Can do” – that is the Singaporean spirit. This motto has propelled Singapore’s development and brought us onto the global stage. As a nation with few natural resources, it was only through our confidence in our workers’ and country’s abilities that we were able to brave the storms that this young nation had faced.

To have confidence is to believe in one’s potential and abilities. This mindset is crucial going into the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world where volatility and uncertainty could easily generate doubts in oneself.

**THEORY OF SUCCESS: SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

In combining the three core skills and three mindset shifts, I have produced a theory of success that is adapted from the business excellence model<sup>4</sup>, which organisations should adopt to achieve success. Known as the “7 Elements of Social Entrepreneurship”, this model comprises seven different elements – leadership, strategy, process, people, knowledge, beneficiary, and results – all of which work in tandem to ensure organisational success (Figure 3). Each element is non-negotiable and will impact all other elements. As such, to achieve organisational success, there is a need to develop all aspects of social entrepreneurship.



<sup>4</sup>Professor Ang Hak Seng was the Chairman of the Singapore Quality Award Committee for Business Excellence from 2010 to 2020



**Element 1: Leadership**

Leaders, at all levels, are critical for organisational success as they are the key drivers of change for the teams that they lead. However, in a world of complex and multifaceted problems, a single leader would not have the expertise to resolve every issue on his own. Hence, this sets up a need for collective leadership, as a group of leaders from diverse backgrounds would have the collective wisdom to tackle most issues that today's organisations may face. Having diverse collective leadership in the People sector is crucial as the needs of clients and beneficiaries are everchanging and require different perspectives to ensure effective solutions are recommended.

**Element 2: Strategy**

Traditionally, strategy comprises only two main perspectives – long- and short-term solutions – which are created independent of each other. However, moving forward, we will need to develop approaches which would address more than just two points of view. Similar to social systems theory, the new system thinking strategy will be able to account for both the long- and short-term perspectives at the same time, where the short-term solution will contribute to the long-term solution. Hence, this ensures that the solutions created will be sustainable and effective.

**Element 3: Process**

As a direct result of the age of disruption, many previously held assumptions and hence, solutions, are no longer relevant. Therefore, social innovation is necessary to revise old processes or create new ones that can better address current and future problems. One such instance of social innovation is the adoption of social prescription into Singapore's healthcare system.

Healthcare has typically been about curing the sick via medical procedures and prescriptions. However, there is evidence to say that many healthcare outcomes are impacted by one's social determinants of health (SDH), many of which are outside the influence of traditional healthcare. Hence, on top of medication, healthcare providers may be prescribing

food to induce positive behaviour change to treat a person's SDH, ensuring that people will attain wellness.

**Element 4: People**

Compared to previous generations of workers, the workers of today have very different expectations regarding work. For one, people now place greater importance on the organisation's purpose. Therefore, in the future of work, to meet the expectations of the people, it is vital to align the individual's and organisation's purpose and aspirations. One such possible method would be the concept of shared vision, actions, and experiences as these three would result in the creation of trust between the organisation and employee.

**Element 5: Knowledge**

As Singapore pushes towards its Smart Nation vision, it is vital for the People sector to view the incoming technological wave as an opportunity. One such tool that People-sector organisations will need to adopt for the future of work is data analytics. With data being the bedrock for all decision making, it is crucial for those working in the People sector to know how to draw meaningful conclusions from data to substantiate their decisions, which would then allow them to make better decisions for the organisation and most importantly, for the beneficiaries.

**Element 6: Beneficiaries**

Like how today's employees have very different aspirations than previous generations of workers, the beneficiaries of today also have very different expectations about the aid they receive from the People sector.

Today, beneficiaries want dignity – to take control of their situation and to be involved in the problem-solving process. To achieve this, social entrepreneurship advocates for organisations to co-create and co-deliver with their beneficiaries. Through co-creation and co-delivery, aspirations and concerns of beneficiaries will be addressed in the ensuing service/product that the organisation creates, resulting in a service/product that will be better received by the beneficiaries.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK



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FIGURE 4 THREE FORMS OF LIFELONG LEARNING



Source: Social Entrepreneurship webinar by CESG, SUSS

**Element 7: Results**

As the People sector is in the business of improving the wellness of people, the positive impacts of our actions tend to be invisible and thus difficult to quantify. However, to ensure that the interventions are effective, some means of evaluation is required. In this respect, social entrepreneurship pushes for the use of social impact analysis to quantify the good that the sector does. It enables input to output to impact reporting, ensuring that the entire intervention process is well documented.

Social impact analysis also equips SSAs with the vocabulary to better communicate their progress and accomplishments to stakeholders like their donors or volunteers.

**LIFELONG LEARNING**

The future of the People sector is filled with opportunities for those who are ready to seize them. To be prepared for these opportunities, lifelong learning will need to happen in the sector, which means we need to head back to school to upskill. I am proposing three ways to do so – formal education, informal education, and applied learning (Figure 4).

In the first track, education institutions like Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) have produced micro courses which are modular and stackable, allowing students to attain formal accreditation at their own pace. In the second track, informal learning happens via webinars and workshops, which training centres like CESG will be organising for the People sector. For the last track, applied learning can be done via communities of practice (CoP), which are self-sustaining self-help groups where like-minded volunteers share their experiences. These self-help groups serve as informal consultancies where experts and others who have undergone similar experiences can provide step-by-step guidance for others.

**CONCLUSION**

In an era of disruptions and uncertainties, one thing is certain – the future of work is changing as we speak. To remain relevant, Singapore's People sector will need to develop the 7 Elements of Social Entrepreneurship, and we are prepared to walk the journey with you. ISCA

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Diverse collective leadership brings different perspectives, which help ensure that there are effective solutions