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MEANING MATTERS

Essays by David Chan

David Chan (Singapore Management University, Singapore)

“Through his essays, Professor David Chan shows us that understanding human behaviour and attitudes is key in facing different situations and crises. In Meaning Matters, he offers valuable insights on how individuals, the society and the Government can strengthen our psychological defence against the COVID-19 virus as we manage the pandemic. In times of crisis, David reminds us that public trust is an invaluable asset for us to emerge stronger from this pandemic as one united nation.”

Mr Gan Kim Yong

Minister for Trade and Industry, Singapore

“David is able to write about the social and behavioural sciences in clear and simple language. He is also able to apply scientific concepts and research findings to explain many hot issues of contemporary Singapore and make practical recommendations on how to move forward. Admirably, he also writes in a non-partisan manner and dispenses wise advice to the different stakeholders, both courageously and constructively.”

Professor Tommy Koh

Ambassador-At-Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore

This book is the third collection of essays by behavioural scientist Professor David Chan, most of which first appeared in The Straits Times. Endorsed by fifty leaders from different sectors, this book provides a powerful springboard for self-reflections, sense-making, internal and public discussions, and individual and collective actions. A common theme that runs through these essays may be described as “Meaning Matters” which refers to the content and subject matter of the critical issues experienced by people and what it means to them. It is also about why the way that people think, feel and act as they make sense and meaning of their experiences should matter to individual well-being and societal progress in Singapore. This book goes beyond examining what critical issues mean or matter to people, policy making and nation building, and why they do, to focus on translating the “what it means” and “why it means” to “how it means” and “when it means”.

Contents

- From police officer to professor: A conversation with David Chan
- The search for meaning amid tasks galore and race to be first
- What it means to give
- Let's get the psychology of debate right
- Stop calling those who speak up a 'vocal minority'
- A different perspective: 10 Questions for David Chan
- What does a highly liveable Singapore mean?
- Too much of a good thing – when virtue becomes vice
- How to take feedback seriously
- The “Seven S” approach to subject-based banding in schools
- Why smart leaders fail
- Why people self-sabotage, and how to stop it
- The 5Cs of beating the coronavirus outbreak
- Drill into what makes people socially responsible
- A toolkit to deal with negative reactions in the COVID-19 crisis
- How to make critical decisions amid COVID-19 pressures
- Foster positivity amid COVID-19 challenges
- The psychology of trust amid COVID-19 challenges

Read what 50 Leaders from Different Sectors said about this book ...

Beh Swan Gin	Gan Kim Yong	Lim Chuan Poh	Mohamad Maliki Osman	Mildred Tan
Chan Heng Chee	Geh Min	Jeremy Lim	Danny Quah	Stanley Tan
Cheng Hsing Yao	Ho Kwon Ping	Lim Sau Hoong	Euston Quah	Tan Tee How
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Arnoud De Meyer	Laurence Lien	Sudha Nair	Tan Eng Chye	George Yeo
Gerard Ee	Benny Lim	Niam Chiang Meng	Tan Kian Hoon	Masagos Zulkifli

"David has the rare talent of a scholar who can explain complex social and psychological issues simply and clearly. His articles are therefore always worth reading if a policy maker or layman wishes to have a conceptual framework to think about matters relevant to Singapore."

Mr Eddie Teo

Chairman, Council of Presidential Advisers, Singapore

"As a public intellectual, David Chan has made a valuable contribution to draw attention to the psychological aspects of any issue or phenomenon. He has deepened our understanding on what ails our society and how to craft solutions better. Meaning Matters is the third compilation of his writings and should be read."

Professor Chan Heng Chee

Professor, Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of Technology and Design

"Many scholars and thinkers have written about meaning and purpose, but David's analysis provides a unique blend of scientific rigour and practical relevance that will help us deal with current issues and future challenges as we navigate new realities in a changing Singapore society. This is a must-read book."

Professor Kishore Mahbubani

Distinguished Fellow, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

"David is like an oracle, who can be counted on for truth-telling, especially when issues are complex and hidden. We should read him – and I always do – because it helps us reflect on insights that we can easily miss while we carry out business as usual. This could either be from failure to self-reflect or from mistakes from cognitive distortions. I particularly like the essays "Why smart leaders fail" and "Why people self-sabotage", perhaps because they help me make sense of the people around us."

Mr Laurence Lien

Chairman, Lien Foundation & Chairman, Asia Philanthropy Circle

"As mentioned to him on several occasions, I am always struck by two fascinating features of David's works and the ideas he expressed. One is the accuracy of the many future-oriented points he made, prior to significant events unfolding in Singapore. The other is the continuous relevance of his works over time such that re-reading his essays at any time often brings about fresh insights and practical applications to the wide variety of prevailing issues. I strongly recommend reading this book now and re-reading it in the future."

Mr Gerald Singham

Global Vice Chair & ASEAN CEO, Dentons Rodyk & Davidson LLP

"David brings to these essays his deep scholarship, disarming candour, and heartfelt empathy, conveying profound insights with crystal clarity. This book is both an education and a delight to read."

Mr Ravi Menon

Managing Director, Monetary Authority of Singapore

"When professors integrate science and practice to produce theoretical insights and solve real-world problems, they not only do their university proud but also serve as role models for what it means to make a meaningful impact on society. David is an example of such professors. Read and re-read these thought-provoking essays to find new ideas on meaning matters and new perspectives on what it means to make a positive difference."

Mr Ho Kwon Ping

Executive Chairman, Banyan Tree Holdings & Chairman, Singapore Management University



David Chan is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Behavioural Sciences Initiative at the Singapore Management University. He has received numerous international awards and he is Elected Fellow of several international psychological associations. He has served as Editor or board member on several journals and he also serves on various national councils, taskforces, boards of directors and scientific advisory panels. In 2020, a study by Stanford University on researcher impact named him in the top one percent worldwide among all scientists across all disciplines.

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