A Resilient Society for a Global Singapore

Professor Arnoud De Meyer
President, Singapore Management University

In his presentation, Professor Arnoud De Meyer shared his views on what it means and takes to be a resilient society for a global Singapore. The following is a summary of the major points:

• The short to mid-term future of Singapore may be described as moving from being best in class in catching up to taking on leadership in a “VUCA” world – a world characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

• To be ready for the VUCA future, Singapore needs to develop (even) more resilience at the individual, organizational and societal levels. Resilience can be defined as ‘the capacity of an individual or an organization to withstand or recover (and even to grow) from significant shocks or gradual and long drawn challenges that threaten your stability or viability’. It can also be defined as “a system’s ability to mitigate and withstand disturbances and bounce back afterwards, while continuing to function”.

• For the organization, it is important to focus on the strengths of the organization and be convinced that the organization can effectively change. It is also important to avoid groupthink and “think-traps” such as tunnel vision, jumping to conclusions, failing to keep perspective and clarity in vision, and playing blame games.

• At the societal level, it is important to focus on diversity, redundancy and inclusiveness to provide a wide range of responses so that failure becomes less likely. Examples of other important factors include having tight feedbacks, innovation, social capital, empowering and enabling communities to make choices and enact them.

• Education can play a very important role in enhancing resilience through creating a learning environment for “learn to learn”, diversity and choice, and inserting VUCA into the educational pathways.