AARON MANIAM

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Aaron Maniam was awarded the Singapore Public Service Commission's Overseas Merit Scholarship in 1998, graduating in 2001 with double First Class Honours in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) from Somerville College, Oxford. He received a Master of Arts degree in International and Development Economics from Yale University (2002), and a Master of Public Policy (with Distinction) from Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government (BSG) in 2014, which he attended on a Lee Kuan Yew Postgraduate Scholarship from the Singapore government. He is currently working on his PhD at the Blavatnik School, which involves a comparative study of the motivations and strategies for digital transformation of a range of governments.

Previously, as Senior Director (Industry) at Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry, Aaron was responsible for coordinating economic policies and regulating the manufacturing, services and tourism sectors, as well overseeing long-term economic transformation. He joined the Singapore government in 2004, serving on the North America Desk of the Foreign Service (2004-2006) and at Singapore's Embassy in Washington DC (2006-2008). He was posted to the Strategic Policy Office (SPO) at the Public Service Division in 2008, where he worked on scenario planning and was appointed the first Head of the Singapore Government's newly-formed Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF) in January 2010. In July 2011, Aaron was appointed Director of the Institute of Policy Development (later renamed the Institute of Public Sector Leadership) at the Civil Service College (CSC), which organizes leadership training programmes for public sector talent (the top 1% of the public sector workforce). In 2012, he started CSC's Applied Simulation Training (CAST) Laboratory, an experiment to apply principles of "serious play" to training public officers to deal with complex environments. He led the development of the College's curriculum on complexity science, and convened the College's multi-sector interest groups on Complexity and Governance.

In June 2012, Aaron was conferred the Singapore Youth Award, the highest national honour for young people who exemplify excellence in their professional lives and community work, by the Prime Minister. He was identified by the World Economic Forum as a Young Global Leader in January 2013. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA).

Between chronos and kairos: Overlapping timeframes in public policy

Analysts often speak of governments' "policy process" in the singular, as if there is a single, pristine version of policymaking against which all others are aberrations or deviations. This talk explores how there are actually many policy processes at work in governments – notable among them operations/implementation, planning and strategy. In each, time is conceptualized and treated differently. In operations and implementation, emphasis is placed on execution, speed and accuracy, so reaction times are often short and compressed. In planning, the priority is optimization among multiple constraints, with concomitant attention to efficient use of resources and cost benefit analyses. Timeframes for decisions and actions can often extend into multiple years. In strategy, timeframes are elongated even further, allowing for open-ended exploration of trends, scenarios and possible futures.

The talk will illustrate each timeframe with policy examples from Singapore. In addition, it explores two further areas. First, how do the three timeframes fit into a broader spectrum of times, including cultural time (in which human values and attitudes shift), biological-ecological time (in which life repeats and replenishes itself), and evolutionary time (wherein the very definition of what constitutes life and living might vary)? I argue that there potentially infinite "times" between the strict sequentiality of Chronos and the timelessness of Kairos, each porous, affecting and affected by others. Second, how malleable and manipulable is time? I suggest that it is possible for policymakers, organisations and nations to manoeuvre across times, infusing strategic thinking into operations and planning; as well as incorporating the detail orientation and ground sensibility of operations and implementation into planning and strategy. There is agency, not just passive reactiveness, in the timeframes. The talk will explore implications for complex systems approaches, especially how to include space not just for interdependence among agents, but also interdependence among timeframes.