

Chapter 10

Community Awareness and Leadership Among Singapore Youths Amidst a COVID–19 Landscape

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how businesses operate, how people work, and the way people socialize and interact. The changes that needed to be made were significant and did not happen easily. However, the COVID-19 pandemic also presented opportunities for creativity to flourish, innovations to happen, and kindness and magnanimity to be extended to one another. In Singapore, an island-nation city-state, significant changes had to be implemented to ring-fence the spread of infections and ensure the local economy and healthcare system could cope with the impact of the pandemic. At the forefront of some of these changes were the youths. Young people with creative ideas, boundless energy, and a strong sense of social cause and fairness led initiatives that had significant and positive impact on those most vulnerable. In this chapter, the backdrop of the evolution of a values-based education system in Singapore and its impact on the younger generation of Singaporeans is discussed followed by examples of youth-led initiatives in Singapore amidst a COVID-19 landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic that began in December 2019 spread quickly and globally throughout the two years 2020 and 2021. Even as the Covid-19 vaccination programs were rolled out in almost every country in those two years, the way that businesses operate, how people work, and how people socialize and interact, have changed significantly. Constant reminders on personal hygiene, frequent cleaning and sanitizing, safe distancing, and management measures, as well as regular self-administered checks and tests, remain the norm. In many societies, community-centric initiatives and programs were launched to help groups, especially vulnerable groups, better cope with these significant changes to our daily lives. In this chapter, we explore some of these community-centric initiatives and programs in Singapore, a small city-state in Southeast Asia, specifically those that were led by the youths or younger Singaporeans who have increasingly demonstrated a strong advocacy for social causes and social justice. This is done by first dissecting values-based education in the Singapore education system, and how that had paved the way for a more extensive and deeper integration of social innovation projects, or initiatives that generate positive social impact, in the education curricula from primary schools through to universities and other institutes of higher learning. The chapter ends with a discussion of how the social impact of such youth-led projects or initiatives can be evaluated for sustained impact and continuity of efforts.

BACKGROUND OF SINGAPORE

Singapore is a relatively small island nation situated in Southeast Asia, just one degree north of the equator, off the southern tip of peninsular Malaysia. Having gained independence in 1965, this young city-state has grown by leaps and bounds, having progressed from an underdeveloped country to a progressive and advanced nation with impressive achievements in education, healthcare, information technology, scientific research and development, and many other areas.

The Singapore education system, which has garnered sufficient interest and scrutiny from academics, practitioners, and policymakers alike the world over, has, to a large extent, a significant part to play in shaping the mindsets and aspirations of youths in Singapore. The integration of values-based elements in the school curricula was instrumental in developing common core values among Singaporeans – that of *respect, responsibility, resilience, integrity, care, and harmony* (or R³ICH, as an acronym) – which form the basis of the framework for 21st century competencies student outcomes that undergird teaching and learning in the Singapore education system. The next section provides a brief overview of the development of a values-based education in the Singapore school curricula.

VALUES-BASED EDUCATION IN SINGAPORE

Not long after Singapore attained independence, the government played an active role in stimulating public discussion on moral and national values that would ensure social cohesion of the new multi-racial and multi-religious city-state. It was alluded that the motive behind this keen interest to articulate and implement a set of shared or common values for the new nation was precipitated by the government's then concern about activities related to the 1970s "hippie" culture of the west (Murray, 1991, p.8). By the early 1980s, a moral education syllabus was introduced for primary and secondary schools, beginning

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