

Sesión 5. El estado del arte en materia de comisiones de futuro parlamentarias en el mundo. Experiencias exitosas.

Presentación 1, Jeanette Kwek. Directora del Centro Para Futuros Estratégicos, Grupo Estrategia, Oficina del primer ministro. Singapur (presentación virtual)

Silvia Hernández: I would like to start with Mrs. Jeanette Kwek, who will explain to us the experience of Singapore. Since she is already connected with this huge difference in time, I will open the space for debate after her intervention. This way we can interact, take advantage of her presence for a few additional minutes and be able to say goodbye to her.

To continue later with the participation of Freya, we have the chance to have her in the room this morning. We will do the same, we will listen to her participation, I will open a space for the interactive debate with her and then we will listen to the experience or the experiences in the videos very widely developed in depth in the cases of Finland. And after that, I will open the interaction, but we will be waiting for people from 8 o'clock.

Silvia Hernández: I am going to take two very quick sentences with which the last journey was closed.

The deputy Andrea Alvarez said that this is an exercise, a space that allows you to share experiences, but above all to learn from those who make us feel. That is coincidentally what we expect to happen with this session this morning. We have the successful cases, I would say, original or initial cases from Singapore and Finland that preceded many of the experiences or good cases for Latin America and the Caribbean. Daniel Zovatto also said that closing the experiences from yesterday, if the region must go or will go to a mechanism via congresses, via parliaments, or on the contrary to something more systemic, integral, of both sides, start from the congress and from the executive.

Is this possible? Is it very ambitious?

Should we start on one of these two paths?

That is a bit what we would like to hear this morning.

Where we will have experiences from the executive, from the congress or from the parliaments.

Also the case of Finland from what we could call a multi-actor or something more systemic than integral.

And how this can be emulated for our region.

And there I am going to take advantage of the experience at the table of the cases of Chile and Uruguay

that they have had, let's say that they have preceded and I am sure they have taken advantage

many of the strengths or opportunities that these experiences have provided to bring them to their cases.

So well, without further ado, I welcome Jeanette Kwek, General Director of the Center for Strategic Futures, Strategy Group of the First Minister's Office,

Jeanette Kwek: Thank you very much.

Silvia Hernández: Welcome. Thank you for your participation this morning here.

It is a pleasure to have you and the floor is yours.

Kwek: Thank you very much. Can you hear me?

Silvia Hernández: Yes.

Yes, very well.

Jeanette Kwek: Excellent. Thank you very much for the invitation.

Good morning to all of you from our last year in Singapore.

And now I am going to try to share my screen. Hopefully it works.

There.

And hopefully you can see now the slides.

Yes, we do.

Thank you.

So I thought today I would just very quickly share why we do foresight in the Singapore government,

what is the impetus and our experience in trying to embed foresight within the Singapore government

and connect it to policy.

And then hopefully we might have some time for discussion at the end.

I realize that we've got a couple of, we also have invited Vince to speak at this session.

And I also want to point out that we have a very different construct in Singapore than we have from the Finland example.

In Singapore, the strategic foresight capability in government is really ability to the executive,

not in parliament, not in the judiciary, but in the executive.

But maybe I'll begin by saying a little bit about why Singapore is quite so concerned about understanding the future of strategic foresight.

Not just because our Prime Minister said it, although he said it very well.

It's really because if you think about Singapore tomorrow, a very open economy, very dependent on the international system,

a very multicultural, multi-religious textured society, very open to influences from beyond our shores,

it really behooves us to pay attention.

We really should pay attention to what is happening, what is changing,

so that we can be prepared either to take advantage of new opportunities or to avoid, or deal with emerging challenges as they struggle and really for them to become problems for us.

And we have realized over time that strategic foresight as a tool helps us to deal with four big challenges that come at us from the future.

The first I'm sure all of you will be very familiar with is this notion that change is accelerating.

We have this sense that more and more things are changing faster and faster.

And the size of the impacts of these changes also seems to be increasing as we progress through the 21st century.

So a tool that helps us get a handle on trying to understand these changes early is very helpful to government.

The second is this notion of a wicked problem, that the challenges and the opportunities that we see emerging are increasingly interdependent.

And we can't separate them out and solve them one by one.

They need little pockets as we used to be able to do because the challenges and opportunities that are coming at us have multiple causes

and the solutions have their own effects on various stakeholders.

And so a more holistic approach and a more holistic understanding of what is happening is required.

The third, again, I think would not be unfamiliar to you, is this notion of shocks and discontinuities.

We are being surprised more frequently today than we have in the past, in part because of accelerating change, in part because of wicked problems.

We must be prepared to constantly be surprised.

And Foresight has been a tool to help us develop some thinking around resilience that helps

us deal with these shocks.

The last is this notion of a hidden future and a powerful past.

We cannot see the future clearly and we have experienced the past.

So we act very much as though the world tomorrow would look very much like the world yesterday,

because that's the world that we're committed with, even though empirical evidence suggests that's not true.

And so we need to have some tools that help us think differently about the future so the past can release its hold on us

and we can adapt and be more resilient to this emerging future.

So how are we going to do?

In Singapore, Foresight has had a very long history, beginning with the implementation of scenario planning in the Ministry of Defence as early as the 1980s.

Singapore only became an independent nation in 1965.

So you'll see that it was very early on in our history that we decided we needed some kind of tool that helped us to do a little bit more of the long-term strategic plan.

And it was so successfully used in the Ministry of Defence that by the mid-1990s, we had decided to make it a whole apartment strategic planning tool

and we had created what we then very imaginatively called the scenario planning office to do what we call the national scenarios.

It is a way for us to take a long view, to consider the trends and challenges that affect and shape Singapore's environment over a 20-year timeframe

and then to have good conversations about what we might want to do in response to those emerging challenges and opportunities.

What we'll see on screen is really a timeline of how that function, the strategic Foresight function, has developed at the centre of government over the last 20 or 30 years.

And it has also been an experiment in how much just to do the work, to understand the future, but to connect that thinking to strategic decision-making and to policy planning.

The most recent evolution of this process has been for the centre to be transferred to what was set up in 2015, the Strategic Group with the Prime Minister's Office.

The Strategy Group, which is my current organisation today, was set up mainly to do two things, a whole of government policy coordination and medium-term strategic planning.

What the centre does in relation to those two things is to provide the longer-term context for us to do our medium-term planning,

but also to provide a reason for us to have strategic conversations about the future, to situate this, to build a common understanding of what that future might look like,

what Singapore's challenges and opportunities in that context might be, and therefore what policy shifts we might want to make in the near term.

So Foresight in this context provides a common lens for all our government agencies to have a common picture of what we think are the challenges and opportunities public policy needs to address,

and then to develop a medium-term policy agenda to address those things.

So how do we do this? At the CSF, we perform three main functions.

The first function is Scout, which is what most people would think of when you say Foresight.

It's the research function, where we work very hard to identify what the emerging trends and challenges might be to inform national policies.

The second function is the Challenge function.

This is where I like to phrase it as we borrow the future as a safe space to talk about the present.

We use the future as a way of challenging our prevailing assumptions,

though the mental models and policy assumptions that we use to make decisions today continue to hold true across a range of possible futures tomorrow.

If they don't hold up well to a range of possible futures, then are there things that we should be changing today to make ourselves more resilient or more adaptable to that range

of futures?

The key idea in the Challenge function is that we don't do strategic foresight to make better decisions about tomorrow tomorrow.

We do it to make better decisions about tomorrow today.

And so we need to ask ourselves what assumptions do we need to change in order to be better prepared for tomorrow?

It's also the way that we build a common picture about the future landscape.

And this is where scenarios have proven to be quite a powerful tool for us.

The fact that we develop scenarios at a whole government level and share them across agencies provides a shared context for us to have conversations and a shared vocabulary for us to talk about the future in a way that makes sense to agencies.

The final function is role as the center of government agency in the Singapore government doing foresight.

The center has a responsibility to build system capability and capacity not only to develop strategic foresight products, but also in how to use the products to in decision making.

We do this in a few ways.

First of all, we teach at the Civil Service College, which is the training institute for the public service.

We run courses for practitioners to help practitioners learn the skills, the tools and frameworks of strategic foresight.

But we also participate in also programs for future public service leaders.

And at these programs, we introduce the notion of strategic foresight to our policy community.

We explain why foresight is significant and important to Singapore as a governance capability.

And then we encourage our future leadership to think about how they can use the insights that emerge from foresight.

A very lonely process.

Teams are often small, and they're often the only teams in government that have a longer term progressive.

Given that, we try and build up a community of practitioners across the public service.

We convene ourselves a few times a year to share notes on what we're working on and also to encourage one another in how we might carry the work of foresight through to decision.

Ultimately, the goal of the strategic foresight ecosystem is to reduce the frequency and amplitude of shocks that the government has to endure.

We're very clear-eyed about the fact that we're not going to be able to reduce the number of shocks to zero.

But we can try our best to prepare the system to better ride out the shocks that we have to face.

And we do this in two ways.

First, by doing what my senior advisor likes to call hunting black swans.

When swans are involved, surprising, game-changing, no-mobility events.

By being very curious about the world that we operate in and trying to reduce the unknown unknowns that we are not familiar with.

The other is tailing black elephants, where the black elephant is a cross between the elephant in the room, the issue that nobody wants to talk about, and a black swan.

The idea being that if we can get the system to talk about the issues that we know might one day soon present us with challenges or opportunities,

we can get them to talk about it early, perhaps through the lens of the future.

Then we will be more prepared for these challenges and opportunities when they eventually emerge.

That's my last slide. I will stop there.

I'm happy to take comments and questions if there are any at this point.

Thank you once again for this opportunity.

## Comments and questions regarding Kwek's presentation.

Silvia Hernández: Thank you. Thank you for this powerful presentation and sharing your ideas.

I'm going to open up the space for questions.

It seems to me that Jeanette has presented in a very brief way elements that have to do with an experience from the beginning,

where many times the immediacy and the need to address problems in the short term, and the need to have an understanding of the situation.

That's why the exercise of foresight, from the dynamics of the executive, is a tool that we are going to explore this morning for the first time in the dialogue.

And the second element, very valuable, sustained by the presence of you as parliamentarians,

has to do with that sustainability in time, in actions.

How a process, like the one presented today, contributes a lot to that exercise of sustainability of these actions and tools in time.

So, well, you have the floor, the executive secretary, in the first instance.

Jose Manuel Salazar: I understand the work that you do, I understand Singapore being Singapore,

that you do this and have been doing it very effectively for many years.

I have two questions, if I may correct.

One is, how do you choose the topics on which you do scenario planning?

There are so many issues.

I tell you what I hear, for instance, for Latin America, we have this list of 10, or you can make any number of these topics.

One thing that you would do for the different areas of policy, like health, education, productive development, this and that,

I mean, this is really a question.

How do you choose the topic, how broad and narrow, to do the scenario planning and the horizon scanning that we talked about?

And my second question is, do you apply this, or rather, I'm sure you apply this, but how do you apply this to the analysis of the world conditions, the world economy and geopolitics?

Do you do scenario planning, horizon scanning for geopolitics?

Thank you.

Silvia Hernandez: Excellent.

Daniel, please go ahead.

Let's take a group of questions.

Daniel Zovatto: Thank you so much.

Great presentation.

I have two questions.

Number one is, why Singapore decided to locate the foresight office only in the executive branch instead of having also another one in the parliament?

What were the reasons behind that?

Because here in Latin America is the other way around.

The commission and the future committees are located in the Congress and not necessarily in the executive branch.

Has this any relation because of the political regime?

Because we are a presidential system, you are a more parliamentary one, so that's number one.

Number two, in terms of the methodology, I think that is very important.

We don't use to talk about black elephants.

We use to talk about grey rhinos, the difference between black swans and rhinos using elephants.

But they are completely different because with the black swans, it is very difficult to predict when that is going to happen.

On the grey rhinos or black elephants, for me those are the most important ones because you already know that.

The problem is that you neglect how dangerous they are until they almost kill you.

So, which is the methodology behind that?

Thank you so much.

Silvia Hernández: Excellent questions.

Yes, Jeanette, please go ahead.

Jeanette Kwek: They are really excellent questions, which is great because I love difficult questions.

I'll take them in order.

How do we choose topics? (Answers of Jeanette Kwek to Salazar's questions)

It's very much a science, more like an art.

The fact that we are situated in the strategy group today has helped us a lot with deciding what our research agenda should be.

Because the team now has a much better situational awareness of what the policy community is already working on, is already aware of, and doesn't really need more impetus from the centre to do.

And so we typically choose to focus on issued areas where we think the system is not paying enough attention.

Either because they are emergent, so they are so new that there is no policy owner for any of these issues yet.

Or very frequently, they fall at the intersection of issues where two different types of trends or two different types of opportunities for challenges might coincide.

And again, there is often unclear how to proceed, partly because perhaps the policy owner is not here, or perhaps because the path forward is unclear.

And that's where then the centre assesses our input might be most valued by the system.

It does relate to what kinds of issues that we choose to pay attention to.

We do, at the centre of government, where the centre sits, pay attention to issues that affect all of Singapore's policy points.

So it includes issues that are social in Asia, geopolitical in Asia, economic in Asia, for example.

Because all of these things do affect Singapore's ability to make policies, or affect the amount of policy space that we have to operate in.

So we do work by our scenarios. When we do our national scenarios, for example, we cast the net very wide.

And the trends that we consider do range from the geopolitical forces, what does the international system look like, what might the international economy look like in 20 years, all the way to the rather micro forces that affect how your daily life can be.

And we try and stitch all of that together through our scenarios into a coherent picture for our policy community to pay attention to.

Jeannet Kwek's answers to Zovatto's questions: As to the question of why we've chosen to situate foresight in the public service, not just the executive, but within the public service, rather than in the Parliament legislature.

I think part of it is an accident of history. Where the function began was really because there were individuals at the time who were interested in foresight and interested in the value that foresight could bring to government and governance.

And they were the ones who pushed for the establishing of scenario planning and then eventually scenario planning in the public service division.

So that is probably the reason why we began in the public service.

But also the model of working in Singapore, the public service works very closely with our political leaders.

And therefore, I think we don't just serve the public service, but also the executive government at the day.

I guess we just never got the need to embed this elsewhere in government, in part because the centre and the public service and the foresight ecosystem within the public service do see it as our responsibility to Singapore and Singaporeans, not just to the government. I don't know if that helps clarify the question, but that's been my experience with why we've been situated the way we are.

The last question about black swans versus grey rhinos or black elephants is a perpetual challenge for the centre.

They are quite different animals, as you rightly pointed out. Black swans, by definition, cannot be spotted in advance.

You can only see a black swan after the crisis has happened.

But it is the reason that we do horizon scanning and the reason that we look for emerging signals of change is to try and catch as many of these black swans as early as possible. But at the same time, you're right in that it is important to get the system to talk about the known unknowns, the issues that we already know are going to be challenges or opportunities to try and get some early momentum before they become a problem or before we miss the chance to take advantage of the emerging opportunity.

A tool that we have found quite useful for that has actually been scenario planning.

If you're familiar with scenario planning, I would argue that it's not very good at spotting this continuous change, which is what a black swan typically is.

It's a surprise. It's unanticipated.

But it is quite good at getting the system, getting your stakeholders, your audience to understand emerging black elephants, emerging issues that might be significant challenges or opportunities and provides a safe space for us to talk in hypotheticals about how these issues might be dealt with before they become reality.

And that's how the center has been encouraging addressing of your way of looking at black elephants.

I hope that answers the questions. Happy to take them.

Silvia Hernández: Thank you very much.

Thank you very much.

I think it was a very excellent presentation.

We have also the slides that you use that we will share with all the participants.

And I think there was a very important point that you mentioned about champions, individuals that were interested in these processes.

And I think this is what we are developing right now with this network of champions thinking these issues.

Thank you very much for your participation.