Training and Development for Public Sector leaders: How the National Leadership Academy contributes to leadership excellence and good governance

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Introduction

In just a few decades, Singapore has transformed a struggling economy with limited natural resources to one of the richest nations in the world. The recent prosperity index report by HelloSafe ranked Singapore the richest country in Asia and the 6th globally [1]. Moreover, Singapore is the leading country in Human Capital Index (HCI). HCI measures how effectively economic success is translated into human capital development indicators such as education, healthcare, and productivity potential [2].

Multiple factors contribute to Singapore's success. Among this are good governance and exceptional leadership inspired by its founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, a highly competent and visionary leader, as well as sustainable investment in human capital.

This article does not seek to compare Somalia and Singapore. The two countries differ significantly in terms of Gross Domestic Production (GDP) per capita, digital literacy rates, unemployment level, and human capital index scores. Instead, the article discusses two key reflections from the National Leadership Academy (NLA) Executive Leadership Study Tour to the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

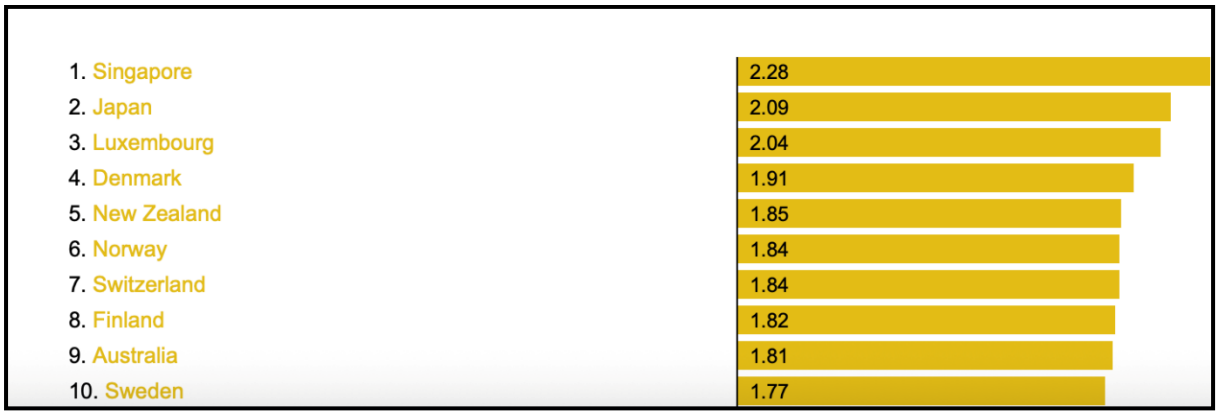
Firstly, a special training session titled "Training and Development in Singapore Public Service" provided a solid understanding of how Singapore's public service operates, including the ways in which training and development are designed for public service. This was an eye-opening experience for me, and likely for the other members of the NLA delegation. It offered practical insights into how competency-based training approaches can be structured to improve the quality of the public service and provide clear accountability on investment in trainings.

Secondly, the article examines how Somalia, where 70% of its population is young, can draw lessons from Singapore's Skills Future initiative to upskill and reskill its citizens in their careers. Cultivating a lifelong learning culture would help Somalia to equip its youth with in-demand skills, strategically positioning them as critical assets to drive national development and state-building agendas forward.

Since NLA has officially signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoA) with the National Civil Service Commission to improve leadership and training programs for all civil service levels, the insights gained from the Executive Leadership Study Tour provides important takeaways that reflect global best practices. These lessons can help Somalia to lay the foundation for a competent public sector workforce where meritocracy, impartiality and integrity serve as core guiding principles for recruitment, promotion, and accountability, instead of the adopted Four Point Five (4.5) clan-based political power sharing formula into the civil service.

Government effectiveness

According to the World Bank Group, government effectiveness is measured by "*the quality of public services, the quality and degree of independence from political pressures of the civil service, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies*" [3]. As shown in the image below, Singapore ranks 1st in for government effectiveness scores among 193 countries [4].



from its formative years, Singapore recognised that developing highly competent civil service was critical for national development. To safeguard meritocracy, integrity and impartiality in the public sector, Singapore established an independent Public Service Commission (PSC), an independent agency, to ensure that recruitment and promotion are merit based.

To attract competent talent to the public sector, the government awards competitive salaries and benefits that match the private sector. Additionally, a wide range of scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate studies are offered by the Public Service Commission to prepare civil servants to continue shaping Singapore's future [5].

Singapore has also gained a reputation for running a government free from corruption. The Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy [6] listed six key principles of good governance in Singapore which include:

- *Meritocracy* where individuals are judged by their capabilities not their background, race or religion
- Racial and religious harmony where diverse religion practices peacefully coexist
- *A clean government* where zero-tolerance policy to corruption is adopted within public and private sectors.
- *Rule of Law* where everybody is treated equal and fair before the law.
- *Inclusiveness* where social equity is regarded crucial in Singapore's development and growth strategy.

- *Care for environment* as the founding father Singapore Lee Kuan Yew believed that clean environment is crucial for the national development.

Human Capital Development

The concept of human capital development has been a subject of debate among economists since in the 1950s. In Goode's study [8] human capital is defined as "knowledge, skills, attitudes, aptitudes, and other acquired traits contributing to production". Becker [9] developed human capital theory model, defining human capital as "activities that influence future monetary and psychic income by increasing resources in people". In the early theories of economic studies, physical capital, labour, and technology advancement were assumed to be the main drivers of economic growth. However, studies conducted by Lucas and Romer [10, 11] claim that human capital has a significant influence on the economic growth. Similarly, Barro and Lee [12] argue that there is a strong correlation between investment in human capital in the form education and economic development.

Since its independence in 1965, Singapore has understood that its people are the greatest resource for national development. Thus, investing in human capital has been an integral part for the national strategic plans to achieve sustainable economic growth. For example, the Ministry of Manpower developed a Manpower blueprint [13] which envisioned Singapore a talent capital for knowledge-based economy.

Shared responsibility model for human capital development

Apart from the Ministry of Manpower, there are other institutions that have been setup to contribute to human capital investment implementations. In the following sections, we briefly discuss the role of some institutions in relation human capital development.

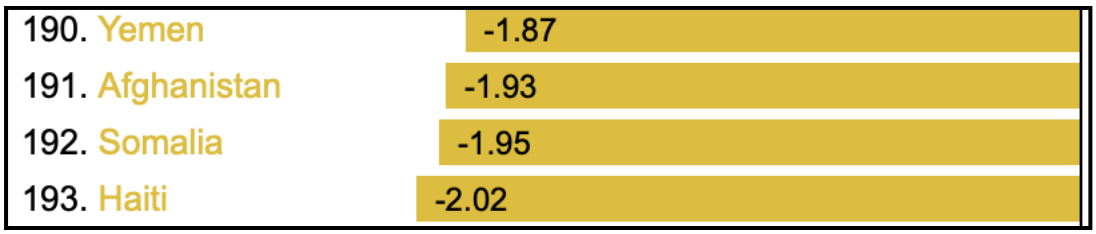
1. **Civil Service College:** The Civil Service College (CSC) was established with the vision to be the centre of learning excellence and development for the Singapore Public Service [14]. To achieve this vision, the CSC focuses on enhancing civil servant knowledge and capabilities to raise the competence of the public service. The core philosophy of the CSC in learning and capacity development is to ensure that the skills and knowledge gained through training programs are effectively applied in the workplace. Therefore, CSC is committed to supporting agencies designed to a learning that connects training programs, workplace application and outcomes.
2. **Skills and Workforce Development Agency (SWDA):** it is another important agency that is dedicated to human capital development in Singapore. In partnership with other government institutions and economic agencies, SWDA enables Singaporeans to take responsibility for their career development through lifelong learning opportunities. Also, the SWDA leads the skillsfuture initiative that was developed in 2015 to enable Singaporeans to learn new skills to enhance their career growth and support national economic priorities.

3. **Lifelong Learning Institute (LLI):** it is another key institute which participates in the implementation of Skills Future in partnership with higher education institutions, training providers, government agencies to empower Singaporeans explore opportunities for carer growth and development.
4. **Lew Kuan Yew, Public Policy (LKYPP) School:** The LKYPP is ranked 1st in Asia, and 8th globally [15]. While all the programs that are offered in the school contribute to the vision of transforming the world through good governance and leadership excellence, in this section we will present two key programs that are relevant to NLA's leadership training pathways.
    a. **Youth programs:** The LKYPP school substantially invests in youth engagement before they embark on career in the public or private sectors. Target audience for the youth programme include high school students, college and university students, and young working professionals up to 35 years. To successfully execute youth programs, LKYPP works in partnership with government agencies, high schools, donors, and education consultants or agents. For example, the Young Leaders and Changemakers Summer Camp are designed to enable youth to get a grasp of how policies are made, evaluated, and implemented. Additionally, the programme provides students opportunities to develop their critical thinking as they involve themselves in teams to solve complex policy issues. ***From curriculum development perspective***, the youth program curriculum is designed using a youth-centric approach, where students are the centre of learning. The learning outcomes are clearly aligned with students' needs, their motivation and aspiration. In the student centric curriculum design, the role of the instructor is limited to being facilitator, coach, and learning designer. Moreover, the assessment method of student's learning outcome goes beyond traditional exam methods. Students are assessed through project based learning and practical learning activities in a collaborative learning environment.
    b. **Senior Management Programme:** Senior managers are facing an increasingly complex world characterised by economic uncertainty, as well as social and institutional changes. The LKYPP school launched the Senior Management Programme (SMP) to equip directors, deputy directors in both public and private sectors with practical leadership skills to develop sustainable and adaptable policies in mid of uncertainties. The programme includes an overseas component to enable participants learn global best practices from policymakers and industry leaders. When senior management understand well how to formulate policies and strategies effectively, they can be in a better position to drive implementation in their respective institutions.

Ethical Public Sector Leadership for good governance

Although Somalia gained its independency before Singapore, the success story that Singapore has achieved in last five decades have become an excellent model to follow for good governance and human capital development initiatives. On other hand, Somalia is slowly recovering from decades-long civil war, terrorism, maritime insecurity, and challenges associated with clan-based federal state building model. In the following sections, we will highlight some valuable lessons that Somalia can learn from Singapore, and how the NLA can participates in nation building by cultivating principled leaders across public and private sectors.

Good Governance: As shown in the image below, Somalia ranks 192nd in government effectiveness scores among 193 countries [4].



Some may question how a country almost the bottom of the human capital index can learn government effectiveness from a country that is ranked 1st? However, we believe Somalia can learn government effectiveness from Singapore if the followings are achieved:

- Somalia must realize that good governance is only possible when there is zero tolerance on corruption in public and private institutions. For example, the success of Singapore to become a business hub is due to its anti-corruption principles that is free from bureaucracy and bribes practices. Similarly, Somalia can create an inclusive and attractive business environment by improving its governance structures and systems while enforcing zero tolerance for corruption in public and private sectors. Although Somalia has the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2026-2030), there is an urgent need to develop an independent anti-corruption agency tasked with investigating and prosecuting corruption-related activities in all sectors.

NLA can help Somalia achieve its anti-corruption goals by training clean and honest government officials who will promote transparency and accountability inside government agencies and the private sector. For example, NLA is committed to include key modules on anti-corruption, ethical leadership, integrity and good governance into its curricular to develop Somalia's new generation of honest and clean leaders.

- Human Capital Development: Unlike Singapore, Somalia possesses largely unexploited natural resources. However, from the outset Singapore recognised that its people are the greatest resource for national development as discussed in the previous

sections. Investment in education, skills development initiatives, and public sector capacity enhancement are the primary forces of Singapore's economic success.

Somalia can learn a valuable lesson from Singapore's development experience - that a country can achieve sustainable growth with limited natural resources, when it invests effectively in its human capital. In contrast, a nation can remain poor and underdeveloped despite possessing vast natural resources if it fails to invest in the education, skills development, and enhancing capabilities of its people.

While Singapore is struggling with its aging population, Somalia has one of the youngest populations in the world, where approximately 75% of its people are under 35. This demographic advantage presents both significant opportunities and challenges for national development. Therefore, transforming Somalia's human capital into a strategic asset should be a top priority for the national development. This requires substantial investment in education and skills development.

The NLA can play a pivotal role by equipping upskilling current and future decision makers with excellent leadership and good governance skills needed to address complex challenges that Somalia faces.

- Meritocracy is one key principle that significantly contributes to Singapore's development and good governance. Singapore provides equal opportunities for its citizens as individuals are judged by their education and capabilities, regardless of race, gender, disability, and ethical background. Somalia can learn from Singapore's experience by moving beyond the current practice of 4.5 systems for the selection and promotions of individuals. It should adopt merit-based system which gives individuals opportunities based on their qualifications, skills, and competencies. Meritocratic principle can lead administrative efficiency, social cohesion, economic growth and development, and good governance. The NLA can significantly contribute to promote meritocracy through training visionary ethical leaders who see Somalia beyond clan-based lenses. To implement meritocracy in the public sector, the NLA should collaborate with National Civil Service to improve governance efficiency, accountability, and service delivery in the public sector.

Conclusion

The miracle transformation of Singapore from poverty-ridden nation to one of the most successful economies in the world is an extraordinary example that good governance through Meritocracy, racial and religious harmony, zero-tolerance policy, rule of Law, Inclusiveness, care for environment, and investment in human capital are key pillars to for a nation's development and growth.

The human capital index gap between Singapore and Somalia is huge, however, the experience of Singapore from its formative years and present practices can be used as an example to lay the foundation for a sustainable in Somalia.

The National Leadership Academy should play a significant role in addressing Somalia's leadership gap by equipping current and emerging leaders in both the public and private sectors with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to drive national transformation. The Academy is committed to investing in human capital development through the delivery of specialized leadership and professional development programs that prepare leaders to effectively address the complex governance, economic, and social challenges facing the country.

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