



Panelists at the ST Education Forum 2017 were (from left) ST senior education correspondent Sandra Davie, SMU president Arnoud De Meyer, SMU's board of trustees chairman Ho Kwon Ping, Ms Nandini Jayaram, the South-east Asia human resource lead for Google Asia-Pacific, and the moderator, ST managing editor Fiona Chan. About 500 people attended the forum, which focused on the future of work, universities and the economy. ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

Call for more course flexibility at varsity level

Singapore Management University board of trustees' chairman Ho Kwon Ping said Singapore's higher education system, which largely follows a "relatively antiquated" British system of requiring students to decide on a major when they apply to university, contradicts its own philosophy of getting Singaporeans to see education as a lifelong exercise. "We talk a lot, even at undergraduate level, about how we shouldn't pigeonhole students when they are so young," said Mr Ho. But Singapore is not really "walking the talk about flexibility and lifelong learning" if it does not address

this issue of forcing students to decide at too young an age, he said. "We're forcing our youngsters to decide at an age when they are not ready to be an accountant, (for example). Now, at most, we're going to make you the most flexible, creative accountant in the world. "But what if... (after) one year of accountancy, you actually want to do computer engineering? Or you want to go to business? We do not allow you to do so." He was responding to a question from ST managing editor Fiona Chan on how universities should be structured to support lifelong learn-

ing. Mr Ho acknowledged that addressing the "more fundamental problem" would introduce "disruptive change" in the system. "But unless we go that way, I don't think we're going to really grapple with this problem, because we still have inbuilt inflexibility." Forum panelists were also asked by Ms Chan about traits they would look out for if they were hiring someone to take over their own job. Ms Nandini Jayaram, Google Asia-Pacific's human resource lead for South-east Asia, spoke about "Googliness", alongside other traits like leadership and problem-solving skills. "Do you challenge the status quo? Are you willing to ask the hard questions, call out the elephant in the room?" "It is easy to do the right thing when all conditions are ideal, but how do you make trade-offs? How do you optimise? And how do you navigate the grey zone... If things

ST Education Forum
 More stories at straitstimes.com

Video:
 Panelists give advice on how to stay relevant in the age of disruption
<http://str.sg/47t3>

go wrong, how do you take ownership or accountability?" Meanwhile, SMU president Arnoud De Meyer said having international experience can help one acquire characteristics that "you don't learn by writing an algorithm". "For the young people in this

room, don't think about a fixed path. Go overseas, get yourself into difficult situations, get out of this wonderful infrastructure... go to places where services don't work very well."
Yuen Sin

Future *Impact*

The Future is

HERE

NOW

The future of work is imperilled. Robots will take over our jobs. Man loses, machines win. Need it be so?

Not if we continue to deepen skills that will have machines working with and for us. Skills in critical thinking and problem-solving from multi-disciplinary perspectives, sound decision-making through the benefit of lifelong learning, and effective execution from an empathetic heart and with a human touch.

Engaging communications, adaptability, flexibility, self-direction, leadership and team-building as well as intellectual curiosity to learn and re-learn are enduring lifelong skills we develop in our graduates so that they are future-ready. The experiential SMU-X courses, the interdisciplinary Politics, Law and Economics major, the innovative Smart City Management & Technology major and Data Analytics courses are just a few of the many initiatives at SMU poised to transform the future of higher education for meaningful impact.

In a disruptive world, make a prescient choice to study at a university that embraces the future with ideas, confidence and courage.

SMU
 SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY
 A Different U

UNDERGRADUATE APPLICATIONS CLOSE TODAY, 26 MARCH 2017. Apply now at smu.sg/apply-v