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Interview with Arnoud De Meyer: Creating a new management university

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Interviewee:	Arnoud De Meyer (ADM)
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TSS: Okay. Can we start? Today, 9th of April. I have with me in the studio, Professor Arnoud De Mayer, president of SMU. We are here for Howard Thomas' book on strategic decisions in business schools looking at SMU from 2000 to 2018. Good morning professor Arnoud. You had described yourself as a doubter about which direction SMU would take and that was in 1998-1999. Ten years later, you accepted the position to be the fourth president of SMU. What about SMU then attracted you?

ADM: It is true that when SMU was created, that I had some doubts about creating a totally new university in the undergraduate space. Ten years later, as you said I was approached by Ho Kwon Ping, our Chairman, with a question of whether I wanted to become president of this university and I, in the end, accepted that offer, or that yes I was positive about the idea for two reasons. First of all, in the ten years of its existence, nine to ten years of its existence SMU had actually delivered on its promises, in terms of undergraduate education. It had built up a good reputation in the academic circles worldwide. It had a good graduate employment survey results, the students were appreciated by the market, or the graduates were appreciated by the market and there was a good faculty team, young, but dynamic, creative and full of great ideas. So that was the first part, they had delivered on their original promises. The second part, why I was attracted was that, Kwon Ping wanted to make this a complete university. These are not his words but he wanted to compliment the undergraduate program with much more postgraduate programs, with executive education, with continuing education in general, and with many more research contracts. So he wanted from what was a sort of fairly focused undergraduate university, make this, in my words, "a complete university". And I thought that, thought that was an interesting challenge and I was then convinced ten years later after my first hesitations, that it could be done, because the team had proved that it could develop an

undergraduate university. And since I arrived here in 2010, September 2010, I haven't had one single moment that I regretted my decision.

TSS: Thank you. I'm sure you also must have felt that you could really make a difference from your experience you could bring something to this young university. What would that be?

ADM: I remembered that in the discussions that Ho Kwon Ping and myself had, and a few other people here at university, that I often asked the question; but what can I bring? Because I have had at that moment like thirty years of experience in graduate business schools, my original employer INSEAD is a graduate Business School, very focused on one program plus executive education and even the Business School in Cambridge, though Cambridge is an undergraduate university. The business school didn't really have undergraduates. It was also a graduate business school. So I remember that I said to Kwon Ping, hey what I know is about graduate business school and SMU is an undergraduate university. I really don't know anything about how to run undergraduate programs and he said and I paraphrase him of course I don't know what literally anymore what he said. But I remember that he mentioned, yeah that's precisely why we interested in you, because we know how to run an undergraduate university but what we want to have is a very strong development of the postgraduate programs, support for those faculty members who want to go for large-scale research projects, and we want to develop executive education much more than what we did at that moment, and we want also to internationalize the university and that's what you, i.e. "me" actually can bring to this university. So I thought it was a good compliment between the ambitions of our Chairman and what I could deliver.

TSS: And you had the opportunities to do all that?

ADM: I had the opportunity to do all of that, because when we look eight years later after the moment that I arrived, we do have about 2,000 students in our graduate programs, while we had around 300 when I arrived, and we do close to 30 million of research contracts per year compared to less than 10 million when I arrived, and we do around 20 million, Singapore dollars always, of continuing and executive development programs compared to the 4 million that we did when I arrived. So the development has actually succeeded.

TSS: If I could take you to the present 2018 compared with 2010, when you arrived, have you noticed shifting expectations on the part of various entities, including Ministry of Education, including parents, students, faculty and staff? I mean it's eight years. I mean were there trends already developing?

ADM: I…

TSS: Could we take MOE first?

ADM: If I look at MOE, there is no hesitation in their support for institutions of higher learning in general, and I use that word because it encompasses universities as well as the polys, the polytechnics. There's no hesitation in their support, as I said. But there is a reality of budgets when you look at what's happening in Singapore. While the budgets are still fairly good for education, there is a shift in priorities in the country and thus we see that, while in the 2000s education was clearly a priority, and it's still is, we should say. But the priority, the issues around ageing, healthcare have become much more important today within the priorities of the of Singapore government. That translates of course in the amounts that are spent on education. I repeat, I don't think this really a reduction in the support for higher education but in practice and the budgets, we see that there is a stability and not a growth anymore in the budgets that are available, at least for education. We also see a trend from MOE that they really focus on undergraduate education and continuing education, I mean, mid-career skills future type of programs, I mean by that, there is a reduction of support for postgraduate programs and that is

translated in two ways. That is a limitation on the number of PhD students. We cannot have more than hundred and seventy-five PhD students on campus financed by government money and secondly there is no interest in supporting postgraduate programs, master's programs. So you see slight shifts in what the government wants to do. On the other hand, there is an enormous support for a mid-career skills development and that's the reason why we have been able to build up the SMU Academy so rapidly. So that I see from the Ministry of Education.

From the students, now let me first turn to the issues that universities have worldwide. I think that when you read about universities worldwide, we, everywhere, grappling with two issues that is mid-career skills development or mid-career development. It's not only skills, it can also be competencies, capabilities and whatever. But I think all over the world, we are grappling with this issue of how can universities that originally were really focused on the 18 to 28 year old person, how can we actually get much more effective in adult learning for the 45 or even older person. Of course, business schools had an experience with executive development and we knew or we know how to do mid-career education and development. But that of course was always a very elitist type of approach. You had to have a lot of money to go to these programs or business schools or you had to be sponsored by companies. What we see is that we had, all over the world, this is nothing specific to Singapore, are grappling with how do we reach out to the broader masses, basically they don't have necessarily the financial means to pay for very expensive executive development programs. But it's not only an issue of how do we broaden it and how do we make it more accessible. But of course we also know that adult learning is very different from learning of a 20 year old, the type of memory we have is a very different one and the way we learn things is probably very different if you are 45, 50, 55 years old and universities have to adjust to that. I think that is one big challenge that we have. The second big challenge that we have as universities worldwide is, how do you develop, how do you create a learning environment, how do you develop people, in a world where information has become so easily accessible. Today, we all know that getting access to databases, to information is virtually free for students, not for the universities, but for the students. And they basically have access to the best data. There are no organizational boundaries, there are no geographical boundaries. They can sit anywhere in the world and still have access to data. How do you create a learning environment, when the student actually has access to more data than the faculty sometimes has? Why do I say that, because we all sort of know the joke that when you're in class as a faculty member, you don't have access to databases because you're teaching, while the 30 or 40, 50 students sitting there, they're all on that computer and they all have, while you're talking, they have access to databases though so they can correct you almost immediately when you would cite a wrong statistic or whatever. How do you create a learning environment in a world with abundance, if not overload of information? I think that's a second major challenge worldwide for universities. Why do I mention it because your question was more about stakeholders, because our students have different expectations. It is clearly between 2010 and now, I clearly see a change in the way students relate to information. We shouldn't forget that 2010 was still a time where smartphones were still a luxury for many people. Today, everybody has one, right, everybody has access at any moment in time to any type of database. The expectations of the incoming students have changed, and I'm not sure we always have the right answer. Parents over the years, I have seen a more growing group of adamant parents who want to be involved in the education of their, actually 21, 22, 23 year old son or daughter. I think there is a more… Parents are more preoccupied with what's going on at university. I get more emails, more letters from parents these days than I got in the first year or than I've ever got before. It strikes me that parents show up for these discovery days, that more parents want to come to the parent evenings, so there seems to be in a higher interest, I guess the "Tiger mothers" or whatever they were called, have now struck Singapore too.

TSS: Do you see that is as positive?

ADM: It's an interesting question. In one way it's positive that parents stay involved with their 21, 22 year-old son or daughter. On the other hand, at some moment of time you have to let go. You have to, I mean they are adults, right, and they should take charge of their own life. So it's a fine line to walk in between being interested and being a good partner for your son or daughter and having an overbearing control over what they're trying to do.

TSS: What about faculty? We have a younger faculty.

ADM: No, I would say that the difference is today that when I came here, more than 50% of our faculty were assistant professors. So we're very young and inexperienced. Today, we have a lot of, a much more balanced portfolio of young assistant professors, associate professors and full professors. We actually also have grown our own associate and full professors, people who started here as an assistant professor and have actually been able to develop their career. So I would say today, we have a much more balanced group of faculty members, which opens up opportunities for the university, in the sense that when you have, when you are an assistant professor, you basically do your disciplinary research, you want to get your papers out, you want to build up your reputation in the international academic environment by writing as many good A-level papers, or A-publication papers as possible. But very often, the research you do is very narrow, very focused and very disciplined-based. It's only when you sort of have the confidence that you can make it, that you have built up your reputation. When you got your tenure, you're sort of a mid-career associate or full professor, then you actually can start thinking about research projects that are interdisciplinary and that are looking at problems relevant to Singapore and where the preoccupation about, how much can I publish with it is perhaps less important, and where the impact that you have on society it becomes a more important criteria. So, I think that's a healthy evolution for the university. Have faculty changed? They all have become a lot more technology savvy but that's the whole society I guess that is happening. I still see the same commitment to making a difference, teaching well, taking care of students. There I don't see too much difference, I would say.

TSS: And adjusting the pedagogy to you know easy access …

ADM: Yes, you know, I should mention that over the years, one of the contributions I've tried to make to SMU is to shift to more experiential learning under the title "SMU-X". Why did I do this or why am I so committed to it? For the very simple reason that in a world where everybody has access to databases, where there is an overload of information, we as faculty are not anymore the source of knowledge. Knowledge comes from elsewhere. What we have to do as faculty is be more of a mentor, in helping the student to make the difference between the good, the bad and the ugly, but what is the right and useful information, what is fake information or useless information and how you use that information to solve problems. And so I felt that we needed to shift as university not away from the traditional inter-class interaction that we have here, but we needed to add and complemented it, and shift towards more project-based learning. I call it experiential learning because you experience, you build up experience through a project, but it's really what else, what is called elsewhere project-based learning. Project-based learning at the level of the graduate schools is quite well-known concept, is not that much, we have done it elsewhere. We know how to manage it in small groups, etc. The big challenge for SMU is that, I wanted to do this at the level of undergraduate programs. In other words, which students who have no experience, in contrast to an MBA program, where the graduate students would have some experience and know how to operate in a work environment and in an organization. So you work with undergraduates who have no experience. You want to ensure that it is a learning experience for them. In other words, that there is no expectation at the company or at the partners level, that there will be a solution. The learning is most important. Thirdly, we need to do it at a big scale. It's not like let's do five projects, but as you know, we now have 35

courses in under SMU-X, with each time perhaps 10-15 projects, which is 350-400, we probably pushing very soon to 500 projects a year, 250 partners. The scale of it is very different from what one would see in a graduate program or in a MBA program. But I strongly believe that in this new environment, students need to have the opportunity to learn through solving problems, tackling new problems that have never been solved before, as opposed to a case study which is really tackling a problem for which the faculty has the solution in their drawer, through the teaching note. That type of education requires a lot more effort from the faculty, to come back to your question. And so, faculty find it exciting but also very taxing. It requires more work. The other problem is that in the old days and still today, if you teach a course once you've done your preparation, you can use it several times. If you do project-based learning, the projects are each time different. So, there is always a lot more preparation time involved in SMU-X, in experiential learning. We will need to find a solution for that. We will need to find better systems to support the faculty in handling these projects. But I do see quite a lot of excitement for this type of education, and this type of pedagogy.

TSS: So from the students' point of view, they are accepting of this?

ADM: Oh, they're very enthusiastic about it. In the beginning, they didn't really know what it was all about and you had a few, like always, a few trendsetters and a few who said: "Oh, let me try this out. You never know what maybe I'll learn something new". Now, I hear that students like very much, the whole approach and start seeing this as part of the portfolio of what SMU offers them through our holistic education.

TSS: Can I now move on to our board of trustees? There's always a rather stable core. There's a lot of stability, I noticed through the years and this is an unusual board. Outsiders have commented that it's not made up of the usual suspects of accountants, lawyers, doctors and officials. Would you like to comment how a new members brought in? How does support of Trustees renew itself? What is the criteria in selecting members and the process? How do they how did they get appointed to committees and have ownerships of certain areas?

ADM: Well, you should ask that question to our Chairman because it's ultimately his responsibility.

TSS: Really, we did…

TSS: From my perspective, I should start by saying that I like the idea of stability in the boards. On the other hand, we also put in place a rule that, after 12 years, people have to step down. In other words, for good governance, you want to have some renewal. But as you know, our board consists of 16 business people, two members of the government and two, traditionally, two more academically-oriented people. For the 16 business persons and I would even say for the representatives of the government, probably a university is a very strange organization. I would say it's strange, for three, strange is perhaps the wrong word but different type of organization. Why? I would say to simplify for three reasons. First of all, it's one of the few organizations where a number of employees, who are paid by the organization, do not think they owe a lot to the organization, that's the faculty. They think more about their own career, their own contributions, their own impact and they see the university rather as a conduit or as a nice organization that helps them in achieving those goals. But they not necessarily think they owe something to the organization. The chairman has expressed that a few times by saying that he, this is the only organization that he knows where when you pay somebody, they don't care about what you ask them to do. It's a bit black and white. But there is this independent group of employees, where you look for goal congruency between the organization and their individual interest. And if you can achieve that, you have a great university. The second big difference of a university but in other organization is that we actually are a fairly slow-moving organization, because we still have like an almost agricultural cycle of one year. There are lots

of things we only do once a year. In other words, if you want to launch a new product, a new postgraduate program, you're not going to do that throughout the year. Actually we did do that a little bit at SMU, but now we've learned that you either do that in January or in August. So you only have two windows of opportunity to launch a new product and many things you only do once a year, which makes it, for somebody like me, who's leading this in organization when you try out something and you want to adjust it or tweak, you learn from it the next time, you can do it is in a year from now. Which makes it, as I said for many business people, a rather slow moving organization. The third big difference is that we have students, and students are neither employees nor customers. They're sort of somewhere in between. I mean students do shape the organization. They are partners in building up this university. They're not consumers, they're not customers, yet you provide the service to them. So it's a very strange group of people. Let me say that, in between somewhere a customer and an employee. By the way, they're here for a long time. It's not that they just come into your organization and after a few days leave. It's not like a hotel where you take a room and it's three nights and you move on, you maybe repeat buy there. But in our case, the undergraduate students are with us for four years. They sometimes know the place better than its management. So, I could go on there are other differences but I think those are the three major differences. So, I like stability in our board because there is actually quite a long learning cycle, to learn how this university operates, or universities in general operate.

Now coming to your question, how do we, in this slow renewal of the board, how do we handle this. In most cases, it is a discussion between our Chairman and myself, of what are the needs that we have in the board. And we obviously want to have diversity in the board. We want to have different industries represented. We want to have, obvious diversity, of gender diversity, we want to have diversity in a number of Singaporeans and a number of overseas trustees. It's not that we have a strict formula about it, but I would say, we try to look at who is there, how is this group evolving and what would be good to bring, in terms of new people, to preserve the diversity we have in the board. We come up with a list of potential trustees and that is then brought to the board itself, because to some extent it is a co-optation formula right, and the board will discuss it and if we feel that there is some hesitation about a particular name, we wouldn't pursue it. I do need to insist that, the ultimate appointment comes from the Ministry, not that we have had any issues in the past with it, but we have to take into account that the Minister is the ultimate decider in appointing the trustees. Committee work, it's a little bit, who is available and who has the capabilities, if you're in an audit committee you need to have people that have an understanding of audit. The committee that takes the most time and energy, I think, is the finance and the renumeration committee. But again we try to find people that are committed to do it and to help us in doing the work.

TSS: I have to assume that discussions and debates in in the board must be quite lively and robust. Can you recall were there one or two subject areas that got everybody excited or their different opinions whether it was as an SMU Vision 2025 or some other area, the discussion on expanding the humanities program or could be anything, that really got the whole board excited?

ADM: First of all, I should say that a lot of the discussions is happening in the committees. That's the way I see our Chairman managing the board, that is that, he wants all issues that come to the board first to be discussed in the committees. So that you have a robust discussion in the committee and that the committee can bring to the board the real issues that need to be discussed at the full board level. So there's a lot of preparatory work that is happening in the committees. And I have to say this because I have to give the credit to our trustees who commit themselves to be present in these committees and to contribute a lot there. Now, when you ask me exciting, excitement, the topic that always, that over the years has always drawn the attention of our

board, is basically the admissions to our undergraduate program. Every year that is a major topic for discussion. And it's right, it's the correct thing, because the undergraduate program is still 65% of what we are. Two-thirds of all the activities, of all the revenue are linked to the undergraduate program and if you think in terms of number of people, 8,000 undergraduate students on campus beat everything else, right, in size. So it's the core of the business and it's right that we discuss that core of the business thoroughly. But why do I come back to the admissions, because there is always the big question about, do we get the right students, right in terms of quality but also in terms of other characteristics. Some other universities, if you look at NUS, there's an example of that. They just look at academic achievements and the top level in academic achievements will be admitted. That's fine. We have a different approach to it. We want to have more diversity in our student body. We have always refused a number of people who are really very good, but don't fit within SMU. When I say really very good academically, we always have been open to people with, perhaps not so good academic achievements but who can contribute to the university, who are mavericks, who may be future entrepreneurs, etc. So that discussion around what is it that we want to have as a student body, and do we achieve our goals, is a topic that always has created a lot of excitement. There were very robust discussions about, and you mentioned Vision 2025, there have always been very robust discussions also about what kind of university do we want to be. And I would phrase it that way it, Vision 2025 was then my response to that question. You refer to humanities, that was part of that Vision 2025, to broaden university beyond its original focus of business. But the real question is, what kind of university do we want to be? That is what trustees still ask very regularly, and I wouldn't be surprised that in two years from now, my successor will have to come up with a different answer to that question, or an additional answer, not a different that and a complimentary answer, and pushing it forward. When I say what kind of university do want to be, very often people look at the role models. The role models are of course straw-men to create a discussion and so people have been looking at Princeton, trustees have been looking at Princeton, have been looking at London School of Economics. I have sometimes brought in the examples of other focused universities that are rather similar to us, like St. Gallen or Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo or Renmin in Beijing or Paris-Dauphine in Paris where you see universities that are rather similar in disciplines, in type of activities, programs and where we actually have to navigate what is it that we want to be. Yeah, those are sort of two discussions that I can remember that always create quite passionate and lively discussions, I should say.

TSS: Strikes me that stakeholder management, presidents, deans robust discussions about where do you want to bring the university, the kind of university that SMU wants to be with an obvious comparative advantage to other local universities. Is this communicated to a would-be undergrad that is seeking admission? I mean is the culture so widespread that they can say, ah for my kind of personality, I think I should go to SMU rather than NUS? I'm talking about how this communicated to the student?

ADM: We do spend a lot of time and effort on that communication, whether we're successful, you should ask the students. But I would say there are four ways that we do this. That is one, we have actually quite an active presence on social media and so we try to communicate through the social media, Facebook, Instagram, all kinds of other traditional social media. We try to communicate the liveliness, the buzz on campus, what's happening here. Obviously we position that, in such a way that, this is in the period six months before the applications have to come. But when you look at the buzz, there is actually quite a lot of activity on social media. Secondly, we obviously have the events that bring students to campus, whether it is the open house, whether it is the discovery days, whether it is the tea sessions with the deans and the faculty. There are several events where we try to communicate again what SMU is all about and where we try to gradually socialize them with what we do here, more through show rather than to tell. The telling about what's happening at SMU, we can do that in a brochure or on a website but

students need to experience it. It needs to be credible. The open house is a good way to show that it's more than teaching that happens here. We try this here on our campus green to have a lot of sort of sports activities and food, etc. To show actually you can do sports at SMU. There is a lively sports life here, because some people think that because we're in the middle of the city and we don't have sports fields, that there is no sport at SMU. So we try to communicate, but rather than saying we do sport, they just played it. I mean there were softball and whatever they were playing on the campus and actually some of the potential candidates could actually play also. So this is the showing, whether it is open house, as I said, discovery days, tea sessions, etc. The third way of communicating a little bit about what we are, is through our general communication campaign and there I always believe in the soft selling not the hard advertising. We do a bit of that, but I do believe that the real selling of what's happening here on campus is trying to show our thought leadership. That's the reason why I started with this Perspectives with CNA, and I think that is an example. We do a lot more than that but we also have this education forum with the Straits Times where we had about 500 students from polys, from JCs coming over and listening to the future of education, do you need this here, a debate, about do you need really need a degree. So it's positioning ourselves as this is a happening place, some of that is actually aimed at the parents, because of course, parents are still strong advisors and important advisors in for students to decide upon which school they want to go to, which university they want to go to. We also need to make sure that parents see that this is a lively place, and not only a lively place in terms of student activities, but lively in terms of ideas, in terms of thought leadership. It's not easy to communicate that because we tend to write for other academics, right, and going sort of popularizing our ideas, it's not always what faculty are good at, but we hope that we achieved it. And then there is a fourth way, that I hope that we communicate that, and that is by testimonies by our current students. We know that future students in the end, in order to make a decision, listen to current students and so we need to find ways of having our current students, talking to their friends, to their juniors and we have a number of activities around that. Whether we succeed, that you have to ask a student.

TSS: That means some comments of overselling that you know that expectations therefore were raised. Can I move on to the fact that SMU was an experiment on the part of the Singapore government, they had to have a third university. I believe the demand was there but the nature of the third University need not be SMU as it is today. So it was actually a very bold move on the part of the Singapore government then, pre-2000, to say, let's have a different university that is you know connected to a US university, city campus, etc. Knowing the Singapore government, with its track record of being able to make bold moves with regards to SMU. Do you think there is something that the university should do which may need the support of the ministry or the government which will really have an impact on the university and in the region?

ADM: Now?

TSS: Now. If we had a wish list, what would we want the Singapore government to give to SMU?

ADM: Money.

TSS: Good…

ADM: No, I would say, I agree with you that this was a bold move. What is the next step? I think the Singapore government wanted to ensure that its universities were world-class. Let's say top quality university. My personal view of this is, and this is a very personal view. So it's not the president of SMU. It's the personal view of somebody who has observed this over the last 20 years if not longer. My personal view is that, when after the committee, that our current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong led in 1988 about the transformation of the economy and when there was this view that Singapore needed to transform itself from being a manufacturing and

production country into a knowledge economy, that there was a realization that there were not enough knowledge workers. In other words, that you had to create many more knowledge workers. In other words, develop the universities. There was at that moment in 1988 only one university then, from 1990 onwards we had an Nanyang Technological Institute as an engineering institute, as a second university. But it was, and now I really speak personally my observation was that the government thought that they were not good enough. I remind you that when I was at INSEAD in 2000, I was interviewed by The Straits Times and that the title of that article of that big interview was "Mediocrity is not good enough" and my title was referring to the fact that I thought that at that moment the existing universities NUS and NTU, NTI as it was still called then, were rather mediocre. That was arrogant on my side, I have to say. I can't take it back, that article exists. I also observed that after having tried to improve the local universities in the early 90s, by providing them with more resources, that probably, that process didn't go fast enough and as a consequence that DPM Tony Tan, at that moment, decided that in order to improve the quality of higher education, there needed to be more competition. And if I simplified, more competition internally within the universities, by attracting more foreign talent and raise the bar for what is the quality within the existing universities. Secondly, attract foreign institutions of high standing into Singapore, set up business here, and provide competition for the existing universities. And that's the reason why places like MIT, INSEAD, Georgia Tech, in earlier days, Chicago, Tisch, all came here. And thirdly provide competition by creating a third university on a different model than the two existing universities, which are based on a British model. But a different model being a US-based model, which is SMU. That was a very bold move. Why then SMU is what it is? I also think that the government had some hesitation about: will that third university be successful? They had engaged Mr Ho Kwon Ping, who is known to be a bit of a maverick. So by engaging him as the leader of this effort, they were giving really the signal we want to have something different, right. But I'm sure that there must have people who said: wait a moment, we are gonna spend so much money, is this going to be successful? And then let's be realistic, there was a huge demand in the early 2000s for people in business. So the demand for business studies was there, and secondly let's face it, it's not the most expensive of activities in an university, the dentistry or engineering where you need wet labs, it much more expensive. So what we have as disciplines are probably the cheap disciplines. So it was a bit risk management or risk control, I believe. I think SMU has been lucky. And I will come to your question, but SMU has been somewhat lucky that in the early days, our two colleagues, NUS and NTU did not pay a lot of attention to us. In other words, that we could develop ourselves, while the business schools or the accountancy programs that the other universities didn't really take notice of what was going on. Which has left us for five, six years in a fairly protected situation. I believe, I wasn't here, but I believe that our colleagues probably at the other universities woke up at the moment that they saw the first graduate employment survey and suddenly saw that our students got good jobs, on the average better salaries than their students. And probably the first year, they also thought: oh this the pioneer group, it's such a small group. So it probably took a few years before they realized that SMU was developing very well. This for me has been one of the success factors for SMU, that we for five, six, seven years were in a relatively protected environment. Our colleagues of SUTD probably have never had that situation, because for them based on the learning from SMU, I'm sure that the engineering groups at NTU and NUS, from the beginning consider them to be significant.

TSS: Competitors?

ADM: Competitors. I'm trying to avoid that word, but yes, that's what it is. Now, we have to say that in 2018, that strategy of Dr Tony Tan has worked. The competition has improved, though overall in higher education landscape in Singapore, and NUS and NTU are tops in the rankings, as we are top in our disciplines. SUTD to be a relatively good success when it comes to research

and research output. I think that and when people say, oh yeah, but Chicago Business School left us and Tisch left us. I think they've served their purpose. Their purpose was to provide competition, and by doing so, to improve the whole of the landscape. They've served their purpose that some of these institutions like MIT or INSEAD have actually found their own role within Singapore and have stayed longer and probably, like in the case of INSEAD will stay here forever. That's a positive, I would say. Windfall profits maybe an exaggeration but it is beyond the success story of the competition, that some of them indeed have found their role here in Singapore. Today, we're looking at a very different landscape than in 2000, when there were only two universities, now we have six autonomous institutions. Two, more or less comprehensive ones, two, specialized with SMU and SUTD, and two teaching institutions, SIT and SUSS, with each their sort of own niche in the market. I think that is a very interesting landscape, an interesting portfolio of institutions. Now, your question is, what's next. I think, while I believe that we have now a very robust and very successful higher education landscape in Singapore. The question is what, how do we go out? How do we go overseas? How do we go abroad? NUS has a few, has been dabbling a little bit with its overseas colleges, and NTU has this major activity in China, research activity. We have quite a lot of collaborations with Chinese universities on programs and some research activities. So, we have started this internationalization process, but I would say that for all three of us, this is still rather marginal. I think there's a real reflection needed about, at each of our universities, a real reflection needed about how do we see the network of NUS, NTU, SMU, in ten years from now. And that for me will be a network of subsidiaries, collaborations, joint ventures outside Singapore. That will require resources to set it up, that will require also some confidence at the level of the ministries, that this is the role for our universities to play. There is of course, this tension between why would we use money from the Singapore taxpayers for something that is will happening outside Singapore. That tension exists in many different aspects, not only for education. But I believe that for the success of the Singapore universities or at least the major ones, it will be very important to build their own international networks.

TSS: What then…

ADM: Have I answered your question?

TSS: Yes. I could also follow up, I said if you are the Minister for Education what would you do?

ADM: Yeah.

TSS: Which I won't. What would you say then are the three follow-up challenges or priority areas you would hand to your successor? Each president, I believe, would have two or three priority areas which they feel they haven't got the time to continue doing it or they feel that it could be something quite new and needs to be looked into in depth. What would you hand your successor?

ADM: I'm very careful with answering that question because I don't want to sound as: hey this is what you need to do. I mean I wouldn't have wanted that, Howard Hunter would have told me what to do and I don't want Lily Kong to think that I tell her what to do. I think presidents should come in, make their own judgement of what needs to be done, and then implement that strategy. When I think what could be challenges that the next president will have to reflect on, and let me phrase it that way, is that we as an institution haven't fully understood what technology will do to education and learning. We've made a few choices, and one of those choices is that we strongly believe that SMU is about face-to-face learning and that technology should be supportive of that. So we have good learning management systems. We have some blended learning, to make sure that what's happening in the classroom is more effective and that the students what they can learn on their own, can learn through technology. But the idea there is

not that we have technology-based learning, but that we would be, the idea is that we want to make what's happening in the classroom more interesting, by doing the preparatory work through technology-based learning. But, I am not convinced we have fully understood what artificial intelligence, machine learning, will do to education. I'm not saying that others have very well understood it, but I think this is going to be a challenge for the next five to ten years. A second challenge is the internationalization. We really need to internationalize our students more than we have done until now. I'm happy that we have now decided that from next year onwards, the incoming students are required to have an overseas experience and that's a very good step, to make that a requirement, to make it a hundred percent for all students. But I also believe that we will need to think a lot more about; what is it that overseas experience is all about? Between the student that goes to Paris because it's a good base to visit as a tourist Europe, or a student that goes to Seoul because they want to be in the place where K-pop and where the Korean culture can be sampled. And really discovering what it is to work and live in France or work and live in a Korean company or a Korean environment. I think we still have a gap to bridge there. And this is going to be more than looking at what is the experience that happens at universities. I hope that we will have a lot more international internships, international projects and so there is probably this international development of SMU that will require some answers. What those answers are, I can't give them at this moment. I have ideas what I would do, but I should leave it to the next president to look into that. The third challenge, I think, is the financial model of SMU. I often say somewhat tongue-in-cheek that when Professor Howard Hunter handed over to me, that was the 1st of September 2010. Then I knew at that moment what the revenues of the year were, because I knew how many students had matriculated on the 18th of August or whenever it was. And the whole model was one of, I know what the revenues are going to be for this year, now it is about controlling spending. Today, the undergraduate program is still, in its revenue 65 percent, 64 percent of SMU, but it does mean that 35 percent is actually other sources of revenue and many of them are market-linked. You don't know the 1st of January or the 1st of September how much money there is available that I can spend. One now who has to think about what will be the revenues of postgraduate programs, the SMU Academy, executive development, research contracts and so in that sense we could become a bit more a normal business. But it means that you also have to have a very different control on your expenses. How you manage that, is culturally a big challenge for SMU. It's what I've noticed. Over the last few years, I have been preaching, and you know that that, we have become a multi-product university. But in the behaviour of people, we still behave as if we are a university that gets in the beginning of the year, the capitation grant and the tuition fee from the students and now we only have to spend within our means. That's a big cultural change, I think.

TSS: I think Professor Howard may have one or two questions for you. But can I round up about place making. I've heard comments. I've often asked this question, it's sufficient have we done sufficiently to make our students understand that they're actually part of the Bras Basah precinct? You know, part of a little village because it's easier to identify with a village then with a larger nation. But I'm also told that some of our students don't care, because the most of the time they are below ground. They don't really have a sense that they are part of an eclectic area. The larger Bras Basah area, is a village identification important, is place making, making our students do projects for some parts of the stakeholders in that area. I mean this doesn't add to building a university community in the center of the city.

ADM: The answer, you know what, you know what my answer is going to be. Yes, because it's one of my seven building blocks of my Vision 2025 to be an university in the city and an icon or for the university in the city can be. I still remember when I came here in 2010, that I felt that our campus was an isolated island within this area, partially because the physical environment, the two very busy thoroughfares, Bras Basah and Stamford Road. Partially because if you look

at Stamford Road, for example, there are these fences or this you can't cross the street very easily. So there was a physical environment that isolated ourselves. The other element of the physical environment was that, we have the very interesting and very good concourse but which is underground and which is air-conditioned. So all the reasons to stay on the ground, right? Then, secondly, so the physical structure was such that that we were this island, isolated island. Secondly, our students had really no good reasons to go and be part of this village, as you say of the BB precinct, because they live in, I don't know, Toa Payoh or Lim Chu Kang, probably not the many living live there, but Changi, Pasir Ris whatever they live the dock, they come here by MRT. We have our MRT station under now too, under the campus, they actually never go out in this. They have all the services on campus if they want to, doctor and dentist, bank, medical. I mean shopping, food, they have everything on campus so there is no real push factor, to sort of say go out, and be part of this community. So when I, when I thought about it and that's what that building block of being an icon of what a city, what the university in the city is all about. I always had this model of New York University in mind as opposed to Columbia. Columbia which is really somewhat of an isolated island in Harlem, while and while you don't see where NYU stops and starts. It's part of that whole, around in Greenwich Village, around Washington Square right? It's sort of, it's part of the community and that was always my hope to some extent. London School of Economics is somewhat similar, right, sort of. And we've done three things, but I think it's work in progress. That is first of all, we change the physical infrastructure, by creating this campus green. And I do think that we have been able, we've succeeded in bringing some activities above ground. It's clear that our European exchange students like to hang out on the lawn, that most of the Singaporeans don't still don't see the point of that. But at least, when you walk around, you see people above ground, there is life. It's small things but also making sure that the gym is above ground and that you can see from the outside at night, people working out there. If you walk along Bras Basah, with the new study areas at the level of the School of Economics and Social Sciences, at night, there is light, there is, there is life, there the students are sitting there. So from the outside, at least you see people, but that's a physical. There are a few other things we did, but that's the physical infrastructure that we have changed. Secondly, I have started a number and supported a number of activities, which hopefully in the long run, will lead to more collaboration between the people living around us and the students. I remember that I once spoke to a few elderly people, they were probably very nervous that I spoke to them, but living here in Waterloo Street and saying when I went to the hawker centre there for lunch, I said; why don't you come and on campus, I mean you're very welcome on campus. The way they say, who we don't think we can go there that's not for us. So we need to break down the barriers for people to come onto campus and give projects to our students to reach out to people around us. I've supported SMU Grow, because it's like an urban garden. I hope that I see that, actually quite some again elderly people sometimes sit on the benches there and enjoy watching that. Hopefully at some moment in time, they will start working with our students in tending the garden. With the Uglies food market that we have, we also bring some people from the neighborhood onto campus because it's actually cheap to buy. So, I hope that we gradually will break down this sort of mental barrier of coming to the campus. Sometimes, I tell this only as an anecdote, but sometimes I see elderly people sitting in our concourse on their computer and you wonder how they got access to our wi-fi. But I don't ask too many questions because I think it's good that they are there and that some of our students have done something they shouldn't do, i.e. share a password. I don't want to know too much about it. So that's the second point. Can we really ensure that students have, I mean, when they did that market study for Bras Basah Complex? Again it was with my full support, because we need to find the projects for our students to go off-campus in the immediate neighbourhood. The third point that we did, is make sure that the outside world can come to many events on campus. We are always proud of having to be so close to Shenton Way for the internships in the financial world, or so be so close to Supreme Court and the legal profession.

But that they're close is fine, but actually should come on campus, right? Come to us and this should be some, I mean, active links, not sort of, we made geographically close to each other. I think with our new law school, with some of the events we organized, we've actually gotten a lot more outsiders on our campus, to see what's going on, but it is work in progress. So my answer to your question is yes, we have a responsibility to be part of this community and, but we need to overcome the barriers to do that.

HT: I have two questions actually. The first really came out of your tiger mom analogy and I remember some of these tea meetings with parents and discovery days. What seems to me is that the parents have, rather like my father did, had a view as to what I should be and the kids have a very different view. If you look at someone like Ken Robinson, that's an old friend of mine, but he's just written a book, I mean he's been doing this stuff about creativity and so on for a long time. He's just written a book which is really in praise of liberal management education. If you really think of it that way, and so as SMU unfolds, will the liberal management education tradition of the first two years persist, or will the parents continue to ask the questions, about, you know, the specialist nature of what we're doing and the comparison which they always make with NUS and NTU, in the sense that it's a British degree and they can get out with an accounting degree in three years or whatever it may be? What's your reaction to that?

ADM: My reaction is, I hope that the liberal management tradition will be preserved. And why do I hope so, as we discussed before, because frankly speaking, if you ask me what should you study now to be successful in 15 years from now, I really have no answer. Because I cannot imagine what it is that an accountant will need 15 years from now and I look even at a specific profession, far more difficult it becomes to say what is it that a person who is working in a company in marketing will need to know 15 years from now. So, I'm convinced that the best thing we can do for a student today, is to give him two things. That is a very broad education so that with that broad education he or she can understand in 15 years from now, what the new challenges will be. So broad education. Of course, you need to have some depth too, that's reason why we have four years, right? Secondly, I think I am convinced that the second capability we can give to a student is the ability to learn, learn how to learn, is what we should do at university. And that's my strong commitment to SMU-X. It's more than project-based learning, learning from a project, at the same time, it is learning how to learn from a project. It's the meta-learning, in my opinion, that is much more important than the immediate learning from the project. You can learn from a project in, let's say in quality management, what the tools for quality management are all about. But what is I think is much more important this, you know one thing for sure all students when they graduate will get into jobs where they do projects. What, how can you ensure that the graduate has the reflex, of each, when the project is finished, what did I learn from this and how can I consolidate that learning? So that's where I hope that we can convince both students and parents, that a liberal, a broad liberal management education prepares them better for the challenges of 15 years from now. And secondly, that initiatives like SMU-X and there are different ways of doing it, help the student in discovering how to learn from your daily experiences.

HT: So you would see SMU-X is necessary complement in a broad management education?

ADM: Yes, yeah.

HT: Okay. So the second question I have, and I slided the previous one in slightly but and second question I have this, you talk about how to manage SMU-X and I've had a lot of experience at the graduate level for trying to organize this, a consulting course for last 20 years. Trying to work with the client, is really quite difficult. So you know one question I have to ask is about how you think it's going to happen? Because you talk about 500 projects and I believe in, you know, five years' time it could be a thousand. How is that going to play out?

ADM: In my mind, there are five things. I usually only have three, but in this case I have five. There is one we need to find the right projects. Because you can't find, if the project is too complex or too big to be solved in 14 weeks by a group of let's say five undergraduate students with no experience. It's going to be a very frustrating experience for both the students and the partner. So, choice of projects is very important, and that will require the development of some kind of an account management, of finding those projects, working with companies, etc. Secondly, in that discussion with the partners, we need to ensure that they understand that this is a learning effort, not a consulting effort. And why do I stress this, because I'm convinced that not all projects will lead to a satisfactory result, either because they were too complex and we didn't scope it well enough or the students are not that good, frankly speaking that happens too, even at SMU. So, it is a learning experience and I just throw out now some initial experiences. But we notice that about 60% of the projects lead to very good results. But that about 40% either don't succeed or lead only to a partial result for the partner. We need to make sure that the partner understands this that, that they are part of a learning effort, that they may benefit from it, but that the benefits are not guaranteed. In other words, I don't have liability that the consultant would have to come up with a solution. The third challenge is finding the faculty that is willing and capable of doing this. It's a very different way of pedagogy. I avoid the word teaching, because you don't teach right, but you want to ensure that you know what your learning goals, learning objectives are, and that those learning objectives are achieved by the end of the course. I think the Centre for Teaching Excellence can probably help in developing faculty in doing this. But we probably need to ensure that the faculty get the right support. It is not a traditional teaching assistant that can do a bit of administration. You probably need to have true project mentors that can help the faculty in managing these projects. The fourth hope I have is that, we can motivate faculty in doing this because it may well help them in their research. They may well, through these SMU-X type of projects, discover new questions, discover case studies that can help them in their research. So that the link between what's happening in SMU-X and the applied research, that our faculty are doing or even some of the more theoretical research, because it helps, perhaps shaping questions, not necessarily answering them but shaping the questions, that we can make that link happen. And then the fifth challenge is that, we're working on it, but is that I hope that we can do this in collaboration with other institutions overseas to give a strong international aspect to it. And our Vice Provost for UG is working on that, he is enthusiastically working on that. But we've just expressed a wish to do it. We haven't done it yet. I think we will discover quite some difficulties in managing that but we'll have to manage least, or at least those five points.

HT: Can I have one supplementary, because that was the next question I was going to ask. You talked about managing the network if it's only in Singapore. But you also talked about the international network and these alliances. So if you, if you had your way, it would be even more strong. That in itself is an issue isn't it? I mean in terms of, even if you just look to the project and manage the project, let alone an alliance with Renmin or Dauphine or one of that you've mentioned, its another level of complexity.

ADM: It's going to be. So we shouldn't run faster than we can walk. We should grow, go gradually and not put ambitious goals of we want to have 20% or 30% of these projects overseas. Let's first try it out and see how it works. But on the other hand, I also think this is the future of higher education. The time that when, there is always going to be room for the Cambridges and Stanfords of this world, who say everything happens within our campus and those among you who want to benefit from what we do, come to our campus, and that's where it will happen. But I think this is going to be for, I don't know, 20, 30 institutions worldwide, possible. All of the other institutions will have to work a lot more in international networks, and we're not used to that. I mean universities were mono, mono, not monoculture but sort of in one place right? Many of our universities are called the University of, right, a particular place and they are

associated with a particular place and so even in the names it is clear that we are in one position, in one geographical position. Universities will have to… When I project myself 10, 15 years from now, I think that lots of universities will have an international network and we should not at SMU miss that opportunity. I'm coming back to your previous question about broad liberal arts or liberal management education, one of the things that I find is always a strength at SMU, compared to many other universities that I know, and that we insufficiently publicise, is the flexibility for the student to organize herself or himself. It is amazing, when you look at it that we say to do a particular degree, these are the requirements that you have to achieve, but how you organize yourself is up to you, and that's the big advantage of the BOSS bidding system, right? That the students know they have to do 36 courses. Then they can look at their exemptions, they can look at second majors they want to do, they can, they know they have to go overseas now, they know they have to do the community service, they know they have to do an internship, they know what the requirements are to get the degree. But we don't even say you have to do it in four years. Quite a few of our students do it in three years and a half. We don't even say you have to do it in two terms per year. Some students do a summer term. The degree of flexibility to organize yourself at SMU is, compared to other universities that I know, other ones that have that but it is very high. You can decide when you do your internship, where you go for overseas exchange or internship, what do you do in terms of community service, when you do it, you can do summer terms, you can do all kinds of different, you can really exploit the exemptions and make sure that you can do another major in another school, than the one that you will graduate from. Now, I know that some students don't use that flexibility. They just follow the standard pattern of, I do my internship in my second, after my second year. I go in my third year, the second term overseas. I mean they follow the standard pattern that has proved to be a good pattern, but there are very creative students too.

HT: I think another one I would add towards, you've said, is that if a student comes in and not absolutely sure about what they want to do there they can change, and that is not a characteristic of any European school I know.

ADM: So I see it already as a strength of SMU and one that we should probably promote more. I mean, promote in the sense of, hey come to SMU and you really can organize your own life. I mean you can not only in terms of sequence of what you do, but you can say, I only want to have courses on a Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and the rest of the week I'm free by doing the right bidding, right. Which means that you can combine it with another internship or with some work, if you want to, or just goofing off, whatever right. But you, you can really organize your life at SMU quite well and I wouldn't be surprised that degree of flexibility, that that sorry, that flexibility, that students will require it more and more in the future. And that they will want to have, perhaps more time off, a year off to be able to do something else. I know that now we can have a leave of absence for two years maximum. But maybe it will become three, four or five years. Maybe we should find a system to have students come back and say I did the second major, now I want to do a third major. Why not? That flexibility which is already one of our strengths, and we don't even think about it. I believe could become, well, an even stronger aspect of what SMU is all about.

HT: Thank you.

TSS: Thank you, Professor Arnoud.

ADM: You're welcome.