

Headlines: Book tackles inner workings of public policy

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INSIGHTS: The book takes a behind-the-scenes look at Singapore's civil service, exploring the policy-making process.

Book tackles inner workings of public policy

BY JEREMY AU YONG

IT IS not easy for others to copy or imitate Singapore's model for success, but there are principles of governance that will come in handy for those who are interested, President S R Nathan said yesterday.

He made this point yesterday at the launch of the book *Dynamic Governance: Embedding Culture, Capabilities And Change In Singapore*. It takes a behind-the-scenes look at the civil service.

"We certainly do not claim to be a model for exact replication of the policies that have worked within our shores," he told the audience, who included Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean, who also oversees the civil service.

"But Singapore is a model for an experiment that has worked well, based on governance principles that are crucial for success in the new knowledge-based global economy," he added.

Mr Nathan used a children's story about five blind men who were asked to describe an elephant to illustrate how it was sometimes difficult to understand Singapore's secret to success.

One needs to look at the big picture and not focus on individual elements.

In the fable, five blind men touched different parts of an elephant and reached a conclu-

sion based on just the feature they had felt. The one who touched the ear said it was like a fan; the tusk was likened to a needle; the trunk, a hose; the leg, a tree trunk and the tail, a fly whisk.

In the same way, President Nathan said, "the search for an answer to our transformation can be expected to continue in order to gain a more complete picture".

Applauding the book by academics Neo Boon Siong and Geraldine Chen for looking into the "long neglected" field of the civil service, he said: "Policy choices and decisions, which often attract media attention when they are announced, are only part of the story.

"How we arrived at a particular policy is itself an important part of the process, and after the policy is articulated, there remains a lot of work to effectively implement the policy to achieve the desired outcomes and to continually adapt them when circumstances change," he added.

President Nathan and Professor Neo launched the book by swinging open a giant replica of it to reveal a bookcase stacked with copies of the 477-page tome.

The 100 or so business leaders, civil servants and academics who attended the event, at the Bukit Timah campus of the National University of Singapore, were each given an autographed copy of the book. Its price before GST is \$45.