

Why Partnership and Engagement Matter to the Public Service

Leo Yip

Finding Common Ground for Partnership

Kuik Shiao-Yin

Making Good Work

Lam Kee Wei, Li Hongyi,
Nitya Menon and Alwyn Tan



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ETHOS is a publication of the Civil Service College, Singapore. It aims to provide thought leadership, insight and context on a wide range of public policy issues of interest to Singapore.

ETHOS is circulated to the policymaking community in Singapore as well as to a select international readership.

We welcome contributions, suggestions and Letters to the Editor. The editorial team reserves the right to select, edit and publish articles according to its editorial policy. All correspondence should be directed to:

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Designed by Oxygen Studio Designs Pte Ltd

ISSN: 0218-799X



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Editorial

by **Dr Alvin Pang**
Editor-in-Chief, ETHOS

Global polycrises have continued unabated, and even deepened, since the COVID-19 pandemic. Humanity's complex challenges ought to have firmed our collective resolve and unified us in common purpose. But even as societies become more connected, they have also become more estranged. Where once governments might have been looked to for authority and assurance in daunting circumstances, many around the world now look at their public officials and leaders—and at one another—with scepticism, wariness, even rancour. Some even contemplate whether the edifices of state ought to be dismantled outright. Such perspectives, downplaying the public sector's contribution to contemporary society, are corrosive on expectations and discourse at best; at worst, they serve the interests of a few, while exacting a cost on those in society least able to bear it.

Collaboration within and across sociopolitical and sectoral siloes may have become more potentially fraught, but remains indispensable. The societies best able to hold and strive together

despite inherent tensions and differences are more likely to achieve a desirable shared future. The question is how to find effective ways to do so, in a volatile and uncertain environment.

Singapore still enjoys relatively high public trust in government, a cohesive society, and general confidence in the proven competence and good intentions of the Public Service. But we too are facing significant transitions as a nation and our Public Service cannot take this hard-earned goodwill for granted (p. 6). Nor can we afford to squander Singapore's best resource: the diverse energies and spirit of our people. We must continue to hone and refine our ability to stir, support, steward and steer efforts across society towards causes that matter: not just great ideas but effective action (p. 16). While many public agencies have long connected with the broader community as part of their service culture and institutional DNA (p. 24), the recent launch of the Singapore Government Partnership Office gives fresh, concerted impetus to a more cross-boundary and collaborative approach to governance.

For any collaboration to succeed, there must be alignment on desired outcomes and what the different actions and key roles are in order to get there. In the face of complexity and uncertainty, continual learning-by-doing is key. It is not enough for the data and lessons gleaned to accrue to only one custodian: knowledge should be shared, so that all partners can be better equipped and more agile in adapting to shifting circumstances (p. 34). Learning how to co-learn in this way could mean unlearning long-standing habits: such as tendencies to overclassify data as sensitive, drip-feed information on a need-to-know basis, undervalue the tacit wisdom of those on the ground, or fall prey to confirmation biases. Co-learning can enable more meaningful co-creation and more effectual co-production. But it first asks that participants embrace the vulnerability of not knowing all the answers, and to be open to radical change, in order to collectively make space for something better to come (p. 46).

On a national scale, collaboration often needs to be intentionally engendered, resourced, and managed so that well-meaning efforts become impactful and are not at cross purposes (p. 58). There have been recent initiatives to develop innovative frameworks for public participation that are meaningful, respectful and inclusive (p. 72), and that empower communities to develop their own problem-solving capacity over time (p. 80). Some of these experiments suggest that how the public is

perceived and treated by public officers can determine how receptive and committed they are to working with government (p. 94). For the Public Service, it may be constructive to begin with the mindset that the broader community can and will appreciate what is the national good, and contribute towards it. Putting this principle into action, one public service unit has been organising an annual hackathon to crowdsource and prototype new ways to do good for Singapore (p. 102).

Government-Citizen interactions are varied, nuanced, and subject to a spectrum of private motivations, assumptions and capacities. It is possible to account for these variations in designing and implementing collaborative engagements (p. 114). What may matter most is the consistent time and effort invested in building up working relationships for the long haul, based on sincerity, rapport and mutual understanding (p. 128). And while it is natural to seek success stories, it could well be circumstances of difficulty or failure that truly test and hone such relations, allowing enduring bonds based on genuine trust and care to be forged (p. 136).

As we mark our 60th year of independence as a nation, we should gather all the collective wisdom we can, from past and present, to help us make our best possible future together.

I wish you an engaging read. ■

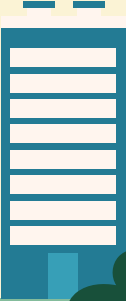




WHY PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT MATTER TO THE PUBLIC SERVICE

by Leo Yip

The momentum towards greater co-creation
and collaboration with the public will strengthen
our efforts to better prepare Singapore for the future.



Leo Yip is Head, Civil Service and Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office (Strategy Group). He is concurrently Permanent Secretary, National Security and Intelligence Coordination. He has served as Principal Private Secretary to former Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew and held various key appointments in the Economic Development Board, Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Manpower.

In recent years, the Public Service has placed ever greater emphasis on partnering and engaging the public. Over the years, we have progressed from simply communicating policy decisions to consulting the public more purposefully to build consensus for issues of public concern. We have also begun to develop ways to co-create and co-deliver solutions with the public.

Recent initiatives, including the Forward SG exercise, Alliances for Action (AfA), and the establishment of the Singapore Government Partnerships Office (SGPO), are examples of how partnership and engagement with citizens have become more important to the way we fulfil our mission as a Public Service. Indeed, we now consider working effectively with citizens and stakeholders a core competency for public officers, further anchoring our commitment to partnerships and engagement in our work.

OUR CONTEXT IS SHIFTING

The 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer indicates that Singaporean residents have a high level of trust in the Government.¹ This stands in contrast to many other countries—among the

28 countries surveyed by Edelman, government was distrusted in 17 of them.

Trust in government is critical. It is a barometer of how confident people are in their government to do what is fair, right and in their best interests. With trust, we have the support of the public for what we do. Without trust, our actions and decisions can be viewed with scepticism and even disdain, as some other societies are experiencing. The Government, conversely, may have less policy space to do the things it believes is right and good for the country.

However, trust levels are not static. Around the world, societal polarisation, big power contestation, climate change, demographic transitions, and even the advent of artificial intelligence, are threatening to significantly disrupt societies. Such trends have generated anxiety and uncertainty about the future and can weaken a people's trust in their government.

OUR PUBLIC IS CHANGING

Singapore is not immune to these developments. Domestically, we are witnessing changes that can divide our society. Social media has amplified the flow of information, leading to a wider

In the next bound of nation-building, greater attention must be given to the “heart” skills of engaging, listening, empathising and partnering, in order to maintain and build trust with Singaporeans.



and more divergent range of views among our people on many issues. Cultural and political influences, even from halfway across the globe, can now pull us in different directions.

In recent years, we have also seen a shift in expectations among Singaporeans on how they want to be governed. While the Government remains responsible for deciding how best to serve and build Singapore's future, it cannot claim to have a monopoly of ideas. Singaporeans today are more affluent, better educated, and well-travelled; they have also become more diverse in profile, needs, and aspirations. Many have ideas and a desire to take action on issues that they care about. Empowering and working together with more Singaporeans to address issues of shared concern can help strengthen their continued trust in Government, and bolster their sense of having a stake in this country.

To do this, the Singapore Public Service must continually reinvent our thinking and the way we engage our citizens. It will no longer be sufficient to focus only on achieving technical excellence, or the “hard” skills. In the next bound

of nation-building, greater attention must be given to the “heart” skills of engaging, listening, empathising and partnering, in order to maintain and build trust with Singaporeans.

THE THREE Ts IN PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

The focus of public engagement in the Public Service can be expressed as the three Ts:



Building and sustaining **Trust**;



Keeping in **Touch** with citizens' needs and aspirations;



Building the future **Together**.

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING TRUST

We must never take the high level of trust in our Government for granted, because building and preserving trust is an ongoing endeavour. Trust is built

painstakingly through the daily efforts of our public officers to serve the public diligently. But it can be broken by one act or incident that shatters the public's confidence in us.

To build and sustain trust, we must first and foremost be effective in how we serve the public. Beyond that, we must also double down on our efforts to better engage the public. The Government has made a stronger push to engage more widely and deeply of.

In 2022, the Government mounted the Forward SG Exercise² to engage



Singaporeans on how to refresh our social compact. This was a massive effort—our officers engaged more than 200,000 Singaporeans over the 16-month exercise.

It was an important effort that gave Singaporeans the opportunity to share their diverse views, develop a better appreciation of the trade-offs involved in different policy priorities, and generate good conversations about areas that the Government and people should focus on. In partnership with Singaporeans, we were able to generate a collective sense of the key areas to work on, to build a stronger society.

Besides such nationwide exercises, we have also stepped up the tempo of thematic engagements and expanded the range of modalities of engaging the public. Last year, the Ministry of National Development ran a series of conversations to engage Singaporeans on their housing aspirations, and invited participants to role-play the Housing and Development Board (HDB) in deciding how to allocate HDB flats to different archetypes of Singaporeans. Through these sessions, the public learnt to better appreciate the trade-offs that the Government has to grapple with, while public officers were able to identify new areas of concern.

REACH (reaching everyone for active citizenry @ home) is another good example of how we are constantly improving the way we engage the public. In addition to organising in-person and virtual dialogues and Listening Points, REACH has expanded its public presence through WhatsApp, Telegram, and a range of social media platforms. In March this year, REACH partnered Allegra Productions to engage young adults through Interactive Theatre, where performers acted out scenes based on topics such as housing, parenthood and the 'Singaporean Dream'. By catering to changing societal profiles and interests in creative ways, REACH has been able to better connect with diverse groups of Singaporeans on important issues.

Demonstrating that we care about the needs and concerns of the public as we serve and engage them, is also important for building trust.

I recently received an email from a member of the public who took issue with the decision of an agency pertaining to his case. He asserted that “civil servants have a responsibility to be engaging and cannot behave in (an) uncaring and negligent manner”. Even though I did not agree with his position on the case, his feedback was insightful in highlighting an expectation—that civil servants ought to have been more caring in the way we engaged him, rather than simply closing his case with an officious and curt email. His view is likely shared by an increasing number of Singaporeans.

Care comes from our empathy for the people we serve. When the public gives feedback, do we respond earnestly or sluggishly? Do we try hard to understand viewpoints from the public, even those that challenge our own perspectives? Do we actively seek to improve our policies and processes, and harness new tools and technology in order to serve the public better? Every touchpoint and every interaction with the public is an opportunity for us to win and build trust. To do this continually, we must maintain a strong sense of service and empathy for the public that we exist to serve. Engaging with care and empathy builds trust.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH CITIZENS' NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS

As a Public Service, it is essential that we keep in close touch with the public that we serve. This means understanding citizens' changing needs and aspirations, as well as their daily, lived experiences. It is not enough to just look at quantitative data on whether lives of our citizens are improving; we must augment this understanding with a *qualitative* appreciation, which is possible only through deliberate efforts to interact with our citizens.

To this end, **we have stepped up efforts to empower public officers to engage citizens more and stay close to the ground.**

The Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth has developed hands-on and interactive resources like the Partnership and Engagement Playbook, which provides step-by-step guidance to officers on how to design and implement engagements. Last year, we also launched the Public Service for Good (PSFG) movement to encourage public officers to volunteer and do good for fellow Singaporeans. Under the PSFG, more than 1,000 public



Engaging with care and empathy builds trust.



We must develop better ways to plan and build the future together with Singaporeans, and tap on their evolving ideas, hopes and aspirations.

officers have stepped up to contribute in various ways, such as mentoring youths and befriending seniors. In early 2024, the Public Service Division partnered Montfort Care and the Government Technology Agency to pilot the Government Assisted Living Ecosystem (GALE), allowing our public service befrienders to engage vulnerable seniors online, in real-time.

We have also redesigned the Engagement Immersion for Leaders (EIL) programme to give Middle Managers and Directors more opportunities to develop ground engagement capabilities and experience, understand how policies affect citizens' lived experiences, and develop greater empathy and stronger instincts to think and act in a citizen-centric manner.

BUILDING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

A strength of our Government over the years has been achieving the duality of dealing effectively with today's issues and problems, while working on and building the future for Singapore. **We must develop better ways to plan and build the future together with Singaporeans, and**

tap on their evolving ideas, hopes and aspirations. Co-creating the future more closely with Singaporeans is one way of strengthening collaborative governance. It avails to us a greater diversity of views and richer ideas that can strengthen policymaking and better prepare us to seize new opportunities. Such an approach also deepens ownership on the part of Singaporeans for the future we seek to build together.

The work of the Kampong Gelam Alliance (KGA) is an example of how diverse views can be harnessed to shape the future of a precinct and community. The KGA, comprising residents, cultural institutions, property owners and businesses in Kampong Gelam, had worked with the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) to develop a set of plans for enhancing the heritage and vibrancy of the Kampong Gelam Historic Area. From August 2022 to July 2023, the KGA invited over 1,600 members of the public to provide feedback and share their aspirations on the future of the precinct. The KGA's efforts culminated in a roadmap—the Kampong Gelam Historic Area Place Plan—that set out the community's shared values and vision

for the Kampong Gelam area over the next five years.³

The Government has mounted similar efforts to partner Singaporeans in shaping the future of public housing, a topic close to the hearts of many. As part of the Remaking Our Heartland (ROH) programme, HDB has engaged residents and various community stakeholders on their aspirations for their town and neighbourhood, and co-creating the ROH proposals with them. Engaging with persons living with dementia and their caregivers on their lived experiences and challenges has informed HDB's approaches to improve and better prepare for a more aged society in the future.

We have also been more purposeful in providing youths a platform to co-create policies with the Government, and build the future society that they want to see. Last year, the National Youth Council (NYC) introduced Youth Panels to institutionalise youths' involvement in the policymaking process. Public agencies use these platforms to share their policy contexts and considerations and invite youths to propose policy recommendations. These approaches enable us to engage youth more deeply on a broad range of issues, including financial security, careers and lifelong learning, digital well-being and sustainability.



The Kampong Gelam Alliance organised "walkshops" —site walks covering various locations in Kampong Gelam—and invited participants to share place-specific views on various topics. Photo courtesy of URA.



As part of the ROH programme, HDB engaged residents and community stakeholders on improvement works to parks and public spaces to enhance their wellbeing, as well as initiatives on dementia-friendly features in neighbourhoods, such as improved wayfinding and co-creation of murals. Photo courtesy of HDB.



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OFFICE



PARTNERING CITIZENS TO BUILD A BETTER SINGAPORE

The Singapore Government Partnerships Office (SGPO) was officially launched by then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong on 19 January 2024, with the mission to strengthen the government's partnerships and engagements with citizens. It addresses a key theme emerging from the 16-month Forward Singapore exercise—that Singaporeans aspire to play a more active role in shaping their communities, and co-creating policies, public spaces and services.

The SGPO has three functions:

- It acts as a first-stop for citizens and interest groups keen on partnering the government, by identifying opportunities for collaboration and linking interested citizens with the relevant agencies. Its website includes a Partners Portal that offers a range of partnership resources, and enables citizens to share their proposals.
- SGPO brings people together to share knowledge, expertise and best practices on effective partnerships.
- SGPO amplifies stories on inspiring changemakers, to encourage more to step forward and contribute.

Find out more at www.sgpo.gov.sg



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Such initiatives are examples of what will be a new norm for the Government. In January 2024, we launched the SGPO as a first stop for citizens and interest groups who are keen on partnering the Government to address cross-cutting and complex issues. The SGPO website includes a *Partners Portal* that offers partnership resources to empower citizens to turn ideas into action. As public officers, let us make full use of these resources and opportunities, to partner and engage the public to build the future together with us.

OUR ETHOS FOR THE NEXT BOUND

Today, the Singapore Public Service is well regarded by other public services around the world, and more importantly, by the public that we serve. We must leverage this position of trust to

strengthen how we serve and partner with Singaporeans.

Growing our competencies to partner and engage with Singaporeans will become more critical. We will have to persevere in our efforts to better understand Singaporeans' needs, hopes and aspirations. We must develop new and better ways to partner with Singaporeans to formulate and implement new solutions and initiatives, in order to seize opportunities and address challenges. We also need to better listen and empathise, and strengthen our agility to improve processes and programmes to be more citizen-centric.

Collectively, these shifts will help us build and sustain trust, keep in closer touch with the views and needs of the public that we serve, and partner and engage them to build a brighter future together, for Singapore and Singaporeans. ■

Notes

1. The Edelman Trust Barometer is an annual survey conducted by Edelman (a global communications firm) on demographically representative samples in countries around the world, surveying individuals on their level of trust towards different institutions in society, including government, media, businesses and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The 2024 survey was conducted in 28 countries and involved around 32,000 respondents.
2. For more information, visit <https://www.forwardsingapore.gov.sg/>.
3. For more information, visit <https://www.listeningtokg.org/>.



Practising Collaborative Governance:

How the Public Service can Support a Democracy of Deeds

by **Teoh Zsin Woon**

To help build a vibrant, active and engaged society, we must cultivate new mindsets and muscles better suited to supporting co-creation, co-delivery and collective responsibility.



Teoh Zsin Woon is Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) in Singapore. Prior to her current role, she was Permanent Secretary (Development) in Public Service Division (PSD) and Permanent Secretary (Development) in the Ministry of National Development.

A New Social Compact: Collective Responsibility

What is the future Singapore that we want to build? How should we build it? These are key questions that over 200,000 Singaporeans discussed as part of the Forward SG exercise.¹ Singaporeans aspire to build a vibrant and inclusive society where there are diverse opportunities for people to pursue different pathways to success and be respected for who they are and what they do. We all want to see a fair and thriving society where Singaporeans are supported with their basic needs in every stage of life, so that they can live fulfilling and dignified lives.

A key element of this new social compact is collective responsibility. Everyone—businesses, community groups, families and individuals—has a role to play to collectively build the future Singapore we want to see.

Building a Vibrant Democracy of Deeds: Three Cs are Key

To contribute to this national aspiration, we in the Public Service have to continually evolve our way of governance. Beyond consulting on policies and programmes and

communicating policy changes well, we should be prepared to engage more deeply with citizens, involving them in policy development and in co-creating and co-delivering programmes.

The Public Service is operating in a much more complex, volatile and resource constrained world today. We benefit from learning how to engage the perspectives, creativity and resources of the people and private sectors, to deliver better for Singapore and Singaporeans. In doing so, we also deepen our relationship with citizens and stakeholders, so that collectively we continue to strengthen trust within our society. This is the glue that will bind us together in good times and difficult times. What is our picture of success? A vibrant democracy of deeds, where we have a robust ecosystem of active citizens and connected communities, working together to make life better for fellow Singaporeans.

How can the Public Service foster and nurture such a democracy of deeds? As a start, we have to build up three Cs—learning to **Cede space**, **build Capability** within and outside the Public Service, and **strengthen Collaborations** within the Public Service and in the community.



We benefit from learning how to engage the perspectives, creativity and resources of the people and private sectors, to deliver better for Singapore and Singaporeans.

Ceding Space for Collaboration

The Public Service must be intentional in identifying areas where we can cede space for citizens to play a bigger role in coming up with ideas or solutions.

One example of this is the Partners Portal by the Singapore Government Partnerships Office (SGPO), launched in January 2024.² The Portal lets citizens take the lead in proposing ideas, instead of the Public Service setting the agenda and consulting the public. SGPO will then support them in making their ideas happen: by providing information and resources, and coordinating the help needed across multiple public agencies. SGPO ensures that proposals are seriously considered and engages public agencies to bring the ideas to life. Thus far, the Portal has attracted a range of promising proposals, including an idea to fight misinformation with artificial intelligence, and an initiative to document kampung life in the past.

Youth Panels³ are another example of intentionally creating space in policymaking. Over 120 youth panel members have worked with public officers on issues that are important to our youths: financial security, careers and lifelong learning, digital wellbeing, and environmental sustainability. The Youth Panels were given the autonomy to decide what they wanted to focus on. With access to data, information and policy

considerations provided by public officers, the youth participants developed policy ideas that were shared at an inaugural Youth Policy Forum in August 2024. More than 1,000 Forum participants were invited to listen to the Youth Panels' journey and contribute feedback and suggestions.

Beyond policymaking, the Public Service has also been empowering our Singaporean youths to lead and implement projects to make a difference in the community. The Young ChangeMakers⁴ and Youth Action Challenge⁵ programmes create space for our youths to be the positive change that they want to see in the world, supporting them with mentorship, networking and coaching. Ceding space for collaboration empowers our youths to take ownership of issues that matter to them, which in turn nurtures them to be active and contributing citizens.



Partnering to Grow Community: Woodlands Botanical Garden

SGPO recently worked with Ganesh Kumar, the founder of Woodlands Botanical Garden (WBG) in Marsiling. The gardening enthusiast first planted the garden in 2020 as a way to cope with the loss of his mother. His efforts soon caught the eye of fellow residents, and WBG quickly became a community spot where visitors came to socialise. Ganesh saw its potential to be a communal space for people to reconnect with nature, and for elderly residents to keep active. Since 2020, WBG has blossomed with support from various groups to become a thriving ecosystem that both contributes to the biodiversity in the area and serves as a venue for local community events.

Ganesh has big dreams to grow the garden and the community spirit in Marsiling but was not initially sure which government departments to approach for support. In 2024, he submitted a proposal through the Partners Portal. SGPO came on board to facilitate his requests, linking him up with various agencies including the National Arts Council, Housing Development Board, National Parks Board, People's Association, National Library Board, and Ministry of Health, to explore and implement feasible programmes across domain areas.



Ganesh Kumar (middle) with fellow residents at the Woodlands Botanical Garden. Photo courtesy of the Singapore Government Partnerships Office.

WBG is a prime example of what we can achieve when agencies and citizens work together to make a positive change. Ganesh himself says: “Both citizens and government must work together. The government cannot do everything alone. We need the community’s passion and knowledge to drive change. If we as citizens want to see impact, we need to step up our game too.”⁶

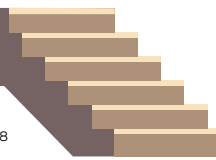
To play their part, public agencies must also stay open to citizens’ ideas and support citizens in bringing their ideas to life.



Interview with Ganesh Kumar, founder of Woodlands Botanical Garden in Marsiling.



Building Capability at Every Level



Working effectively with citizens and stakeholders is a competency we all need to individually build up to be effective public officers. This is already expressed in Our Core Competencies, which are foundational competencies for all public officers. For our policies and programmes to be effective, the Public Service must stay connected to the ground—not only to have a deep understanding of citizens’ needs, but also to be able to rally stakeholders and citizens to develop and implement solutions with us, for the collective good of Singapore.

Officers who need to interact more frequently and engage more deeply with citizens and stakeholders need more specialised skillsets. For instance, if their daily work involves facilitating engagements, cultivating partnerships, mobilising partners and analysing data and insights on the impact of engagement efforts, they will need to develop specific partnership and engagement (PE) capabilities. The Public Service has designed a Partnership and Engagement Competency Framework that outlines the skillsets public officers will need to develop to do their work well.⁷

To support the development of these competencies, the Academy of Public Communications and Engagement (APCE) delivers a comprehensive

suite of programmes or public officers.⁸ It offers:

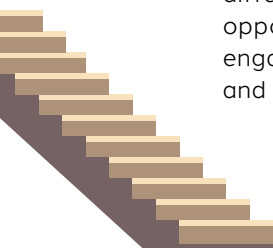
- Programmes to cultivate partnership and engagement capabilities such as designing engagements, facilitation, and sensemaking. The foundational Partnership and Engagement 101 programme helps officers new to PE work to build capabilities, using key frameworks such as stakeholder mapping and engagement planning.
- More advanced courses targeted at more experienced officers. A Partnership and Engagement Network community of practice has also been set up.
- Hands-on opportunities, such as Short-Term Immersion Programme (STIP), gig work, and Structured Job Rotation. To practise ground engagement, officers can volunteer as mentors, befrienders and more through PSD’s Public Service For Good initiative.⁹

Our Public Service Leaders must take charge of building these organisational capabilities, and they must lead by example. There are a range of structured ground engagement opportunities available for leaders to immerse themselves in frontline services and better understand citizens’ lived experiences. These include the Engagement Immersion of Leaders (EIL) programmes,¹⁰ which

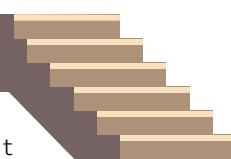
have enabled directors to participate in ground attachments to gain insights into the operational challenges of implementing policies.

MCCY refreshed EIL programming this year to enhance its focus on developing openness, empathy, and citizen centricity in officers who are in middle management and above. The refreshed programme includes a community walk to meet different citizen groups, giving officers opportunities for ground-sensing and engagement so they can better design and implement policy.

Building relationships with citizens and seeking to understand their needs and aspirations must become a new way of working for the Public Service. Building this culture is not always easy and will require leaders to walk the talk and walk the ground. Leaders can be role models for deepening ground engagement experience by participating regularly in PSD's centrally curated hands-on opportunities, engagement STIPs or gig work, and even curating ground opportunities within their ministry families for fellow leaders and officers.



Strengthening Collaborations: Enablers for a Connected Society



To effectively build a democracy of deeds, we need an ecosystem of active community partners. They act as connectors to bring more citizens and communities on board the collective mission of building a cohesive and resilient society. We have to be intentional in developing collaborations among community partners beyond specific projects. We should also invest in building partners' capabilities and work with them to co-create new initiatives.

Through our Partnership Development Fund,¹¹ MCCY supports public agencies in developing longer-term collaborations with their partners. For instance, MCCY supported

the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) in its partnership with Preschool Market (PSM), a social enterprise, to further expand the Start Small Dream Big (SSDB) Programme. The SSDB programme supports early childhood practitioners, children and parents through meaningful community projects and engagements.¹²

Through this collaboration, PSM galvanises other preschools and partners to scale up the SSDB movement. To date, it has made a meaningful impact on over 1,100 preschools, 210,000 preschool children, and 160,000 parents across Singapore.



Taking Singapore Forward, Together

By partnering and engaging our citizens, we can build a stronger, more cohesive Singapore for future generations. As we cede space and build capabilities, we can co-create better policies and programmes to meet citizens' needs and collaborate with strong partners to deliver these. Such efforts build trust between the Public Service and our citizens,

enabling us to find common ground, connect with people from different backgrounds, and understand others' diverse needs and views.

Governing collaboratively offers unique opportunities to strengthen our community to move forward together as a nation. This is how we will lead the way as a Public Service, by taking the first step to work together with our citizens to build Singapore's future in a complex world. ■

Notes

1. <https://www.forwardsingapore.gov.sg/>
2. <https://www.sgpo.gov.sg/take-action/partnersportal/>
3. <https://www.nyc.gov.sg/youth-panels>
4. <https://www.nyc.gov.sg/programmes-grants/young-changemakers>
5. <https://www.nyc.gov.sg/youth-action-challenge>
6. See: https://www.instagram.com/p/C9TogpcyeiV/?hl=en&img_index=1
7. Singapore public officers can find further information on the Partnership and Engagement Competency Framework on the Partnership and Engagement Network microsite (intranet access only, go.gov.sg/mccy-pen).
8. Singapore public officers can find further information on the APCE training programmes on the Partnership and Engagement Network microsite (intranet access only, go.gov.sg/mccy-pen).
9. The 'Public Service for Good' movement encourages public officers to go beyond traditional job and agency boundaries to 'be a force for good' in new and different ways for the benefit of Singapore and Singaporeans. Public officers can find further information on PSD's Public Service for Good on the Singapore government intranet. Also see: <https://www.psd.gov.sg/newsroom/press-releases/public-service-week-2023/>.
10. See: <https://www.facebook.com/PSDSingapore/videos/engagement-immersion-for-leaders/564156290752043/>. Course offerings are outlined here: <https://register.csc.gov.sg/registration?courseId=307911&classNum=0> (for middle managers) and <https://register.csc.gov.sg/registration?courseId=307910&classNum=0> (for directors).
11. Singapore public officers can find further information on the Partnership Development Fund on the Partnership and Engagement Network microsite (intranet access only, go.gov.sg/mccy-pen).
12. See: www.startsmalldreambig.sg. The SSDB portal is a platform with stories of projects submitted by the preschools, as well as e-resources for educators' use from SSDB community partners.

CONVERSATION

Mobilising the Public:

Making It Work

by





Three public agencies reflect on efforts to engage community volunteers as part of their organisational mission.



Denise Low is Director, Service Delivery, Social Support Group, Ministry of Social and Family Development.



Soh Lin Li is Director, Partnership, Partnership & Strategy Group, National Library Board.



Woo Wee Meng is Coordinating Director, Community Partnerships, National Parks Board.

This conversation was facilitated by **Dawn Yip**, then Coordinating Director, Singapore Government Partnerships Office, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth.

What does mobilisation mean to you and why is it important to your agency?

Woo Wee Meng: For the National Parks Board (NParks), mobilisation is the next level of citizen engagement and partnership. Whereas outreach is about raising awareness and helping citizens understand what we are doing, mobilisation is getting citizen volunteers to take action with us in different ways as community stewards. NParks has, over the years, created various platforms and touchpoints to enable this to happen.



Mobilisation is getting citizen volunteers to take action with us in different ways.

One early example of mobilisation was the introduction of the Community in Bloom programme in 2005 to kickstart a national gardening movement. NParks rallied interested gardeners in the community and facilitated the setting up of community gardens island-wide. The movement started out as an effort to introduce Singaporeans to gardening and as part of the process, foster greater social connections and cohesion amongst residents in the community.

NParks introduced the Friends of the Park initiative in 2016¹, gathering people interested in specific park spaces and topical issues to come together—whether researchers, conservationists or parkgoers. The initiative was a platform for everyone to come together to take action, conduct programmes or just volunteer together, to promote stewardship and responsible use of our parks or champion certain causes. We also have separate touchpoints for youths to expose them to the work that NParks does, such as the Youth Stewards for Nature.²

Our early initiatives catered more towards particular interests, for example, in gardening, biodiversity and wildlife conservation or park-based interests. Today the context has evolved, and it has become even more necessary to get citizens on board if we want to mainstream and realise our vision for Singapore to be a City in Nature.³ Across NParks' different strategies and initiatives, Community Stewardship is an overarching horizontal where we partner the community and bring people together to be stewards for nature. Mobilisation and stewardship go hand in hand, because they both require Singaporeans to take action to nurture what we have. This was the key idea behind the Nature Kakis Network,⁴ which we are now trying to build.

While it is generally easier to mobilise those who are already bought into and support the work that we do, it is much harder to reach out to the rest of the general population—the everyday citizens going about their lives, who may not be aware of our work or interested in it. This is why we established the Nature Kakis Network, a new platform and touchpoint centred in the heart of local communities.⁵ It started when Minister for National Development Desmond Lee identified a few volunteers who were passionate about nature, and asked them to educate residents in his Boon Lay constituency and get more of them involved in nature. Calling themselves 'Nature Kakis', these volunteers took residents out for bird watching, kayaking and so on, on a regular basis. Through their efforts, they reached many different groups of residents. Given the success of the Boon Lay Nature Kakis, Minister Lee then challenged NParks to make this into a national movement for the rest of Singapore.

To build a sustainable movement, we knew we had to take a ground-up approach. We had to step up our mobilisation efforts and revolve them around a particular group — the kampung chiefs. These are individuals within the community who are mobilisers and influencers able to galvanise

their fellow residents. The people who will stay and contribute tend to be those who feel mission alignment with the work we do; they are also more likely to be inspired by hearing the experiences of peers who are passionate about the cause and have already taken action to run an event or programme, compared to just hearing the government narrative.

Soh Lin Li: Community engagement is not new to the National Library Board. We have always worked to establish a common vision with the community for how we might create a learning ecosystem together.

To do this, we work with the community in different ways. For instance, when we open a new library, we engage our patrons, both to have them understand what the library needs, and to seek their inputs on the new design. At the same time, we also invite our volunteers to come to the new library and participate in activities they are interested in. One



People are more likely to be inspired by hearing the experiences of peers who are passionate about the cause and have already taken action to run an event or programme, compared to just hearing the government narrative.

example is a ukulele club: people who like to play this instrument come together to share their hobby and also activate library resources about it, bringing others in. When we opened Central Public Library, we worked with sponsors such as Resorts World Sentosa to do cross-promotions on biodiversity.

We also consider the demographics of each library's location. For instance, since Bedok has relatively more senior citizens, we considered how the library system, services and programmes could be better tuned to that community. So, we have more health programmes in Bedok Library, and partnerships with polyclinics nearby. We also encourage senior volunteers to teach fellow senior citizens to use digital services, helping the community to build a sense of civic ownership and participation.

There are also ground-up groups, such as the Dyslexia Reading Club at Geylang Library, which started out as a group of parents who themselves wanted to help their children with

dyslexia come together to learn and read together.

Denise Low: For the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), mobilisation is about bringing together different groups in the community to work towards a common goal: that is, to uplift vulnerable families. It is about reaching out and rallying people together to join us in this common cause. To further this aim, we work with many different groups in the community, including non-profit organisations, social service agencies, grassroots organisations, and individuals.

This is important, because the government cannot do everything alone. Take financial assistance for instance: where the government cannot provide assistance because the affected person or family does not meet the criteria for some reason, we can turn to the community, which has more flexibility, to provide this help. Over the years, we have built up a number of community partners in this regard.

Indeed, in Singapore's earliest years, it was not the government who went about mobilising the community, but the community mobilising themselves to do something to meet the needs of the vulnerable in the society that



Mobilisation is about bringing together different groups in the community to work towards a common goal.

had not been met by public services at the time. Many of today's social service agencies have their roots in that earlier era.

What has changed about the way ground-up initiatives and community groups are viewed by the Public Service?

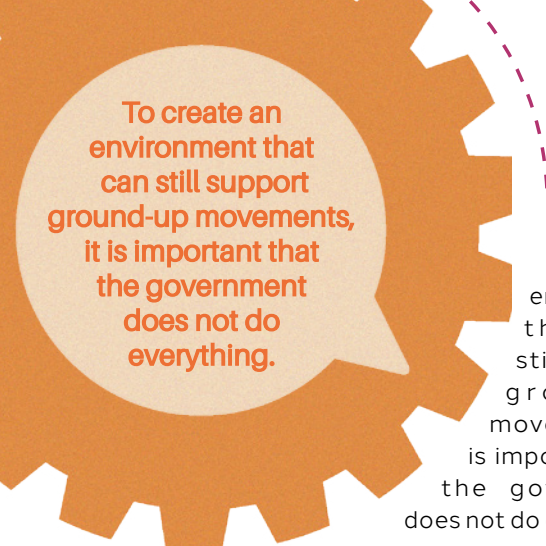
Woo Wee Meng: Over the last decade, many agencies have stepped up our engagement efforts to get to know ground-up and community groups because there is so much value and synergy we can gain from the collective wisdom and energies. Ground-up initiatives and community groups are now viewed as important resources and partners for agencies to support and work with because our objectives are often aligned. With closer engagements over time, trust, mutual understanding, and relationships are also built up and these ground-up groups may also be more open to leaning forward to contribute to our vision.

In NParks, community and stakeholder engagement have become a part of our DNA. From horticulture to biodiversity and wildlife, there are plenty of common interests

between the community groups and NParks. Through our long-term engagements, our stakeholders will see that we are similarly passionate about what they are championing, but just playing different roles within the ecosystem.

Denise Low: At MSF, we are used to groups on the ground taking initiative and taking the lead in many areas. The shift we now see is that citizens expect government to do more to help vulnerable families, rather than let non-profit organisations and social service agencies do the work.

Our challenge is to strike the right balance between government intervention and ground effort, because we do not want to take over all the community-led social services, or we will lose that citizen involvement. At the same time, we recognise that it is increasingly more challenging for non-profits to sustain their work in terms of fundraising and so on. I have had social service agencies ask, with the introduction of Comlink, why the government was taking over family care roles that they used to do. I explained that our structure allows for proper tracking, and for a range of resources to be available so that even volunteers can help families more efficiently. To create an



To create an environment that can still support ground-up movements, it is important that the government does not do everything.

environment that can still support ground-up movements, it is important that the government does not do everything.

Soh Lin Li: Community involvement is a two-way street. We welcome ground-up activities—and our public libraries have always been a base for such initiatives. But sometimes they also need us to pull things together. For instance, we involve the communities in shaping our libraries. We do so by getting feedback from them on how the library can best suit their needs: for example, we invited the public to give us their thoughts on the new design elements when we built the library@orchard at Orchard Gateway to serve them better. Similarly, when we built the Punggol Regional Library, we worked with various communities, including persons with disabilities, to develop accessibility services. One change that has taken place is that the public can have very high expectations of our community volunteers and expect them to deliver the same standards of service as our professional staff, for example, during storytelling sessions.

How do you attract, retain, motivate and level up the volunteers you mobilise?

Woo Wee Meng: There are many avenues and touchpoints to volunteer with NParks. People can join us through different programmes highlighted earlier like Community in Bloom, Friends of the Parks or the Nature Kakis Network. They can also join us as citizen scientists through our biodiversity watches.

We generally follow a pyramid framework for volunteer engagement, where people may join our programmes first as participants, gradually level up as our volunteers, and eventually grow to become our activators and mobilisers. Through our various programmes, we try to provide opportunities for capacity building and training to level them up based on their interests and commitment levels.

We can mobilise and build up volunteer pools, but at the end of the day we must acknowledge that they are volunteers—many of whom wear many different hats. Our challenge is to keep our programmes relevant and top of mind for our volunteers. The onus is on us to make it engaging and meaningful for them, so that they will keep coming back to work with us. We try to be mindful not to overload

our volunteers just because they are proficient or capable, and to appreciate them for all that they do.

Soh Lin Li: A good volunteer is also an advocate and spokesperson. At NLB, we have designed a recognition and reward framework to retain, sustain and level them up.

We do not rate our volunteers; our framework is based on the number of hours they put in: the more hours, the greater the recognition. We have an annual volunteer appreciation event for those with a certain tier of hours. Those at a higher tier are invited to special events such as a chat with our CEO, or exclusive tours.

We also make sure we listen to them, so they know that their feedback is taken seriously by NLB, and they are needed and appreciated. This strengthens their motivation to want to continue with us.

Denise Low: MSF also has a recognition framework with different tiers of awards, including some based on their contributions and numbers of years of service and so on. However, MSF not only engages individual volunteers, but also many agencies and organisations. We engage them to try to align their work with our

policies. We do this by spending a lot of effort talking to them, understanding what concerns they might have about particular policies and working around and through them together.

How can public service agencies further support the community's ability to volunteer and contribute?

Soh Lin Li: The relationship we build up with volunteers must be based on trust. When we work with our volunteers, they need to know that what we do is aligned with what they believe in as well, and that the process can be trusted. This calls for continual reassurance and communication. On our part, we must be sure not to take volunteers for granted. If everyone understands this, it leads to win-win outcomes for both the organisation and the volunteers.

We may also want to work with fellow agencies to identify key volunteers who work across agencies, to prioritise their contribution based on our particular needs.



A good volunteer is also an advocate and spokesperson.

Denise Low: Without a proper structure in place, the community may duplicate efforts, which could mean leaving out areas no one is looking at. A proper structure that is shared with the community lets them know where they can step in, what is to be done, and where and how to do it in a most efficient way.

For instance, our Comlink+ initiative is structured in a way that encourages cross-agency mobilisation, because the needs of the families it serves span different agencies. We have been leveraging different agencies' programmes to help with our families. For instance, NLB's Kids Read volunteers

Mobilising the Community in the Public Service: Best Practices



Align goals

Identify mutual goals and alignment across agencies and community stakeholders to work towards common objectives.



Structure mobilisation

Potential volunteers should be clear how they can get involved, and what the terms of participation are.



Offer a spectrum of opportunities

For different levels of interest and intensity.



Balance top-down versus bottom-up momentum

While ground interest and ownership are necessary to sustain volunteering, it may need some government support to get started or keep going.



Manage stakeholder expectations

Including those of the sponsoring organisation, the community using services, and the volunteers themselves.



read to the children. SportCares, from SportsSG, has volunteer coaches who teach the children to play various sports. Comlink+ thus acts as an aggregator, identifying needs and then reaching out to different providers, each with their own volunteers, to serve those needs. We serve as a single point of contact for people who want to help uplift the lower income.

Woo Wee Meng: In the volunteering landscape, different people have different and even multiple interests that can spread across different agencies. Our tendency as administrators is to try to streamline where we can. But to volunteers, it may be specific programmes they are interested in, rather than which agencies they are working with, or whether they are working across agencies in a whole-of-government way. So public agencies must understand our own volunteer base and cater to them, ensuring the

programmes we set up are relevant and meaningful to them in the long run.

Even with a strong volunteer movement, it is still important for agencies to have a continuing presence on the ground. It is not just about getting people to come on board and then leaving them to do the work whenever we need them. For example, NParks has regional managers for our Community In Bloom gardens: these managers work closely with the community gardeners, building relationships and journeying with them. The relationship cannot be perceived as a transactional one. We need to show that we are here to walk the journey alongside our volunteers, as facilitators and partners.

If you want to grow a movement, it is not as simple as getting it started and then tapering off completely. As we grow the volunteer pool, we will need to sustain and grow the relationship, and that takes continuing effort and investment of our resources. ■

Notes

1. <https://fotp.nparks.gov.sg/>
2. <https://www.nparks.gov.sg/learning/youthsgnature/youth-stewards-for-nature>
3. <https://www.greenplan.gov.sg/key-focus-areas/city-in-nature/>
4. <https://www.pa.gov.sg/our-programmes/sparks-bukit-canberra/nature-nurturer-network/>
5. <https://naturekakis.nparks.gov.sg/>

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH

CO-VISION, CO-ACTION AND CO-LEARNING

by Ang Hak Seng



The next bound of complex and intertwined social issues can only be addressed by sharing responsibility with community stakeholders for service design and delivery.



Ang Hak Seng is a Professor at the Singapore University of Social Sciences and an Adjunct Professor with Nanyang Technological University's Nanyang Centre for Public Administration. Prof Ang was Deputy Secretary with the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and a Fellow of the Civil Service College.





In Singapore, the social sector (also referred to here as the people or non-profit sector) is experiencing a number of significant trends. These include resource considerations such as greater scarcity, overserved and underserved populations, resource matching issues, as well as a growing number of multifaceted and multidisciplinary challenges, from a rapidly ageing society to digital transformation and more. At the same time, the citizenry has become more able and willing to be more involved in public issues, shifting the emphasis on government directed interventions to more ground-up community engagement and participation.

Traditional community engagement strategies, which are more top-down directed, must evolve to contend with these new priorities and pressures. In doing so, the sector benefits from looking outside itself to take in new ideas. In this light, modes of co-creation and co-delivery have emerged as opportunities for Singaporeans to be more actively involved in planning and delivering the services they receive. Co-creation is about planning together with citizens and co-delivery is about doing and learning together with citizens. Such approaches are aligned with the aspirations presented in the Forward Singapore report released last year,¹ highlighting the importance of working with the general public to keep the Singapore dream alive and well.

HOW TO CO-CREATE AND CO-DELIVER WELL

How can stakeholders in the social sector make the most of co-creation and co-delivery as modes of engagement? To realise these

strategies well in practice, my research into Singapore's social sector suggests that an iterative, three-pronged framework that involves co-vision, co-action and co-learning (Figure 1) is effective.

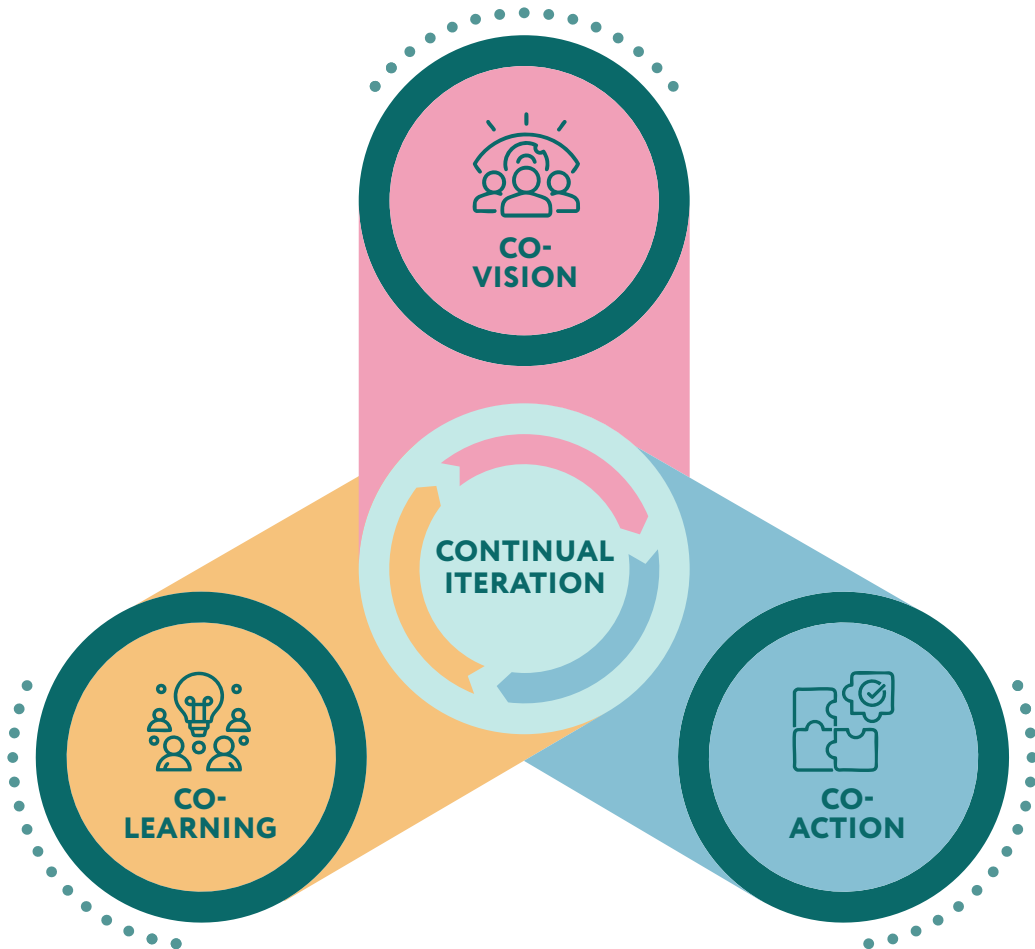


Figure 1. Co-creation and co-delivery by using co-vision, co-action, and co-learning, with R as the continual iteration of this process.

CO-VISION

To co-vision is to create a common purpose. Traditionally, organisational leaders decide the vision in a top-down manner, which other stakeholders (such as the rest of their organisation) are then meant to adopt. However, while this approach may appear quicker to implement, it does not engender a sense of ownership, as the majority of stakeholders have not participated in creating the vision.

At the other end of the spectrum, a 'bottom-up' approach to co-visioning can foster a strong sense of shared ownership for the vision—but can take much longer to align the many different perspectives among community stakeholders.

A pragmatic approach draws on the benefits of both top-down and bottom-up approaches (Figure 2):

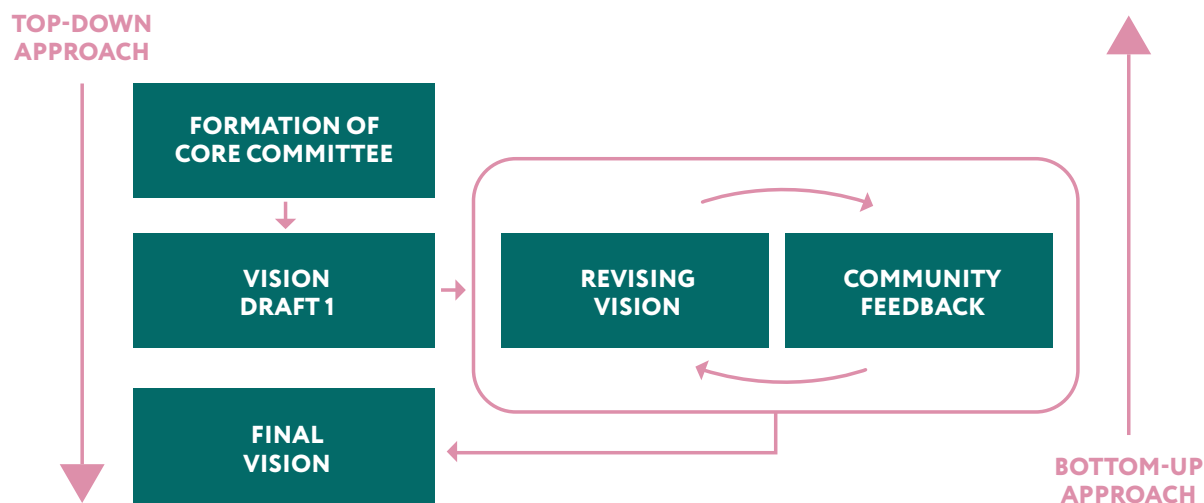


Figure 2. Co-visioning with inputs from both top and bottom.



*To co-vision is to create
a common purpose.*

- i. A small but diverse core committee of people, comprising representatives of all stakeholders, is formed to draft the vision for the programme. Care is taken to ensure that the committee members are truly representative of the respective stakeholder views, and to ensure that the committee is as diverse as possible.
 - ii. Design thinking methodologies might be used to expedite the initial visioning process. Once the first draft of the vision is produced with input from all committee members, it is offered to the broader community for their input.
 - iii. During the community feedback sessions, participants are encouraged to diverge in thinking before converging to the best few ideas.
 - iv. After the feedback session, the vision and the community's inputs are given back to the committee for further deliberation. This iterative process is repeated until at least 30% of the community is satisfied with the vision. My research on organisational transformation in the sector suggests that this is the critical threshold beyond which the vision gains enough momentum to spread throughout the target population.
- It is important in the convergence process to emphasise aligning concepts and ideas rather than to fixating on the exact words used. These collective thinking sessions should be conducted to ensure that as many possible ideas can be generated, allowing for the best version of the draft vision to emerge.



CO-ACTION

Co-action is about doing things together in a concerted effort to achieve shared goals. This can

be achieved using an integrated programme management framework.

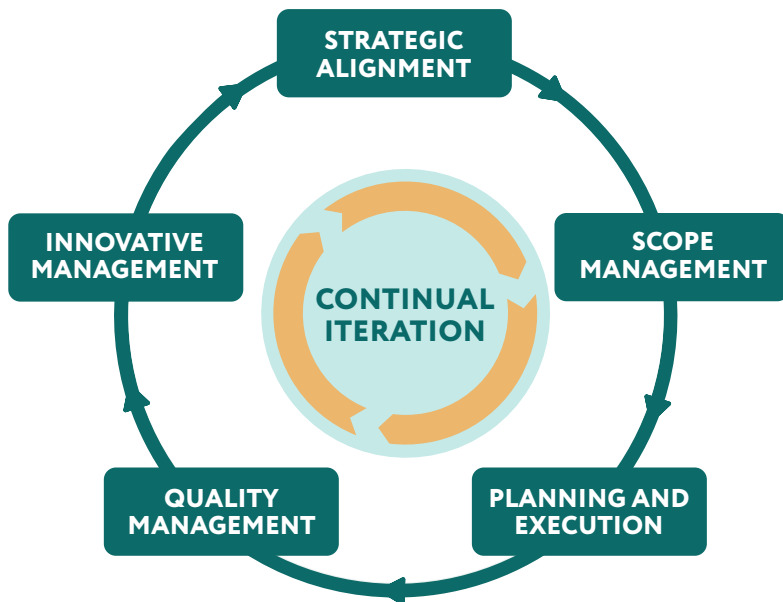


Figure 3. Implementing co-action.

Such a framework enables the stakeholders co-participating in a project to work in unison, much like a successful football team would:

- i. For a football team to be successful, its players must operate with a clear common

objective in mind: to score goals on the opponent's side. Similarly, **strategic alignment** enables the working group to have clarity on their mission and the purpose of the project, ensuring that the project serves the community's vision and objectives.

- ii. A football team is consists various roles, but most players are able to switch roles easily as they understand one another's function on the team. Likewise, **scope management** allows the working team to understand both their own responsibilities as well as those of their fellow team members by defining objectives and deliverables for the project. This builds agility into the team, allowing members with the right skills to cover for each other's roles when required.
- iii. While players seem to be moving in random patterns in a football game, their movements are in fact guided by an overarching game plan. Good **planning and execution** enable this adaptability and flexibility to take place in co-creation and co-delivery programmes, by providing an overarching strategy that guides the team's work, enabling them to work independently from each other while still being able to stay on track.
- iv. Before each football game, a team discusses their plans for the game ahead, including how many goals they aim to score. Similarly, **quality management** allows for project teams in the social sector to operate in a similar way, by establishing and monitoring KPIs to ensure that actual deliverables meet requirements established earlier in the project.
- v. Football teams conduct practice games with opponents to hone skills and develop new strategies for upcoming competitions, enabling teams to respond more quickly to their opponents during actual matches. In a similar manner, **innovation management** allows social sector project teams to quickly respond to new opportunities. This includes a risk management approach to determine ahead of time what kinds of risks the project is able and willing to take.

*Co-action is about doing things together
in a concerted effort to achieve shared goals.*



CO-LEARNING

Co-learning is about building a system of continual improvement by closing the learning loop within a co-creation and co-delivery partnership of stakeholders. This ensures that lessons from the project are ingrained in the system, helping future iterations of the project do better. A learning loop framework can help boost confidence because partners and stakeholders have a foundation to work from, rather than feeling like programmes have to begin from scratch with every iteration.

Co-learning allows co-creation and co-delivery teams to leverage what has worked in the past, while also trying out new ways of doing things. Learning feedback loops help the team identify when project results deviate from desired outcomes, and then to take appropriate correction action. This enables new solutions to be quickly rolled out and reviewed to improve the next iteration: allowing for greater project agility and rapid prototyping in an increasingly volatile and fast-changing environment.

Collaborative learning with stakeholders across the different sectors in society, both for strategic and operational, ground-level issues, will become increasingly relevant. As public issues become more multifaceted and complex, they will require not just whole-of-government coordination but also whole-of-society understanding, innovation and action.

Co-learning with stakeholders across and outside the public sector can not only surface fresh perspectives and ideas, but also engender greater trust in government, foster greater understanding and ownership of complex issues, as well as acceptance of trade-offs and different possible outcomes. The paradigm shifts from a know-all government with the sole responsibility to resolve all problems, to one where all of society are learning together to grapple with the challenges we must face together.

One way to create a co-learning feedback loop is to conduct co-learning debriefings (Figure 4).

Co-learning allows co-creation and co-delivery teams to leverage what has worked in the past, while also trying out new ways of doing things.

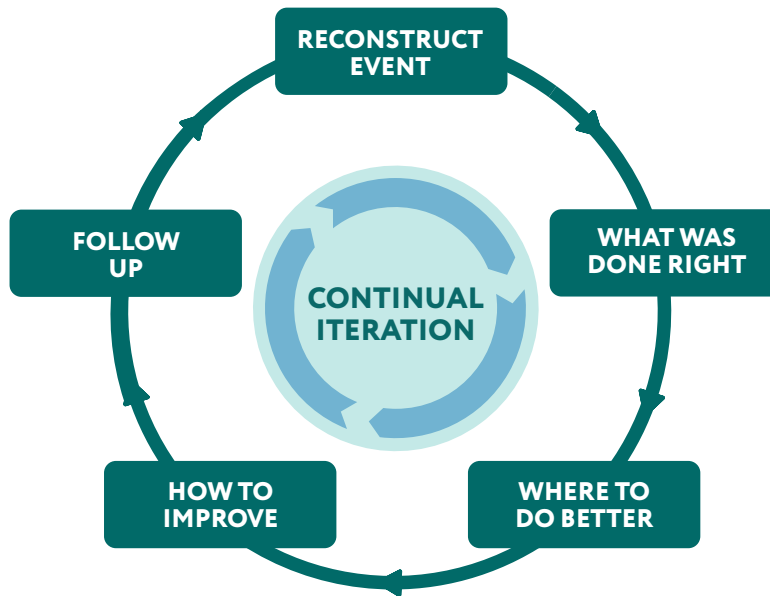


Figure 4. Co-learning debriefings: a learning feedback loop.

For the co-learning debriefing session to be productive:

- The **right processes** need to be put in place, such as feedback channels for participants to provide their suggestions.
- Participants of the debriefing session should have the **right attitude**: one of learning and not of placing blame on others.
- The debriefing process should result in **actionable and tangible improvements** for performance tracking.

During debriefing sessions, there are three types of questions to surface:

- **What was done right**—participants think about the positives and acknowledge efforts put in by themselves and others towards the intended goals. This is an important step as debriefing sessions could otherwise easily descend into blame-games and derail morale.
- **Areas for improvement**—participants analyse past activities or events to determine the root causes of any issues presented.
- **How to improve**—participants brainstorm and develop solutions together and ensure that the lessons learnt will contribute towards subsequent iterations of the programme.

ROLES IN CO-CREATION AND CO-DELIVERY

For co-creation and co-delivery to be possible, the people, public and private sectors cannot work in silos. But what are their most appropriate respective roles? While different projects will have different parameters and arrangements, I suggest that these key roles may be usefully distinguished thus: the people sector serves as the executor, the public sector as the enabler, and the private sector as the sponsor.

PEOPLE SECTOR AS EXECUTOR

People sector organisations, such as social service agencies (SSAs) and charities, enhance social good through their initiatives and programmes. These activities generate social impact, improving quality of life for the community. Co-creation and co-delivery enable the people sector to produce better initiatives with greater relevance and reach, with greater social impact for the community. Working with the private and public sectors greatly enhances the resources and scale available for their work. Engaging with the beneficiaries they serve help people sector organisations more fully understand actual needs, wants, and concerns, particular for the crucial last mile of services, and to better appreciate and address the root causes of problems.

PUBLIC SECTOR AS ENABLER

Public sector organisations, such as government agencies and statutory boards, are no longer the primary executors of social services. Instead, they serve as catalysts, helping to facilitate the development of new social initiatives by providing knowledge, infrastructure development, grants, training, and policies to guide and support people sector organisations in implementing social interventions. For instance, if a youth-focused SSA wants to venture into eldercare due to rising demands from their beneficiaries, government agencies can support this by educating the SSA on the current eldercare landscape, key government policies on active ageing, and potential partnerships to expedite development.

PRIVATE SECTOR AS SPONSOR

Private sector organisations, from large corporations to small and medium-sized enterprises, often undertake initiatives that contribute to enhancing social good, as part of their corporate social responsibility agenda. Businesses may engage in philanthropic projects that help fund non-profits, or they may lend effort and expertise through corporate volunteers with skills in areas like project management or IT. The private sector may also be able to offer or share corporate resources such as computer systems or physical office space with non-profit organisations lacking access to these resources.

MOVING FORWARD WITH CO-CREATION AND CO-DELIVERY

In pursuing co-creation or co-delivery, we need to be mindful that different individuals among the many stakeholders in the community will have different levels of commitment. Not everyone wishes to be fully involved in a project. Many are satisfied with being kept informed about new developments—but this does not mean they are indifferent to project outcomes. We should incorporate ways to keep this silent majority updated on the status of initiatives intended to meet their needs.

In the long term, we must also be sure to take measure of the actual social impact of co-creation and co-delivery projects.² This might include evaluations of whether community

empowerment has improved: through surveys or other studies of whether members of the community feel more agency and self-efficacy. Such measures help demonstrate the effectiveness of co-creation and co-delivery to all stakeholders—generating a virtuous cycle of engagement and success—and foster accountability and transparency.

As our world continues to become more volatile, uncertain and complex, collaborative approaches to addressing societal issues will become ever more necessary. More work still needs to be done to develop a more nuanced and effective co-creation and co-delivery methodology for Singapore's context: particularly ways to enhance co-visioning, co-action, and co-learning. I invite all interested parties to collaborate with us in this endeavour! ■

Notes

1. L. Wong, C. S. Chan, G. Fu, et al., and the Forward Singapore Workgroup, *Building Our Shared Future* (Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, 2023), https://www.forwardsingapore.gov.sg/-/media/forwardsg/pagecontent/fsg-reports/full-reports/mci-fsg-final-report_fa_rgb_web_20-oct-2023.pdf.
2. For more information about implementing social impact measurements, see: H. S. Ang, *Restructuring Charities (Part 2): Toolkits and Best Practices* (Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants, 2023), <https://ca-lab.isca.org.sg/insights/restructuring-charities-part-2/>.

THE SG100 FUTURES LAB:

A Prototype for Seeding
Trisector Collaboration

by Druga Rajendran and
Jacqueline Wong

A new model of transformative dialogue
shifts the conversation from 'Ego' to 'Eco'
in envisioning a better shared future for
all in Singapore.





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Jacqueline Wong is Managing Director and founder of Sequoia Group. She is a process consultant, facilitator, coach and teacher with close to 30 years of experience in the field of Leadership and Organisation Development. A strong advocate for national development, she has partnered with over 200 organisations and several national level movements to support the building of institutions, businesses and communities worthy of people's commitment. She was the founding Dean for the Centre for Systems Leadership and introduced the SG100 Futures Lab as a prototype for engendering leadership conversations that transcends sectoral boundaries. She is a member of the Co-governance Community of Practice hosted by the Singapore Government Partnership Office (SGPO). She is also a Board member of Assisi Hospice and Chairperson of its Human Resource Committee.

The SG100 Lab was organised by the Centre for Systems Leadership, Singapore Institute of Management and supported by the Ministry for Community, Culture and Youth (MCCY).

Tri-Sector Collaboration is Needed to Tackle Today's Complexities

Today's complex global challenges—be it climate change, public health crises or economic inequality—are too large for any single entity or sector to solve on its own. Governments, businesses, and non-governmental organisations or civil society (also termed the Public, Private and People or 3P sectors) each play critical roles in addressing these issues, but it is through collaborative efforts that their impact can be magnified. Tri-sector collaboration—the strategic partnership between these sectors—is essential to creating innovative solutions that can be implemented effectively, with the necessary support to be sustainable for the long term.

Singapore has on record numerous compelling examples—from Smart Nation to SkillsFuture and the Sustainable Singapore Movement—of how tri-sector collaboration can create significant positive outcomes. The public sector in Singapore has many contributing strengths, such as a strong regulatory environment and effective policy frameworks. However, significant gaps remain, particularly in engaging civil society and fostering ecosystem level collaboration beyond business-government alliances. In this light,

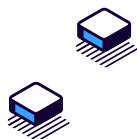
the establishment of the Singapore Government Partnerships Office (SGPO)¹ is a welcome step forward. Nevertheless, more can still be done to bring leaders across the three sectors together in equal measure for dialogue in a consistent manner.

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Co-creating the World We Want to Live In

Facilitated jointly by the creator of Theory-U, Otto Scharmer² and the then Dean of the Centre for Systems Leadership and Managing Director of Sequoia Group, Jacqueline Wong, the SG100 Futures Lab³ was born of an initiative by a nucleus group of senior leaders from across Singapore's 3P sectors coming together,⁴ on their own accord, out of a concern for the shortage of platforms for convening systems leadership dialogues. The idea was to create a space for envisioning the desired future we want to create for Singapore for SG100.



THE LAB AND PROCESS

The initiative was intentionally named a Lab to signal it as a deliberative space for reflective dialogue and sensing the future—rather than a task force, project team or action-bound steering committee. The Lab was meant to be a parallel space, in which participants could step out of their individual organisational and sectoral perspectives and come together for meaningful dialogues about what they collectively care most about creating for a future Singapore.

Participants were brought through a guided “U-process”:⁵ this first required a suspension of answers and know-hows, then a disciplined co-observing, co-sensing and contemplation (also known as “presencing”). Participants then articulated and crystalised for themselves what actions would be of most significant impact from the perspective of a future generation and the whole ecosystem.

The Call to Participate

The nucleus group personally reached out to their contacts in the three sectors to explain, enrol and engage people they know who might be keen to embark on this learning journey together.

Participant had to commit to the three-day SG100 Futures Lab, which was by invitation only. A total of 24 leaders from SMEs, MNCs, social service agencies, government and civil society

responded to the call. The Lab was held on 7 to 9 November 2022.

The Lab then culminated in a larger Centre for Systems Leadership Conference, centred on the same theme of SG100, involving a larger community of over 150 leaders. This was held on 10 November 2022.

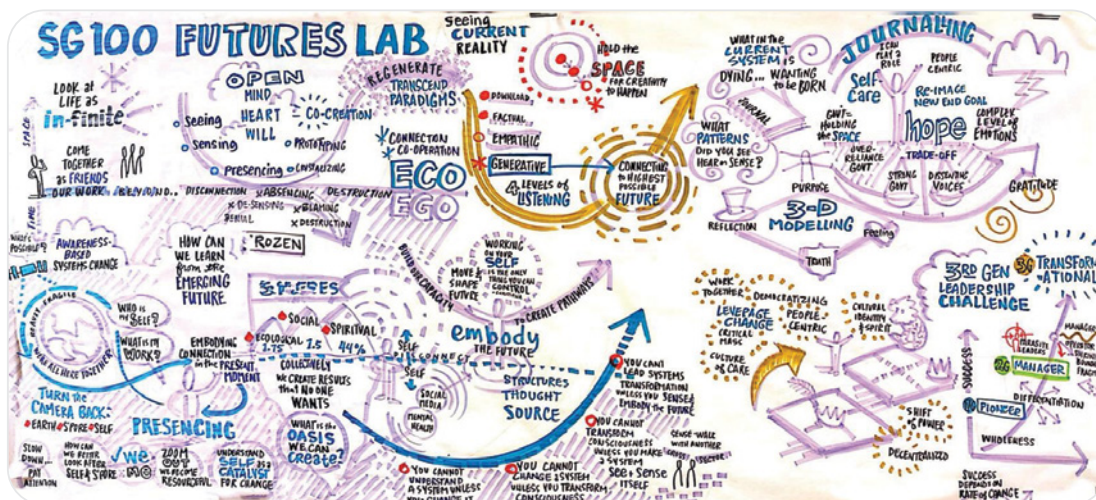
The Lab aimed to uncover the deeper reasons why existing systems and structures often led to fragmented outcomes that ‘nobody wanted’.



Objectives

The Lab aimed to uncover the deeper reasons why existing systems and structures often led to fragmented outcomes that ‘nobody wanted’ and to help leaders recognise personal leadership blind spots that hindered collaboration across boundaries. Shifting the collective focus towards a future they truly cared about, the Lab sought to prototype ideas for realising this vision, while building a community of leaders passionate about driving systemic transformation for themselves and others.





▲ Visual recording of the Lab proceedings by Tim Hamons. Reproduced with permission.

THE EXPERIENCE

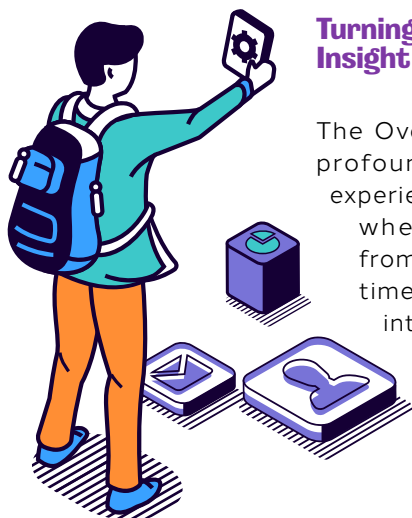
Over three days, participants engaged in practices of deep listening, generative inquiry, deliberate stillness and embodied movement to make visible “the emerging future.”

leading to a new level of environmental awareness and care for the planet amongst astronauts.

During the Lab, participants engaged in a reflective process that mirrored the Overview Effect⁶, focusing on their own experiences and insights about Singapore and its challenges. Recognising the fragility of their environment and the interconnectedness of societal issues, they reflected on what it means to be Singaporean and their roles in shaping the home they care about. Their cognitive shift was recognising that effective leadership is not just about *What* we do or *How* we do it, but is dependent on the *inner place* and intrinsic motivations from which we operate.

Turning Inward for Insight

The Overview Effect⁶ is a profound cognitive shift experienced by astronauts when viewing Earth from space for the first time. They often report intense emotions and a sense of unity with humanity and the planet,

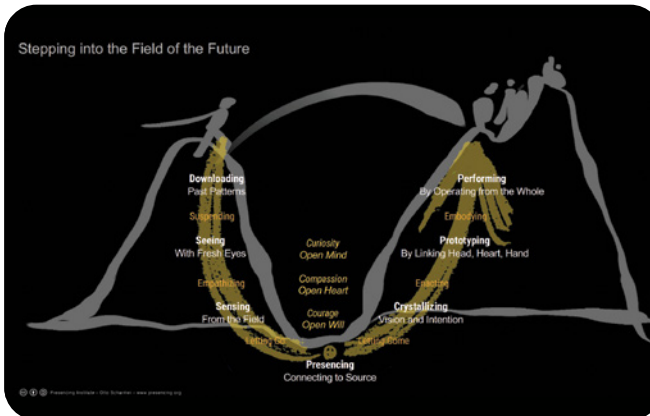
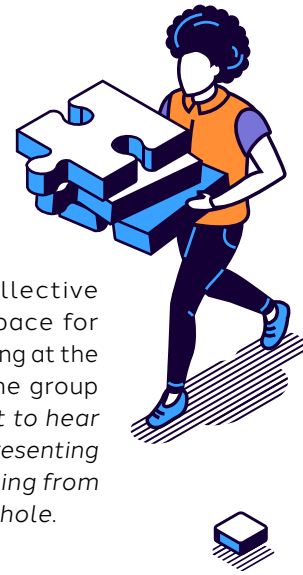


Sensing and Presencing: Embodiment

To further experience this cognitive shift, the group created a 3D sculpture representing how we as a system today collaborate on addressing complex challenges our nation faces. After building the model, they reshaped and iterated it to reflect the system they aspired to build. This creative expression let participating leaders

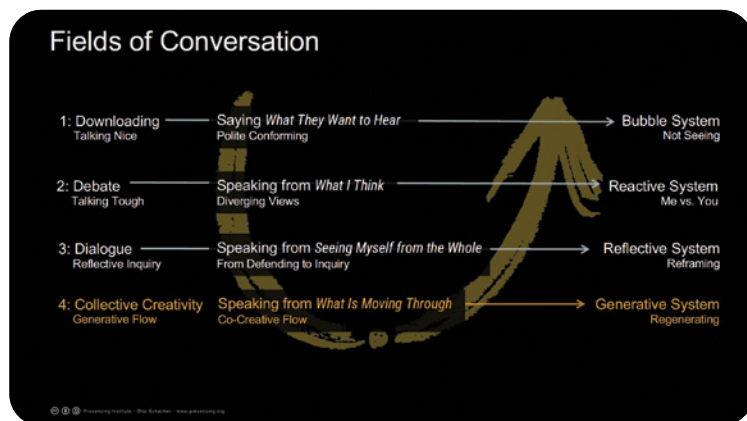
visualise systemic barriers, hard truths and potential pathways for transformation.

This method of making collective thinking visible opened up space for collaborative building and looking at the whole ecosystem. It shifted the group from *saying what people want to hear* and *speaking as individuals representing their vested interests* to *speaking from seeing themselves from the whole*.



◀ *Stepping into the Field of the Future and connecting to the source require us to embody an open mind, open heart and open will, through suspending the voice of judgment (VoJ) to see with fresh eyes, the voice of cynicism (VoC) to connect with an open heart, and the voice of fear (VoF) to act freely, letting go of past baggage and assumptions. © Presencing Institute. Reproduced with permission.*

▶ *From Downloading to Dialogue. © Presencing Institute. Reproduced with permission.*





To deepen the practice of speaking and seeing themselves from the whole, the participants also experimented with 4D Systems Mapping. Using an embodiment method from Social Presencing Theatre (SPT),⁸ group members physically embodied roles within a system and—through relational positioning, movement and spoken expression with these roles—made visible the system's current reality and emergent potential.

**You cannot understand a system
unless you change it
You cannot change a system unless you
transform consciousness
You can't transform consciousness unless
you make a system see and sense itself
You can't lead system transformation
unless you sense and embody the future
as it emerges**

—Otto Scharmer during
the Futures Lab Workshop



A total of 13 roles were defined for this 4D mapping: Mother Earth, ASEAN, China, US, Singapore Government, Big Businesses, SMEs, Social Sector, Arts and Culture, Children and Youth, Marginalised People, and Retirees. The task was to embody the Vision of Singapore, SG100.

The roles were intentionally selected to represent the voice of the system as much as possible in this gathering and to mirror the three divides (earth/environment, marginalised groups or individuals who are usually not the decision-makers, and the voice of the future). Thirteen members stepped forward to take on these roles while the rest observed. The only guideline

given was to not choose a role they actually play in daily life. For example, we had a government representative choose the role of the citizen, a soon-to-be retiree choose the role of a child, a young working adult choose the role of a retiree, and so on.

By deliberately stepping into new roles, leaders gained insights into alternate realities, and a deeper appreciation of systemic dynamics and interconnectedness.



▲ The forming of sculptures to represent the dynamics of the SG100 Singapore system. Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Wong.

Participants each formed a shape in the shared space to represent their role in the system. Each member found their space in relation to the centre, the edge and others. They asked themselves, “Am I bigger, smaller, in the centre, to the side; do I feel powerful, weak and vulnerable?” They were reminded not to act, but to empathise, identify with

**By deliberately stepping into
new roles, leaders gained
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the role and embody it. Once they found their shape and space, they offered one sentence from the experience of the shape in the first person 'I' voice. The process was repeated until everyone's voice was heard.



▲ An emerging sculpture of the SG100 system. Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Wong.

The group was then prompted to take up new positions and form different shapes, based on a mindful awareness of their own bodies relative to the surrounding space and each other—rather than acting out preconceived ideas or concepts. This led the group to shift organically from their positions in Sculpture 1 (current) to Sculpture 2 (future), revealing potential new and different relations between each role relative to each other and to the whole. Notably, the sculpture evolved from government being in the centre to the government operating from the periphery, enabling citizens and stakeholders to play a bigger role.

Participants were asked to reflect on what they noticed, saw or did leading to the formation of the new, future-oriented sculpture. Their reflections highlighted the importance of addressing gaps and overlaps in our

Voices representing present systemic reality



Government

"I seek order. I can't do it alone"



Big Business

"I am very mobile"



SMEs

"I am just trying to survive. I need the help of the region to survive"



Citizen

"I am going to watch things happen from the sidelines"



Social sector

"I am trying to catch whatever I can" (in reference to supporting the various communities of people in need of help in the field)



ASEAN

"I envy you but I don't want to be you"



Mother Earth

"I don't have much time left"



Children and Youth

"I just want to be happy"



Marginalised People

"I take one step at a time. I am always hidden"



Arts and Culture

"I need all your support. I am a valuable member of this community"



Retirees

"I feel useless, please let me help"



systems, particularly for those who are hidden or marginalised. There were some who challenged us to consider whether people feel a true sense of belonging to a whole, and whether our society fosters unity. Others reiterated the need to unlearn traditional approaches and embrace new ways of thinking. Instead of seeking solutions from centralised authority, the group offered suggestions to look to the margins and the edges where change often originates.

Co-creating the Emerging Future

The group then articulated what they saw as the leverage points to realise the envisioned future embodied in Sculpture 2. Their ideas centred on reclaiming our relationship with self and with others, as well as with the environment we inhabit. These included:



Establishing an Arts & Nature Lab:

To empower artists to engage citizens in reconnecting with nature, fostering environmental awareness and community involvement.



Creating a Living Lab for Active Citizenry in Schools:

To educate children and youth about their rights and encourage them to envision the Singapore they wish to create, promoting civic engagement and social responsibility.



Promoting Purpose-Driven Businesses:

Enhancing the role of the "S" in ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) criteria, encouraging businesses to adopt socially responsible practices that contribute positively to society.



Leveraging Retiree Expertise:

Using the skills and knowledge of retirees to augment manpower in social sector service delivery, thereby enhancing community support systems.



Fostering a Culture of Giving and Nurturing the Heartware of Singapore:

Encouraging a culture of giving by all was identified as a way to strengthen social compact and create a more gracious, caring society.



▲ *Crystalising the big ideas for collaboration. Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Wong.*



LESSONS FROM THE FUTURES LAB

Reflections on the SG100 Futures Lab

"The fear of letting go is real and core, which hampers us from achieving our desired future. ...Getting over this hurdle requires much time, understanding and faith/trust before new possibilities can really start to emerge."

Leader from Social Sector Agency for the Young

"As leaders, we should not always jump in and solve problems for our team. We need to learn to hold back and let things happen. Don't take away ownership of problems from our team."

Leader from Social Sector Agency for Seniors

"I valued the chance to practise co-presencing and co-generation with fellow change-makers (all willing to be honest, vulnerable, etc), who are on the similar journey."

Leader from Healthcare Sector

"The Systems mapping, personal sculpture and 4D Mapping exercises link the person to national issues directly and are a powerful eye-opener to create personal accountability."

Leader from Public Sector

"This Lab is a powerful experience that helps leaders keep the larger ecosystem in mind even if they seek to resolve real business challenges. The key is to make an impact for the long-term health of the system."

Leader from Business Sector

The Futures Lab experience has reinforced the importance of investing time and energy for a system to see and sense itself before jumping into action.



The Futures Lab experience has reinforced the importance of investing time and energy for a system to see and sense itself before jumping into action.

There are many ways in which this reflexivity can be achieved. However, in facilitating conversations towards this goal, a number of principles are vital to success:

1.

Purposeful invitation: Invite participants as concerned citizens and emphasise personal engagement. This encourages participants to view their involvement as part of a significant transformative journey and responsibility rather than just another obligation.

2.

Check our blind spots: Effective leadership involves letting go of the impulse to control outcomes and attending to the blind spot of leadership. Continually foster an environment of engagement that is centred on purpose and intention.

3.

Address fear of Letting Go: The fear of letting go is a significant barrier to achieving desired changes. Understanding this fear is crucial for facilitating deep, transformative change, which requires time, empathy, and trust.

4.

Move at the speed of trust: Trust-building and vulnerability are vital for creating a safe space in which leaders can share challenges and insights. Relationship building encourages participants to engage honestly with one another, paving the way for authentic collaborations and collective innovation.

5.

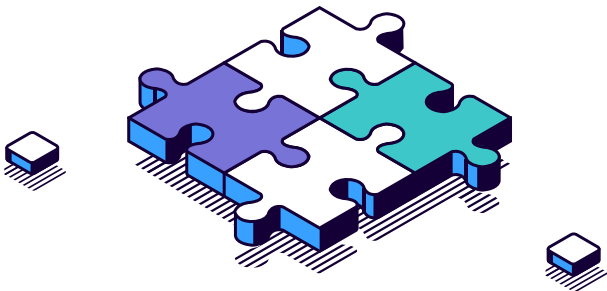
Suspend knowing: Recognising that knowing is often overrated, gently nudge the group through reflective practices to name and suspend the voices of judgement, cynicism and fear.

6.

Practise collective awareness: Embodiment techniques let participants visualise current realities and emerging possibilities, accessing 'wisdom below the neck'. This process helps them identify personal blind spots and fosters open dialogue about their roles in systemic change, enhancing awareness of their impact on larger systems and personal accountability.

7.

Looking for Leverage Points: Identifying key leverage points for systemic transformation moves participants from reaction to regeneration.



CONCLUSION

As a prototype, the SG100 Futures Lab holds promise for integrating embodied intelligence in the process of bringing together trisector actors to address complex social and technical challenges. It is most helpful when:



The issues we want to address have no single root cause and is dynamically, socially and technically complex: such as determining the future of a nation. A lab of this nature helps with unpacking the complexity of the issue by adopting a systems perspective, mapping interdependencies, and exploring mental models.



The issue cannot be solved by any single organisation and lacks a clear or widely agreed definition among the actors who could address it. This process helps to harness and represent the multiple and often marginalised voices of the system.



An issue is emergent and shifting, defying silver-bullet solutions, or when people are unsure of how to make progress. This process may help with breaking down silos of learning and practice, by sensing and responding together on what is waiting to emerge.

The Lab process addresses the need for a different kind of platform where leaders gather as concerned citizens and activate conversations on what we all care most about, suspending the tendency to leap into action from the start.

Instead, the process places significant importance on developing the ontological intelligence of leaders—a self-awareness about who they are and what their deep purpose is—by having people access their ‘below the neck’ knowledge of heart and will: which is often overlooked in traditional collaboration settings that focus

primarily on actions and strategies. This is vital for sustainable transformation.

By prioritising deep dialogue, inner awareness and community building, the process lays the groundwork for leaders across sectors to come together to co-create a future we all want. ■



▲ Visual recording of the Lab proceedings by Tim Hamons. Reproduced with permission.

Notes

1. <https://www.sgpo.gov.sg/>
2. Otto Scharmer is the author of *Theory U* (Berrett-Koehler, 2007), co-author of *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-system to Eco-system Economies* (Berrett-Koehler, 2013) and Founding Chair of the Presencing Institute.
3. The SG100 Futures Lab was organised by the Centre for Systems Leadership, Singapore Institute of Management and supported by the Ministry for Community, Culture and Youth.
4. The seeding conversation was initiated in 2022 by a nucleus group co-hosted by Jacqueline Wong, the Managing Director of Sequoia Group and founding Dean for the Centre for Systems Leadership and Seah Chin Siong, then President and CEO of Singapore Institute of Management and Chairman of NVPC. Seah Chin Siong then invited Anita Fam, President of the National Council of Social Services and Gerard Ee, Chairman of the Agency for Integrated Care, as well as other leaders from the 3P sectors, into the conversation.
5. The Lab's process was based on Theory-U, a methodology pioneered and developed by Dr Otto Scharmer, through grounded-research from interview over 300 leaders across the world who have pioneered transformational changes across society, government and business. Otto Scharmer is the founder of the Presencing Institute. The process is a social technology for co-sensing, co-evolving and co-creating the future from an expanded level of collective awareness. See C. O. Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (Berrett-Koehler, 2007).
6. Yaden et al. The overview effect: Awe and self-transcendent experience in space flight. *Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice*. 2016;3(1):1-11
7. <https://presencinginstitute.org>
8. <https://www.u-school.org/4d-mapping>

Navigating Complexity

through Collaboration

by Lim Kar Yee



Complex public problems can only be addressed through a whole-ecosystem approach. A guiding framework can ensure aligned agendas and efforts for collective impact that makes a difference.



Lim Kar Yee is Senior Director, Community Development Council Planning and Development in the People's Association, where she oversees the five Community Development Councils (CDCs) in Singapore and is the Secretary to the Mayors Committee. As a community development practitioner, her forte includes helping partners to build their capabilities and connecting them to benefit the community.



In today's increasingly complex world, public officers are faced with the daunting task of addressing multifaceted challenges that transcend traditional boundaries. These problems often involve multiple stakeholders, require innovative solutions, and demand a collaborative approach. To effectively navigate this complex terrain, especially with multiple stakeholders, public officers must embrace a new paradigm of leadership and partnership.

Often there is more than one explanation or solution to a complex problem. Although we may not have either full knowledge of the causes and effects of a complex problem, or control over the key levers, we do know that such problems tend to involve many stakeholders, all of whom may have different opinions and views on how and what should be done to address the issue. A complex problem will also need significant resourcing, usually longer term, and therefore can be a large economic burden that no one party, including the government, can bear alone.

In addressing problems, we tend to look for a template solution that we can apply, replicate and scale up. Unfortunately, complex problems do not have such straightforward template answers: we often have to go in blind, try out different approaches and test how we are doing along the way. Moreover, there may not be any simple right or wrong answers to such problems.

In many ways, we have to take a broader, ecosystem approach in addressing a complex problem. For instance, unemployment may impact healthcare needs and family stability, and relate to school absenteeism. All the elements need to be looked at in totality. We

know we cannot do this alone. No one stakeholder has sufficient reach, time, effort and resources. To address such problems, we must work with partners within and across the public, private, and people sectors so that collectively we can make a difference.

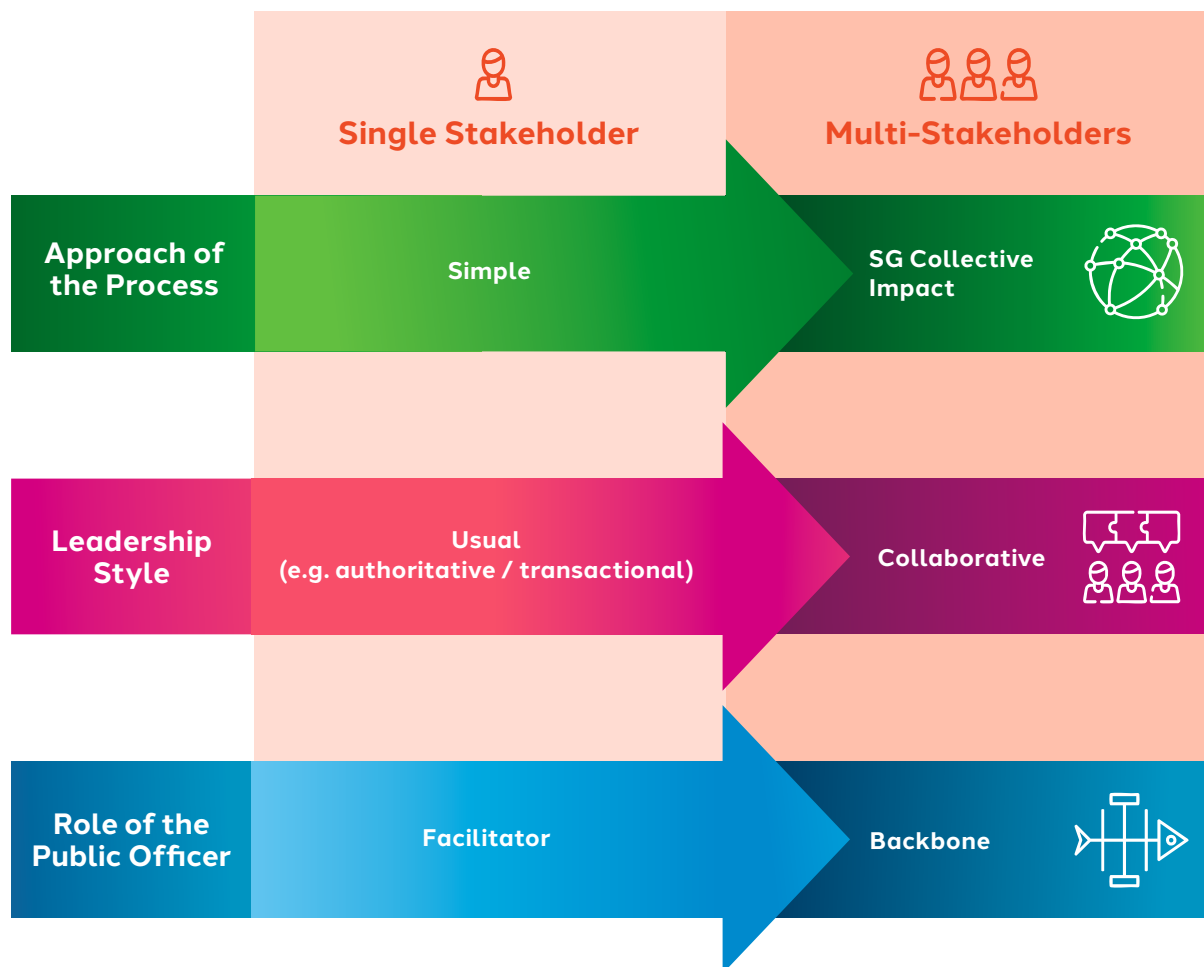


Figure 1. Shifting from a single stakeholder to multi-stakeholders approach is necessary to address complex problems.

What then is the best way to engage with ecosystem partners? How can we make sure they stay with us and share ownership of the work needed to address an identified problem? How do we motivate them?

Our experience at the People's Association (PA) tells us, that as we move from an environment where we work mainly with a single or a few stakeholders to multiple partners and multi-stakeholders, we must also shift our mindset and our approach of the process.

We also need to reconsider our leadership style. Managing any one stakeholder is relatively easy. We can often be transactional and sometimes top-down in our approach, especially as a funder for programmes. With multiple stakeholders, the relationship becomes more of one among peers, as everyone is a leader in their own sphere of influence. There needs to be mutual respect and a more collaborative approach.

As public officers, we are familiar with our role as facilitators today. But when working with multiple stakeholders to address complex problems, we need to shift from being just facilitators to being a backbone, connecting with different people.

The Power of SG Collective Impact

For more than a decade, PA has applied the SG Collective Impact framework as a robust approach to tackling complex social problems with multiple stakeholders. It has been tested in contexts involving long-term, multi-stakeholder and complex issues such as the CDC Vouchers Scheme¹ with over 60 stakeholders, as well as the Integrated Care Programme (ICP),^{2,3} a nine-year-long social mobility programme for 650 primary school students who graduated into secondary schools, with wrap-around care for their families.

The SG Collective Impact framework embraces three fundamental concepts:



Collective Impact



Collaborative Leadership



Community Development

Each concept reinforces the partnership and helps build the social capital⁴ required to sustain stakeholders' interest and commitment, as well as to co-solve complex problems for the longer term.

With multiple stakeholders, the relationship becomes more of one among peers, as everyone is a leader in their own sphere of influence.



Figure 2. The Singapore Collective Impact Framework, used by the People’s Association and the Community Development Councils. Adapted by the author from *Collective Impact* by John Kania and Mark Kramer (Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2011).

SG Collective Impact is adapted from the Collective Impact framework proposed by John Kania and Mark Kramer in 2011.^{5,6} Unlike other countries, Singapore is both compact and small, but it has a government with strong reserves. This unique context gives our adaptation

of the Collective Impact framework a slightly different slant. Instead of the original five conditions, we consider seven conditions and two further embedded concepts—Community Development and Collaborative Leadership—in SG Collective Impact.

The original five conditions PA adapted from the Collective Impact were:

- **Common Agenda:** Aligning and co-creating a shared vision and goals. With any programme involving multiple stakeholders, everyone must share a common goal and purpose. Each may have their own perspective, but we must work towards the same overall purpose.
- **Backbone:** Establishing a dedicated entity and personnel to guide vision and strategy beyond just coordinating and facilitating collaboration. Public officers can play this strategic ‘backbone’ role, which is to think through and manage the process, see clearly where help is needed, and rally people together to provide it.
- **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Ensuring complementary efforts and roles, while avoiding duplication. Every complex problem is a unique problem. With limited resources and time, every partner needs to focus on what they do best and not duplicate efforts. In order not

to spread any one stakeholder too thin, there needs to be partners who can provide complementary support, to one another and to the government, in different areas of the work needed.

- **Continuous Communication:** Having big and small conversations with stakeholders consistently and regularly, to foster trust and confidence among stakeholders.
- **Shared Measurement:** Adopting common metrics to track progress and impact that all stakeholders must agree to.

To these, PA added two additional conditions for SG Collective Impact:

- **Aggregators of Resources:** Leveraging Community Development Councils (CDCs) to mobilise resources and address local needs. CDCs are nimble and closer to the ground and often the first respondents for emerging needs. For example, during the COVID-19 circuit breaker, all schools were closed and went on home-based learning (HBL). Students relying on free canteen food for lunch missed out on lunch when they had HBL. CDCs received feedback from social workers and within 10 days, CDCs developed an end-to-end digital scheme called CDC Student Meals which helped over 8,000 students whose families lived in rental flats, over the next one and half months.



The strategic ‘backbone’ role is to think through and manage the process, see clearly where help is needed, and rally people together to provide it.

- **Community of Partners:** Building a strong network of organisations committed to long-term collaboration and mutual support. To nurture a community of partners who trust and have confidence in each other is not easy. But when this happens, the partners will not run away in times of need and trouble. When the Integrated Care Programme (ICP) ran out of money in its first three years, the partners shared their funders and worked together to overcome the programmes' financial challenges.

The Concept of Asset-Based Community Development: Empowering Local Communities

Community development is essential for creating sustainable and resilient communities. By investing in local capacity, fostering social cohesion, and promoting civic engagement, we can empower communities to address their own challenges and drive positive change. One role of the CDCs is to build capabilities in partners and residents. Beyond doing things for residents, partners also tap on the CDCs to help residents kickstart the process of learning and relearning to achieve a better quality of life for themselves.

Community development, like Collective Impact, is a place-based concept. In this case, PA adopted an Asset-Based

By investing in local capacity, fostering social cohesion, and promoting civic engagement, we can empower communities to address their own challenges and drive positive change.

Community Development (ABCD) approach to identify local partners and leverage local strengths and resources to spark and nurture community participation and to build capability in partners and residents. The objectives are:

- **Community Organising:** Mobilising residents to advocate for their needs and participate in decision-making
- **Capacity Building:** Providing training and support to community members and organisations
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Building strong relationships with government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector.

The Concept of Collaborative Leadership: A Catalyst for Change Culture

It is common for organisations to have a top-down hierarchical leadership style, but this is no longer as readily accepted. A newer generation of Singaporeans



Collaborative leadership is a leadership of process, and not of people.

wants a more collaborative way of working together. The public increasingly also expects explanations for what is being done, rather than accepting statements or instructions at face value from the authorities.

It is important to first determine whether a situation calls for collaborative leadership or a simpler, more directive style. Some problems only need consultation or coordination. But with complex problems, where there are no clear solutions and there are also many stakeholders at play, collaborative leadership becomes vital.

Collaborative leadership is a leadership of process, and not of people. Collaborative leaders are social architects who facilitate, shape and support conversations. As collaborative leaders, our focus is on the process of getting things done in a way that is win-win for all parties, having the courage to call a spade a spade, being humble and acknowledging that we do not know everything.

A table is like a 'leveller'. When we sit around the table, it does not matter if you are a boss or employee or board member: everyone is equal because everyone is a leader. At the end of the day, our focus

must be how to arrive at and to achieve the common agenda. During the nine years of ICP, there were many instances of strong disagreement. Despite this, the partners remained friends, knowing that everyone was acting from the best intentions for the programme.

Collaborative leadership is based on a mindset of shared power: it is not about ego. We do not fixate on telling people what to do. Instead, we focus on rationalising and promoting understanding and consensus on what we do about certain things in certain ways. We also gather feedback on where something is not right with the current situation and discuss ways to rectify it through the process.

With shared power also comes shared credit. At PA, we invite all our other agencies to share in the recognition for successful programmes such as the CDC Vouchers Scheme, because we want to acknowledge and motivate our partners who have been on the journey with us. This is also what builds mutual trust and respect, and hence true collaboration over time.

Today, we recognise that knowledge is power. But in a network society, information does not become power unless we share it for broader use, rather than keep it to ourselves.

Underpinning all these behaviours are the values that guide us. Collaborative leaders are open, authentic, inclusive and not suspicious of others' intent. This means being true to ourselves and to others. If we have any point of disagreement or unhappiness, we say so and work out the issues.

We participate in rather than direct the activity—just because we chair a committee does not mean we tell everyone what to do. This is also how we role model leadership for a future generation of leaders who can take Singapore forward together with the community.

Collaborative Leadership in Practice at the People's Association

Collaborative Leadership is not new. In 2009, Hank Rubin⁷ popularised the concept of Collaborative Leadership, but it was David Chrislip⁸ that crystallised the idea in 2002, looking at leaders in the US.

The PA first adopted the Collaborative Leadership concept in 2018 when we co-created our community vision for the first time. It involved almost all 86 grassroots advisers and their key grassroots leaders together with the PA management. Over a series of sessions spanning almost two years, we came together to co-create a common community vision where the grassroots advisers voted for the community vision that best resonated with them. It was a unifying moment as the grassroots advisers practised the leadership of process and voted for Dr Vivian Balakrishnan's Community Vision that encapsulated the hope, desire, and dreams for the community. This effort also resulted in bridging and aligning the Workplan processes (with Grassroots or Community Seminars that parallel the PA Workplan Seminar) between staff and grassroots.



Collaborative leadership is essential for fostering a culture of partnership and innovation. By embracing a leadership of process, authenticity, and shared power, public officers can empower stakeholders to contribute their expertise and perspectives.

- **Leadership of Process:** Focus on facilitating dialogue, building consensus, and guiding the collective effort.

- **Authenticity:** Be transparent, honest, and genuine in interactions with stakeholders.

- **Shared Power:** Distribute decision-making authority and encourage participation.

By adopting these principles, public officers can create a supportive environment where diverse voices are heard and valued.



Figure 3. The strengths of collaborative leadership.

The Evolving Role of Public Officers as Backbone for Complex Problems

As a facilitator of collaboration, public officers play a useful but still limited role. In a backbone role, however, we can guide the overall vision and strategy of the process, working with other partners and stakeholders. Our job is to ensure that the process is headed in the right direction.

Being a backbone also entails establishing and monitoring shared measurement, which could be outcome or output based, to assess progress. A key backbone function is to gather public will: rallying people by sharing with them what we are

doing and how we have done it, and galvanising their support.

The backbone also works to advance policy goals and mobilise funding and resources towards them. One way in which we can do this is by aggregating needs and resources, by building a community of partners so that we know where both the local needs and local assets are, on the ground. The PA CDC Planning & Development Division has been playing the backbone role since 2013, helping in both community and CDC programmes.

As backbone, public officers can:

- **Provide Strategic Leadership:** Setting the direction and guiding the collaborative process.

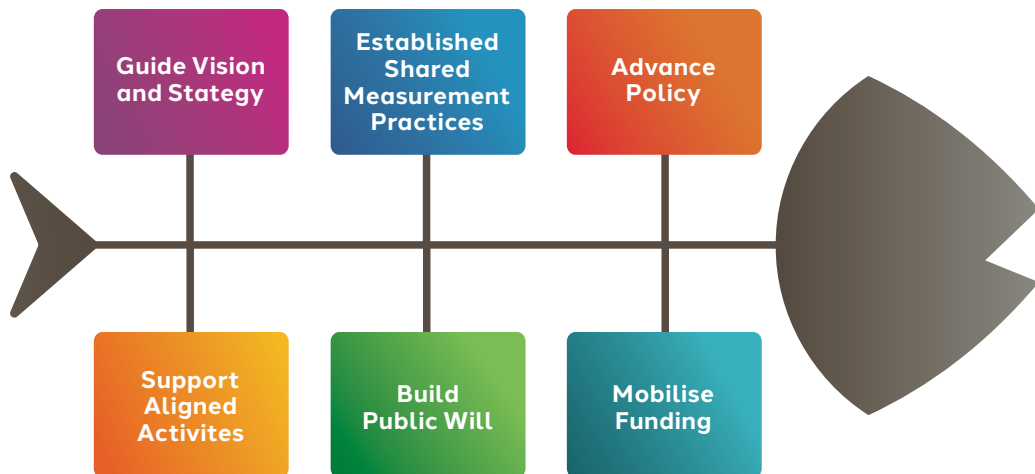


Figure 4. The role of the public officer as backbone for complex problems.



By connecting stakeholders, facilitating collaboration, and monitoring progress, public officers can ensure that a collective impact effort remains focused and effective.

- **Facilitate Collaboration:** Building and maintaining strong relationships among partners.
- **Mobilise Resources:** Securing funding and other resources to support the initiative.
- **Monitor and Evaluate:** Tracking progress and making necessary adjustments.
- **Communicate Effectively:** Sharing information, celebrating successes, and addressing challenges.

All public officers can catalyse meaningful change. The backbone role is a crucial one for public officers looking to drive collaborative initiatives forward. By connecting stakeholders, facilitating collaboration, and monitoring progress, public officers can ensure that a collective impact effort remains focused and effective.

The Future of Public Service

As we move forward, we as public officers must continue to adapt to

the evolving landscape of public service. There are both challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, due to the emergence and interplay of key trends such as:

- **Technological Advancements:** Leveraging technology to enhance collaboration, data analysis, and service delivery.
- **Emerging Social Issues:** Addressing new and complex social problems, such as climate change, inequality, and mental health.
- **Changing Expectations:** Meeting the rising expectations of citizens for transparency, accountability, and responsiveness.

To navigate these challenges and seize the new opportunities they represent, public officers must embrace a collaborative approach, build strong partnerships, and continuously innovate. By working together, we can create a brighter future for our communities. We can be the catalysts for positive change, empowering Singaporeans and building a better future for all. ■



Notes

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4. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000).
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Participatory Design and Planning

Helping Citizens Make More of a Difference

by Larry Yeung and Jan Lim

A civic design and planning non-profit group explains how they bridge community and institutional stakeholders, helping them work together towards a better built environment in Singapore.



Larry Yeung is a designer and community organiser who champions participatory design in Singapore. As Executive Director of Participate in Design (PID), he leads efforts to integrate community-based processes into urban planning. Since 2013, Larry has worked on neighbourhood planning, public space design, and community art. In addition to his work at PID, he also advises government agencies on citizen engagement projects. Larry was a World Cities Summit Young Leader in 2021 and a National University of Singapore (NUS) College of Design and Engineering (CDE) outstanding young alumnus in 2023.



Jan Lim is a researcher and practitioner working in the fields of participatory urban design, planning and governance. She is the Co-founder and Director (Research & Strategy) at Participate in Design (PID). Her work explores the intersections between power structures, political systems, and the agency of ordinary citizens to influence spatial development trajectories. Jan was a PY Fellow under the Philip Yeo Innovation Fellows Programme, a World Cities Summit Young Leader, a Tatler Gen.T Leader of Tomorrow, and a member of the Salzburg Global Fellowship. She holds architecture degrees from the National University of Singapore and obtained her PhD at KU Leuven, Belgium.

The Challenges and Realities of Participatory Frameworks

Over the past decade, public participation channels in Singapore's planning and policymaking have proliferated, reflecting a global trend towards inclusive governance. This evolution presents unique challenges and opportunities within Singapore's approach to public engagement. It is timely to reflect on the purpose and practice of citizen participation: who benefits and whose interests are served?

The promise of citizen participation is to forge empowered communities, enhance the quality of public solutions and services, and align governmental actions with the varied and often nuanced needs of the people. However, the actual influence of such engagements on decision-making processes remains ambivalent. Globally, scholars have critiqued the effectiveness of participatory initiatives, noting that increased engagement does not automatically translate to greater empowerment or influence for the community.^{1,2,3}

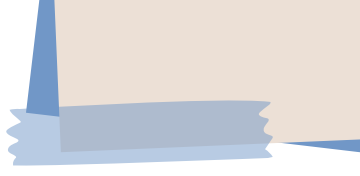
Imagine you are presenting findings from a rigorous public engagement process to attentive stakeholders. As you conclude, you learn a decision has already been made, rendering the participatory process a mere formality. In another scenario, recommendations

from extensive citizen engagement appear to have been adopted, but the process continues without further including those previously involved. In the end, it is unclear how much of the citizens' input is reflected in the outcomes, leaving both citizens and facilitators in the dark.

Such scenarios may occasionally arise within participatory frameworks, including those used in public projects across Singapore.⁴ This prompts a critical question about the participatory design and planning landscape: what makes citizen participation meaningful, and what would it mean to have meaningful community participatory processes?

Defining Meaningful Community Participatory Processes

To address these questions, we draw on our decade of experience in Participate in Design (PID)⁵ as intermediaries in the participatory process in Singapore. As a non-profit organisation, we provide consultancy and training to integrate participatory processes into urban space design and planning in Singapore. This involves navigating client-consultant relations and managing various stakeholders' interests, affecting our impact on local communities. In our work, we act as a bridge between the community stakeholders who



are affected by a public decision (e.g., residents, local interest groups) and the institutional stakeholders who lead this decision-making (e.g., government agencies, Members of Parliament). We seek community stakeholders' views and ideas on the urban designs and plans affecting them, and translate them into proposals and recommendations for institutional stakeholders.

Through our ten years of applying our participatory approach, we have identified three pillars essential to making participation meaningful and empowering to local communities involved:

- **Inclusion and access:** Ensuring that diverse voices, especially those often neglected, are included.
- **Co-creating agendas and influence on decisions:** Giving communities power or influence over the agendas and decisions that affect them.
- **Capacity building:** Building the capacity of all parties involved to effectively implement and/or engage with the participatory process.

While these pillars may seem like common sense, they are easily overlooked. For example, institutional stakeholders may agree to include a participatory process because it is the politically correct thing to do,

even though they do not genuinely intend to share their decision-making power with community stakeholders. It is critical to use these pillars to analyse and reflect on our roles as intermediaries executing citizen engagement work in Singapore.

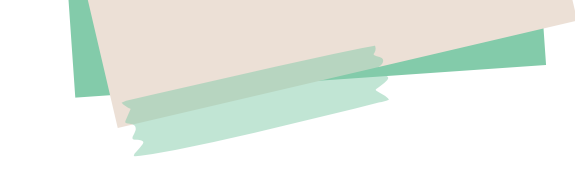
Experimental Strategies for Enhancing Participatory Processes in Singapore

Inclusion and Access

Designing an inclusive engagement process means recognising that all affected members of the local community are stakeholders, and creating opportunities to involve them.

Engagement sessions planned by intermediaries, including public officers, often employ technical jargon, which can make these engagement sessions intimidating and less accessible to the general public. Additionally, they tend to engage only a small group of community members, assuming they represent the interests of the wider community. This creates a barrier to inclusion and access for the everyday community.

To ensure participatory processes remain inclusive, and for the broader community to be able to give meaningful input, we must lower the barrier of entry for such engagement.



We should reduce the use of technical jargon and rework communications and related materials to be more easily understood by the public.

We must also look beyond only involving those who are typically invited to participate, and reach out to those who tend to be underrepresented. We should develop measures to ensure the community engaged in our processes is diverse enough to represent different demographics and viewpoints. These may include working adults who are often too busy to attend engagement sessions, or communities marginalised due to their socioeconomic status or disability.

For example, in Neighbourhood Renewal Programmes,⁶ we often design our engagement strategies, after brainstorming with Resident Committee leaders, to include non-English-speaking seniors and working adults who do not frequent community events. This is to ensure that what we propose resonates with the wider community before implementation. We have found that doing so provides the grassroots and project implementation team with greater clarity, and gives those not in the Resident Committees a chance to share their perspectives, enabling the implementation team to make more informed decisions later in the project.

Co-creating Agendas and Influencing Decisions

A community's influence encompasses the impact they have on both agenda-setting and decision-making. Traditionally, institutional stakeholders (such as public agencies and their representative officials) have dominated these processes. Agenda-setting is about determining the issues and problems to be discussed or prioritised, while decision-making entails shaping the final policies or designs to reflect the needs, interests, values and priorities of the community.

Empowering community stakeholders to co-create agendas and participate in decision-making significantly enhances their ownership. This approach ensures that the resulting outcome is more widely accepted. Some questions that we need to constantly challenge ourselves with include: Are there opportunities for community stakeholders to participate in decision-making? After decisions are made, have we explained to the community our reasons for accepting or rejecting their views and suggestions?

In recent years, PID has begun experimenting with power-sharing mechanisms in smaller-scale projects. These initiatives involve designing participatory processes where small groups of community stakeholders help co-determine

the agendas and outcomes. These projects, often initiated through grants, provide the flexibility needed for experimentation.

For example, for a project in Toa Payoh West where we wanted to reimagine an underutilised public space, we collaborated with an artist and community stakeholders to collectively determine the project's focus and objectives. By openly sharing information about the project's progress, decision points, and the rationale behind decisions, we were able to build trust with the community. Based on our observations and

conversations with the local residents who participated in this process, we found that this approach not only increased the project's relevance and acceptance but also fostered a sense of ownership and pride among residents. For instance, many residents volunteered extra time beyond their initial commitment to work alongside the project team in completing the artwork. Their dedication was further evident during the official launch event, where, despite heavy rain, residents participated enthusiastically, demonstrating their deep connection to and investment in the space they helped create.



Stakeholder visioning workshop as well as community pop-up at Toa Payoh West to reimagine an underutilised public space (Source: Participate in Design).

Capacity Building

Next, building capacity for community facilitation and planning involves equipping both government and community stakeholders with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to effectively implement and engage in the participatory process.

As intermediaries, it is our responsibility to provide communities with access to critical data (e.g., budget details and costs of building different types of amenities) and resources (e.g., access to key government officers) that can empower them, develop local leadership, and help establish stronger networks among themselves and with institutional stakeholders.

Capacity building also involves changing mindsets and attitudes toward participation, enabling both community and institutional stakeholders to see themselves as confident and valued participants in the process. A critical question to ask here is: Are we creating opportunities to strengthen the knowledge and skills of community stakeholders in our engagement processes?

Recently, we partnered with the Fengshan community to co-create a soon-to-be-closed car park space. We trained a group of local residents and stakeholders in community facilitation, involving them in gathering opinions and making decisions alongside us. Some of the skills and knowledge they gained



Community Facilitation workshop with Fengshan residents/stakeholders to train them on effective techniques for engaging residents in reimagining a soon-to-be-closed car park space at Fengshan (Source: Participate in Design).

in this process included understanding benefits and trade-offs (such as of road closures) and facilitation skills to manage differing views. This integrated capacity-building into our engagement process, creating opportunities for both institutional and community stakeholders to learn by doing. By actively participating, they gained confidence in their ability to implement and sustain the participatory process. This approach enhanced their ability to listen and question their assumptions about people's needs, paving the way for a more successful exit strategy (i.e. handover of the project or process to the community and institutional stakeholder for further continuation).

Conclusion

Having worked with different government agencies over the past 11 years, we see the importance of having public officers who are open-minded

towards alternative and experimental ways of implementing participatory processes. Our more innovative projects were often only possible with the support of public officers who were willing to: (1) include a diversity of voices for and against the project or plan; (2) allow community stakeholders to shift agendas and decisions towards the issues and interests that they prioritised; and (3) approach the participatory process as a capacity-building and learning opportunity for themselves as well as the community.

As the Singapore government continues to engage the public in future planning and policy processes, we believe in leveraging such progressive forces within the public sector to make participation more meaningful for all those involved. For participatory processes to give citizens a stronger sense of ownership over the city and nation, we must do more to foster spaces for people to openly debate and collectively define what constitutes the public good. ■

Notes

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2. J. R. Levine, "The Paradox of Community Power: Cultural Processes and Elite Authority in Participatory Governance," *Social Forces* 95, no. 3 (2017): 1155-1179, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sow098>.
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The Transformative Logic of Community Empowerment

by Justin Lee





The IPS Policy Lab is exploring how communities might help one another without the need for permission, professionals or philanthropy.



Justin Lee is Senior Research Fellow and Head of Policy Lab at the Institute of Policy Studies. He serves on the research committees of Singapore Children's Society and SINDA. He created socialcollab.sg, a wiki platform that allows citizen mapping of social needs. He is working with partners to implement participatory budgeting at a Town Council, among other community innovation initiatives.

In Singapore, the dominant paradigm of how to enact social change has been characterised by interventions which are state- or philanthropy-funded, centrally managed, professionally administered, carried out at scale and decided through competitive bidding so that the best agencies with the strongest interventions deliver the most impact.

Each aspect of this paradigm is based on well internalised rationales that have become truisms:

- The state is prepared to provide for social needs, but charitable contributions can help to plug gaps and reduce the burden on the public purse.
- Volunteers are appreciated for reasons beyond defraying the cost of running programmes, but certain social services are best delivered by professionals who have deep expertise informed by research and acquired through extensive training.
- Where viable, a social business model helps reduce reliance on grants.

- While collaboration is ideal among charities, allowing some forms of competition between providers can help to improve quality and efficiency. Sometimes consolidating smaller players into fewer larger organisations eases administration.
- To improve sector-wide outcomes, services should be centrally administered to reduce duplication, coordinated across multiple agencies for a coherent overarching strategy, and scaled so there is greater impact.

This approach might be termed a ‘service provision’ paradigm. It combines the logic of administration and the logic of the market.¹ Such a paradigm tends to regard citizens as ‘clients’ presenting problems for experts to resolve. As the government has expanded social welfare provision and professionalised its manpower, the paradigm has become entrenched in our common understanding of how to approach social issues. This paradigm is dominant for good reason—it predominantly works.



A service provision paradigm tends to regard citizens as clients presenting problems for experts to resolve.

The Logic and Limits of Service Provision

The problem with paradigms, however, is that there are always limitations. People use cognitive shortcuts, defer to established protocols, and apply institutionalised scripts based on unquestioned assumptions. While this facilitates quick consensus on appropriate action, they also limit viable alternatives from being considered seriously.

To illustrate what might be missing, take the example of a social issue close to the hearts of many: youth learning. If a family is concerned about their children not doing well academically, a popular solution today is to turn to private tuition. For low-income families that cannot afford tuition, there is a voluntary sector answer: our community self-help groups, along with every other social service agency (SSA) working with young people, will offer volunteer-run or subsidised tuition. From the service provision point of view, this solution is attractive because it is a clearly defined intervention with highly measurable outcomes that can be scaled if resources are put in place. Indeed, the solution can be effective—youths who just need some extra help outside the classroom will benefit. But for others, tuition fails to improve grades because their problems are more wicked—perhaps an incarcerated parent,

drug abuse, difficult relationships with teachers, or all the above. When more challenges are discovered, more services are stacked on to address them.

Singapore, being well-resourced, can continue to redouble efforts and offer ever more service provision for a time. Today's youth receive counselling, mentoring, group work, financial assistance, and other interventions so comprehensive the approach is described as 'wraparound' care, coordinated as a seamless experience across multiple agencies. The operating logic seems to be: "If only there were more services, and if only we could improve the coordination of these services and enhance their quality, we should be able to solve these problems." However, to meet rising aspirations for ever more comprehensive administrative oversight, our social service system has grown bigger and more complicated.²

Researchers have pointed out that professional services can become a kind of 'disabling help'.³ It has been argued that experts can crowd out the ability of communities to self-organise and build capacity and capabilities to solve their own problems. Those who advocate for an 'asset-based community development' approach suggest that disadvantaged communities have an abundance of underutilised strengths and untapped skills if we know how to find and unlock them.

An unintended consequence of a service provision approach is that SSAs begin to primarily relate to one another as competitors. They focus on cultivating ‘vertical’ ties with funders and government agencies—because that is how they secure resources—while neglecting their ‘horizontal’ ties with their peers. Research points to turf issues being commonplace among SSAs even though they recognise the value of, and even desire meaningful collaboration with peer organisations.⁴ Anecdotally, policymakers can also find it challenging to encourage SSAs to take on meaningful work if there is no funding to compel them to do so.

Alternative Paradigms: What Might They Offer?

Even if the service provision paradigm has limitations, it might continue to be employed—because it is difficult to step outside what has become ‘common sense’. There may even be attempts

to solve problems created by service provision with even more services. For example, social workers are given individual-level tools (e.g. casework and counselling) to solve structural problems (e.g. poverty). This mismatch can escalate to the point where they burn out. Then we create services to help these service providers. Tellingly, there are now stress management courses that equip social workers with self-care techniques so that they can cope.

Alternative paradigms allow us to consider entirely different kinds of solutions. I present three approaches here.

Community Building and Collective Empowerment

1

The underlying logic of community building can be expressed thus: **“How do we unlock the unrecognised strengths, hidden potential and untapped capacities of communities—so they can collectively figure out meaningful solutions that are respectful of their culture, uniquely suited to their circumstances, and offer a chance to overcome structural disadvantages?”**

A simpler form of this approach is already in mainstream use, which is the call to empower citizens, communities and clients to participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives.

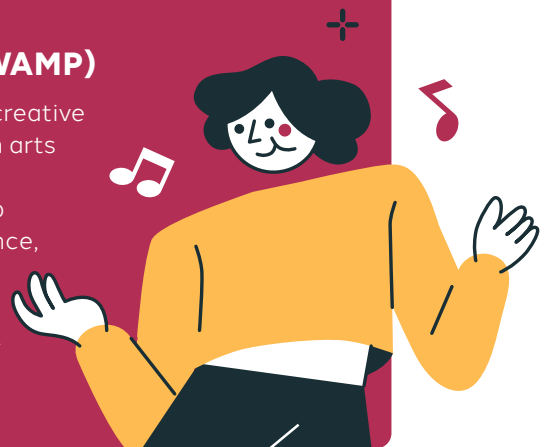
**How do we unlock
the untapped capacities of
communities facing systemic
disadvantages—so that
they can collectively
figure out meaningful
self-determined
solutions?**



- In experimenting with alternatives to private tuition, IPS Policy Lab has been partnering with SINDA and exploring with other Student Care Centres to determine whether youths can teach and learn from one another through self-directed, collaborative learning groups.⁵ Instead of subject tutors, we are considering learning facilitators who will provide guidance on where and how to access resources and focus on learning strategies—e.g. ‘learning how to learn’.
 - Beyond Social Services helped a mother who suffered from schizophrenia and was not able to care for or send her children to school. Applying an ‘asset-based community development’ lens, they engaged the help of her neighbours, whose children went to the same school, both to chaperone the affected children, and to check in on the affected mother.⁶
 - Yishun Health has built ‘caring communities’, called Wellness Kampung, in which community connectors help seniors come together to deliberate on and engage collectively in health and caring activities for one another, allowing the flourishing of diverse local responses, instead of imposing standardised programmes.⁷
- When community building logic is applied to firms, it leads to different solutions for social mobility and economic inclusion, such as worker-owned cooperatives and community-owned enterprises—where instead of

Community-Owned Enterprise in Action: Southwest Arts and Music Project (SWAMP)

Glasgow’s SWAMP engages in youth work through creative media. They operate a music recording room and an arts room in a refurbished government building. Their community centre also runs a food bank, thrift shop and woodwork shed. People can rent spaces for dance, exercise or meditation, and a cafe plays live music every Friday. They ensure that their tenant mix includes non-commercial or charity tenants so that families are not turned away because they cannot afford to attend a dance class or other activities.⁸





If the concept is to become peer-led mutual aid, then a programme should also have an exit-to-community strategy.

shareholder-led firms designed for profit-making, the economic activity is subsidiary to and in service of community objectives. Worker cooperatives are “values-driven businesses that put worker and community benefit at the core of their purpose” instead of profit at the expense of people.⁹ Community-owned businesses engage in commercial activities, but this is always anchored in a cause or community.

Another example of the community empowerment logic is Participatory Budgeting. This novel approach to citizen participation originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989.¹⁰ In 2025, Policy Lab will pilot a Participatory Budgeting project with a Town Council, empowering residents to submit ideas, deliberate and vote for the amenities they want in their neighbourhood.¹¹

Policy Lab also hopes to kickstart a form of Citizens' Assembly to see if Singaporeans can arrive at solutions to issues that divide them. The process involves pre-polling to help identify diverse opinion segments, deliberately forming citizens' panels that include people who disagree with one another, and then tasking them to arrive at a synthesised position.

Another round of public polling is then conducted on these suggestions to see if they can achieve broad consensus.¹²

Mutual Aid and Peer-to-Peer Action

2

While community building might require formal organisations and even their own class of professionals (e.g. community workers), people can engage in self-help and mutual aid without them.

The logic operates this way: **“How can regular people help one another without the need for permission, professionals or philanthropy?”**

Coming back to our youth learning example: if our culture of mutual aid were strong, instead of professional services leading the way, parents might themselves form learning circles and mobilise their neighbours' children to participate. While less common today, such demonstrations of ‘kampung spirit’ still exist in Singapore.¹³

What might a peer-to-peer approach be to some of our most pressing and intractable problems? Are we able to

create communities that care for one another? The 'Community Circles' project¹⁴ is a test of this: It mobilises a small group to provide informal support to meet ad hoc needs or longer-term aspirations. No official permission, approval or grant funding is required to do this. All that is needed is a small group of friends or neighbours as a unit of transformation. As such local actions and small groups can proliferate, the problem is addressed via a social movement instead of a programme.

When community-led initiatives are new, central administration and coordination can provide the sustained focus required to get it off the ground. A programme might be funded to kickstart, catalyse and coordinate diverse efforts. However, if the concept is to become peer-led mutual aid, then a programme should also have an intentional exit-to-community strategy so that groups can eventually self-manage these efforts.

The mechanism of social change would be decentralisation and distributed autonomy, to allow communities to re-use and remix what has been learnt elsewhere. This might be done, for instance, by documenting and sharing best practices for how to form, maintain and spread circles so that they can proliferate through a viral structure of social change rather than the 'scaling-up' of a programme. While a centralised programme can be effective, the more beautiful story would

be if regular Singaporeans come together in small groups to offer direct support to their fellows in need. Instead of a small professional class of 'changemakers' who heroically intervene to save the day, it would be more meaningful and sustainable to have the mass participation of everyday active citizens who care and contribute.

Contributing to the Commons

3

Implied in the first two logics is a core question that suggests the third paradigm: **"How can we create, enlarge and safeguard common shared assets in a way that everyone can contribute jointly to and benefit collectively from?"**

An example of this is the Open Education Resource Movement,¹⁵ founded on the conviction that learning resources should be open and free for all to use instead of enclosed within educational institutions. This 'commoning' approach involves pooling and sharing what might otherwise be proprietary or inaccessible assets, based on collective decisions on how to manage this shared resource together.

Non-profit organisations running programmes might well engage in community building and not commoning. Charities face pressure from funders and stakeholders to monetise their

knowhow as proprietary knowledge so that they can receive grants for further runs of their programmes, or charge licensing or consultancy fees to others who want to learn from them. Indeed, Policy Lab had originally budgeted for training and consultancy fees for the UK organisation running ‘Community Circles’,¹⁶ assuming we would have to pay them to teach us. When we looked more carefully at their website, we found comprehensive ‘do-it-yourself’ kits and modular training videos enabling us to equip ourselves to run Community Circles. Making everything publicly available at no cost is their business model—and one considered foolish in a service provision paradigm.



“Commoning” involves pooling and sharing what might otherwise be proprietary or inaccessible assets, based on collective decisions on how to manage this shared resource together.



Policy Lab's Approach Less Karate, More Aikido

Policy Lab is a policy innovation unit operating out of IPS. We champion economic and social alternatives and consider the broader question of whether transformative change can be brokered without antagonism. We conduct policy experiments and social change programmes that ask questions of current social arrangements and power dynamics, without being unduly confrontational.

For example, instead of critiquing extractive finance or focusing research on predatory lending, we lead with a solution such as interest-free loans to the poor. Instead of framing ideas as 'alternatives to capitalism', these same ideas might go down better when packed as part of 'new economic thinking', 'ecological economics' or the 'wellbeing economy'. Public officials are often reluctant to engage in Participatory Budgeting because of the assumption that when you share power, you lose power; but they can be persuaded when it is demonstrated that sharing power can instead build power.¹⁷

The strategy we have adopted requires engaging with alternative paradigms and building parallel institutions. As brokers and intermediaries, the balance we take is often delicate—we articulate how 'parallel' does not necessarily mean 'against' but could offer an 'alternative' that is more ideal. But 'parallel' does not mean 'complementary' either because those who create alternative parallel institutions see something wrong with the status quo that needs to be addressed. We think of what we do as less Karate and more Aikido—instead of fighting against power, we find ourselves working in harmony with it, defending ourselves but also protecting our opponents from injury.

Our current strategy is summarised this way:



**Lead with
a solution**



**Plant a seed of
structural change**



**Bring
everyone along**



**Guard against
co-optation**



**Practise
commoning**

But a poor business model may be a great social one. Enlarging the knowledge commons reduces the need for formal provisions from the state or markets. Communities can be better resourced because enabling assets are shared, and they can be more resilient, being more capable of self-organising and with fellow practitioners for support. An example of this principle at work is the open source movement that has helped accelerate software development and the IT revolution.¹⁸

How Do We Get There?

These different institutional paradigms or structural logics are not necessarily superior to any other, as each has their own limitations. Mutual aid or peer-to-peer efforts may be messy, duplicative and lack coordination. Communities may also lack deep technical expertise that professionals can bring in a more clinical context. Collective efforts and community decisions may also take a long time to realise, especially if there is a commitment to include marginalised groups. However, they offer alternative approaches well worth considering, particularly where service provision has reached the limits of efficacy.

When might one approach be considered over another? Where the citizenry is highly educated and capable of contributing

meaningfully, it seems sensible to promote citizen empowerment, community building, and to distribute decision-making and agency.

We can experiment with diverse forms of citizen participation—so that enough low stakes deliberations at small-scale or local levels help prepare citizens when stakes are higher. Participatory Budgeting in our towns, if commonplace and routine, prepares residents with parochial interests to step up to the role of citizens making decisions of national significance. Perhaps with enough practice, the Ministry of Finance could eventually trust citizens to deliberate on a portion of the national budget through participatory budgeting.

Observers have often characterised society as a three-legged stool, for which the three pillars—the public and private sectors, and a third people (or civic) sector—need to be equally balanced.¹⁹ If ‘nationalisation’ means the transfer of industry or commerce from private to state ownership and control, and ‘privatisation’ is the process in the opposite direction, then we may need a third term—‘communitisation’—to describe the transfer of private or public control to a local or user community for self-management.^{20,21}

What we may need is a ‘third sector’ development strategy that intentionally focuses on meaningful



What we may need is a ‘third sector’ development strategy that intentionally focuses on meaningful community building, mutual aid and contributing to the commons. The community can itself be a site of serious economic activity that is subservient to local community needs.

community building, mutual aid and contributing to the commons. Indeed, Singapore’s National Council of Social Service already acts as a membership body for non-profit social service providers, but there is no equivalent National Council of Voluntary Organisations to act as an associational body for charitable organisations across the larger third sector—arts, sports, health, education, social services and community.²² Issue-based networks and place-based communities could be formed to encourage voluntary organisations to connect with their peers. The goal would be to encourage the growth of a high solidarity third sector articulating and enacting the logics of communitisation and commoning.

Indeed, when communitisation is strong, useful alternatives start to become more evident. The community and non-profit sector has been regarded as a ‘cost centre’ of Singapore

Incorporated—markets make money and the state redistributes it to the third sector to be spent. However, the community can itself be a site of serious economic activity. Local communities could well operate enterprises dealing with large amounts of money: in Germany, one such trust operates a wind farm in which the proceeds go to meet local needs.²³

If we are serious about addressing structural inequalities, we need to focus on building community (not individual) wealth. It is worth noting, however, that when such a venture is completed, the enterprise does not go around the country to scale up its operations. Instead, it looks to its local community to see what else it needs—a library perhaps, or youth centre, or some kind of social service. When economic activity is subservient to local community needs, it grows to an appropriate, sustainable size—never so large that it starts to exploit people or the planet. ■

Notes

1. The logic of administration and markets are powerfully twinned in what governance scholars call 'New Public Management' See C. Hood, "The New Public Management in the 1980s: Variations on a Theme," *Accounting* 20 no. 2-3 (1995), 93–109.
2. The size of the social service sector has gone up in terms of the number of social and welfare charities registered as well as their total income, the diversity of client groups they serve, and the manpower profile they have. See National Council of Social Service, *Social Service Sector Strategic Thrusts 2017–2021*, <https://www.ncss.gov.sg/press-room/publications/SocialServiceSectorStrategicThrusts4ST>.
3. Notable scholars have discussed this decades ago, in *Disabling Professions* (1977). More recently scholarship includes William Easterly (2014), *The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor*.
4. Justin Lee et al., *Survey of the Social Service Sector*, IPS Exchange Series (Institute of Policy Studies, 2021).
5. <https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/research/ips-policy-lab/learning-circles>
6. Justin Lee et al., 2020 "Nurturing Villages and Safeguarding Community: A Case Study of Beyond Social Services" https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/a-case-study-of-beyond-social-services_report.pdf
7. Yishun Health 2022, "Caring Communities: Production & Participation by People".
8. "Tools for Community Empowerment: Insights from Scotland Study Trip 2023" https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/scotland-study-trip_report.pdf
9. <https://institute.coop/benefits-worker-cooperatives>
10. B. Wampler, *Participatory budgeting in Brazil* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).
11. Part of Future Ready Society Impact Fund, a partnership between IPS, LKYCIC and Toteboard. <https://futurereadysociety.sg/participatory-budgeting-citizen-design-in-town-councils/>
<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/citizens-could-get-more-say-in-town-council-budgets-under-new-trial>
12. We call this process 'Citizens ReAssembled'. <https://futurereadysociety.sg/citizens-re-assembled/>
13. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/it-takes-a-village-to-raise-a-child-inside-a-bedok-estate-s-kampung>

14. CNA. 2021. Community Circles initiative to provide support for caregivers of persons with disabilities. 21 October; The Straits Times. 2021. New community initiative to support caregivers of persons with disabilities to be piloted in 2022. 20 October.
15. <https://www.unesco.org/en/open-educational-resources>
16. <https://www.community-circles.co.uk/>
17. See E. Cinar, P. Trott, and C. Simms, "A Systematic Review of Barriers to Public Sector Innovation Process," *Public Management Review* 21, no. 2 (2019): 264–290. However, Fred and Mukhtar-Landgren point out that it is important to recognise that public sector organisations comprise agents who may resist innovation, not as a consequence of organisational conservatism or bureaucratic procedures, but because they—based in their professional knowledge and experience—consciously keep bad ideas out, see M. Fred, and D. Mukhtar-Landgren, "Productive resistance in public sector innovation—introducing social impact bonds in Swedish local government," *Public Management Review* 26, no. 3 (2022), 793–810. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2123027>
18. See: <https://opensource.com/>
19. Markets and the state remain indispensable, but "when the three pillars of society are appropriately balanced" ... "society has the best chance for providing for its people, See Raghuram Rajan, *The Third Pillar: How Markets and the State Leave the Community Behind* (William Collins, 2019).
20. See: R. S. Pandey, *Communitisation: The Third Way of Governance* (Concept Publishing, 2010).
21. 'Communitisation' has been used to describe the formal transfer of control of government-owned public institutions to a user community, such as schools and health centres in Nagaland, India (see Pandey, Note 19). In the UK, 'community asset transfers' is "an established mechanism used to enable the community ownership and management of publicly owned land and buildings", see "Understanding Community Asset Transfers" (MyCommunity, 2020). 'Commoning' is a broader term that captures the act of collaboratively creating, sharing and collectively managing resources that can happen whether the commons produced has any legally recognised owners or not.
22. Our National Voluntary and Philanthropic Centre shares similar aspirations of such voluntary apex organisations but is itself not an associational body that can claim to represent member interests.
23. <https://www.theenergymix.com/community-wind-farm-earns-support-generates-income-in-german-village/>

Kitchen Table Conversations:

Challenging Assumptions About the Community

by Emma Fletcher and Emily Jenke

A new approach to public engagement allows for both inclusivity and broad scale in getting citizens to consider and respond to policy issues.



Emma Fletcher is Co-CEO of DemocracyCo. She is an award-winning policy and community engagement expert with more than 13 years' experience in the public and private sector in Australia and the United Kingdom, and has spent more than 10 years designing and delivering deliberative democratic processes.



Emily Jenke is Co-CEO of DemocracyCo. She is a skilled facilitator with over 25 years of experience. Emily designs engagement experiences that help communities navigate complex situations and come to sound collective decisions. She is one of Australia's leading deliberative facilitators.



There is considerable room for innovation in the world of community¹ and stakeholder engagement today. The fields of communications, marketing, consultation, co-design, deliberation and community development offer a plethora of tools and methods across different engagement modalities.

When engaging on any given problem or opportunity, government agencies should consider using a range of different tools or methods. This is important because:

- Different people will engage in different ways—so we maximise the opportunity to hear from people with different perspectives, ensuring that everyone who wants to be heard, will be heard.
- Engagement at different points in the policy cycle will have a different purpose—and therefore will require the use of different methods
- Different methods will provide government with different insights into the community's knowledge and perspectives—including their lived experience, individual opinions, the considered judgement of individuals or even where groups can reach common ground (where individuals can compromise and find a place where they can 'live with the way forward').

Different Methods Provide Different Insights

Individual Views and Lived Experiences

Traditional consultation methods such as surveys, town hall meetings and some workshops are useful when governments want to understand individuals' opinions and lived experiences.

Informed Opinions/ Considered Judgements

There may be times when we want to move beyond understanding people's 'opinions' to get a deeper perspective. We may want to understand what individuals think when they have had more time and information, enabling them to develop a more considered judgement. Deliberative democratic engagement methods, such as deliberative polling,² can help governments understand how people's opinions change once they have more information and have had a chance to discuss the issue with people with different perspectives. These approaches can also help shed light on 'why': what contributes to these opinions changing. Deliberative polling has been used by institutions such as Stanford University in the United States to explore a range of issues—including solutions to climate change and how views on addressing climate can change when people are exposed to more information.³

Finding Common Ground

Other engagement methods enable public agencies to go deeper still—and allow policy makers to better understand where diverse individuals can reach ‘common ground’, i.e. the ‘sweet spot’ which the vast majority can live with as a solution to an issue. Examples of such methods include deliberative processes, including Citizens’ Juries and other panels (such as the Citizens’ Jury for the War on Diabetes⁴), which have been used in Singapore since 2017 to enable public agencies to more deeply and meaningfully engage on complex policy topics. These approaches are generally small scale and involve very few people—often between 50 and 100 people.

However, there are deliberative methods that can enable public agencies to reach bigger numbers in the community and conduct an informed conversation where participants agree on the best way forward.

One such method is starting to build momentum in Australia, and it is known as Kitchen Table Conversations, or community conversations.

A New Deliberative Method: Kitchen Table Conversations

Kitchen Table (KT) Conversations⁵ empower small community groups to discuss complex and sometimes divisive issues whilst at the same time



Kitchen Table (KT)
Conversations empower small community groups to discuss complex and sometimes divisive issues whilst at the same time contributing to a broader conversation.



contributing to a broader conversation involving lots of community groups. KT Conversations involve these elements:



Evidence-based Information

A succinct Discussion Guide outlines the problem government wants community to discuss, along with possible solutions to the problem. To help community members grapple with the possible solutions, the Guide also includes an open assessment of the ‘trade-offs’ of each solution, informed by facts and research. The Guide can also link to other sources of information such as videos or research papers.



Clear Questions for Conversation

The Discussion Guide asks readers to consider key questions that government wants community advice on. These might include community views about the problem, or perspectives on which of the solutions community members support. The Guide is used as a central tool by small groups in the community to talk about the issue and proposed solutions, reaching agreement on their answers before providing their advice back to Government.



Instructions to Support Facilitation

Accompanying the Guide, a Hosting Kit helps community members organise their own community conversation with simple instructions about how to facilitate a group, how to collect feedback, and where to post the feedback.



Self-organised and Independent

KT Conversations are self-organised and independently hosted. Community members wanting to host a conversation may use an existing forum that they may be involved with (a sporting club, church group, workplace or community group meeting). They may also bring together a new group of friends, acquaintances or family members.

This process can also be used to support conversations in any policy area. It has been employed in diverse policy contexts including community resilience building, immigration, nuclear waste storage and environmental management.

KT Conversations can enable practical engagement on a grand yet cost-effective scale. If appropriate, the outcomes of all the KT Conversations can be used to feed into a smaller representative group (such as a citizens' panel) to look across the responses and decide the best way forward. In essence, this method allows public engagement to go broad, using a light deliberative process through the KTs, with deeper deliberation within a smaller group.

Making Sure the KT Process Succeeds

For KT Conversations to succeed, a number of factors should be considered.



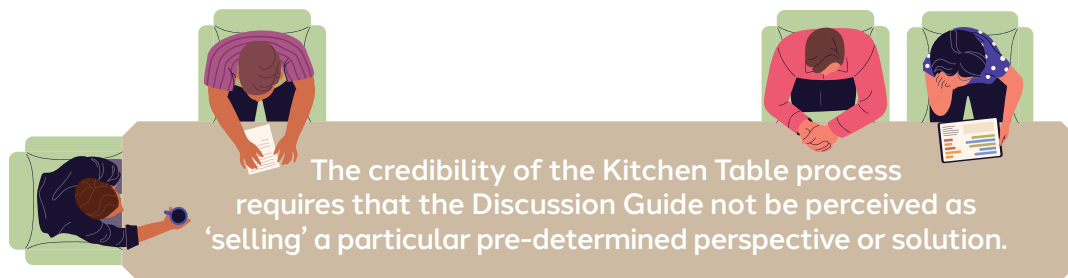
Diverse Connections and Networks

Unlike many traditional engagement methods, KT Conversations involve community members 'self-organising' by setting up their own conversations. But today's citizens in countries such as Singapore and Australia are not used to self-organising: because they have not had to.



In 2023, DemocracyCo organised a KT conversation process in Australia on climate change where 100 groups met, involving almost 800 participants. Each group used a Discussion Guide to explore what the priorities should be for transitioning to net zero greenhouse gas emissions.⁶

The feedback received using this method was thoughtful, comprehensive and empathetic—with participants demonstrating a good understanding of the issue, including its complexities and trade-offs.



As governments become more competent and better resourced, public agencies often take the lead to solve problems for citizens, which can ironically weaken the community's ability to organise itself. This could make deploying the KT Conversation method harder—at least until the community becomes familiar with the approach. In such situations, the work for government agencies when adopting this method is in encouraging take-up and involvement from diverse members of the community, community groups and community leaders.

While not much work may be required from government to run or facilitate sessions, there is a lot of work behind the scenes in encouraging individuals and groups to promote and host the conversations. This takes time, so it is important when using this method to leave at least four months for the community conversations to take place.

We believe nevertheless that this work is worth it, because government is then investing in building up the self-organising muscles of the community, including

- the ability to work together during times of hardship,
- skills in 'facilitation' to help groups overcome division, and

- community connectivity and relationships, improving wellbeing and mental health outcomes.

These are competencies critical for societal resilience in general.



It is important for the initial Discussion Guide to provide balanced information: i.e. it should openly weigh up the pros and cons of different options and be evidence-based. The credibility of the KT process requires that the Discussion Guide not be perceived as 'selling' a particular pre-determined perspective or solution but that it trusts in the common-sense ability of members of the community to weigh up options for themselves.



Most important to any engagement process, and particularly for KT conversations, is that the government be prepared to trust in the community: that it is able to self-organise, to work together, to work with government, to understand complex issues, and ultimately to meaningfully contribute to policy development for the benefit of the whole of society.

For the Public Service, the Right Mindset Matters

Data from training we have run with both Singaporean and Australian civil servants over recent years suggests that a significant proportion do not trust in community's ability to consider complex issues or to even have civil discourse on polarising issues:

- **Less than half (48%)** said that they trust in the community's ability to work collaboratively and effectively with government.
- **Only a third (33%)** said that they trusted in the community's ability to reach agreement with each other.
- **About a quarter (24%)** said that they trusted in the community's ability to move beyond self-interest.
- **Less than half (49%)** said that they trusted in the community's ability to understand complex policy issues.⁷

Our decades of engaging and listening to citizens tells us that the assumptions underpinning such views are unfair.

If we assume that the community does not have the capacity to self-organise, consider complex issues or collaborate towards a practical solution, we will not create opportunities for the community to do so. The public service might then close the doors to community involvement that might contribute significantly to the process of policy development and successful implementation.

But if public officers create a respectful environment and meaningful process, citizens will collaborate positively with government. If groups of citizens are given balanced, thoughtfully presented information and time to consider the facts, they can understand complex issues. If we start with an open question and enable people to work collaboratively to build solutions together, community members can overcome their own divisions to develop effective policy responses that can be broadly accepted. If we bring diverse people in the community together, support them to build empathy and to understand the trade-offs in decisions, they can and do move beyond self-interest.

If public officers create a respectful
environment and meaningful process, citizens
will collaborate positively with government.





Seeing Beyond Narrow Self-Interest

One of the most powerful moments DemocracyCo has experienced is listening to some of the most vulnerable and poor in South Australia advocate for increased investment in electricity services for industry, even though they knew that this investment would come at an increased cost to themselves—because they could see that this investment was necessary for the ‘greater good’.

We know many people in public service may not have had such positive experiences; that they have often witnessed high degrees of division, conflict and negativity, with the community sometimes lashing out at government decisions, or showing complete disengagement and disinterest. In our experience of working closely with communities, both responses seem to come from a similar place: frustration with the lack of a meaningful opportunity to influence—a sense of powerlessness and a feeling of not being able to

make a difference in the face of institutional authority.

The power to change this sits with public officers and the willingness to meaningfully engage. To move forward, those in the public service need to reconsider assumptions: but this means daring to trust in the community’s capacity, doing so with a clear and informed understanding of “where community is at”, and appreciating what is needed to get them to be ready, willing and able to engage meaningfully in policy issues. ■

Notes

1. Community means members of the public who aren’t officially organised into identifiable groups.
2. Deliberative polling is a method developed by Stanford University. See: <https://deliberation.stanford.edu/what-deliberative-pollingr>
3. A really good example of a deliberative polling process is “America in One Room: Climate and Energy”. See: <https://deliberation.stanford.edu/news/america-one-room-climate-and-energy>
4. Ministry of Health, Singapore, [https://www.moh.gov.sg/wodcj#:~:text=The%20Ministry%20of%20Health%20\(MOH,manage%20diabetes%20as%20a%20nation](https://www.moh.gov.sg/wodcj#:~:text=The%20Ministry%20of%20Health%20(MOH,manage%20diabetes%20as%20a%20nation).
5. They are called Kitchen Table conversations because they are suited to casual, small conversations because they are suited to casual, small conversations — akin to conversations we often have around families around the kitchen table.
6. Community Conversation Guide and Host kit along with other information about the process and project can be found at <https://www.democracyno.com.au/climate-change/>
7. It is important to note that the bias in this group means that this data probably underrepresents the scale of the problem. As those attending the training have a bias towards being interested in community engagement, the group is more likely to trust in the public than public servants that have not opted to attend the training.



Making Good Work:

How One Government Unit Co-Creates Solutions for a Better Singapore

by Lam Kee Wei, Li Hongyi, Nitya Menon and Alwyn Tan

By using hackathon approaches, GovTech's Open Government Products (OGP) convenes talent, energy and passion to solve problems Singaporeans care about.



At Open Government Products (OGP), **Lam Kee Wei** is Senior Engineering Manager, **Alwyn Tan** is Head of Developer Relations, **Nitya Menon** is Policy and Transformation Specialist and **Li Hongyi** is Director.

OGP is an experimental development team that builds technology for the public good. This includes everything from building better apps for citizens to automating the internal operations of public agencies. The team's role is to accelerate the digital transformation of the Singapore Government by being a space where it can experiment with new tech practices, including new technologies, management techniques, corporate systems, and even cultural norms. The end goal is that through OGP's work, Singapore becomes a model of how governments can use technology to improve the public good.

Hack for Public Good: How it all began

At GovTech's Open Government Products (OGP), we believe that no one has a monopoly on tackling problems of public concern in Singapore. We want to help identify what the actual problems are on the ground, and make sure any solutions work in the real world.

Our *Hack for Public Good* hackathon initiative started as an outlet to explore and experiment with ideas that might drive public impact. The idea—inspired by hackathons and other similar initiatives by tech companies—was to set aside a stretch of protected space and time to let people work on things they really want to do, in relation to serving a public need.

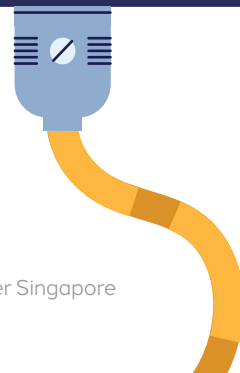
As public officers, we often get so caught up in our day-to-day work that

we do not step back to think about doing something different. So at OGP we designate one full month in the year to dedicate ourselves to an idea we really want to look into—we get time to talk to agencies and collaborate with other people we may not normally work with, and then build something to solve problems.

When we kicked off *Hack for Public Good* in 2018, we decided to avoid the term 'hackathon', because the concept had become popularly associated with business plan competitions. We wanted *Hack for Public Good* to be rooted in working prototypes that have been tested with real users, rather than making slide decks and concept presentations.

Our idea was to show that in a limited amount of time, with modest resources, we can actually produce something concrete, useable and which solves a real problem.

In a limited amount of time, with modest resources, we can actually produce something concrete, useable and which solves a problem.





Everything starts with having people with the right motivation, the right skills, who understand the problem, and who are given a chance to work on it.

Making It Work: Design Principles

The *Hack for Public Good* process has become core to OGP's success: it is how the majority of our products, including some of our most well-received ones, have emerged. It is a means to harness the collective intelligence of the growing OGP team, yielding more and better ideas and actual products than any one person could come up with.

It is not a given that a group of intelligent people will collectively come up with better outcomes than they might individually. In many organisations, planning by committee can lead to less optimal results than what a capable individual might come up with alone. To be smarter collectively than individually, we need a different process and a more flexible structure.

A number of principles keep this process effective.



Get the right people.

The hackathon process works because we start by recruiting people who want to do good. For instance, we ask candidates we interview for OGP what they would do to solve a problem for Singapore if they were given the autonomy to do anything—this helps us determine the values and mindset of the people we bring in.

This means we do not ever need to force people to join *Hack for Public Good* or other projects, because it is what they already have a passion for: we are just creating space for them to do it. It is an opportunity for people to solve problems for Singapore by thinking not only as public officers, but also as fellow citizens.

Everything starts with having people with the right motivation, the right skills, who understand the problem, and who are given a chance to work on it.

Putting Together Hack for Public Good

Every year, *Hack for Public Good* begins with an initial gathering of people to set the tone and context for what we want to do. This can vary by year: we have had public volunteers come in as co-hackers, for instance, or agencies that are particularly interested in a theme.

Convening the Hackers

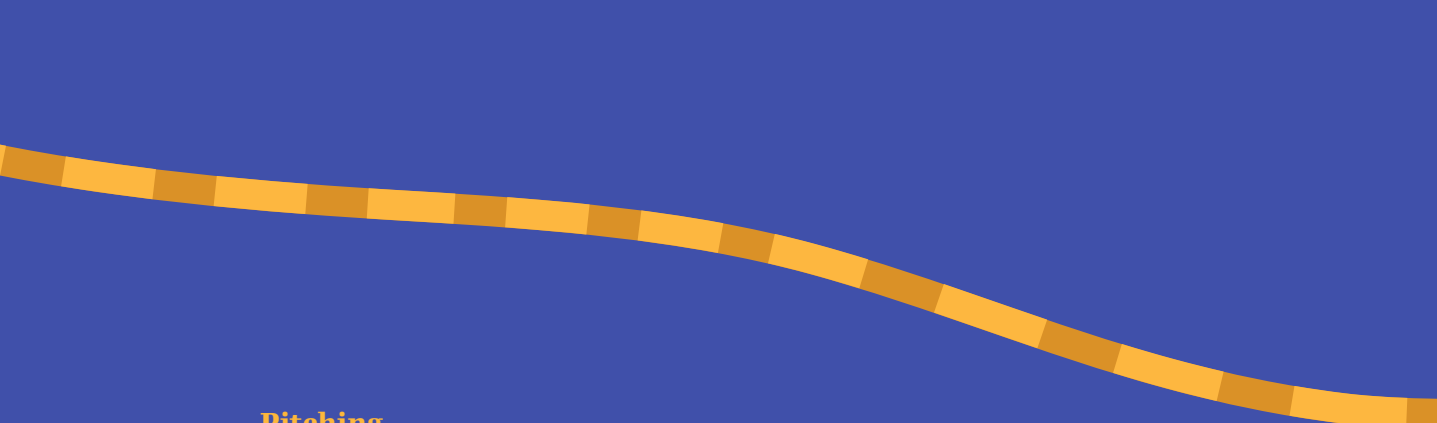
When we first started, there were only 20 of us. We gathered in the lobby, asked everyone to share what ideas they had for half an hour, and then met at the end of every Friday in January to update each other on progress.

The process is intended to be largely organic. We try to mandate as little as possible: instead, we want to bring people together who are passionate about the same things and let the magic happen. We encourage teams to be no bigger than five people to minimise communication overheads, which can take time away from actually building a solution.

Today, with approximately 170 people in OGP, there needs to be a framework to organise the event. We put more effort into curating problems upfront. One month is not a lot of time to go from problem discovery to validation, testing, building and launching, so there needs to be some pre-work, especially around gathering problem statements.

Problem Discovery

We consolidate the problems we receive, which tend to come from the public, from other government agencies or from what the team members have identified in the course of their regular work. We then let people organically gather around a problem they want to address. On occasion, we organise field trips to better understand the issue through first-hand observation. We try to limit this problem discovery phase to about a week.



Pitching

We do pitches where people drum up excitement about what they are working on and recruit people for their teams. For *Hack for Public Good*, we take an all-hands-on-deck approach—so while someone may be more involved in stakeholder management in day-to-day work, during the hackathon phase they might find themselves doing more user interface research or product management. We step up to whichever roles are needed on the teams: whatever it takes to get it done.

Presenting Solutions

We have experimented with different formats to showcase the prototypes on Demo Day. We used to have stage presentations in the past, until there were too many to practically manage. We also have a strict rule that there has to be a working prototype to show, not just a high-fidelity design prototype. We want those who come to view the solutions to interact with something that really works.

We select our Demo Day attendees carefully: we want stakeholders who will feel excited about the projects, provide valuable feedback and perhaps champion or support their broader use. These primarily would be representatives from fellow public agencies.

Because Demo Day is often structured like a science fair, it is set up as fun environment where people play, interact, respond, take away something that reminds them about a product, and consider possibilities for the future.



Identify the right problem.

Public officers can often have a particular view of the problems society faces that may be different from that of the average Singaporean. We are often also siloed from one another. People on the ground, even frontline public officers who encounter and collect problems faced by the public every day, may not be in a position to influence a policy designed by another department. Even those of us in GovTech can feel quite disconnected from the rest of government.

An important aspect of our process is to talk to the people who are actually facing issues—going to the public if we have to, through various channels—to clarify where the problem actually lies. For instance, there was a group working on elder tech who found they needed to go to community centres to talk to those actually engaging with older people, and to speak to the elderly themselves.

Apart from this, teams are free to pick their own projects—there is no area that is out of bounds.



Build a real solution. Key to the process is for our teams to be able to design, build and launch a useful,

working prototype quickly. Not every idea presented in a hackathon will succeed, but they should all be intended to succeed.

To facilitate this, we have come up with a range of design systems and starter kits, both for engineering and product design, so that teams do not have to reinvent the wheel—they can take these templates and run with them if they have to.

We also conduct workshops and learning journeys on a range of different topics. These may be seasonal or be related to an area of interest popular with our teams. They could even be held before *Hack for Public Good* starts in January, so that by the time it begins people have an idea of what they want to work on.

We also help teams find the resources to realise projects, although most of them do not require much money. Today, there are many online platforms—from webpages to databases—that can let teams roll out digital products with little to no budget.



Support accountability.

Every week, we have a check-in to make sure our teams are on track in spending their one month building their prototypes. We share updates, ask each



"As a leader, you are not trying to design a process where you assume you have the best idea and get everyone else to execute. If there are ideas everyone believes in, and they can prove that it works, you should see it, recognise it, and support it, even if you do not understand or agree with everything personally. This is how you create an organisation that is more intelligent than you are."

Li Hongyi, Director, OGP



other tough questions, surface blind spots and identify blocks. This is also an opportunity to seek help. The organising committee, being cross-functional, can help teams plug gaps and solve issues, whether they are about engineering or to do with stakeholder negotiation or user testing.

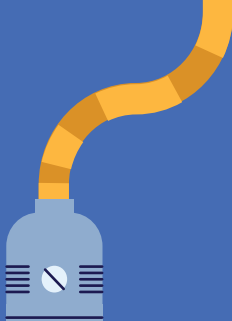


Set the right cadence and expectations. A hackathon process is effective when it does not happen too often:

otherwise, the creative intensity of it is diffused, or can be too much to sustain throughout the year. You need time to accumulate residual ideas not already resolved in the course of regular work. We have found that one month, once a year, is long enough to develop a real product, but not too long to be bogged down.

Once an idea has been proven and shown traction through the process, it also needs time to be fleshed out. Realising these prototypes as full products and live services securely and at scale can take years of further work. This was the case with initiatives such as RedeemSG,¹ which came out of *Hack for Public Good* but took years to become the national system it is today. As anyone in public service knows, it takes a lot of quiet, day-to-day effort to make these innovations part of the lives of Singaporeans.

The real measure of success is not how exciting or fun the event is, but whether we are getting good, long-term work out of it: work that is not just for show. Realistically, you might have 100 ideas at the start of the hackathon, end up with 20 to 30 projects presented, out of which four to five make it to full-scale production.



Hack for Public Good

Go.gov.sg

The Government's official link shortener was created after recognising that the public needed a way to easily remember and identify official communications and content from the Government. Go.gov.sg allowed public officers to create short links to direct content to the public, using an official gov.sg domain.

Redeem.gov.sg

This digital voucher platform was created during the 2020 edition of *Hack for Public Good*. It has allowed the CDC voucher campaigns to scale to national level, as well as take on other use cases like NEA's Climate Friendly Household Programme using the same infrastructure.

Scribe

Prototyped during *Hack for Public Good 2024*, Scribe uses a Large Language Model to help draft case notes and summaries for conversations between medical social workers (MSWs) and patients. It has since been integrated into Care360.

Visit <https://www.open.gov.sg/products> for more details.



Build for Good

Koel (Build for Good Environment)

A data processing and visualisation platform to allow ecologists to identify and track bird species through audio recordings from microphones placed throughout a natural habitat. This tool improves the accuracy and efficiency of EIAs (Environmental Impact Assessments), and helps reduce uninformed decision-making that may introduce a net harm to our natural environment.

RemediSG (Build for Good Environment)

A platform that facilitates distribution of expiring medications from health institutions to community clinics and non-profit organisations, reducing wastage of unused medication and ensuring that healthcare is more accessible to all in society.

NoteFlow (Build for Good 2023)

A tool that uses a Large Language Model to help school counsellors draft notes for their sessions with students.



Getting Started in Your Organisation



Start with your work teams. Take a week out to explore an idea or relook the way you do things.



Begin with the smallest use-case possible: in your work team, then in your department. Keep it as organic and ground-up as possible.



Try. Not everything has to be a resounding success at the start. Do not be afraid to make mistakes as this gives us the data necessary to improve and iterate.



Stay connected. Be engaged with the community. See what other people are doing so you can find out where you stand, learn to do better, and find ways to work together.

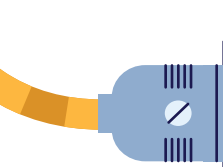


Follow your passion for public good. Otherwise, the ideas will not go far.



Humility matters. Accept that you do not know everything about an issue, be prepared to talk to the people/users who actually experience the problem you are seeking to solve, to accept different ideas, and to be proven wrong. Recognise that things can always be better: that there is always room for improvement.





This movement aims to inculcate a mindset where anyone who wants to solve public problems and work for the public good can do so, without needing to be public officers or in government.

Building for Good on a National Scale

The *Build for Good*² movement extrapolates the month-long hackathon process to a national scale, so that the ideas do not just come from the OGP team but from the public. It is about rallying the public to help address the problems that they see.

The movement aims to inculcate a mindset where anyone who wants to solve public problems and work for the public good can do so, without needing to be public officers or in government. To support this, the Public Service should work as enablers, helping people make the country better rather than gatekeeping access to that effort.

In convening *Build for Good*, OGP helps bring together like-minded individuals with different skillsets who care about similar issues, such as the environment, so they can work together to do more than they can individually.

As a platform, *Build for Good* helps lower the barrier of entry for getting things done, offers insight into problems the government is looking to solve and access to public agencies, and empowers participants—through funding, mentorship, training, space and opportunity—to do the good they want to do.

By facilitating this process, OGP helps *Build for Good* participants navigate government regulations and working culture, and to frame solutions so they have a better chance to be realised. ■

Notes

1. <https://redeem.gov.sg/>
2. <https://www.build.gov.sg/>

Varieties of Engagement in Government-Citizen Interactions

by Aaron Maniam



Understanding the micro motivations of stakeholders could allow for more targeted strategies and technologies to improve the quality of participatory governance efforts.



Aaron Maniam is Fellow of Practice and Director, Digital Transformation Education at the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government. He leads the school's programmes on how governments can better user, enable and regulate technology, as well as how governments can more effectively anticipate and prepare for future trends like technological developments. He co-chaired the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Technology Policy (2022-2024), currently co-chairs a new Council on GovTech and Digital Public Infrastructure and the OECD's expert network on strategic foresight, and is a member of the OECD's expert network on Artificial Intelligence Futures. He is a Fellow of the Civil Service College, Centre for Strategic Futures, Centre for Liveable Cities and Culture Academy, and previously served in a range of postings in the Foreign and Administrative Services.

The author is grateful for helpful comments and suggestions from Jon Alexander and Andrew Sorota on early drafts of this article.





Introduction: Engagement as a Growing Phenomenon

Theorists and practitioners of citizen engagement—used interchangeably here with related concepts such as deliberative democracy and participatory policymaking—often refer to the Athenian Oath:

“We will never bring disgrace on this our City by an act of dishonesty or cowardice. We will fight for the ideals and Sacred Things of the City both alone and with many. We will revere and obey the City's laws, and will do our best to incite a like reverence and respect in those above us who are prone to annul them or set them at naught. We will strive unceasingly to quicken the public's sense of civic duty. Thus, in all these ways, we will transmit this City not only, not less, but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.”

This oath was often recited by the citizens of Athens, Greece, more than 2,000 years ago. It is frequently cited as a timeless embodiment of civic responsibility and active participation by everyday citizens in the larger social, political and economic life around them.

Several ongoing projects (see box story on pp 118-119) that embody this same spirit of empowerment and agency by citizens, community groups, businesses and other stakeholders—in a climate where governments face declining trust in their ability to deliver services and reliably meet stakeholder needs.

Unified Movement or Varied Phenomena?

It is tempting to see the developments as part of a broad-based, consistent, possibly even global trend—leading ineluctably to more and deeper engagement between citizens, other stakeholders and public agencies. But the reality is much more murky, with a wide range of outcomes and configurations of how governments and citizens interact. Not all governments, and not all communities, businesses and other stakeholders, participate evenly in deliberative efforts.

Why not?

Many political scientists might address this by looking at how such engagements are structured, organised and institutionally supported. But what if these deliberations do not even happen in the first place, because they did not get approved to proceed, or were aborted at a nascent stage?

I suggest a different explanation for why such projects happen or not, and then whether they succeed, based on what some economists call ‘micro foundations’ or ‘micro motivations’: Are the individual human beings involved willing players, or are they more reluctant participants in deliberative activities?

For instance, the staff of a government agency could be willing players and advocates for participatory processes. They could be entrepreneurial, believing in the richness and value of deliberative activity, recognising that governments can have biases and other limitations, and not possess a monopoly on good ideas. Such agency officials may have undertaken successful participatory projects before, and built mutual trust with relevant stakeholders—making them more willing to take on the risks of experimenting with such consultative and co-creative approaches.

Conversely, a government’s staff might be unwilling players: risk averse about the potential resource costs and other downsides of deliberative projects, including whether such efforts might generate expectations among citizens that all their recommendations would be taken on board, or that all decisions would henceforth be made in a participatory manner.

In some instances, government officials might have tried but been disillusioned by previous attempts at deliberation. A politician I interviewed remarked that he was “once bitten, twice shy” about engagement processes, and was reluctant to undertake new efforts “because I was so badly burned before” when expectations from an engagement process spiralled out of control and

Recent Examples of the Growing Global Trend in Citizen Participation

- ◆ The New Citizen Project led by Jon Alexander in the UK, which aims for individuals to once again see themselves as “citizens”, rather than “subjects” of top-down authority or “consumers” of products and market forces¹
- ◆ Involve, a UK charity focused on fostering public participation in policymaking²
- ◆ Taiwan’s GOv (gov-zero) project, a decentralised civic tech community with information transparency, open results and open cooperation as its core values³
- ◆ Participatory budgeting projects in Brazil, which began in the city of Porto Alegre, one of the most populated cities in South Brazil—where budget allocations for public welfare works have been made only after the recommendations of public delegates and approval by the city council⁴—and have since been applied in Europe, China and elsewhere.
- ◆ Deliberative polling projects spearheaded by Stanford academic James Fishkin and his Deliberative Democracy Lab⁵
- ◆ Citizen Assemblies in Ireland that have discussed gender equality, biodiversity loss and the state of the Irish constitution⁶
- ◆ The city of Hamburg’s Urban Data Challenge, which made available exclusive public mobility data as part of a competition of ideas where citizens, universities, businesses and other organisations could suggest innovative concepts and proposals for micro-mobility flows in the city⁷
- ◆ Citizen conventions in France which have discussed a range of issues, including climate, end of life, and how to respond to the Yellow Vest (gilets jaunes) grassroots movement, which was initially motivated by rising crude oil and fuel prices, a high cost of living, and economic inequality⁸





More and more organisations are also initiating or intensifying ground-up participatory approaches:

- ◆ Democracy Next⁹ led by Claudia Chwalisz, which has worked across Europe and OECD countries
- ◆ The Kettering Foundation,¹⁰ Centre for New Democratic Processes¹¹ and National Coalition for Deliberation and Dialogue¹² in the USA
- ◆ DemocracyCo¹³ (which also features in this issue) and the New Democracy Foundation,¹⁴ in Adelaide and Melbourne, Australia, respectively

Singapore is no stranger to such developments, with examples including:

- ◆ The foundations of a citizen Feedback Unit (subsequently renamed REACH)
- ◆ The Our Singapore Conversation (OSC) process in 2012
- ◆ The Singapore Together movement and Alliances for Action which emphasised partnerships between the government and other stakeholders in business and the community
- ◆ The Emerging Stronger Together project during the COVID-19 pandemic
- ◆ The recent Forward SG effort spearheaded by Prime Minister Lawrence Wong

The establishment of the Singapore Partnerships Office (SGPO) in the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) has consolidated these efforts to ensure a structured, coordinated approach to citizen engagement and building partnerships between government agencies and other stakeholders.



led to ever increasing demands from participants. Even more fundamentally, government officials might simply believe that they should be what New America Foundation CEO Anne Marie Slaughter has described as a “control tower”,¹⁵ clearly calling the shots in most interactions because they can access superior information.

Similarly, stakeholders in a project—whether citizen, community groups, businesses or some combination of them—could occupy a spectrum of willingness. They could be naturally and instinctively engaged in civic participation, believe in the ethos of the Athenian oath and see their role as active contributors to democratic life, as well as active students of democracy who learn from the mutual interactions of a deliberative process. Or they could be unwilling—apathetic and disengaged on issues—or disillusioned with previous deliberative efforts that they might have attended and found to be superficial or merely rubber-stamping predetermined decisions.

In any case, participant motivations need not be either binarily willing or unwilling but could instead occur along a continuum of willingness and unwillingness. Individual projects could be situated anywhere in the 2x2 space outlined in Figure 1, but for ease of analysis, I discuss four broad archetypes.

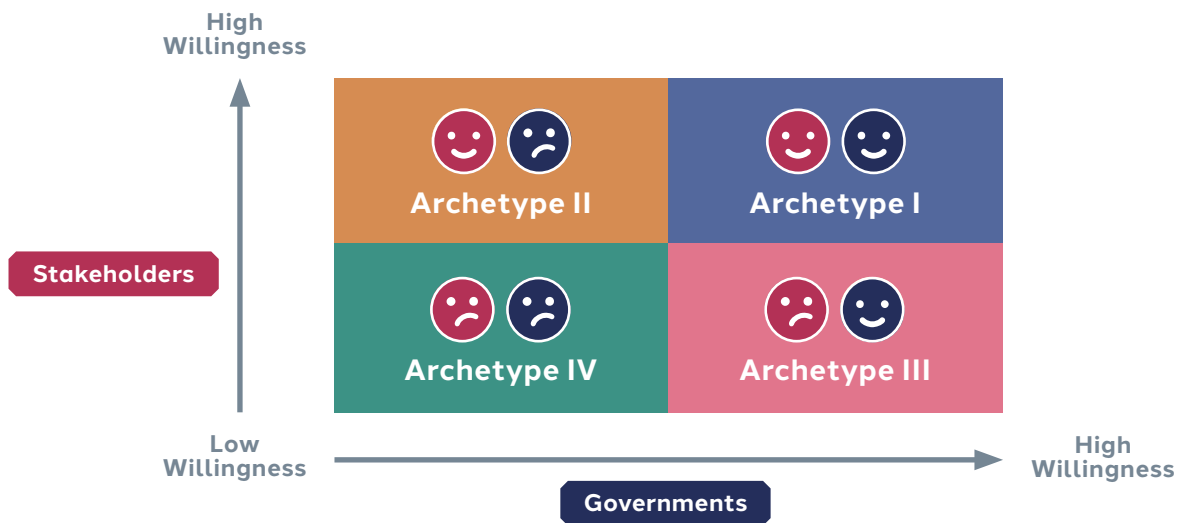


Figure 1. Four archetypes of deliberative projects with different levels of micro motivation.

Archetype I involves both willing government and willing stakeholders—leading to rich outcomes from mutual deliberation and engagement. There can be collectively useful outcomes, at the system-level, and mutual learning between both parties.

Archetype IV is the direct opposite, with unwilling parties on both sides. This leads to participatory processes that are either short-lived or do not even take place, getting cut off at the early stages of approval or recruitment of participants.

Archetype II, with more willing stakeholders and less willing governments, may often end up being marketed as “bottom up” or “grassroots” movements. Such

projects lack the formal imprimatur of involvement by, or at least support from, government agencies.

Archetype III, with more willing government agents but less willing stakeholders, can often be stylised and ritualised deliberative processes, where discussions are somewhat staged, with pre-set questions and avoidance of more spontaneous discussions. They may take the form of formal town hall discussions, with government officials sharing pre-prepared material and engaging in cursory Question & Answer sessions. Citizens and other stakeholders may cynically regard these as political theatre meant to endorse predetermined government decisions rather than platforms for genuine conversation and debate.

Nash Equilibria and Other Nuances

Several points about the four archetypes are worth noting.

First, from a game theory perspective, the payoffs to each set of actors (i.e. governments and other stakeholders) may be such that, under conditions of uncertainty about each other's motivations, it is always 'rational'—more convenient, more efficient in the short-term, and more logical according to strict cost-benefit analysis—to assume that the 'other side' is unwilling. If this is the case, then the Nash Equilibrium will tend towards the sub-optimal Archetype IV. This is unless there are other factors demonstrating the willingness of each side to initiate and (crucially) sustain an engagement effort. Perhaps successful examples of citizen participation are in fact an exceptional minority among countries globally, rather than a growing trend.

Second, the boundaries of the 2x2 matrix could well be porous. Within a given polity, different deliberative projects could occur in different quadrants, depending on the government agencies and stakeholders involved. A single deliberative process could also end up inhabiting different quadrants at different times, as circumstances evolve (and the protagonists involved change, for instance).

Third, a system as a whole can be more resistant and unwilling, even if individual citizens or small groups of officials are keen. Such personalities, sometimes described as policy or civic innovators/entrepreneurs, could well be an active minority that ends up sidelined by more sceptical and unwilling counterparts.

Managing these dynamics is key to maximising the opportunities and minimising the challenges of each archetype—as well as avoiding the trap of the sub-optimal Nash Equilibrium.

Relational approaches could prove beneficial, if they allow public agency staff and stakeholders to get to know one another better and give one another the benefit of the doubt when dealing with uncertain outcomes.



Implications for Participatory Practice

Game theorists often point out that sub-optimal Nash Equilibria are best avoided when players understand that they are in a repeated game, not just a single scenario where win-loss

outcomes are once-off and immutable. They also emphasise the role of commitment mechanisms, whereby each actor can make clear and irrevocable commitments to strategies that, if chosen by both, will lead to better collective outcomes.

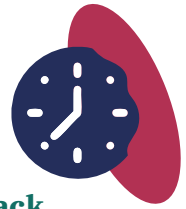
Common to both these approaches is the importance of relationships—where each player sees the other not as just a strategic adversary, but someone with whom mutual interests and trust can be cultivated. Such relational approaches could prove beneficial for deliberative outcomes, if they allow public agency staff and stakeholders to get to know one another better and give one another the benefit of the doubt when dealing with uncertain outcomes. It is also important for each group to check their biases and suspicions about the other. If such interactions happen with sufficient regularity and substance—e.g. through regular meetings where information about priorities, plans and programmes are exchanged—they could provide a critical bedrock for deep and substantive deliberative programmes in the medium-term.

Government officials can contribute to realising Archetype I by making clear their intent and the unique selling points of the whole deliberative process, so that participants are

aware of what they volunteer for. Governments should appreciate that even with the best of intentions, they wield significant power and are engaged in a highly asymmetric relationship with citizens. Moving towards Archetype I will involve significant sharing of information, particularly on the policy intent of proposed changes or ideas under discussion. Citizens, on their part, can consider where they might exercise autonomy and agency and contribute actively to processes where outcomes are not determined by government agencies alone.

As with many interactive engagement efforts, facilitators play a key role. They should be sensitive to power dynamics between stakeholders and agencies that commission such efforts, even going to the extent of calling out potential power differentials when recruiting participants, and actual power gaps during a process. If necessary, time should be set aside to discuss and unpack issues of willingness—especially if there is an

If necessary, time should be set aside to discuss and unpack issues of willingness, especially if there is an underbelly of reluctance.



underbelly of reluctance on the part of either the commissioning agency of a project or its stakeholders.

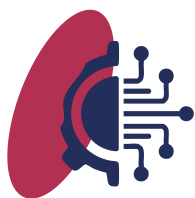
Digital Technology as Participatory Enabler

Digital technology has been much vaunted as a potentially transformative force in politics and governance, including in the space of engagement, deliberation and participation by non-government stakeholders. But technology watchers also know that its effects are seldom homogeneous across sectors and issues.

Conway's Law, a theory of Information Technology created by computer scientist and programmer Melvin Conway in the 1970s, asserts that "Organisations, who design systems, are constrained to produce designs which are copies of the communication structures of these organisations."¹⁶ This implies that, far from being inevitably transformative, technology can sometimes be adopted in ways that reinforce or even entrench the prevailing culture, history and approaches in an organisation.

Technology makes hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations more hierarchical and bureaucratic, while it is adopted by more democratic, distributed and decentralised systems in ways that intensify those qualities.

For deliberative projects, a key question is what technology does not change. This could include the different underlying logics and motivations for groups in each quadrant of Figure 1—digitalisation may well make unwilling groups more unwilling to deliberate (e.g. due to fears of information being used in ways that erode government security or personal privacy), or make willing groups even more willing (e.g. because of the scope for richer information flows and cross-pollinated ideas). Technology will also do little to change any asymmetries in power dynamics when different groups interact (e.g. protocol-consciousness when politicians participate in engagement events can play out equally in a Zoom meeting and in person), while there will be a continued need for facilitators to design the experience of a deliberative process even on a digital platform.



Technology can sometimes end up being adopted in ways that reinforce or even entrench the prevailing culture, history and approaches in an organisation.

Making Technology Work for Participation

Savvy officials and civic stakeholders can ensure technological tools are deployed and managed for the most positive results possible.



For **Archetype I projects** (willing government and willing stakeholders), new information-sharing tools can build up public understanding of an issue even before deliberation occurs: such as through shared files or secure discussion platforms. Online communications tools like Zoom can facilitate relationship-building among citizens, and between citizens and government, including outside deliberative sessions—allowing future champions and enthusiasts of deliberation to be nurtured. Such online tools were used extensively during Singapore’s Alliance for Action initiative on tackling online harms, especially against women and girls, in an effort named “Project Sunlight”. Technology (and Artificial Intelligence in particular) could also improve the quality of the deliberation itself: through support features like real-time language translation, synthesising expert input and points of consensus in otherwise intractably large volumes, use of AI mediators when participants have conflicting views, and enabling deliberations at scale through digital facilitators who might, for instance, pose some pertinent starting questions on an issue.



For **Archetype II projects** (willing stakeholders, unwilling governments), technology can be used to research and highlight successful international examples, and to enable simulations and role play to provide immersive personal experiences and overcome initial scepticism. Allowing potentially unwilling officials to experience a deliberative process first-hand, and/or to learn from others’ successes, could tip the balance in favour of giving a project a chance to prove itself. An experiment in Southern Chile used role-playing to evaluate how residents affected by high concentrations of fine particulate matter perceive the problem and debate possible solutions. Digital technology allowed participants across six mid-sized cities to assume the role of advisors, as part of which they had to prioritise between a series of mitigation measures and reach a consensus with other advisors.¹⁷



Archetype III projects (willing governments but unwilling stakeholders) could gain from technology-enabled low-cost ways to engage lightly at first, e.g. through prototypes and beta versions, as well as simulations that can be cost-effectively repeated. These could help prove to citizens that the engagement projects are worth participating in, and could support participant selection for eventual, full-blown deliberative processes. A field experiment in Germany showed how technology can enhance a process termed “democratic persuasion”.¹⁸ During the COVID-19 pandemic, citizens were invited via Facebook to participate in one of sixteen Zoom town halls, to engage in discussions on pandemic politics with members of German state and federal parliaments. Each representative hosted two town hall meetings, with random assignment to a condition of ‘democratic persuasion’ in one of the two town hall meetings.¹⁹



Type IV projects, where both sides are unwilling, will probably be the toughest nuts to crack. Mutual scepticism may make them difficult to begin in the first place. Here, the connective potential of digital technology may help: pockets of enthusiasts can use the social web and other networking tools to locate one another, exchange ideas and best practices, and convene online discussions. While these do not completely replace deeper, in-person interactions, they can be a useful start, especially if such interactions lay the foundations for deeper inter-personal engagement subsequently. Over time, such efforts can hopefully catalyse a move away from Archetype IV to Archetype I, since the boundaries across the archetypes are porous and unhealthy equilibria need not be the permanent state. While this may not be easy or quick to realise, the possibility of a shift is real. There are nascent but promising examples of these, including in conflict-riven societies like Colombia. The Territorial Dialogue Initiative²⁰ uses a stakeholder dialogue methodology to generate spaces for collaborative co-creation and technology-enabled advocacy in response to local challenges. The Civic Laboratories project creates spaces, including some online, for participatory budgeting, with up to 50% of the budget in Bogotá’s 20-constituent municipality Mayor’s offices being dedicated to citizen-led projects.

Scholars and practitioners alike point to the potential of participatory processes to enrich both political and civic life. In many of the examples cited at the start of this article, deliberative platforms have led to better ideas for societies and cities as a whole, while also proving edifying and educational for individual participants. However, these conclusions are far from necessary or foregone, since they

depend critically on the micro-level motivations of the individuals involved, both within and outside governments. Addressing these motivations directly, through both analogue and technologically-enabled means, could take deliberative projects to new levels of achievement, and be critical enablers to realising the vision of the Athenian Oath in ways that are fit for our times. ■

Notes

1. <https://www.newcitizenproject.com/>
2. <https://involve.org.uk/>
3. <https://gOv.tw/intl/en>
4. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/600841468017069677/participatory-budgeting-in-brazil>
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12. <https://www.ncdd.org/>
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15. Slaughter, Anne-Marie. "America's Edge: Power in the Networked Century." *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 1 (2009): 94–113. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20699436>.
16. Conway's Law gained popularity after being cited in the iconic book *The Mythical Man-Month*. See Brooks, Frederick P., Jr., 1931–2022. *The Mythical Man-Month: Essays on Software Engineering*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1982.
17. À. Boso, J. Garrido, L. K. Sánchez-Galvis, et al. "Exploring role-playing as a tool for involving citizens in air pollution mitigation urban policies," *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 11, 447 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-02686-2>.
18. The process involved actively making the case for democracy and discussing democracy's inherent trade-offs while engaging existing doubts and misperceptions among citizens.
19. A. Wuttke and F. Foos, "Making the case for democracy: A field-experiment on democratic persuasion," *European Journal of Political Research* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12705>
20. <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/territorial-dialogue-initiative-idt-yumbo/>

CONVERSATION



Finding Common Ground for Partnership



ETHOS speaks with former Nominated Member of Parliament Kuik Shiao-Yin, who is Executive Director of Common Ground Civic Centre, a 9-year-long project initiated in partnership with the Ministry of Community, Culture and Youth (MCCY).



Kuik Shiao-Yin is a cultural change strategist and Executive Director of Common Ground Consultancy. Since 2022, she has been helping people and organisations build meaningful, life-giving cultures. She was a co-founding director of The Thought Collective (2002-2021) and Nominated Member of Parliament (2014-2018).

What is the Common Ground project and what does it aim to achieve?

I had been a cultural change strategist for some two decades, working with people and organisations in different contexts. MCCY approached my outfit at the time, The Thought Collective, to consider taking over a vacated state-owned community building that was not being fully utilised, to run as a kind of experimental civic centre. We agreed, because this felt aligned with our own interest in exploring how to shift aspects of Singapore culture that perhaps needed a relook.

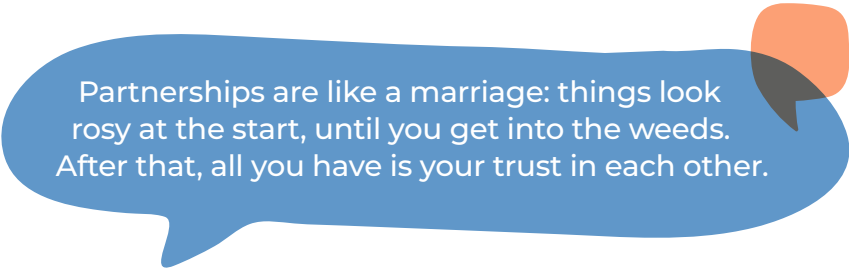
The idea was to set up a civic centre to support the community's ability to explore social concerns. The project scope involved bringing in resident partners to co-locate in the building. We were looking for organisations based in Singapore, non-profit or otherwise, to take up at least a three-year stint. They had to be concerned about something in society, and also have a professional skillset to contribute.

One of the narratives I try to counter through this project is the notion that a social concern must involve organisations or figures associated explicitly with social content or causes. This is because there are other significant aspects that could have an impact on social issues.

For example, a resident partner who came on board early on is Studio Dojo, a transdisciplinary consultancy team that does not fit the typical profile of an outfit in a civic centre. They see many organisations trying to solve problems from the mindset of a single discipline, which then runs into problems along the way. Instead, they apply a range of skillsets to issues: from design thinking to leadership development and futures thinking. To me, this is also a way to address social concerns.

Another of our resident partners, Daughters of Tomorrow, is a non-profit organisation that facilitates livelihood opportunities for underprivileged women, and supports them in building financially independent and resilient families. They complement the work of training and workforce-related agencies. By collaborating with key partners and employers, they influence organisations to consider workplace schemes that make regular employment more possible for the less privileged.

A more recent partner, Kontinentalist, does data storytelling. Their social concern is to help people be more data-literate, and more skilled at interpreting data. They publish data-oriented stories and conduct public education on how to use data. They are also Asia-centric, to counter a prevailing dearth of data from and about Asia, and are also strongly socially focused, believing that data should be more inclusive.



Partnerships are like a marriage: things look rosy at the start, until you get into the weeds. After that, all you have is your trust in each other.

Common Ground is built on partnerships. How do you engage with the government, partners and other stakeholders?

Our partnership with MCCY began with a mutually agreed set of tentative key performance indicators (KPIs), but none of us quite knew what the project or its outcomes would look like in detail: in my experience, this is quite unique. We started with a sincere willingness on both sides of the table to give it a go, and a lot of mutual trust. The Government has given us a lot of leeway for us to explore possibilities. While we still need to be self-sustaining, the state has provided a generous amount of funding to cover the rental of the property and some expenses.

Partnerships are like a marriage: things look rosy at the start, until you get into the weeds. After that, all you have is your trust in each other, and how you talk to one another to work things out. For instance, the project kicked off in 2019 when the COVID-19 pandemic was taking place. Our government partners were understanding and did not insist that we keep to our agreed-upon initial KPIs regardless of

the crisis. Had they done so, it would have compromised our mutual trust. Instead, we found a way forward together.

A similar climate of trust and flexibility extends to our relationship with our resident partners. This is not a master tenant and subtenant relationship: the concept we settled on is a membership. Via a membership fee, our resident partners have access to affordable spaces for their daily operations as well as to gather people and build networks. They also receive developmental hours that can be used for skills development or to get support from our consultancy team—for instance, they could use this time to have me facilitate a conversation with their board of directors.

We are learning to do better over the years, based on how our members use our resources. When we started, our proposition to members was more unstructured. From observation, we found that such an approach is not always effective, depending on the profile of our resident partners. Going forward, we are planning to offer a more structured approach, with interventions based on the key issues we have observed recurring across our resident members' work.

From your experience, what are some challenges faced by organisations seeking to contribute to social concerns?

This work has given me a lot of empathy for the variety of organisations trying to

do something meaningful. One insight is that some do certain parts of the work better than others. But we have noticed that no one can be very effective if they cannot resolve **nine key questions** (see box story). Such questions include practical ones, such as how to price your product or service, or what sort of entity they should be.

Business Concerns

- ☐ How do I develop and price a new product?
- ☐ How do I better communicate to the public about my work?
- ☐ How do I develop an effective proposal or pitch?
- ☐ How do I develop my network of opportunities?

Leadership Concerns

- ☐ How do I strategise for the future? (What are some necessary endings so that something new can begin?)
- ☐ How do I negotiate better terms for myself (in a specific situation)?
- ☐ How do I facilitate a necessary conversation (in a specific situation, i.e., not a training programme, more specific in terms of conversation)?

Design Concerns

- ☐ How do I design an effective programme (for a specific programme I'm already working on)?
- ☐ How do I design and build a community around the cause I care for?



One of these difficult questions is that of when to end. This is important to consider at the beginning. For instance, when we conceived this project with MCCY, the idea was that it would be time-bound—limited to ten years—and not go on forever. But this is a crucial question to also ask in the middle: when an organisation reflects on the way in which it has addressed an issue and whether it is indeed the best way to proceed.

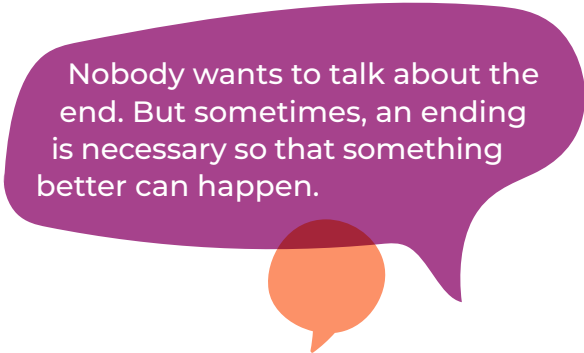
Many incubator-like spaces are all about the beginning and middle of things. Nobody wants to talk about the end. But sometimes, an ending is necessary so that something better can happen. It could be the end of a certain approach to doing things, or a business partnership, or recognising that one is not the best person to be playing a particular role. All this involves a grieving process, which takes time and trust.

In a sense, this civic centre began at peak loss, having started during the pandemic when many purpose-driven organisations had to face quite abrupt ends because they could no longer sustain their activities. We recognised that in many ways, we and some of our resident partners were sheltered by our situation, with projects that were not dependent on gatherings, for instance. But others had to make hard decisions during these tough times. One partner jointly decided as a team to stop and go out to try and earn a living before circling back to their work later.

How should we be thinking about designing KPIs for work with social value?

The social sector is impactful but can sometimes struggle to explain exactly how and to what degree it makes its impact. In a sense, this is one of the aims of this civic centre project: to discover what works and what does not, and to iterate as we go. We are starting to converge on what are some of the broad buckets of KPIs that matter. The first has to do with awareness. The second is around skills-building. Then there is a set that is needed most, but is also most complex, which is about how to measure social value.

One article¹ has argued that it is more meaningful and practical to track inputs and activities that support collaborative learning and adaptation, since we may not truly know how things turn out until later. Tracking input means paying attention to the quality of thinking and design that goes into an initiative and trusting that good input has a higher likelihood of resulting in good outcomes down the road.



Nobody wants to talk about the end. But sometimes, an ending is necessary so that something better can happen.



It is one thing to come up with KPIs, and quite another to design them so that people are willing to put up with them.

One grievance many practitioners share is that they feel they are doing a lot of good work, so why must they be tracked at all rather than being trusted to carry on with it? Once they accept that some indicators are necessary for good governance, their next concern is whether the instruments used to do this tracking are too blunt—for example, only tracking the attendance of people who showed up at their event. But we do need to ask: If we want good work to scale, what does that look like? Do we mean big numbers of people reached? If not, are there other ways in which we can articulate quality and progress in a way that meets the needs of funders, practitioners and the community?

Coming up with good KPIs is a difficult thing to do and involves tough, complex questions. Such questions must be considered in a relationship where all parties trust that everyone has a genuine stake in wanting to figure out how best to make it work. It can feel oppressive, unfair, or unhelpful when the people on the ground are left out of this conversation.

Good KPIs cannot be developed by people who are not doing the work. They can only come out if you are both doing the work *and* observing the work, which is the position I find myself in. A traditional consultant stands at a safe distance from the world and, from that zoomed-

out vantage point, observes and judges it. You need someone to perform that role, but you also need the perspectives of those who are actually labouring in the trenches and suffering the actual conditions that arise from the goals they have committed themselves to.

Realistically, you do need to invest a significant amount of time to examine and review KPIs as you go along, to ensure that they continue to meaningfully track how well you are actually doing in the areas you care about. It is also one thing to come up with KPIs, and quite another to design them so that people are willing to put up with them.

The gold standard would be if stakeholders look at the KPIs and all agree that these make sense and so they do not mind tracking the data, because it is intuitively in alignment with their goals, not excessively onerous to collect, and affirms the work that has been done.

To design good KPIs that are also practitioner-centric, you need three capacities in balance. You must be able to do the work and understand the nuances of doing it—so you know what is worth tracking. You need a good emotional feel for what the impact of the tracking is: not just on the practitioner, but also the people being tracked. And you need the cognitive ability to articulate what all this means. This is a big ask for people who are just interested in doing the work itself, but it is necessary.

How can we continue to grow and nurture an active citizenry?

I tend to take the view that citizens are already active in something—just not necessarily the things the state wants them to be active in. So, we need to be curious about what they have been active in: we may be pleasantly surprised to find that it is in alignment with what we need.

We need to first recognise the ways in which those outside the usual circle of social causes and non-profit organisations, including the person on the street, are already being active. For example, some young people may be actively trying to stop a friend from self-harm, but they may not be signing up for official activities. There could be millions of different people and activities out there not captured by the data as being ‘active’.

The question is: how can we get an entire people to be vested in the good of everyone? To do this, we need to look beyond our usual scope and come together, the public and the government, to look at what is working well and what is not, which will be different in many areas. We should not begin with an assumption that we already know best what the issues are, or how best to address them.

The key is whether we can have relationships with enough trust that we can be honest about our experiences, frustrations and concerns. Otherwise, people may hold back and simply voice grievances or discuss only parts of their experience that they think officials want to hear.

What we have done at Common Ground will have been worthwhile if we manage to give our partners and stakeholders a taste of what it is like to operate in a climate of mutual support and trust. A tremendous amount of trust has been extended to us in this project and in turn, I feel more trust in government for being prepared to make such an initiative work. We have experienced genuine care and sincerity thus far—not just for us as human beings, but also towards the work and the process.

My hope for civic engagement in Singapore is that we learn to trust not just in particular individuals, but in the social sector as a whole: that it consists of people who sincerely care about issues and are striving to address them, on both sides of the table. If we can reach a point where all parties feel this way—where we trust that everyone involved in a civic initiative cares about the quality of the work and the integrity of relationship, and can call one another to account—we will be doing well. ■

Note

1. <https://toby-89881.medium.com/explode-on-impact-cba283b908cb>

MORE THAN A FEELING

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC TRUST

by Heather Humphries and Vernie Oliveiro



Amid widening societal divides and declining faith in institutions, the quality of relations between government and citizenry depends on paying heed to Competence, Integrity and Care.



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THE GLOBAL DECLINE IN PUBLIC TRUST

Trust is the lifeblood of any institution. But it is hard to earn and easy to lose.

Globally, the outlook for trust in public institutions has been bleak. The Edelman Trust Barometer found in 2023 that only 50% of survey respondents worldwide reported trusting their government.¹ In a separate global survey, 45% polled felt governments were “untrustworthy”, ranking among the lowest trusted sectors studied.²

Singapore bucks this global trend: trust in government has remained high, at 77% in 2024. It even increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (from 70% in 2019³ to 76% in 2022⁴). This finding differs from other countries, where the initial rise in public trust eventually reverted to lower pre-pandemic levels.⁵

Globally, there is a ‘trust gap’⁶ between the haves and have-nots: those in the lowest income quartile are less likely to trust institutions compared to the top. This is also the case in Singapore: the average trust in institutions⁷ by low-income earners was 18 percentage points lower than high-income earners (55% vs 73%) in 2023, putting Singapore in seventh place



**Citizens may
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in terms of the trust gap among 27 countries surveyed.

What are the key shifts affecting public trust in Singapore, what components make up this trust, and how can governments build meaningful trust with citizens?

SECURING TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Citizens may have different ideas of what constitutes ‘government’, which can impact trust building. They may think of government as the public service and institutions such as the courts, or solely comprising political actors, e.g., politicians and political parties. The actions of one part of government may inadvertently affect perceptions of another.⁸

Securing institutional trust is critical for the public service. Strong institutional trust allows governments to secure process-based trust from citizens. Process-based trust means citizens can accept an outcome—even if it is not their desired outcome—

because they believe the underlying process was fair and justly executed. This form of trust can forge stronger government-citizen relationships and mitigate the negative impact of unpopular decisions or policies. Crucially, leaders representing institutions, as well as the individuals implementing institutional processes, must demonstrate respect for the process and its rules. When leaders and officials disparage systems, trust in systems erodes even if there are checks and proper processes in place.

BUILDING TRUST IN A DIGITAL ERA

The rise of social media has impacted the trust dynamics between citizens and institutions. Social media can create 'echo chambers' that fuel social and public mistrust. Individuals increasingly access content and closed groups that reflect their own beliefs and biases. Recommendation engines then amplify individuals' choices by sending users down rabbit holes toward even more extreme ideas. This is how conspiracy theories and anti-vaccination beliefs spread amongst members of wellness groups during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ Disinformation that rises within online communities can be harder to stamp out as group members grow more insular in their information consumption habits.

Yet, social media also offers a platform to humanise public communications, foster authenticity and enable political leaders to speak directly to a viewer. Public officers must learn to use social media for positive engagement while mitigating the negative impact. This includes creating content that is short, snappy, and easily understood to catch the public's attention. Additionally, they must also be able to promptly detect and dispel disinformation that could sow distrust.¹⁰

MAINTAINING TRUST IN DIVISIVE TIMES

Polarising forces in society can reduce trust. If citizens perceive that governments are ignoring or mismanaging fault lines in society, mistrust can breed. Below are some key trends, not unique to Singapore, that could contribute to societal divides and affect public trust:

- **Income and wealth inequality** can exacerbate tensions and fissures. Less well-off groups may feel disenfranchised by policies, perceive that the system is rigged against them, and feel that those in power are not working in their best interests. There is the risk of economic 'enclaves', where there is little understanding between different socio-economic groups.

These forces can make it harder to build trust and corral a nation towards common goals.

- **Identity politics** can be powerfully divisive, and make it challenging for the government to effectively engage with and represent the interests of all citizens. For example, race and religion, as well as issues of gender and sexual orientation, are complex issues inherently tied to an individual's self-worth, sense of belonging, and lived experience. It can thus be difficult for individuals with strongly held views to compromise or cede space. Nevertheless, it is important for a society to continue having such difficult but salient conversations, rather than ignore or downplay their significance.
- **Generational differences** can impact how trust in government is built. In Singapore, the government enjoys large reserves of trust with an older generation of citizens who had experienced the radical post-Independence transformation of Singapore from a Third World

country to First. However, younger generations, with different lived experiences, have yet to build up the same trust in Government. Younger Singaporeans may also place a higher value on different aspects of governance, such as robust processes, including checks and balances within the system, or fair and equitable treatment of all political parties. This shift in priorities means the government may have to adapt their approach to win trust among the younger generation.

Given Singapore's changing demographics, developing inclusive policies that foster an 'all of us matter' mentality will be vital. Doing this may well involve creating and maintaining physical and online communal spaces for people to meet and foster mutual understanding over time.

Framing policies in an inclusive manner is also essential. Presenting policies as mutually beneficial for the target group and the broader community, rather than exclusively benefiting a specific group, can garner greater support.¹¹



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WHAT MAKES PUBLIC TRUST?

Trust can be a nebulous concept and may mean different things to different people. Research¹² suggests that there are three key components to public trust: **competence**, **integrity**, and **care**.



Figure 1. Public Trust Framework: What Does Trustworthiness Entail?



1. COMPETENCE

Competence comprises two dimensions:

- a. *Ability*: government must have the technical skills and knowledge to deliver promised outcomes efficiently and effectively.
- b. *Reliability*: government must deliver promised outcomes consistently.

However, public trust in one's competence is contextual. **A trustee may be highly competent in one area and less capable in other aspects.**¹³ Citizens' trust in one aspect of government may not always extend to other aspects.



2. INTEGRITY

Integrity comprises several dimensions—honesty, transparency, fairness, and congruence.

- a. *Honesty*: the act of telling the truth, particularly when mistakes or wrongdoing has occurred. Honesty and transparency should not be conflated.
- b. *Transparency*: openness of information. Transparency may remove secrecy but does not reduce deception or deliberate misinformation.¹⁴ In fact, a system of “total transparency” could inadvertently encourage dishonesty, as individuals find ways to obfuscate the truth.¹⁵
- c. *Fairness*: the just and equal application of judgements, rules, and decisions. Here, fairness must not only be applied in these cases but perceived to be applied. Such perception is rooted in social comparison—i.e. individuals compare how rules are applied to them in relation to others. Perceived unfairness can have a greater negative impact than the positive effects of fairness in organisations and systems¹⁶
- d. *Congruence*: maintaining consistent demeanours and values across different situations. While it is natural to adjust behaviours slightly to suit different contexts, inconsistent personas can raise doubts and diminish trust. Integrity matters at multiple levels: individual, organisation, and whole-of-government.

For public trust to thrive, processes, systems, and institutions must be created in a way that is just and fair, and the people behind these mechanisms must also be seen to be fair as well.



3. CARE

Care is an important component of trust but can be challenging to quantify. While competence can be measured by evaluating the outcomes of government policies, and integrity by tracking the prevalence of corruption and political scandals, the notion of care varies depending on individual preferences and perspectives. Research suggests two dimensions of care:

- a. *Citizen-centricity*: the perception that government prioritises citizen needs and perspectives in its policies and services. For instance, designing public services with user accessibility and ease of navigation in mind, instead of prioritising convenient backend management.¹⁷
- b. *Authenticity*: the ability to build genuine connections, empathise and relate with citizens.¹⁸

Citizen-centricity and authenticity can be strengthened through citizen engagement, which signals that the government cares about citizen perspectives. Co-creating and co-delivering outcomes fosters trust by giving citizens a sense of voice and stake. Effective engagements are inclusive and sincere. It is also important to close the loop with citizens after each engagement, to assure citizens that their input is valued, and that specific deliberations and actions resulted from the engagement.



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MANAGING TENSIONS BETWEEN COMPONENTS OF TRUST

Regardless of its competence and fairness, a government may still lose public trust if seen as uncaring.¹⁹ All three components of trust—competence, integrity, and care—are necessary. The challenge for government is when these key components come into tension with one another.

The ideal ‘care’ for citizens is service that is personalised and designed around the individual rather than an aggregation of individuals. However, governments must contend with resource constraints. Prioritising competence in service may mean delivering outcomes at scale, which may lead certain citizen groups to feel less cared for or included.

Another example is data privacy—where transparency may be at odds with competence. Governments have access to troves of citizen information and are entrusted to handle such information sensitively. However, a crisis or emergency may throw up dilemmas: in a pandemic, for example, how much private information should be disclosed to provide assurance and awareness, and how much should be withheld to protect individual citizens? To balance these different trust-related priorities, governments must set clear principles and protocols for





appropriate data disclosure, as well as clear processes and practices that ensure data security.

LOOKING AHEAD

Singapore's government has built a strong reputation for its ability to competently deliver policy, and for maintaining a robust anti-graft and high-integrity system. As Singapore progresses, the focus may shift towards the 'care' aspect of trust. Core to this is a reflection on whether the public service's ethos of serving with heart has translated into a public perception that the government cares for its citizens and their interests.

Leaders should assess the public perception of their agency and the messages it conveys to the public. Agencies can cultivate a more open and empathetic 'institutional body language'²⁰ through their communications, culture, and leadership practices.

Going forward, the public sector will have to establish and maintain trust within an intricate and unpredictable governance context. Proactive efforts to demonstrate competence, care, and integrity across various government functions, such as policymaking, communications, enforcement, services, and engagement, will be essential for upholding public trust amid evolving social dynamics. ■

Notes

1. Among four key institutions—business, NGOs, government, and media—only businesses saw more than half of the surveyed respondents expressing trust. Source: *Edelman, 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer Report* (Edelman, 2023), accessed 14 November 2023, <https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2023-03/2023%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20Global%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>
2. Carl Phillips, *Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Monitor* (Ipsos, 2022), accessed 14 November 2023, <https://www.ipsos.com/en/trust/trust-2022>.
3. *Edelman, 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Report* (Edelman, 2020), accessed 14 November 2023, https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/440941/Trust%20Barometer%202020/2020%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20Global%20Report.pdf?utm_campaign=Global:%20Trust%20Barometer%202020&utm_source=Website
4. See Note 1.
5. This may be explained by the ‘rally-round-the-flag’ effect—a short-term increase in public support of a country’s government or leaders in times of crisis or conflict. Source: Bruce Chew et al., “Sustaining public trust in government”, Deloitte, March 4, 2021, accessed 14 November 2023, <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/government-trends/2021/public-trust-in-government.html>.
6. Ibid.
7. This was a measure of the average percentage trust in NGOs, business, government and media.
8. However, trust in institutions can occur independently of trust in regimes. A 2021 Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Exchange Series report on attitudes towards institutions, politics, and policies observed that trust in state institutions was higher (mean of 2.92 out of 4) compared to electoral institutions (mean of 2.55 out of 4).
9. Eva Wiseman, “The dark side of wellness: the overlap between spiritual thinking and far-right conspiracies”, *The Guardian*, 17 October 2021; and James Ball, “Everything you’ve been told is a lie! Inside the wellness-to-fascism pipeline”, *The Guardian*, 2 August 2023.
10. Research has shown that fact-checking framed as “confirmations” rather than “refutations” tends to see higher reader engagement. Confirmations are framed as “it is true that (correct information)”, whereas refutations are framed as “it is false that (misinformation)”. Source: Natalia Aruguete et al., “Framing fact-checks as a “confirmation” increases engagement with corrections of misinformation: a four-country study,” *Scientific Reports* 14, 3201 (2024), doi:10.1038/s41598-024-53337-0

11. Research has shown that emphasising the overall benefits of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies for all employees can help reduce resistance and the zero-sum mindset.
12. The framework in Figure 1 draws on organisational trust research and interviews with Singapore's public sector leaders. The two main research sources referenced are Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's Model of Integrative Trust (see Note 13), and the World Economic Forum-supported think tank TIGTech's drivers of trust (see Hilary Sutcliffe, "Trust & Tech Governance", *TigTech*, accessed 14 November 2023, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fc12cea2cf09257bd6dcc01/t/5fca5150ac031d3c8e89ff06/1607094623935/Trust_and_tech_governance.pdf.)
13. Roger C. Mayer., James H. Davis, and F. David Schoorman, "An integrative model of organizational trust." *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 709-734.
14. Onora O'Neill, *A Question of Trust: The BBC Reith Lectures* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).
15. For example, UK officials reportedly used post-its, phone calls and private emails to avoid disclosures under Freedom of Information laws. Source: Ben Worthy, "From private emails to Post-it Notes: How politicians avoid scrutiny", June 29, 2021, accessed 7 December 2023, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/freedom-of-information/private-emails-post-it-notes-how-politicians-avoid-scrutiny/>. Martin Rosenbaum, "FOI, fear and personal emails for public business", *BBC News*, September 11, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-19550952>.
16. David Chan, "Perceptions of Fairness", October, 2011, accessed 7 December 2023, <https://knowledge.csc.gov.sg/ethos-issue-10/perceptions-of-fairness/>
17. William D. Eggers et al., "How government can deliver streamlined life event experiences", *Deloitte*, July 12, 2022, accessed 7 December 2023, <https://www2.deloitte.com/xe/en/insights/industry/public-sector/citizen-centric-government.html>
18. This was adapted from an internal research paper by the Civil Service College. Source: Eugene Liow, "Who Cares: Caring about a Caring Government", May 30, 2023.
19. Amanda Greene, "Competence, fairness, and caring—the three keys to government legitimacy," *Centre for Public Impact*, February 27, 2018, accessed on 7 December 2023, <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/insights/the-three-keys-government-legitimacy>.
20. Virginia Hamilton, "Can a government be empathetic?", *Apolitical*, 3 October 2023, accessed 25 January 2024, <https://apolitical.co/solution-articles/en/can-a-government-be-empathetic>.

