

## Year 2026: Doing Singapore Differently

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What if, instead of trawling through job portals in search of the “perfect job”, Singaporeans’ skills could be measured and matched to the industry that needed those capabilities? What if we could bank-in the hours we spent on caregiving now, and in future receive care from others? And in light of disruption to traditional industries, would some version of Denmark’s “flexicurity” system — that aims to achieve both flexibility in labour markets and security for workers — help Singaporeans be more confident of change?

These were some of the possible scenarios of the future presented in [Year 2026: Doing Singapore Differently](#), a report on IPS’ [Action Plan Singapore](#) scenario-planning project. Published last month, the report documents the conversations that took place among 100 participants, including senior government officials, leaders from the private sector, start-up founders, journalists and academics, between August 2016 and September. During the sessions, participants discussed how current developments might play out over the next decade and what strategic action plans Singapore might adopt to ensure that the country remains innovative and inclusive.



*Phase 1 of Action Plan Singapore saw participants attend a two-day scenario-planning workshop for their issue of focus*

IPS Deputy Director (Research) Dr Gillian Koh, who coordinated the Action Plan Singapore project, explained the rationale behind IPS taking on such a project at a briefing last month to members of the media: “At the start of this term of government, the Prime Minister said that he invites everyone to join the government and roll up their sleeves, to create a new and better Singapore. So with that, and also with the announcement of the Committee of the Future Economy (CFE), IPS decided to make its own contribution and catalyse action for the future by asking several critical questions.”

The focal questions of the Action Plan Singapore project were:

1. What will Singapore’s socio-economic landscape be in 2026?
2. How will the three issues of longevity, innovation and skills affect that future?

Participants were split into three different tracks of Longevity, Innovation and Skills, based on their background and expertise. Discussions in each track were led by an IPS researcher and facilitated by representatives of Innovator.sg and Padang. The project was conducted in the following three phases:

Phase 1 — Scenario-planning workshops: A two-day scenario-building workshop was conducted for each of the three tracks in August 2016.

Phase 2 — Conference: New participants and those from Phase 1 came together to explore convergences and divergences in the scenarios on September 5, 2016.

Phase 3 — Strategy-building workshops: Participants reconvened in their different tracks for a full-day workshop each, from 19 to 21 September, to flesh out the strategies initiated at Phase 2.

Dr Koh said the three issues were chosen because they collectively looked at what Singapore society could do as the country undergoes an economic transformation. “We want to be able to harness the fact that we are living longer and tap on the *longevity* dividend, and with that, become *skilled* to create new values for *innovation*,” she said, drawing the link between the three tracks.



*In Phase 2 of Action Plan Singapore, participants of the scenario-planning workshops came together at a conference on September 5, 2016*

Discussions on Innovation, led by IPS Senior Research Fellow Dr Faizal Bin Yahya, focused on how Singapore can maximise our potential for innovation and build a strong ecosystem, in light of advances in artificial intelligence (AI). Some of the strategies include a Stay Ahead Scheme that trains Singaporeans in the key skills required in a world dominated by AI, creating a national plan for a people-friendly AI world, and upgrading social safety nets to mitigate the effects of technological disruption on employment.

Given Singapore's circumstances, the island-nation has no choice but to capitalise on available technology to navigate the increasingly complex environment, said Dr Faizal and lead facilitator Jon Hoel from Innovator.Sg. In their reflections published in the report, they said: "Singapore as a trading economy with no physical hinterland has no viable alternative but to expand its virtual hinterland, ramp-up its knowledge base and innovation quotient, and create deeper and broader linkages with the outside world."

The sessions on Skills, led by IPS Research Fellow Dr Teng Siao See, explored the effects of emerging technologies on manpower and employment. This is especially pertinent given the changing nature of work globally due to shorter economic cycles and technological disruption. Strategies from the Skills track include a Credential Capability Index, which rates graduates and employees on their industry-relevant skills, a national Job Satisfaction Index, and the system of "Pracademia", which aims to foster greater synergy between the workplace and schools in curriculum design.

One of the challenges facing education in Singapore now is having true "pracademics" — educators who are able to be both practitioners and academics at the same time. Nelson Ang, Assistant Director of Learning and Curriculum Design at Kaplan Singapore and one of the key participants of the Skills track, observed that many practitioners who choose to switch to academia do not transition fully into their new role.

"They step into class, teach, leverage on their past experience, which is great. Lots of war stories. But if it stops there and the war stories start to get really old, it stops working. We don't get "pracademics" — we get someone who stops being a practitioner, but never quite becomes an academic," said Mr Ang.

Longevity, led by IPS Senior Research Fellow Christopher Gee, looked at strategies to cope with Singaporeans' increasing lifespan. Strategies include the establishment of an End-of-Life Office to educate Singaporeans on the different care options available across different stages of disability and illness, an Ageless Scorecard to grade companies on the level of inclusion of workers of all ages in their workforce, and a Happy Life Index to measure the professional and personal happiness of workers aged 50 and above.



*In Phase 3 of Action Plan Singapore, participants attended day-long strategy-building workshops for each track*

One of the benefits of using the scenario planning methodology was that it fostered cross-sector collaboration among the participants and challenged existing assumptions. Reflecting on the process of Action Plan Singapore, Dr Teng said: “The workshops were a rare opportunity for representatives of diverse sectors to come together for an enriching dialogue over a topic [i.e., skills] that was previously very much discussed within its own more narrowly-defined domain.”

Action Plan Singapore will continue in 2017 for participants to discuss how best to operationalise the strategies pitched. The outcomes of these discussions will be shared at an IPS conference in November 2017.

*The full Action Plan Singapore report is available on our website [here](#). Click [here](#) to watch a video on the highlights of the workshops and conference.*

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*If you have comments or feedback, please email [ips.eneews@nus.edu.sg](mailto:ips.eneews@nus.edu.sg)*