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A CONDUCIVE ECOSYSTEM FOR SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH

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A CONDUCIVE ECOSYSTEM FOR SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH

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PREFACE

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) conducted the inaugural Social Service Research Network (SSRN) on 31 March 2014 at the Civil Service College Singapore. Eight speakers from academia, government agencies and various voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) presented at two panel sessions on building a conducive ecosystem for research in the social service sector.

The general aim of the SSRN is to bring together academics, practitioners and policymakers with interest in the non-profit sector, to bridge the gap between research and practice so that evidence generated can be translated to actionable insights for policy and practice. Therefore, beyond the dissemination of findings, the network acts as a knowledge broker so that VWOs and policymakers use evidence to inform action and decision-making.

NCSS recognises the key role that research plays in identifying needs, developing solutions and evaluating the impact of those solutions in the social service sector. Following NCSS' Strategic Review in August 2013, the Advocacy and Research Team (ART) was established in alignment with one of NCSS' five key thrusts: to advocate for emerging and underserved social needs. In doing so, the team examines the root causes of social issues in the sector in order to provide evidence for advocacy. Specifically, the research team plays three key roles:

- Conduct independent research on strategic issues surfaced by VWOs and other stakeholders for the purpose of evidence-based advocacy

- Provide methodological support for various NCSS teams to ensure quality research

- Coordinate research projects within NCSS and facilitate collaborations with external research institutes

NCSS had previously organised smaller research networks and invited practitioners who have done research in specialised fields to share their findings. The Council partnered IPS in 2014 in order to extend the reach and impact of such networks. Combining the research and policy expertise of IPS with the experience and connections that NCSS had with service providers, SSRN is able to reach a larger audience — VWOs, policymakers, academics, foundations and many other community partners.

There are currently multiple players that conduct some form of research and development for the social services. These include:

- Government policy divisions and research units: Strategic Planning, Research and Development Division (SPRD) at the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF)**;** the Rehabilitation and Protection Group (RPG) in MSF; the above-mentioned Advocacy and Research Team (ART) in NCSS; and the research units in Singapore Prisons, etc.;

- Academic research institutes: Under the National University of Singapore, there is IPS, the Social Service Research Centre (SSR), the Centre for Family and Population Research (CFPR) and the Centre for Social Development Asia (CSDA);

- NGO research centres: International Longevity Centre (ILC) of the Tsao Foundation, National Volunteer and Philanthropic Centre (NVPC), Lien Centre for Palliative Care (LCPC), and Lien Centre for Social Innovation;

- VWOs with research teams or research interests: Fei Yue Community Services, Asian Women's Welfare Association, and Students Care Centre, to name a few.

Different partners and agencies have different strengths that will be mutually beneficial. Some bring with them experience with clients and problems on the ground. Some have access to innovation or technology and the know-how, while others are equipped with research skills and methodological expertise. Through this network and the concerted efforts of stakeholders with interest in the non-profit sector, we aim to synergise the knowledge and adapting it to reality, so as to ensure research is translated into practice. The SSRN will encourage dialogue and interaction to highlight and share relevant new research; identify areas of research needs; facilitate effective knowledge transfer; and foster innovative ideas and solutions to be put to practice.

This network of reciprocal knowledge flow between academic, non-profit agencies and government will contribute towards the improvement of the social service sector.

Sim Gim Guan
CEO, NCSS

Chapter 1

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Dr Justin Lee
Dr Mathew Mathews
Dr Hana Alhadad

This IPS Exchange Series documents the proceedings, contributions and discussions of the Social Service Research Network (SSRN) that was held on 31 March 2014 at the Civil Service College. This introductory chapter provides a summary of: 1) the origins, objectives and strategic plans for SSRN; 2) the rationale for the theme of the inaugural network; and 3) an overview of the contributions from the panellists.

ORIGINS OF SSRN

The idea to collaborate on a research network specifically focused on the social services was mooted by Director of IPS, Janadas Devan and then CEO of NCSS, Ang Bee Lian in 2013. Previously, NCSS had organised small-scale research networks that mainly invited VWOs to share their research findings with one another. Many of these projects were supported by the VWO-Capability Development Fund (VCF) from the Ministry of Family Social Development (MSF). IPS has also brought together social service agencies together to discuss issues relevant to the sector. The earliest was 1991, where IPS organised a conference to examine the future of social services and in subsequent years involved the social service sector especially in programmes related to civil society. The social service sector was also well represented in IPS' flagship annual event, Singapore Perspectives, and its Family Research Network.

The proposal to collaborate was propitious, as NCSS had started to expand the role that research played in the sector. An indication of the commitment to grow research capability in the sector, NCSS established an Advocacy and Research Team in 2014 to conduct research that will inform broader strategic plans for the social service sector at large. Beyond its original focus on *improving services*, the research agenda was enlarged to help create evidence-based advocacy efforts and strategic planning at the *policy level*.

At the same time, IPS' Society and Identity research cluster has increasingly focused on social services as a key arena where issues such as social inclusion and community integration are played out. Given that both organisations have a strong interest in social issues, social policy and social services, the partnership seemed natural. Fellows from IPS and NCSS worked closely to conceptualise a network that can have greater

scale and impact.[1] The ensuing discussions between NCSS and IPS clarified the objectives of the network, and an agreement was made to run SSRN.

OBJECTIVES OF SSRN

Recognising the lack of coordination and understanding between diverse research players who have different interests and strengths, SSRN is devised so that NCSS and IPS can mobilise research attention, expertise and resources to focus on key areas of interest. This is also a way to support VWOs who are typically under-equipped to leverage on research to improve services and therefore unable to provide credible inputs to policies that affect the social service sector as a whole.

We feel that an overall strategic direction and plan is important to ensure that content for the networks will be better structured and relevant. Importantly, we want to develop a knowledge base that can accumulate and grow coherently over time. This is preferred to merely sharing contemporary research findings or inviting expert speakers, hoping that those will benefit the sector in some way.

To set the stage for subsequent networks, the inaugural session sought to make sense of the landscape of research actors and the range of research activities in the sector, so as to inform the direction and role that social service research should take. The next SSRN in 2015 will then follow up by focusing on taking stock of the various assets of the sector so as to understand how to best mobilise them to meet social needs. Besides VWOs, assets such as social enterprises, corporate social responsibility units, faith-based organisations, community artists, designers, grassroots organisations and other “under-the-radar” groups have diverse strengths and unique contributions that deserve closer attention.

After we put in place a strategic network of partners and resources, the objective of SSRN can then shift gears to focus on substantive areas of research that are important for the sector. More sector-wide issues can then be taken up, and possible themes can include service delivery; community engagement; the social and economic impact of VWOs; social innovation; volunteerism, etc. Specific issues in subsectors such as

1. Dr Mathew Mathews, who leads the Society and Identity research cluster at IPS represented IPS while Dr Justin Lee and Dr Hana Alhadad represented NCSS. Dr Lee joined IPS as a Research Fellow in December 2014 and continues to organise SSRN.

disability, vulnerable seniors, at-risk children and youth may also be studied if they are identified as priority interests for the sector at large.

MAKING SENSE OF THE ECOSYSTEM OF RESEARCH

While there are many players in the field — government research divisions and units, academic research institutes, NGO research centres and VWO researchers — there is no platform that provides a clear understanding of what they do, what they are interested in doing, and what their respective roles in research within the sector should be. (See Appendix 1 for the research conducted by VWOs and Appendix 2 for research conducted by MSF).

The purpose of the first SSRN was to initiate a dialogue between key research players to collectively define the respective roles and chart the direction of research for social services. The dialogue would help to figure out the type of research that is relevant for the sector, and what the existing and potential contributions different players can provide. This will galvanise a more concerted and coordinated approach to research, as well as develop research capability for the sector. It will allow various research players to identify their roles and niche position in the research landscape that best draws upon their strengths. At the same time it is a platform to engage and coordinate the efforts of other multiple players to contribute research that is responsive and relevant for the sector. The outcome of such a dialogue would be to develop a “roadmap” for research in the social services. (See Chapter 10 for our proposed research agenda and strategic plan that can guide research activity and capability building for the sector).

This is an important dialogue to have, because many opportunities exist for potentially impactful collaborations and partnerships. The core business of VWOs is service delivery, so they engage in applied or practice-based research to improve their services. The core business of academia is knowledge production, so the focus is on basic research and theoretical contributions. A variety of research centres specialise in niche domain areas (eldercare, palliative care, youth issues, voluntarism, etc.) while others have more expansive scope. In other countries, for example the UK and the US, there are public research institutes that focus broadly on the third sector (e.g., Third Sector Research Centre, National Council for Voluntary Organisations, etc.) and private research agencies that offer consultation, training or research fee-for-services. In the US, there are also professional associations that engage in applied research relevant for the sector (e.g., the American Evaluation Association). National Research Foundations also provide funding and shape research agendas. Beyond evaluation research to monitor and track performance and outcomes, many

agencies abroad also conduct research for advocacy and for policy recommendations. These are models that we can refer to, and to consider what aspects to explore or adopt.

On 12 March 2015, Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam announced the formation of the Social Science Research Council at the end of the year. Depending on what roles, scope and initiatives this Council takes on, it can potentially provide strategic oversight and longer-term capability building for research in the social services as well. We look forward to see how this Council will be able to support research in the social services, and hope to engage in a productive dialogue on the functions, roles and identity of the council vis-a-vis the sector, taking reference from our analyses in Chapter 2 and Chapter 10.

OVERVIEW OF CONTRIBUTIONS

To begin this dialogue, we invited representatives from academia, policymakers, government research units and VWOs to share their research interests, activities, and how their type of research work can contribute to the sector. We also facilitated a question and answer session to discuss the kinds of coordination and synergies they would like to see among different actors in the field. The chapters in this volume are contributions made by our invited panellists.[2]

In “Constructing a Strategic Research Agenda for Social Service Sector”, Dr Justin Lee, Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies discusses how we might construct a research agenda that is relevant and responsive to the needs of the social service sector. He argues that the key problems lie with the uncoordinated, diffuse and sometimes misplaced research focus of the sector. He makes three strategic recommendations: 1) focus on more “solutioning” types of research instead of just understanding problems or evaluating solutions; 2) facilitate open collaboration to understand social needs; 3) progressively move towards more macro levels of analyses that can inform sector-wide planning; and 4) ensure that stakeholders understand the various assets of the social service sector, which has thus far been neglected.

2. One of our invited panellists, Sanushka Mudaliar, Senior Manager from the Lien Centre for Social Innovation, was unable to provide her contribution as she has since left the organisation.

In his essay “Social Service Research and Translation: Opportunities and Challenges”, Associate Professor (A/P) Marcus Chiu from the NUS Social Work Department discusses the nature of social service research and how findings can be better translated to practice. He argues that social service research utilises mixed methods and is interdisciplinary in nature. Having a shorter history, research in this field is expectedly less developed and sophisticated than other social sciences and the sciences, but this does not mean that it is less significant because it has direct implications to address real and immediate social concerns. He argues that better research infrastructure, networks and a healthy research culture that embraces openness is vital for translating findings to practice. This ethos also echoes the points made by Peh Kim Choo from Tsao Foundation and Chu Chi Meng from the Rehabilitation and Protection Group (RPG) at the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), on the importance of an open and flexible attitude that is required for collaboration.

While A/P Chiu focuses on the infrastructural and cultural requirements, Professor Tan Ngoh Tiong elaborates on methodological approaches required for research — specifically impact evaluation. Professor Tan is Dean of the School of Human Development and Social Sciences from SIM University. He argues for the importance of impact analysis and elaborates on the Reflective Appraisal of Programme Framework that VWOs can use for assessment, stating that qualitative research can be highly useful for evaluation, especially for practitioners and VWOs that may not always be quantitatively trained.

Katijah Dawood is the Divisional Director of Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities Centre for Family Harmony and Family Service Centres (West). With her vast experience in running the day-to-day operations of a VWO, she is well placed to elaborate on the types of research that interests VWOs, namely, applied research projects that can help to support service delivery. These include needs assessment; evidence-based programme development; advocacy and empowerment; and evaluation. She provides an account of the considerations, challenges and constraints of VWO researchers as they seek to perform research projects or seek research partnerships, and also reminds us of the importance of research ethics.

Peh Kim Choo then extends the discussion of research from a practitioner’s point of view, which often run counter to a research point of view. Ms Peh is Director of the Hua Mei Centre for Successful Ageing at Tsao Foundation. She describes how Tsao Foundation has overcome the gap between research and practice through a careful coordination and integration of their corporate functions—clinical practice, training and research. The practitioner’s behaviour is aligned with research and the

larger organisational mission by a collective focus on programme evaluation, as they recognise that research findings can help improve clinical outcomes.

From VWOs and NGOs, we move to research units in the government. As Senior Assistant Director and Principal Clinical and Forensic Psychologist in the Rehabilitation and Protection Group of MSF, Dr Chu Chi Meng shares his experience setting up the research unit. He elaborates on the potential of big data but also recognises that government agencies may not always be forthcoming in sharing data. However, with the right attitude for collaboration and research culture, exemplified by taking in student interns, this too can be overcome. He is conscious of the need to constantly evolve their research agenda to satisfy the knowledge needs of the Ministry, and also to address more macro issues.

Loh Chin Hui, Deputy Director of Manpower and Development in the Sector Planning and Development Division of MSF, explains the role of the VWOs-Charities Capability Fund (VCF) in capability building and research. He outlines the purpose and history of VCF, and how research can lead to certain tangible improvements in clients and professional practice. He also demonstrates that the VCF has encouraged bottom-up approaches, but will now be complemented by centrally driven ones by NCSS and MSF.

Dr Wu Longkai, Research Scientist in the Education Research Office at the National Institute of Education provides insights to implementing the top-down strategy so that innovation can be scaled and disseminated. Using a case study from education, he articulates the challenges at different phases of scaling, and how practitioners enact the innovation in very different contexts.

In the final chapter, we sum up by providing an analysis of the existing research ecosystem, assessing the needs and gaps of this system, and providing a roadmap on how to: 1) build research capabilities; 2) develop a balanced and relevant research agenda; and 3) broker relationships among multiple and diverse players so that the right expertise is harnessed and the evidence generated can be translated to policy and practice. We discuss the possibility and conditions under which an independent research council or its functional equivalent will be able to provide useful strategic oversight of these diverse research activities.

APPENDIX 1: VWO RESEARCH

UNDERSTANDING NEEDS

Children and Youth

- How parenting styles lead to maladaptive schemas (2012) (HOPE)
- The social adjustment of youths in residential homes (2010) *Dr Roland Yeow, Roger Ko & Shermaine Loh, Boys' Town*
- In their own words: Social coping of youths with Autism/Asperger's Syndrome (2010) *Elizabeth Chia & Christabel Ting, Students Care Service*
- Family environment, class, and youth social participation (2009) *Irene Ng, Ho Kong Chong & Kong Weng Ho, National Youth Council*
- Perceptions of group norms in bullying scenarios (2009) *Tan Meizhen Melinda, National Youth Council*
- The state of school social work in Singapore (2006) *Chang Song Eng, Students Care Service*
- Runaway youths: Their motivation, demographics, resources & awareness (2006) *Lana Khong, NIE & Tampines Family Service Centre*
- Impact of family structure and parenting style on adolescents' self-perception, peer relationships, and attitudes towards schools (2004) *Dr Rebecca Ang, NIE & Tampines Family Service Centre*
- Resilience in children: stress and coping (2004) *Arthur Ling, Fei Yue Community Services*
- An exploratory study of out-of-school youths (2004) *Goh-Low Jian Jian, Students Care Service, Vera Huang, High Achievers Training Consultancy and SANA*
- Sexual activities in youths (Amanda Yow, Fei Yue) 2003
- Parenting education and family life satisfaction (2003) *Soh Jo Chih, Fei Yue Community Services*
- A survey on the role of family values in promoting resiliency of youths (2002) *Students Care Service*

Person with special needs

- Assistive technology in Singapore – Needs, Challenges and utilisation (2010) *Sarah Yong, Society for the Physically Disabled*
- Inclusive recreational participation for children with disabilities in Singapore (2009) *Tan Sze Wee, Rainbow Centre*
- Integration of physically-challenged youths from the TEACH ME in Circulation Programme into employment (2009) *Raymond Chow, Asian Women's Welfare Association*
- A study on caregivers of adults with cerebral palsy (2008) *Allison Rowlands, NUS, The Spastic Children's Association of Singapore*

Frail and Vulnerable Elderly

- Expectations regarding ageing (Tsao) ongoing
- Needs assessment report of vulnerable seniors facing end-of-life issues (2013) *Dr Justin Lee, Low Jian Jian, NCSS*
- Seniors living alone in Singapore (2011) *Emily Lim, Fei Yue Community Services*
- Study on the articulation of needs of low income seniors (2010) *Julia Lam, TOUCH Seniors Activity Centre*
- Factors influencing elderly poor living in low-cost public housing in utilising

community-based social programmes in Singapore (2009) *Grace Lee, Care Corner Family Service Centre (Toa Payoh)*

- What are social workers' roles in Singapore's nursing homes? (2009) *Chua Ee Cheng, Peacehaven Nursing Home*
- Profiling the dementia family carer in Singapore (2008) *Jocelyn Neo, Alzheimer's Disease Association*
- Caregivers support services – Perceptions of needs over time from caregivers of the frail elderly (2005) *Julia Lim, TOUCH Caregivers Centre*

Families in Need

- Recovering from affairs and rebuilding marriages (2013) *Linda Haverkamp-Heng, Arthur Ling, Touch Community Services*
- Psychosocial challenges of single Indian mothers and the effectiveness of targeted interventions (2013) *Dr Mathew Mathews, NUS, SINDA Family Service Centre*
- Resilience of low-income blended families served by the Marine Parade Family Service Centre (2013) *Mark Lin and Francesca Seah, Marine Parade Service Centre*
- Cultural Resilience in Singaporean adults living in low-income families (2011) *Stephanie Tan Wei Wei, Xin Li, Chin Hwei Yee Jaswyn, Tanjong Pagar Family Service Centre & James Cook University*
- Helping children cope with divorce (2010) *Dr Katijah Dawood, Kanak M, Ann Gee Low, Fiona K and Dr Peter Newcombe (Centre for family harmony)*
- The dynamics of adjustment of homeless people (2010) *Nicholas Leow Zhi Wei, Student researcher from NUS*
- Remarriage in the Malay community: an exploration of perceptions, expectations, and adjustments to stepfamily living (2009) *Fazlinda Faroo, As-Salaam Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura*
- I'm getting married... again! Exploring children's understanding and experience of parental remarriage (2009) *Fazlinda Faroo, As-Salaam Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura*
- Men's transition to fatherhood – Implications for pre-parenting education, early fathering practices, marriage enrichment and work-life policies in Singapore (2008) *Adrian Lim, Centre for Fathering*
- What do needy families really need? A study on chronic poverty in Singapore (2008) *Lim Geok Huat, Lakeside Family Service Centre*
- The hidden population: familial relationships and social supports upon family incarceration (2008) *Jaslyn Goh, NUS, Singapore anti-Narcotics Association*
- A study on reasons for completion and non-completion of CMF clients (2007) *Alexander Lee, NUS, Singapore Anti-Narcotic Association*
- Counselling professionals in social service setting: profile, practice and preparation (2006) *Dr Mathew Mathews, NUS, Counselling & Care Centre*

DESIGN RESEARCH

Person with Special Needs

- APSN teachers' perception of the kind of curriculum that would help enhance independence and employability (APSN, and NTU) 2004

Frail and Vulnerable Elderly

- Well-being programming for people with dementia in day care centres in Singapore and Australia: Guiding and evaluating person-centred practice (2006) *Jocelyn Neo, Alzheimer's Disease Association*

PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Children and Youth

- Youth COP (Students Care Service, Elizabeth Chia) ongoing
- An exploratory study of School Pocket Money Fund (SPMF) (2011) *Han Chang Keun , David Rothwell, & NCSS 2011 [non-VWO]*
- Students' attitudes towards school counselling (2009) *Elizabeth Lau, National Youth Council [non-VWO]*

Person with Special Needs

- Effectiveness of computer-based training in cognitive rehabilitation for people with mental illness (2010) *Godffrey Lau, Singapore Anglican Community Services – Simei Care Centre*
- A pilot study of Neuro Hand Orthosis Programme: A promising treatment for the severe paralytic arm in sub-acute stroke rehabilitation (2010) *Gribson Chan, St Luke's Hospital*
- A study to establish the baseline of EIPIC service-delivery approaches and influence on client satisfaction and outcomes (2009) *Dr. Winnie Goh, KK Women's and children's hospital, Chang Wai Har, NTU, Chan Whee Peng, NCSS.*
- Peer mediated AAC intervention in the classroom (2008) *Sarah Yong, Society for the Physically Disabled, & Rainbow Centre Frail and Vulnerable Elderly*
- Perception of counselling services among an elderly population: Understanding beliefs and barriers (2012) *Dr Mathew Mathews, NUS, Tsao Foundation*
- The efficacy of gerontological counselling (2007) *Wong Lit Shoon, SAGE Counselling*

Families in Need

- An evaluation of Tampines Family Service Centre's measures in working with Malay School Pocket Money Fund beneficiaries (2009) *Chok Su-Min Martin, Daybreak Family Service Centre*
- Evaluation on perceptions and attitudes of HOPE Scheme low income families at MacPherson Moral Family Service Centre about family life, household andexpectations (2006) *Kuak Keian Meng, MacPherson Moral Family Service Centre*

APPENDIX 2: MSF RESEARCH

- Standards and Guidelines, e.g., for National Standards for Protection of Children, for parents on selecting child care centre, for providers how to set up, understanding elder abuse

- Public Education pamphlets, on building strong families, on understanding elderly, parenting tips

- Report of Committees (e.g., Public Education Committee on Family, Committee on Ageing Issues, State of the Family)

- Surveys
  - National Survey of Senior Citizens 2011, 2005, 1995
  - Survey on Informal Caregiving
  - Report of Committee on Ageing Issues, 2006
  - Eldercare Masterplan FY2001–5
  - Attitudes on Family – Survey on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans (SAS) 2001
  - State of the Family (2004, 2006), compiled from various surveys like SAS, National Youth Survey, etc.
  - Study on the Singapore Family 1999
  - Survey on Gambling Participation Among Singapore Residents, 2011, 2008 (NCPG)
  - Survey on Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Gambling Issues 2007, 2006 (NCPG)
  - Study on Singapore's Pro-Family Business Environment 2005
  - Study on National Work-Life Harmony 2007
  - ComCare Annual Reports (on low-income and needy)

Chapter 2

Constructing a Strategic Research Agenda for the Social Service Sector

CONSTRUCTING A STRATEGIC RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE SOCIAL SERVICE SECTOR

Dr Justin Lee
Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies

In this paper, I discuss how we might construct a research agenda that is relevant and responsive to the needs of the social service sector. Based on a functional typology of the research done in the sector, I argue that the key problems lie with the uncoordinated, diffuse and sometimes misplaced research focus of the sector. Based on this assessment, I make four strategic recommendations: 1) focus on more "solutioning" types of research instead of just understanding problems or evaluating solutions; 2) facilitate open collaboration to understand social needs; 3) progressively move towards more macro levels of research that can inform sector-wide planning; and 4) take stock of the various "asset classes" of the social service sector to recognise the unique contributions they can offer.

FUNCTIONAL TYPOLOGY OF RESEARCH IN THE SOCIAL SERVICES

The most common way to carve out research work is by domain or causes. In the social services, this typically involves population groups that are classified as vulnerable or disadvantaged. Client grouping (e.g., elderly, youth, families) or social causes or problems (e.g., problem gambling, incarceration, addictions) has been used for the departmentalisation of government agencies. For example, MSF has various policy divisions that are demarcated by domains such as elderly, disability, youth-at-risk, ex-offenders, family, women, etc. At times the population group is subdivided into segments and undertaken by different agencies. Therefore, the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) focuses on youth in general, while MSF focuses on youth-at-risk. Even though the Ministry of Health (MOH) has centralised planning for the health and social aspects of the ageing population, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) still oversees some programmes for vulnerable seniors. Various NGOs and philanthropic foundations in Singapore also champion cause-specific research in specific domain areas. For example, Lien Foundation focuses on early childhood education and end-of-life care, and the Tsao Foundation on ageing. VWOs and NGOs that champion certain specific causes often work closely with the relevant government agency and policy division.

Instead of a domain-centric way of classifying research, I propose a functional typology to provide a clearer sense of the *purpose* to which diverse research projects are put to use. Research can be classified into three main types to understand their specific value and purpose: 1) to understand needs or problems; 2) to develop solutions; and 3) to evaluate solutions (See Tables 1 to 3 below).

The scale of such research can also be distinguished between those that focus on a client (micro), a broader client type (meso), or across the sector at large (macro). For example, if we look at the second column on the research work that is done to "develop solutions", we can see that solutions can be derived at the *micro* level, where interventions are identified for a specific client or community; or at a *meso* level where programmes, programme types or a portfolio of services are developed for a general client grouping; or at a *macro* level where sector-wide investment strategy or master plan is devised. Classifying by purpose will allow better analysis of the functional gaps in the diverse research activities conducted.

I have inserted examples of actual studies to help illustrate the kind of research that falls into these categories. However, these are representative examples only in terms of intent, but vary in terms of their quality.

Table 1: Functional typology of applied research (MICRO)

	UNDERSTANDING NEEDS / PROBLEMS	**DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS**	**EVALUATING SOLUTIONS**
MICRO	**Client & Community Needs Assessment** Purpose: to understand the specific needs of an individual client, or the profile of the community in order to tailor interventions	**Programme / Intervention Design** Purpose: to develop an intervention or programme	**Programme Evaluation** Purpose: to determine whether client outcomes are achieved
Examples	➢ Community needs assessments by FSCs ➢ Client assessments	➢ Action Research to improve counselling techniques with youth	➢ Routine monitoring and evaluation done by agency or programme

	done by social workers or psychologists for casework, counselling or therapy	(Boystown) ➢ Formative evaluation to improve pilot programme to integrate ex-offenders and their families (Project SAFE, NCSS)	manager, often required by funders (e.g., NCSS Enhanced Programme Evaluation System) ➢ Case reviews and clinical supervision

Micro level

As service providers, most VWOs tend to focus on needs assessments, programme design and programme evaluation of the specific service they run. Professionals seek to understand the needs of their individual clients for the purpose of casework or counselling, but broader community needs assessments are also performed by Family Service Centres (FSCs) who operate within a geographical service boundary. This is done to understand the profile of their client base people in a neighbourhood or region.

While some of the bigger VWOs have a small specialised research team, and others are sometimes able let their practitioners to do some research, most VWOs are overwhelmed by service provision such that systematic evidence-gathering and evidence-production are considered a luxury. For programmes that are funded by various ministries, routine monitoring and evaluation are expected and this generates basic information to monitor the progress and performance of their services.

Table 2: Functional typology of applied research (MESO)

MESO	UNDERSTANDING NEEDS / PROBLEMS	DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS	EVALUATING SOLUTIONS
	Needs Assessment of Population Type/Subsector Purpose: to map out the needs and gaps of a specific population group, and to prioritise the policy or service	**Development of Programme Types / Portfolio of Services** Purpose: to design programmes and services that can be rolled out	**Portfolio Evaluation** Purpose: to review the implementation fidelity and effectiveness of these programme types and larger

	gaps	across the nation	scale initiatives
Examples	➢ End of Life Needs of Vulnerable Seniors (NCSS)[3] ➢ Employment Needs of People with Disabilities (NCSS)	➢ Enabling Masterplan for Disability (MSF)[4] ➢ Design project to create employment for PWDs (NCSS/PSD)[5]	➢ EIPIC baseline study (NCSS/KKH)[6] ➢ Review of Family Services Centres, SSOs (MSF) ➢ Effectiveness of School Pocket Money Fund (NCSS/NUS)

Meso level

At the broader level, policy divisions in the ministries and NCSS have conducted research to understand the needs of broad client groupings so that they can develop programmes that can be rolled out across the sector. For example, beyond understanding the needs of specific disability types such as the hearing-impaired, visually-impaired, and those with learning or intellectual disabilities, etc., there is an understanding of the needs *across* the disability sector. This allows continuum planning of services from early intervention to education to employment.

This level of planning and research occurs at the level of services that transcend specific client types. These are known as “programme types”. Some of the key programme types are FSCs, Senior Activities Centres (SACs) and the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC). Policy divisions develop the content of such programmes, collate

3 http://www.socialserviceinstitute.sg/Resources/Documents/Elderly/Report%20on%20End%20of%20Life%20Needs%20of%20Vulnerable%20Seniors_29%20July%202013.pdf

4 http://app.msf.gov.sg/Portals/0/Topic/Issues/EDGD/Enabling%20Masterplan%202012-2016%20Report%20(8%20Mar).pdf

5 http://www.challenge.gov.sg/print/feature/co-creating-solutions-that-fly

6 http://www.socialserviceinstitute.sg/Resources/Documents/SpecialNeeds/Disability_abstract_5.pdf

performance indicators and do service reviews to determine how to improve these national programmes. Administrators of such broad programme types are also interested to evaluate them. For example, NCSS has partnered KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) and conducted a baseline study of EIPIC and also commissioned a study on the effectiveness of the School Pocket Money Fund (SPMF). MSF has also done internal reviews of such programme types, e.g., FSCs and Social Service Offices (SSOs) but these are rarely released to the public.

Table 3: Functional typology of applied research (MACRO)

MACRO	UNDERSTANDING NEEDS / PROBLEMS	DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS	EVALUATING SOLUTIONS
	Landscape of Needs & Gaps Purpose: to map out the full range of needs and gaps across all target population groups of interest and to prioritise them	**Sector-Wide Solutions** Purpose: to develop an overall masterplan or investment strategy for addressing needs of the vulnerable and disadvantaged	**Social Impact** Purpose: to measure broader social level outcomes achieved of large scale and coordinated strategies
Examples	➢ Unmet Social Needs in Singapore (Lien Centre for Social Innovation)[7]	➢ Collective impact projects[8] Funding strategies for family and community support services (City of Calgary)[9]	➢ Impact Report: Tote Board Social Service Fund FY2010–2012 (NCSS)[10] Community Impact (United Way of America)[11]

7. http://centres.smu.edu.sg/lien/research/unmet-social-needs/

8. http://www.fsg.org/approach-areas/collective-impact

9. http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Pages/FCSS/Funding-framework.aspx

10. https://www.ncss.gov.sg/Publications/Impact%20Report.pdf

Macro level

At the highest level, the aspiration is to understand not just the needs within each subsector, which are complex enough in themselves (e.g., youth-at-risk, disability, elderly, etc.) but the whole *landscape* of needs and gaps across these subsectors and issues, so that an authoritative overview of all the needs are placed on the same conceptual plane. This is to facilitate prioritisation and rationalisation in policymaking, fund allocation and investment strategy. Once the various needs are established, the gaps can be prioritised. It is a common misunderstanding that *needs* have to be prioritised. Instead, only *gaps* should be prioritised. This is because a need that is large in size or severity but adequately addressed by communal resources and formal support systems will not require as much attention as a need that has no services at all. The research at this level will therefore inform solutioning at the broad sector-wide level, to determine what priority and sequencing of investments will best yield longer-term change. Finally, evaluation of the investment strategy will then determine the social impact of these macro strategies.

Assets of the social service sector

The research stated above focuses on understanding the problems the sector wants to address, and therefore coming up with solutions and evaluating whether those solutions have worked or not. A different but equally important type of research is that which seeks to understand the nature and characteristics of the assets of the social service sector itself. For example, the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre captures trends of volunteerism and giving in Singapore. The Commissioner of Charities also collates broad statistics on the number, distribution, and annual receipts of charities in Singapore (beyond those in the social services). As a membership organisation of VWOs that is also in charge of implementing capability development plans for them, NCSS is keen to understand the organisational capabilities and manpower requirements of VWOs. MSF and NCSS have done surveys to track the size of the workforce, salary, job satisfaction, etc. More recently, NCSS has also increased its focus on other assets of the sector, such as social enterprises, community groups, corporate social responsibility units of large corporations, new financing instruments, etc.

Within these areas, different scale of research is possible. For example, MSF and NCSS is interested in understanding the sector as a whole, and

11 . https://unitedforimpact.org/uploads/about/publications-and-reports/Report-to-the-Community/2014/index.html

measures VWO characteristics and trends, including their capability requirements such as finances, manpower and volunteers. In another instance, a particular ministry may be specifically interested in the VWOs in their respective sectors: special education schools for the Ministry of Education (MOE), nursing homes for MOH etc. The Charity Unit on the other hand will be interested in non-profits as a whole, across different sectors such as education, health, sports and the arts. Or, the scale can be smaller, and the VWO Development Team in NCSS may be interested to further understand the needs of a specific VWO in order to provide consultation and capability building services for them.

Table 4: Research on the assets of the sector

UNDERSTANDING ASSSETS	DEVELOPING & CULTIVATING ASSETS	EVALUATING ASSETS
(1) Nature of Assets Purpose: to understand the characteristics, organisational capabilities and development needs of VWOs, professionals and other public serving organisations Examples: ➢ National surveys of third sector organisations (NPOs, VWOs, Social enterprises, community groups)[12]	**(2) Mobilising Assets** Purpose: to know how to build capabilities, mobilise and empower different assets in the sector Examples: ➢ Cabinet Office for Civil Society (UK)[14] ➢ VWO Capability Development Plans (NCSS)	**(3) Contribution of Assets** Purpose: to determine the economic and social contribution of social services or specific non-profit organisations (NPOs) to Singapore society Examples: ➢ Cross-national comparisons of non-profit sectors in the US (CCSS)[15] ➢ Contribution of

12. Australia:http://www.acoss.org.au/images/uploads/Australian_Community_Sector_Survey_2013_ACOSS.pdf;
Canada: http://www.vsi-isbc.org/eng/knowledge/nsnvo.cfm;
UK: http://www.nscsesurvey.com/; USA: http://ccss.jhu.edu/publications-findings?did=382

➢ State of philanthropy, volunteerism (NVPC)[13] ➢ Size and scope of social service workforce, job satisfaction levels, training needs (MSF/SSI)		social services to national employment, GDP[16] ➢ Independent charity analysis (NVPC)[17]

FUNCTIONAL GAPS IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The functional typology of research above allows us to assess the types of projects that have been done in the sector.

Over-emphasis on evaluation; under-emphasis on solutioning

First, there is an over-emphasis on monitoring & evaluation and under-emphasis on "solutioning" forms of research. VWOs, NCSS and MSF understand the importance of establishing and understanding needs, and also the importance of evaluating solutions, but not the significance of design research or research for the purpose of developing solutions.[18] As a result, agencies may breeze through the process of policy and programme design quite quickly, and then seek to jump to outcome evaluations as if it were a panacea for their problems. Looking at Annex A on the types of VWO research that has been funded by VCF suggests this neglect. Two-thirds of projects funded by VCF have been on understanding needs of their clients, and a third have been on programme evaluations. Only an insignificant amount of research has been done to inform the design and development of programmes. One reason for this may be because a

14. https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/civil-society-update-series

15. http://ccss.jhu.edu/research-projects/comparative-nonprofit-sector-project/

13. http://www.nvpc.org.sg/Portals/0/Documents/IGS%202014_Topline.pdf

16. http://ccss.jhu.edu/research-projects/nonprofit-economic-data/

17. http://www.nvpc.org.sg/non-profits/independent_charity_analysis.aspx

18 This is not a statement about whether they actually perform needs assessments or evaluations well, but that they simply understand these types of research better.

separate pocket of VCF is used to fund pilot projects. However, funding for pilots projects already indicates a commitment to run those projects, and the whole point of "R&D" work is to determine whether the service is worth running in the first place. For whatever reasons, development or design research is not understood as "research" worth pursuing or funding. One reason for the under-emphasis on solutioning forms of research when the initiative is bottom-up, could be because ministries and funders often leave intervention design to practitioners and service providers, since they do not consider themselves to be content experts. However, VWOs are often ill-equipped at research and may not always find it easy to access the existing evidence-base or tap into creative forms of solutioning that the parent ministry and NCSS have access to.

Because policymakers and programme managers understand evaluations well, they tend to think of outcome evaluation research as being able to help improve services. While formative evaluation can in fact lead to learning and improvement, summative or outcome evaluation only seeks to determine whether outcomes were attributable to the programme itself. There have been cases whereby outcome evaluations are pursued, even at the stage of the pilot. This is likely to be due to greater accountability pressures from investors and stakeholders who mainly ask effectiveness questions and want to know the impact their investments have brought about. However, outcome evaluations are meaningless at the pilot phase because the programme would need to be tweaked and refined along the way, rendering the findings invalid. Outcome evaluations are useful for evaluating mature, stable programmes that are already performing well, so as to establish whether those effects can actually be attributable to programme activities. In the end, outcome evaluation studies, no matter how robust, can only tell you the extent of success of a programme, but cannot recommend in a direct and concrete way what solutions might actually work. As Chinese author Lao She once wrote: no matter how much, "criticism won't turn a lump of stone into an exquisite sculpture." It is therefore important to make clear functional distinctions between the type of research that is meant to evaluate a solution — the logic of evaluation — versus the type of research that is supposed to develop a solution — the logic of design.

There is also a common misconception that design research has to be creative. This is not true, because there are "scientific" approaches to design such as evidence-based practice and "service science", and there are more "creative" approaches such as what is now called design thinking. However, these are all part of the tools and approaches that *come up with* and refine solutions. Other fields and tools are also relevant here, e.g., theory of change or programme logic, that can be used to create a

blueprint for the intervention, whether it was developed scientifically or creatively.

Our policymakers and VWOs have typically deferred to conventional professions of social workers, counsellors and psychologists, but there are many other tools, skill sets and methodologies that are useful but under-utilised. For example, there are parallel approaches and issues in the business sector, where discussions of business development, business model innovations, diffusion of innovations are a long-established tradition, where social services could learn from. (Just replace the term “business” with “service” from various sub-fields in business administration and you will have tools and skill sets relevant for public services: service development, service management, service model innovations, etc.). Other professions with unique skill sets, such as game designers or community artists also offer fresh and innovative solutions — forum theatre, art-based forms of therapy, rehabilitative games, etc. — to social issues that are typically dealt with through casework or counselling by social workers and psychologists.

Inability to perform quality sector-wide research

Greater accountability pressures from increasingly savvy funders, investors and stakeholders have created a demand for sector-wide research that can understand the landscape of needs, develop sector-wide solutions and measure social impact. The quality of the research at this level does not yet match its aspirations. It is relatively easy to consolidate a laundry list of various needs of the sector, pieced together anecdotally by appealing to the opinions or experts or practitioners; but it is much more difficult to actually pull quality data together on various social needs and place them unto the same conceptual plane; assess the relative size and significance of their gaps[19]; prioritise these gaps using a framework that will inevitably have to make hard decisions about what kinds of criteria (e.g., size, severity, urgency, etc.) should matter and their relative weightage. It is also relatively easy to make resource allocation decisions on a piecemeal basis, by assessing each need and service for their worth and value; but much harder to develop an overall investment strategy that cares about priorities and sequencing, to name the two easiest means of having a more rational and intelligently constructed masterplan. Evaluating client level outcomes are also relatively easy, but determining the various kinds of community-level and social outcomes (or “social impact”) across a whole portfolio of services run by diverse agencies is more challenging.

19. Capacity gaps are easy to determine, but quality gaps are much trickier.

Much of the work done at ministry level is still service-level planning work, instead of sector-level work. Some examples of sector level research and planning work are the Enabling Masterplan for the disability sector and what the Ageing Planning Office of MOH are undertaking for seniors. NCSS has set up an Advocacy and Research Team (ART) aspiring to do such sector-level work, to complement departments that currently focus on domain areas such as elderly, mental health, disability and so on. This is parallel to MSF's own research and sector planning divisions that do more macro research work, to complement the policy divisions that focus on substantive domains like elderly, disability, family, etc. The main problem here is that work in these areas is highly complex and analytically challenging because of the sheer breadth and depth of information required. Furthermore, the domain-centric ways of organising departments and divisions in government agencies may have a hindering effect to cross-domain and cross-sectoral work. Departments organised by domains have little incentive to work closely with an overall research and planning team in charge of higher level sectoral work, especially if these departments are much bigger and well resourced, often hiring their own research staff.[20]

Assets of the sector are not well understood

Research on the assets of the sector has been largely neglected. While MSF and NCSS have basic biographical information about VWOs, i.e., how many there are, their revenue, types of programmes, size of the workforce, rates of volunteerism, etc. — much more can be done to systematically understand the strengths, interests, values, behaviours and capabilities of different types of VWOs. There is little attempt to make sense of the state of the VWOs by using more meaningful indicators, such as innovation capabilities, values with regard to profit-generation and collaborations with businesses, and the nature of their relationship with the state, etc.

It is also important to characterise different assets classes that have thus far been under the radar, such as community groups, social enterprises, corporate social responsibility units of large corporations, faith-based

20. One possibility why these are not clearly understood is because of the domain-centric way of departmentalisation at MSF and NCSS, where departments are set up to do policy and planning work for seniors, disability, family, etc. The author has personally communicated with public servants who expressed their disappointment at not having acquired deep expertise after many years working within a domain-centric department as they have to do a little bit of everything — from planning and development to public education and advocacy to evaluation.

organisations and other public serving organisations. Only then can the sector at large determine what the different assets are and how to mobilise them to deal with different problems. In addition, with a sense of the broad variety of assets, we could even measure the social and economic contributions of these assets, which will allow us to compare across countries and determine how the sector as a whole is performing, and also indicate to the government in terms of the relative significance of the social services to other sectors that they have levelled more attention to.

In Singapore, MCCY and the Commissioner of Charities (COC) play a more regulatory role, and have not enlarged their understanding through a deeper understanding of the sector beyond basic information on numbers and finances. In the UK, there is special attention to the third sector, which can been seen by the establishment of the Cabinet Office for Civil Society that oversees the development and health of charities and civil society groups. There are also specialised research institutions that study the non-profit sector (e.g., Third Sector Research Centre in the UK or Centre for Civil Society in the US). These research centres tend to focus on taking stock of the assets and trends of the sector at large.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Encouraging "solutioning" forms of research

Both the scientific and creative routes to solutioning should be encouraged in parallel. Resources for evidence-based practice are in abundance, and need to be made sense of for policymakers and VWOs to use, creating access to make sense of services that have been rolled out successfully elsewhere. Meta-analyses, evidence reviews and evidence-based databanks that rate and rank interventions for specific social problems and client groups are widely available. For this approach, working with academics is likely to be most productive, where an intervention is adopted and tested in a local context. Academics are likely to have deep knowledge on the utility and feasibility of such interventions, and will be useful partners in its adaptation and subsequent evaluation.

On the other hand, where evidence-based solutions are unclear or absent, creative solutioning and design thinking can be cultivated and encouraged. More prototyping can be done to learn important lessons before expensive pilots are implemented, allowing users to interact with the service in a safe space. Manufacturers do product testing, game designers do play testing, and musicians do rehearsals. Social service providers and policymakers certainly can benefit from some prototyping. And where pilot programmes are rolled out, a phase or formative evaluation should happen before jumping to outcome evaluations. Ministries have started to experiment with

design thinking as a way of improving public services; however, there is little support for VWOs or NGOs to do so. More design labs and research institutes can be encouraged to provide such design services for the social and public sector. In the UK and US, there is a plethora of government-linked organisations or NGOs that provide policy or design projects for improving public services.

If more vibrant ecosystem of design labs and research firms can encourage more solutioning, specialised departments within ministries and government agencies could also be established to focus on solutioning. If departments are set up by function (e.g., needs assessments, programme design and evaluation) rather than by domain (elderly, family, youth, etc.) then the clarity of roles and expertise may deepen the quality of research and planning work done in these areas. The Human Experience Lab, a design thinking unit within the Public Service Division, is a specialised unit meant to spur more innovation across government. MSF and NCSS can also consider restructuring their departments to better facilitate the growth of deep expertise in these functional areas. If a horizon scanning and needs assessment unit examines existing needs and emerging issues, they are just going to get better at making sense of the size and nature of existing problems and emerging issues. If designers create a service for more varieties of client types, e.g., elderly, children and ex-offenders, they will get better at design. If an evaluation unit evaluates all sorts of policies, programmes and interventions, they soon become expert evaluators. A person that does a bit of everything, within one domain, such as vulnerable seniors, ends up being a domain-expert but functional generalist. While they are still required, deep functional specialisations can bring real value to public administration and social service delivery.

In addition, new “solutioners” should be brought in to add diversity to the mix. Professional communities beyond those the social service sector is familiar with should be engaged and partnered because they bring in deep skills sets valuable for solutioning. Besides social workers, psychologists and counsellors, there are many professionals and community partners who have unique skills and expertise that can provide new solutions, e.g., community artists, game designers, business development, social innovators, social enterprises, corporate social responsibility (CSR) units, etc.

Facilitate open collaboration for needs assessments

Understanding client needs and service gaps is an important preliminary step required for the planning of services and to inform broader policy or investment decisions. Many now recognise the benefits of a more collaborative or participatory approach to needs assessment, where

partnerships with other agencies and clients themselves are involved in the process (see for example, Ross et al. [2006]). Given the availability of technologically mediated collaboration platforms, the conditions are now ripe to bring needs assessment to the next level — by encouraging a technologically mediated form of open collaboration where communities are empowered to identify, deliberate and make sense of their needs.

The archetypal example of open collaboration is Wikipedia, for the purpose of encyclopaedia writing and the open source movement for software development. Such collaborations rely on goal-oriented but loosely coordinated partners. Open collaborations systems are typically an online and technologically mediated environment that supports such collective production, and has low barriers to entry and exit (Forte & Lampe, 2013). The product of the collective effort is made available to contributors and non-contributors alike.

While an online platform is ideal, it is also important to develop an analytic framework and information infrastructure to support the collation, cataloguing and analysis of information — so that contributors can intuitively know how to access the information, and how to contribute to it. The infrastructure should be “contributable to” so that the knowledge base grows from the efforts of the community. Such a framework should also help to clarify what is known and not yet known, so that subsequent data collection efforts can be more targeted and strategic. This allows the collaborative effort to become more coherently accumulative. As the product of the collective effort is made available to contributors and non-contributors alike, people have the freedom and the right to share, use and build upon the work.

An important benefit of open collaborations and collective effort is that it shifts the mindset from over-protectionism driven by insecurity to one of honesty and transparency. When an agency specialises in a task or domain area, they feel pressured to be as competent and authoritative as possible. As the specialists in charge, they have been granted a mandate, and therefore expectations are high. If external observers challenge their information or criticise their analyses, an unhealthy cycle of “attack and defence” begins. They become careful with revealing information, and over time become more concerned with managing impressions and reputations. Politics and relationship-building begin to take centre-stage for the leadership team rather than technical understanding. Instead of focusing on doing good work, an inordinate amount of time is spent on managing stakeholders’ *perception* that they are doing good work. And when some other agency produces a study on the same domain, the reaction is not

"great, that is useful to us!" but instead they worry about turf and wonder whether there should greater clarity and role delineation.

Collective needs assessments can remove these perverse incentives for unhealthy behaviour. When a product is the result of a collective effort, it cannot provide singular glory to any specialised agency, and therefore the focus is on the technical task at hand, not on organisational reputation. Open collaboration encourages participants to confront their own knowledge gaps, so that others may come and help, and therefore creates a culture of honesty and full disclosure. Experts who are willing to contribute are then seen as assets instead of competitors. For example, a social worker who has interacted with only some vulnerable seniors in her care can suggest that the reason why seniors do not make end of life plans is *likely* due to the cultural stigma because of their reluctance to discuss dying. An academic who has actually done a nationally representative survey on death attitudes can then provide more conclusive findings on the extent and prevalence of cultural stigma. And if such a survey has *not* been done, the community can discuss whether this knowledge gap is actually worth knowing by conducting a survey that is likely to be expensive. A specialist agency, on the other hand, may feel uncomfortable being forthcoming that what they know is actually only "possible" or "likely", especially if they are under scrutiny and have to protect their credibility.

Finally, open collaboration also puts a kind of collective peer pressure on agencies that have information that can contribute to the collective knowledge base. If an open collaboration needs assessment on ex-offenders shows that it is crucial to understand how many ex-offenders have children who need support while incarcerated — knowing whether it is 5 or 500 would allow the voluntary agencies, grant-makers and other community groups to decide if it is worth doing something about. And if government agencies have that information but do not release it, then they will have to justify why that information needs to be classified given its ostensible utility in planning services or arriving at solutions. This may be more palatable to government agencies because it helps to articulate the specific use of such information, paving the way for more transparency and accountability without the associated burdens of a Freedom of Information Act. Facilitating open collaboration will therefore help to shift the incremental gains of independent efforts to an exponential growth in knowledge. It will also facilitate greater sharing so that needs assessments do not become proprietary knowledge of agencies or researchers; instead it becomes free content that is more widely shared to the communities and practitioners involved.

Level up to macro research

At the broader macro level, research to understand the sector wide landscape of needs is of critical importance, and the attention should move up to this strategic level. MSF or NCSS might be well placed to take the lead here, partnering with academics while engaging VWOs. For strategic sector-level solutions, it may be timely to attempt "collective impact" projects; business model innovations and policy design initiatives that involve the people, the public and the private sector. Collective impact has been used by organisations (from government, civil society and business) to create solutions to large-scale and complex problems beyond the ability of any single organisation. They define a common agenda, agree to shared measurement and create a backbone infrastructure to coordinate their initiatives and activities.[21] Parallel studies on how townships, regions or governments define their social investment priorities and implementations strategies will also offer parallel insight for the tools that can help to develop an overall, sector-wide investment strategy that is intelligently defined, with a sense of rigorous prioritisation and sequencing.

Evaluations of social impact are to be encouraged, but can be done later, after overall sector strategy is defined, when it will become more self-evident what is worth measuring and evaluations can be more targeted. Many efforts have sought to identify some kind of social progress index to reflect the social health or status of the country beyond traditional economic indicators. Some examples are the gross happiness index and the quality of life forms of measures. While these indices can provide a holistic sense of progress according to criteria and dimensions a nation wants to track, as well as compare across countries, they provide a holistic measure, but not a performance management system that can identify where exactly the problem is. A more meaningful measure of progress is to first identify an overall investment strategy, defined by a theory of change, clarify various milestones and initiatives, so that very specific and meaningful data can be collected to indicate whether the strategy is working or not, and what can be tweaked or refined. An overall indicator may tell you the social progress, and in what areas (economic, health, cohesion, etc.), but not identify what policy or intervention is contributing to those results.

Focus on assets and state of the sector

There is a dearth of studies on more meaningful qualities of various assets. Most of the information collected on VWOs are "biographical" information

21. http://www.fsg.org/OurApproach/WhatIsCollectiveImpact.aspx

such as manpower, size, type of programmes, revenue and funding source. There is scope to collect more meaningful information such as the strengths, values, interests and behaviour of these VWOs, such that we can better understand, e.g., those who have concerns about the profit motive, and therefore choose not to partner private sector; the innovative capacity of service providers. (See Table 4 earlier).

Such research will help to understand the scope of the sector and what other "asset classes" could be relevant: social enterprises, grassroots organisations, community artists, etc. Sector-wide statistics also help to understand the value of the sector as a whole, and its contribution to national development, e.g., such as size of non-profit sector as a ratio to GDP, non-profit share of total employment etc.

A research programme can be established to ensure that such studies continue to grow and develop, such as similar research done in the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK, or the John Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies in the US. Without an organisational base or institutional form like that of the TSRC, projects like these may merely be isolated instead of accumulative. There may be different workable organisational forms that the research programme can be housed in, e.g., as a research programme in NCSS or in a specialised research centre.

GUIDING SENSIBILITIES FOR SHAPING THE RESEARCH AGENDA

To construct the research agenda more strategically, it is important to get the sequencing and scale of research right so that the agenda is focused, balanced and evolves as the sector matures. This is to ensure that the research agenda is relevant and responsive to the needs of the sector.

Although all functional areas are important for their specific purposes, there should be a rough sequencing of research to understanding needs adequately first, before even attempting solutions; and credible solutions should be developed first before moving to evaluations. In other words, where there is insufficient understanding of a specific problem or client group, it would be premature to focus on solutions. And where there are no clearly defined or credible solutions, evaluation is unnecessary and even meaningless.

There should also be an aspiration to rise to more macro scales of research as the sector matures. Devising an overall investment strategy for the sector can provide a guiding framework that gives a sense of priorities.

For example, a sector-wide masterplan can decide to move investments upstream to prevention after making sure existing areas of critical needs are adequately served. Alternatively, investments and community assets can be deployed to address aging issues because of impending demographic changes in the population. On the other hand, ground-tested solutions and practical understanding will provide key intelligence to inform what the overall strategy can be. Only then can a productive dialogue between top-down and bottoms-up approaches yield greater insights.

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Chapter 3

Social Service Research & Translation: Opportunities and Challenge

SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH & TRANSLATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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INTRODUCTION

Science has a much longer history of many centuries, but social research is a latecomer to the game, with less than two centuries of history. Even newer and rarer is social services research, which is a new niche area in social research. I will focus on translation issues in social services research, by which I mean the process of moving from theory to practice; from findings to implication; from experience and phenomenon to patterns and relations.

There are three general functions of research: Exploration, Description and Explanation. Exploration involves the charting of unknown areas and adding to the local pool of knowledge. Description provides a more comprehensive portrait and maps out the dynamic processes of social phenomenon. Explanation involves finding out causality and theorizing about patterns of relations. It is often misunderstood that exploration and descriptions are lesser in value than explanations, but this is not true. Exploration and description are the foundations of further knowledge. Without the foundations set by exploration and description, knowledge cannot move on. Basic science spends a lot of time in these two levels before they develop into the stage at exponential rate. For example, to even explore and describe that the universe is expanding is fascinating, and only much later are we able to explain it.

Being new to the game, social service research needs to do a lot of exploration and description before it can explain. To be able to describe is a valid and valuable task in itself.

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH?

Unlike certain disciplines, social service research is fascinating, diverse and never boring. Unlike mathematicians or philosophers who deal with highly abstract formulation, a social service research always deal with what is concrete, involves human subjects, and therefore has direct relevance and immediate concern for fellow citizens.

Furthermore, unlike some scientists who may never see any breakthrough findings in their work (or even in their lives), social service researchers will always be able to see the benefits of their work in every small step of their work. This is because their projects are real and immediate — about whether people's needs are being met, about changes and improvements that can be done, about the relief or removal of human suffering.

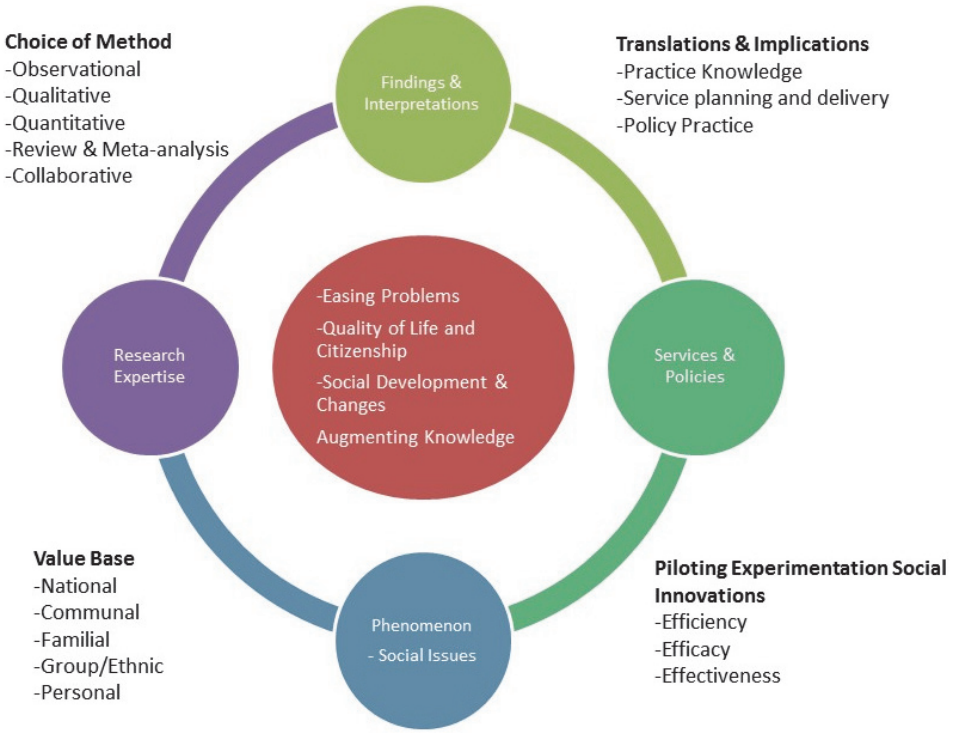
Therefore, social service research is never boring because it cuts across many diverse fields and all projects are done within a reasonable amount of time. If social service research is ever perceived to be boring, it is the fault of the university professors who fail to convey the excitement of such research, which encompasses so many dimensions of human complexity, but has real and immediate concerns, connects to service delivery, programme models and policy practices.

PROCESS OF SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH

Research in social services can operate at different levels. From an observed phenomenon, researchers attempt to unearth the structure of causes. For example, we might observe that people with mental illness do not receive adequate health or social care, and move on to determine that the it might be the stigma that acts as a deterrent, or the diminished perceived helpfulness of the care, or the inability of primary healthcare system to screen and detect cases. These forms of research may then generate other more conceptual and theoretical forms of research — for example, determining how stigma is formed and reinforced, or whether early identification and treatment are helpful.

Once findings are interpreted and made sense of, findings generate implications for policy or practice. It is in this sense that research findings "translates" into practice knowledge, informs services and influences policy. The central goal of this whole enterprise is to ease social problems, improve quality of life and citizenship, help social development and change, and augment knowledge.

Figure 1: Cycle of Research



In this enterprise, it is important to utilise mixed methods to triangulate findings. It is useful for social workers and social service researchers to be good at both quantitative and qualitative forms of research because that is what is required for generating findings that can answer a fuller range of questions that may be raised.

TRANSLATION IS A PROCESS OF MAKING PEOPLE UNDERSTAND

Fundamentally, translating research is a means of communicating to help people understand the research and its implications. It involves drawing out the implications of research findings and policy initiatives. It requires determining the effectiveness of programmes and determining whether they will work in the local context. There are multiple challenges to better translation of research, and this includes the quality and competence of researchers, whether there is collaboration with policymakers, whether findings are adapted appropriately to the local context, whether there are accessible data banks, proper dissemination channels and adequate organisational incentives to encourage research. Beyond dealing with

these problems in a piecemeal fashion they should also need to be coherently dealt with as a whole.

SOLUTIONS TO BETTER TRANSLATION

In conclusion, these are three recommendations to better translate research to practice:

Build research-friendly infrastructure & support

It is important to have infrastructure that is supportive of research work. For example, in Singapore there is no dedicated collection of archived research, information or data relevant to the social service sector. While there is an attempt to create a client information system, this is not yet fully integrated across the country and current data may not be precise or updated. Research support can also be improved. For example, the administrative that is supposed to provide financial or technical support may sometimes impedes and discourages research productivity. Bureaucracy and hurdles are to be handled before situations become too discouraging for social researchers. Part of a supportive infrastructure is a conducive policy for research manpower, because manpower is the greatest resource for research output. Many esteemed researchers are foreigners, like Albert Einstein, who did not speak English when he migrated to America. Having said that, while Singapore sources for talented overseas researchers, it is important to groom local researchers and to maintain a healthy balance between local and overseas talents.

Cultivate the right research culture and ethos

Besides the hard infrastructure, the “soft” culture is also important. The right values and ethos need to complement the infrastructure. Many VWOs adopt a highly instrumental attitude towards research and only want to use social service research to prove or showcase that they are doing well. An open attitude towards findings, even unfavourable ones, will help to generate better learning, which is the whole point of evaluation and research in the first place. Many organisations, government departments and institutions are very concerned, sometimes excessively concerned and prudent over the sharing and use of their data. For research and evaluation to be useful, it cannot be regarded as an “addition” to a programme that is inserted to determine effectiveness at the end of the project. It should be an integral part of the project where evaluation is already planned for right at the beginning.

Researcher network

It is important to have platforms for dissemination and information exchange. It is difficult to know what the larger community of researchers in Singapore are doing because there is no consistent sharing of the research agenda and interests of individual researchers or their research institutions. Furthermore, research is productive when it is a team enterprise and not solo effort. Platforms and networks to allow exchange and the soliciting of support from others are useful. Here, culture matters as well. In Singapore, there is a very keen mindset of competition, where individual researchers want to win and excel on their own. It will be useful to cultivate a mindset of collaboration whereby we create win-win conditions with others, especially by drawing in partners outside the social service sector, such as applied statistics, sociology, economics and other disciplines. What is important is to be open and learn from our mistakes; even if our findings are not what we had expected, they are still interesting as findings, because they allow us to learn and improve.

Chapter 4

Qualitative Social Research and Evaluation for Impact and Change

QUALITATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH AND EVALUATION FOR IMPACT AND CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

It is an ongoing quest for many social service organisations and non-profit organisations to measure their performance and ensure their impact for the client group served or societal change (Dees, 1998; Haugh, 2005; Shaw & Gould, 2001). Funders and policymakers are interested in the impact and whether they achieve their goals or are worth the salt so as to justify continued support and further investments (SEC, 2015).

It is vital that social services ascertain the social impact of their programmes and services. Social impact management, has been broadly defined as "the intersection of business practice and wider societal concerns that reflects and respects the complex interdependency between these two realities" (Gentile, 2002:5; SEC, 2015; ENP, 2007). The call is to document "tangible impact" of VWOs as they respond to various social conditions with the goal to provide effective and efficient ways of meeting social needs.

A brief framework and a considered approach for analysing the impact are proposed in this paper. This will provide more objective ways to ascertain the voluntary welfare organisation's (VWO) effectiveness and success of the programmes.

FRAMEWORK FOR IMPACT ANALYSIS

In developing a framework for performance and impact assessment, three broad categories (ENP, 2007) are traditionally included:

- Financial performance of the organisation
- Mission-related impacts, such as environmental, social, or cultural impacts
- Organisational sustainability and capacity building

The framework may be adapted to include the indicators developed, including the financial viability, cost benefits, reports by clients and customers as well as the stakeholders and researchers. In this paper, we will focus on the mission-related impact, rather than the discussion of financial or cost-benefit analysis.

In every analysis, evidence in the form of information collected would be essential for assessment of the impact. The data collected could be both quantitative as well as qualitative in nature. For example, qualitative data on the following can be obtained (as illustrated in Appendix 1):

- Organisational strategies and performance: such as SWOT analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats; strategies, performance targets, appraisal system, and employee feedback system;

- Organisational innovation and change: Long-, short- or medium-term change, rate of change, openness to change as well as recent innovations and actual changes

In any data collection and analysis it is crucial to include what the various stakeholders consider as important. The indictors adopted would be more meaningful and often relate to the agencies' key missions and goals. As a rule, social services are evaluated for the goals for sustainable growth and viability as an organisation. Another key goal is that of capacity building which means longer-term impact on client or target population. The aim, and thus the approach to evaluating the organisation's functions, is thus not aimed at temporary relief, but that which in the long-term can create value and wrought change that can be sustained over time.

The value of an organisation ultimately should rest in the capacity to facilitate the higher-order or systemic change with more lasting impact on the lives or conditions of people affected. Dees and Anderson (2007) have higher expectations for example of social enterprise as "capable, in principle, of achieving a scale of impact that is commensurate with the overall societal need or the magnitude of the societal problem being addressed" (Dees & Anderson, 2007).

Useful evaluation of VWOs often need to include the descriptive and qualitative factors as quantitative data alone are unable to provide for depth understanding of the process of change and what maintains the change over time. The key tenet in evaluation is the validity of measurement as well as the development of indicators, which are

meaningful to the stakeholders. Measures include both internal as well as external processes of the organisation.

Management information systems are routinely utilised for internal programme feedback and control. The framework to evaluate and monitor the organisation's work and range of activities include what activities and services are offered and what brings value to the clients served.

Reports to funders and other external audit or regulatory agencies are external processes that are vital. Often this includes verifications of expenditures and services provided for stated mission and goals. A proactive approach of social reporting, not just number crunching but choosing measures that are meaningful is advocated. The key is to integrate both internal and external processes and utilise only measures that are efficient and useful.

An example of measures of quality management systems, is the eight “quality management principles” such as: customer focus; leadership; involvement of people; process approach; system approach to management; continual improvement; factual approach to decision making; and mutually beneficial supplier relationships (SEC, 2015). It is advocated that these factors are vital for the non-profit organisation’s effective functioning and goal attainment.

EVALUATION OF VWOS AND SOCIAL IMPACT MANAGEMENT

The social audit process for a social enterprise is essentially a programme evaluation exercise. This involves the process of social accounting as well as documentation of specific social change experience (Virtue Ventures, 2015). The effectiveness of any social enterprise is in its in-built ability to innovate so as to improve functioning. The emphasis of evaluation is thus on being able to attain a higher level of quality service delivery and organisational equilibrium. There must, however, also be stability or persistence of change that can benefit the "clients", ensuring a higher-order functioning of both the clients and the community (Martin & Osberg, 2007).

Logically, the impact of social enterprise is dependent on the organisation's mission and objectives and this frames the discussion of what constitutes social impact management.

Social impact management is the field of inquiry at the intersection of business practice and wider societal concerns that reflects and respects the complex interdependency between the two, and that focuses on how to manage this complex interdependency to mutual benefit of both realms (Gentile, 2000). An understanding of this interdependence would enable the organisation as well as society to optimally thrive.

What distinguishes social service agencies from businesses is still the primacy of social benefit, what Dees and Anderson (2007) referred to as "mission-related impact". Social impact management, as way of thinking about core organisational activities (Gentile, 2000), explicitly to consider and evaluate three aspects of the programmes and services:

- Purpose:
  The key question: "What is the purpose of the enterprise in specific social terms of a particular organisation and its activities?"

- Social Context:
  Social context begs the question, "Are the legitimate rights and responsibilities of multiple stakeholders considered in the management of the agency's activities?"

- Metrics:
  How is performance measured? What is being measured and what is not being measured? Are impacts and results measured across both short- and long- term time frames?

Many innovative and effective programmes remain limited to the immediate communities. The need is for more successful organisations to extend their services and impact more broadly (Wei-Skillern & Anderson, 2003). VWOs should thus spread their social impact through "diffusion", technical assistance or expansion.

QUALITATIVE METHODS FOR EVALUATION

A qualitative approach for evaluation uses interviews, focus groups, participant-observation, reports and case documentations (Lietz & Zayas, 2010; Shaw & Gould, 2001).
Though quantitative measures are useful in programme evaluation, the focus of this paper is on qualitative approach. Specifically the use of Reflective Appraisal of Programme[22] (RAP) is based on (Bennett, 1980).

In the RAP, the goals of the research or evaluation exercise are:

- To improve programmes
  This can be developed through improving programme staff decisions, improving programme committee decisions, as well as improving administrative decisions.

- To improve accountability
  Accountability is vital towards the funding sources or to certain committees formed to gather information, as well as the general public.

- To improve understanding of and communication about programmes
  The RAP could be utilised for clarifying the programme objectives, analysing and describing the processes and outcomes of programmes.

- To improve performance and morale of staff and volunteers and stakeholders

[22]. Claude F. Bennett (1980). *Analyzing Impacts of Extension Programs, ESC-575 (1976) and Teaching Materials on "Seven Levels of Evidence": A Guide for Extension Workers, ESC-575*, will be the technique use in qualitative research. The RAP package is free and readily available online.

Every organisation needs to develop productive staff members and volunteers as well as ascertain if their beneficiaries or programme participants have made significant progress.

REFLECTIVE APPRAISAL OF PROGRAMME

First, the RAP approach to evaluation will need to answer this question: "What are the results expected from the Programme?" The programme results could include (Bennett, 1980):

- Participants' reactions to programme activities, including the methods used in the programme, the subject matter and the standards applied.

- Change in the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspiration (KASA) of clients served with these changes relating to the programme's goals and contents

- End results that can be expected from KASA change as well as practice change

RAP process starts with identifying the questions for the research study and determining the types and levels of evidence needed to answer these questions.

Preparing Interview Instrument and Determining the Levels of Evidence to Study

First, is to develop the questionnaire to be utilised. Developing the right question is the key to any evaluation. The key questions asked are:

- To what extent are programme objectives met— are objectives at each of the levels of reactions, KASA change, practice change and end results, included?

- What are the levels of evidence that correspond to a significant degree with your programme's objectives, needed for this evaluation?

Next, the researcher has to ascertain the level of evidence that is required. There are 7 possible levels *(Bennett, 1980) as illustrated in Figure 1*

Figure 1: Seven levels of evidence

Level 1 — Inputs What kinds of personnel and other resources, and how many, did help in the programme?
Level 2 — Activities What kinds of information and methods of delivery use to interact with programme participants?
Level 3—People Involvement Who has participated in the programme and how much? What have participants done in the learning situations provided by the programme?
Level 4—Reactions How much have programme activities appealed to participants?
Level 5—KASA Change (Bennett, 1980) In terms of KASA change there are the knowledge, attitude, skills and aspiration changes: Knowledge Change. How much have participants changed their awareness, understanding, and ability to solve problems? *Attitude Change.* How much have participants' interests changed regarding the ideas or practices presented? *Skill Change.* How much have participants changed in terms of their verbal or physical abilities? *Aspiration Change.* How much have participants selected future courses of action or made decisions regarding future courses of action? Example of Skills Change An example of a skill change item: *To what extent did you acquire more skill in parent-child communication?* _____to a great extent _____to a fair extent _____to a slight extent _____not at all _____don't know/don't recall _____other (specify)_____ If the interviewee selects one of the first three categories, the interviewer may ask: *Could you give me an example or two?*

Level 6—*Practice Change* How much have participants applied their KASA change to their personal and working lives?
Level 7—*End Results* How much have participants and others been helped, hindered, or harmed by the results of changes in KASA and/or practices?

RAP provides a focus as well as a way to measure change (Bennett, 1980). In any research the study of variability provides understanding of the how change comes about. Variables in the research study may include client, worker, process and intervention variables. These can be measured qualitatively as well as quantitatively (Shaw & Gould, 2001).

In qualitative research there are other methods and approaches that may be appropriate, such as documentation using the case study of a successful case (i.e., what changed and what contribute to the success?) or an unsuccessful case (i.e., what changed and what factors contributed to the outcome?) or even the sampling of cases to study that are "In-betweens" (Lietz & Zayas, 2010; Shaw & Gould, 2001).

DISCUSSIONS

VWOs are not businesses but social enterprises and non-profit organisations. Thus they should be evaluated primarily for their social impact. This does not mean that they should not be efficient or even profitable to a minimum sustainable level. I argue that the social change dimension of non-profit organisations is the critical factor for analysis.

The key change element of the organisation and programmes can be measured using the RAP approach. Through purposeful evaluation, social sector leaders should be encouraged to explore innovative strategies that make their organisations more effective in serving social needs while leveraging social assets.

For leadership of growing and changing organisations, rather than simply sustaining their organisations, they should aim towards innovative and sustainable use of resources that enhance their impact, thus creating greater social value and impact.

Qualitative approach towards programme evaluation has good value for measuring the impact of VWOs. It is often helpful, however, to combine other quantitative approaches that can provide for greater confidence in

terms of the representation and generalisability of the research and evaluation of social enterprise (Shaw & Gould, 2001).

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APPENDIX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS FOR CASE STUDY ORGANISATIONS

This is an evaluation framework adopted to study social enterprises.

ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES AND PERFORMANCE

1 What are the strengths of this organisation?
What are the weaknesses of this organisation?
What are the opportunities available to this organisation?
What are the threats confronting this organisation?

(Note that strengths and weaknesses are internal to the organisation, whereas opportunities and threats are external to the organisation. Most organisations regularly determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, i.e., they conduct SWOT analyses, before they formulate their strategies.)

2 What are this organisation's strategies?
(Strategies refer to the business approaches and competitive moves that the organisation employs, in order to achieve its objectives, realise its vision, and ensure its continued survival and success.)
Are these strategies successful?

If these strategies are not currently successful, then:
- i What alternative strategies should the organisation adopt?
- ii When would these alternative strategies be adopted?

3 Does this organisation set performance targets?

If the organisation does set performance targets, then:
- i Do these targets reflect the organisation's strategies?
- ii Are these individual-level targets, team-level targets, or organisational-level targets?
- iii Please describe these targets.
- iv Who sets these targets?
- v What actions does the organisation take if these targets are not met?
- Vi Has the organisation been able to meet these targets in recent years?

If the organisation does not set performance targets, then:
- I Does the organisation at least track its performance on a regular basis?

ii If the organisation does track its performance, then what specific performance measures does it track?

4 Does this organisation have a performance appraisal system to evaluate employee performance?

If the organisation has a performance appraisal system, then:

i Are the employees evaluated on the basis of whether they have met some performance targets?

Ii How often are the employees evaluated for their performance?

iii Do the employees receive feedback on their performance?

iv Is this performance appraisal system used as the basis for determining employee rewards?

V Are employee rewards based on individual performance or group performance?

If the organisation does not have a performance appraisal system, or if its performance appraisal system is not used as the basis for determining employee rewards, then how are employee rewards determined?

5 Does this organisation encourage its employees (especially those who perform their jobs well) to seek better and more challenging jobs elsewhere?

If the organisation does encourage its employees to seek jobs elsewhere, then:

I Does the organisation assist the employees with such job placements?

ii How would you rate the success of past employees who have moved on to better and more challenging jobs elsewhere?

6 Is there a feedback system in this organisation that allows employees to give suggestions on improving the operating system and work procedures?

If the organisation does have such a feedback system, then:

i Please describe this feedback system.

ii Is this feedback system effective?

iii Are the employee suggestions acted on, and translated into actual changes in the operating system and work procedures?

ORGANISATIONAL INNOVATION AND CHANGE

1 How would you rate the organisation's openness to innovation and change?
If the organisation is not open to innovation and change, then what is it doing to become more open?

2 Please describe some recent innovations and changes introduced by the organisation:

How did the ideas for these innovations and changes come about?
How were these innovations and changes implemented?
Was there resistance from the employees to these innovations and changes?
Have these innovations and changes improved the efficiency of the organisation's operations?
Have these innovations improved the organisation's profitability?
How would you rate the overall success of these innovations and changes?

Chapter 5

Forms of Applied Research in Voluntary Welfare Organisations: Ethical Considerations and Challenges

FORMS OF APPLIED RESEARCH IN VOLUNTARY WELFARE ORGANSATIONS: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CHALLENGES

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Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities

INTRODUCTION

Social workers are trained to be everyday researchers, as we relate to our clients by gathering information, observing and documenting. We are always trying to understand the meanings made by our clients, and advocating for them when we participate in meetings with policymakers and funders. During the Social Workers' Day in 2014, Minister Chan Chun Sing even shared that he was educated by social workers, driving home the point that what social workers say or do can be powerful as it influences policymaking.

This introductory paper acknowledges some of the structures and efforts of social service agencies in conducting research to enhance service delivery. It also examines some of the fundamental ethical considerations agencies need to take note off and some key challenges in undertaking formal research.

THE PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS VWOS FACE IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH

VWOs in general do not have a designated staff or team to focus on research, especially writing professional research papers that could be shared to build knowledge, bridge gaps and support policymaking. Thus, VWOs need to form partnerships with agencies and/or educational institutions that are established and have the capacity to provide the professional know-how to hypothesise or conceptualise, conduct literature review, identify and set up the appropriate methodologies, analyse data and make recommendations in consultation with the VWOs.

The following are the practical considerations that VWOs face when conducting research or seeking research partnerships:

- Who in our agency is familiar / interested in research?

- Do the staff need training in conducting research?
- What are the challenges we have internally?
- What resources are available within the organisation?
- Who can we consult outside the agency?
- What financial resources are available?
- Will there be consequences for the agency if someone else is brought into the agency and has access to the information?

RESEARCH SHOULD FULFIL THE ORGANISATIONAL NEEDS OF VWOS

We need to focus on immediacy and what will help us serve better. The knowledge gained from the research should ideally help us refine our processes, redesign existing programmes and innovate new programmes. Based on the experience of Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities Centre for Family Harmony (THK CFH), some of the initial questions asked before embarking on research studies, which are typical of most VWOs, are:

- Who are my clients?
- What are their needs?
- To what extent are the needs of the clients met?
- What are some of the factors that support access to services?
- What are the enabling and disabling factors that will affect outcomes?
- What theories can inform practice?
- How can we use the information to provide better support for the children?
- How effective are our services?

Therefore the type of research that VWOs typically do include needs assessment, research to support programme development or advocacy, and programme evaluation.

Needs assessment

One of the core programmes in Family Service Centres (FSCs) is outreach. It basically entails creating awareness of the centre's services and conducting needs assessment. The methodologies include:

- Surveys done door-to-door and through information booths set up by the FSCs or by other partners;
- Community observations for familiarisation purpose, where people gather to identify hot spots, to assess whether the community is safe for children and the vulnerable; and
- Focus Group Discussions with partners and service users to hear their perspectives and assessments on needs.

The FSCs are strategically located to collaborate with the Social Service Offices (SSOs) to identify the needs of the community and strategise reaching out to service users.

Evidence-based practice and testing theories for programme development

Social Workers utilise theories in the everyday work with service users. They are highly encouraged to use evidence-based practice and use a theory that is most appropriate given the situation the client is in. Evidence-based practice is usually tested in other countries and not in Singapore. In the last two years, we have been examining the ecological framework as an overarching perspective for all theories and approaches. For instance, when social workers are attending to child abuse, they are required to identify and examine:

- all the legislations, ethics, policies and cultural practices of the family's ethnic group under the macro-system;
- all relevant agencies that may have an impact on the family under the exo-system;
- all significant relationships using family systems theory and person in environment under the messo-system;

- individual factors using developmental perspectives under micro-system; and
- events that may have impacted families universally and the timeline of normative and non-normative events under the chrono-system.

Advocacy and empowerment

Advocacy is a daily task for social workers, where they write letters to agencies such as child care centres to waive off fees, apply for the School Pocket Money Fund under exceptional cases or admit clients to a crisis shelter.

As a team in a FSC, social workers consolidate information gathered from service users to identify service gaps and discuss these with policymakers. Advocacy is possible only when the agency compiles solid and grounded information on service users.

Focus group discussions are also a way to empower partners and stakeholders, including the community. For example, two task forces were set up to examine the high number of Personal Protection Order applications by the Indian and Malay communities. The task forces comprised of social workers and counsellors, who voluntarily got involved to make a difference for their respective communities. The task forces' recommendations were submitted to MSF who then assigned agencies to follow up. The two task forces research studies were funded by MSF.

Evaluation

Evaluation is about looking at "what works". For instance, "Do children's behaviour and school performance improve if they are involved in group programmes that enhance competencies and self- esteem?" "What factors support access between a child and a non-residential parent in a separated or divorced family?"

THK CFH did a study using 100 closed cases. This study compiled information using the social reports of the families, and found that parenting styles are critical in having good interaction during access sessions in the Centre. [23]

Besides research studies specifically designed to evaluate a service, routinely collected programme data, which is used for accountability

[23] http://www.socialserviceinstitute.org/RP/Families/Fulltext/11.pdf. Funding for this study was provided by NCSS' Voluntary Capability Fund.

purposes, can also be used to monitor and refine the services offered. Voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) receive funding from the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), Tote Board or the Community Chest and thus are required to maintain a database and submit quarterly, half yearly and yearly data on outputs and outcomes. The database contains beneficiaries' profiles, as well as case information. Output data comprises the number of open, active and closed cases. Outcome measures include number of families enhancing their problem-solving skills, coping skills, relations, networks and managing on their own. The database also includes feedback on the services provided. Outreach and community support programmes are usually evaluated based on qualitative and quantitative reports.

RESEARCH ETHICS

Research cannot be done at the expense of intervention. In fact, continuous data gathering without intervention is also unethical. As research is part and parcel of a social worker's role, it is important that consent forms are signed by service users' right from the beginning. Otherwise, it may not be possible to use the data and information.

Researches involving interviewing or experiments must include the following:

- benefits for the service users;
- clear information on how the study will be undertaken;
- participants must be given the right to withdraw;
- participants have access to support services;
- information collected can only be used for the purposes stated in the consent form;
- confidentiality and anonymity must be ensured;
- participants must be informed about the limits to confidentiality;
- ensure data is reported accurately;
- research team must avoid conflict of interests and dual relationships

CONCLUSION

Research always leads to more research. Most importantly, documentation of research is critical. Sometimes, some studies considered sensitive are not shared and it creates unhappiness among those who conducted the research.

Hence, there needs to be more support for VWOs to enhance their confidence to conduct small pieces of studies by providing more resources and acknowledging their efforts.

Chapter 6

Cultivating a Culture of Research – A Practitioner's Perspective

CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF RESEARCH – A PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

This presentation focuses on the practitioner's perspective on the need to cultivate a culture of research within the work place in order for research and evaluation to thrive.

It elaborates on three points:

- The importance of the practitioner's world view or knowing the "why" and the purpose of one's work: this forms the raison d'etre for undertaking research
- Understanding programme evaluation to enable its integration within programme design and implementation
- Knowing how to engage researchers in a collaborative partnership to facilitate effective research and evaluation.

The Tsao Foundation's experience in cultivating a culture of research and helping practitioners and researchers to work more closely together is used in this presentation to provide a more concrete illustration.

THE PRACTITIONER'S WORLDVIEW

It is to be assumed that the practitioner's worldview is synchronous with the vision and mission of his work place. In this presentation, we are looking at the Tsao Foundation and its leadership and staff.

The mission of the Tsao Foundation is to seek a transformation of the ageing experience by initiating constructive mindset and systemic change while building intergenerational solidarity. It is a non-profit family foundation, and a "working foundation", as it does not merely give out grants, and its very survival depends on the financial sustainability of its model.

Our founder, Mrs Tsao Ng Yu Shun, was an 86-year-old visionary, who despite her life of privilege, had immense empathy for vulnerable elders

and a sharp insight into the universal aspirations of older persons. Those aspirations and concerns guide the Foundation's fundamental principles of practice, as seen below:

- Live in one's own home = ageing in place
- Be surrounded by loved ones = intergenerational solidarity
- Remain master of one's own destiny = empowerment and participation of older persons
- Have access to quality healthcare, especially if poor = focus on health and psycho-social well-being
- Sustainability = financial and programme model sustainability

For its model, financing and size, the Foundation has a natural edge in innovating new approaches and programmes. To be relevant and impactful, it has to ensure that the knowledge and skills therefrom are efficacious, replicable and transmittable.

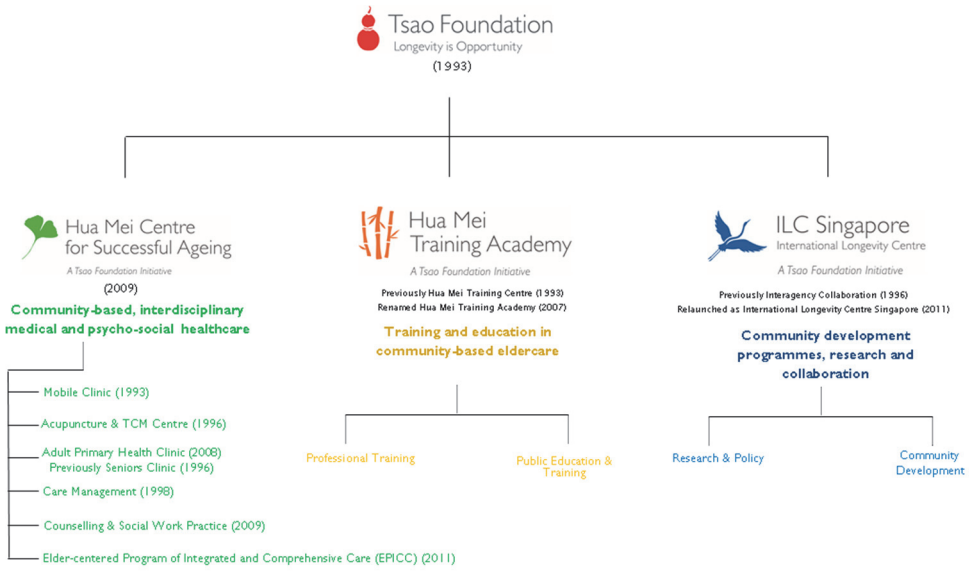
Our clinicians are hardwired to know the impact of their work and for this, they turn to programme research and evaluation. They need to be goal-driven and continuously asking if they are getting to where they want to go. Programme evaluation would reveal if change has taken place for our clients, and it also facilitates learning and programme improvement.

The way that the Tsao Foundation is organised (see Figure 1. below) lends itself to the role of a change agent. There are three initiatives in Tsao Foundation: a clinical arm, a training academy and a collaboration and policy advocacy centre:

- Hua Mei Centre for Successful Ageing provides community-based health and psycho-social care for seniors.
- Hua Mei Training Academy provides practitioner-led training for community-based eldercare professionals as well as family and public education.
- International Longevity Centre Singapore (ILC-S) provides a collaborative platform for practitioners, policy and research to come together to gather the necessary evidence for new approaches to issues in ageing and inform policy translation.

Hence, within a single entity are functions of practice to enable understanding of needs and gaps and best practice service delivery, which then get translated into training (part of advocacy for mindset change and skills enhancement), and advocacy through research leading to effective policy translation.

Figure 1: Corporate Functions of Tsao Foundation



ALIGNING PRACTITIONER'S WORLDVIEW WITH RESEARCH EXPERTISE AND CORPORATE MISSION

With the "right" worldview in place, programme evaluation naturally becomes an integral part of the programme design for implementation.

In order to do this well, it is important to know what data to collect and the tools that can be used to collect such data. In many of Tsao's clinical programmes, validated assessment tools are used so that we can measure and compare results over time, and across organisations to benchmark our performance.

It is not the easiest way to work: data collection takes time and effort, and self-scrutiny can get uncomfortable. Nonetheless, we believe they are worthwhile for the difference that programme evaluation and research can make in the lives of those we serve.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS

We have actively sought research partners and platforms and invested in research, notably, though not exclusively, with the National University of Singapore, in the Tsao-NUS Research Initiative.

What the Foundation wishes to overcome is the divide between community, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. It is only by so doing that we can translation policy action that works effectively to enhance people's lives. Naturally, each group comes with its own needs, perspectives and expertise.

For instance, it is not always easy for clinicians and researchers to work with one another. We have to lead academics out of their ivory tower into our world just as they want us to understand their language and practices. Through sharing goals, clarifying expectations and delineating roles and responsibilities, the collaboration does become fruitful for both parties.

We had a bumpy ride at the start, but have since come to learn that clear communication aided by SOPs like a well-articulated service agreement, goes a long way to frame the process and result of the partnership. In other words, collaborative partnerships require the clear and explicit expression of expectations and roles.

CONCLUSION

Tsao Foundation has managed to overcome the gap between research and practice through a careful coordination and integration of our corporate functions—clinical practice, training and research. We actively encouraged a research culture across our corporate functions and ensured that practitioners recognise the value of research in helping to improve clinical outcomes.

Chapter 7

Developing Research on Rehabilitation and Protection – Challenges and Collaborations

DEVELOPING RESEARCH ON REHABILITATION AND PROTECTION — CHALLENGES AND COLLABORATIONS

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THE SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

Within the social service sector in Singapore, the Ministry of Social and Family Development and National Council of Social Service are keen to understand the social service sector in general, which includes the socio-demographic characteristics and outcomes of clientele populations, as well as the performance of the voluntary welfare organisations that provide these social services. Notably, the last few years have seen an increase in the number of research centres within the institutions of higher learning that examine social issues. Some examples include the Centre for Social Development Asia, the Social Service Research Centre, the Next Age Institute, and the Centre for Family and Population Research. Encouragingly, there are also a number of voluntary welfare organisations that have established research outfits to understand the characteristics, problems, and outcomes of their clients better. For instance, the Tsao Foundation, the Student Care Services, the Singapore Children's Society, the Fei Yue Family Services Centre, as well as the Marine Parade Family Services Centre have invested in research infrastructure and activities over the years. These developments collectively point towards an increased focus on social research within the Singaporean context, and rightfully so.

Lee (2015) shares about the complex challenges of that Singapore faces in order to establish a vibrant research ecosystem to improve policies, services, and professional practice within the social service sector. Specifically, he describes that the national research and development strategy in Singapore which seeks to encourage research and generate innovations that can improve Singapore's competitive advantage, and promote economic growth. However, the focus of the national research strategy pertains to science and technological areas, and unfortunately does not cover social service research.

Research on social services is undoubtedly growing very quickly in Singapore notwithstanding the challenges that the sector faces. Indeed, much coordination, integration and prioritisation are needed to drive the

research agenda for the social service sector given the variegated nature of the interests and services of the players within the sector. Such consolidation efforts will help to raise the level and standards of research within the sector, which will subsequently lend credence to calls for more (strategic) research funding for the social service sector. More and more academics and practitioners are jumping onto the bandwagon to contribute to the expanding knowledge base, but this would require more effective ways for collaboration to so as reduce wastage of resources.

In this paper, I will discuss the importance of collaboration between different agencies and how such collaborations are essential for generating insights to social issues. Additionally, I will touch upon the need to build trust and foster closer working relationships. The research initiatives at the Rehabilitation and Protection Group will be briefly described, followed by the aim behind the establishment of a research centre to foster closer research alliances with other agencies in order to examine the relevant issues pertaining to our vulnerable youth and families.

BIG DATA AND DATA SHARING

We live in an age of data whereby electronic information about different types of human activities are collected (e.g., from online searches and purchases to detailed administrative data from healthcare use or educational attainment). In recent times, there is a burgeoning interest in large datasets (a.k.a., big data), and these are often seen as “the next frontier for innovation, competition and productivity”; and that it is a phenomena that leaders in all sectors cannot ignore (Manyika *et al*., 2011). The advances in technology and capability to capture real time, rapidly changing information have spurred developments to improve analytical capabilities to aid the exploration of such data. Data from various sources and subject matter are combined and explored for relationships, so as to develop new insights and solutions to complex problems. These research endeavours and subsequent commercial applications are well embedded in practice within economic, financial, medical, and sciences arenas, but is unfortunately lacking within the social services sector in Singapore.

Nevertheless, there are opportunities for the power of administrative data to be linked and harnessed, so as to support and guide smart policy and practice change within the public and social service sectors. The Singapore government has also actively encouraged its public agencies to provide de-identified datasets (i.e., data that is not tied to personal identities) for secondary analyses, thus the setting up of the data.gov.sg portal in 2011 to facilitate convenient access to Singapore Public Service’s administrative data. Since its launch, the data.gov.sg has provided more than 8,700

datasets from over 60 public agencies for download. In addition, the Department of Statistics in Singapore has recently announced that it is releasing another 5,000 datasets for free downloads on its website, bringing the total number of available datasets to 12,000 — broadly divided along the themes of economics and population (Department of Statistics, 2015).

Such initiatives are encouraging for social research, as they provide data to researchers for the purpose of examining issues related to the provision of social services, as well as for the formulation and evaluation of policies. For example, the social service sector can learn from the public and private sectors by being more targeted in its approach as well as increasing its productivity and innovation through the effective use of administrative (big) data.

In addition to using available administrative data for analyses, it is necessary for the sector to pursue data linkages. Data linkage is the process of combining two or more streams of data together; this process can open up new research opportunities and enable in-depth analyses across different domains to uncover relationships that may otherwise go undetected when examining unlinked datasets (however big). Data linkages can involve administrative datasets from social services, health services, education services, and urban planning authorities. An example will be the linkage of data on social service utilisation, socio-demographic information, and geographical information. This data can inform social service agencies pertaining to the utilisation of social services across various age and income groups, and how this differs with geographical distance between the clients' residences and services.

CHALLENGES AND COLLABORATION

A significant challenge on realising the value of big data and data sharing will be a shortage of talent. In particular, the social service sector may lack people who have expertise in advanced statistics, research methodology, and data linkage processes, as well as managers and analysts who are apt at running operations and designing policies that will take advantage of the insights that were generated from big data. Training programmes and internships will be very useful to groom potential talent in this aspect. The social service sector can take cue from the private sector and adapt the learning points from their journey.

Despite large amounts of data being provided by public agencies, there have been criticisms of the government by academics and social service agencies for not being forthcoming with the relevant data. Another

significant challenge is to establish the necessary data management and research infrastructure. Research efforts can be seriously hampered if such infrastructure is not available. Nevertheless, it is clear from the preceding section that the government has been building infrastructure and investing resources to facilitate the sharing of information. There are also fiduciary standards that the public agencies are required to uphold, and coupled with the need to safeguard the interests of the public through proper data governance. These processes are necessary although they can be tedious — and even patience sapping.

It should be noted that even between public agencies, data governance processes are strictly enforced to ensure that the abuse of data and breach of confidentiality are minimised — and there are no exceptions, public agencies or otherwise. Dialogues and patience would be useful to enhance the understanding of the perspectives between the various parties. Public officers must also do their part to facilitate sharing of information whenever possible. The clients that we serve must be our foremost consideration. What are the benefits from this research collaboration? What can we do in these research endeavours to generate insights to help our clients? Do we have a sufficient or compelling reason to share data? How can we remove barriers to data sharing whilst adhering to the stipulated data governance guidelines? How can we arrive at a win-win proposal? Notably, Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, shared the following at eGov Global Exchange 2013:

> *Outside Government, we will proactively share more data. This will encourage more feedback, as well as research and analysis on issues of public concern. It can also create opportunities for innovation and new solutions, leading to new jobs and businesses, and potentially improving the everyday lives of Singaporeans.* (Shanmugaratnam, 2013)

Never before has there been so much encouragement within and outside of public service to share data. However, it is also the perfect opportunity for public and social service agencies to reflect on their data governance procedures whenever there is a need to link confidential datasets together for greater insights, and inspire confidence with their potential collaborators. Ultimately, the increased understanding between the parties and strong data governance policies will build trust and facilitate successful partnerships – the bedrock for a more vibrant social service research landscape. In the next section, I will describe the roles and functions of the Rehabilitation and Protection Group and the development of a dedicated

research centre to deliver research pertaining to rehabilitation and protection issues.

REHABILITATION AND PROTECTION GROUP

The Rehabilitation and Protection Group (RPG) at the Ministry for Social and Family Development is responsible for formulating policies and delivering statutory services relating to the protection of children and families, as well as the rehabilitation of youth offenders. In particular, RPG aims to foster socially responsible individuals as well as strong and stable families by creating a safe and nurturing environment for children, youth, and families.

The key operations that RPG undertake include: (a) ensuring the care and protection of children, young persons, and families; (b) preparing social investigation reports for children in need of care or protection; (c) conducting social investigation for adoption applications; (d) coordinating fostering services, (e) providing rehabilitation for youth and adult offenders; (f) preparing pre-sentence reports and suitability reports for probation and Community Service Order; and (g) providing treatment and psychological support for RPG clients.

Underpinning RPG's work are three core beliefs: (i) individuals and families are capable of overcoming difficulties and becoming self-reliant; we help them by empowering them to do so; (ii) the safety and interest of children, youth, and families are important to cultivating socially responsible individuals and strong and stable families; and (iii) the family and community play a pivotal role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of abused or delinquent children, youth and their families.

Cognisant that effective policy formulation and delivering of services necessitate a data-driven approach that also is informed by our heritage, values and aspiration, RPG is committed to conducting research to inform further its goals. Thus far, RPG's research efforts have been heavily focused on validating clinical assessment measures in the Singaporean context, examining clients' profiles, and identifying predictors of key outcomes such as criminal recidivism and service re-entry for our local context. These are undoubtedly central lines of inquiry, which have provided frontline personnel with much needed information to support their decision-making.

Moving forward, there is a need to look beyond these topics to gain knowledge pertaining to other dimensions affecting forecasting and delivery of services, including changes in the broader societal and cultural

landscape, the mechanisms through which our clients change for the better, the cost effectiveness of the types of services provided, as well as the organisational context and staff.

THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON REHABILITATION AND PROTECTION

With the abovementioned foci in mind, the Centre for Research on Rehabilitation and Protection (CRRP) was established in July 2013 as a centre of excellence in research and practice development for matters pertaining to rehabilitation and protection, and aspires to achieve regional leadership in this domain. Operating under the auspices of the RPG at the Ministry of Social and Family Development, the Centre is a clearinghouse for all research and programme evaluation matters for RPG. Its primary aims are to: (a) conduct rigorous research on rehabilitation and protection; (b) collaborate with partners to build research and programme evaluation capabilities; and (c) contribute to sound policies and practices (Kvaale *et al*., 2015).

The Centre's key priorities are to:

- Promote research and education in specialist areas pertaining to rehabilitation and protection issues;
- Inform the forensic mental health, social service, and criminal justice sectors about the characteristics of the relevant clientele;
- Support the development of empirically based, best practices in the relevant sectors with regard to assessment, treatment and case management of the relevant clientele;
- Support the development and implementation of policies relating to rehabilitation and protection matters; and
- Assist with the evaluation of rehabilitation and protection programmes.

In terms of the research agenda, the key focus of the RPG research over the next one to two years will be the mapping of risk factors and needs, as well as protective and resilience factors. After these fundamental research priorities have been addressed, the focus will move towards programme evaluation, delineating the process of change in treatment, investigating the role of the therapeutic alliance, geospatial mapping, and examining demographic trends. This is not to say that studies into these topics will not

be undertaken in the earlier stages of the time period covered by our research agenda, only that these more macro-level topics will increase in importance and prominence over time.

To achieve the various objectives, the Centre will bring together scientists and practitioners from various disciplines, working in collaboration with local and international partners to develop and implement research strategies. The Centre's guiding principle is to mould better lives through improving knowledge. In its work, the Centre aspires to be *creative*, *responsible*, *respectful* and *passionate* (Kvaale *et al.*, 2015).

In essence, *creativity* involves embracing a rich diversity of ideas and conflicting views, in hope that a more nuanced and accurate understanding will emerge. Importantly, we believe that it is the cornerstone of innovation and development. In addition, good research requires *responsible* conduct based on the highest ethical standards; we build trust and relationships by being accountable for how we conduct our business. Research conducted by the Centre (and ultimately, RPG) is fundamentally about people and their lives, and that necessitates a deep *respect* for their experiences, views, and feelings at each stage in the research process. We are *passionate* about our work, and hope that our passion will infect others to come aboard the journey with others (Kvaale *et al*., 2015).

Undoubtedly, the Centre encounters the same challenges in terms of data sharing and data linkage, as well as strengthening alliances and establishing new collaborations. In line with the government's Open Data efforts, the Centre is committed to the responsible and timely sharing of data with other government ministries, agencies, as well as with the wider academic community. The Centre also recognises that social issues in Singapore are multi-dimensional, so the development of practices and policies requires informed inputs from external sources. Therefore we are a strong proponent of data sharing, so as to facilitate innovative analysis and quality research. However, we are mindful that our data can be of a highly personal, confidential and sensitive nature (similar to those from other agencies). As such, we have worked with our internal partners to put in place various mechanisms to safeguard the security and privacy of our clients' data.

At the Centre, our researchers are proactive in seeking out alliances, and we always aim to work with various agencies to conduct data linkages and analyses. This is an important part of our research operations because we believe that such research collaborations will yield whole-of-government indicators for vulnerable populations, indicators that in turn will inform a wide range of policy-related and operational decisions across government

agencies. Building trust is an important activity in this collaborative process, and this can be done through openness during discussions and adopting a win-win mentality rather than just espousing attitudes like "what's in it for me?" or "what can you give me?" By taking a long-term view of building collaborations (i.e., an initial "no" does not mean the end of the road — there are always other opportunities), and small successes do go a long way to build trust and eventually to share data. Of course, having a good data governance policy and understanding of such processes help with negotiations.

At the Centre, we are also cognisant of the protocols of other agencies and we respect that. What we seek to do is to understand their perspectives, and to respectfully facilitate their understanding of where we are coming from, what we are trying to achieve, how we work, and what we need in order to be successful. These are crucial discussions, and we spend a lot of time articulating these to our partners, and also managing their expectations. We are clear that research takes time and a lot of resources, and we help our partners understand this. Planning and communication are very important, and we always remind ourselves *never to overpromise*.

In order for research to realise its full value, research findings have to be communicated to our partners. This feedback loop is crucial in ensuring that research addresses the needs on the ground and policymakers. To achieve this objective, the Centre has been disseminating its research findings in peer-reviewed journals and conferences. However, we are aware of the need to make research findings more accessible. Hence, we have been experimenting with various mediums to summarise significant findings to our colleagues and partners. At the Centre, we are committed to improving our research dissemination efforts, and will continue to explore innovative methods as well as to work toward the dissemination of its research in more mainstream outlets. We strongly believe that success builds success; therefore we spend a significant amount of time sharing these findings and helping our colleagues translate these into possible operational and policy benefits. These build trust and confidence, and journeying with them on this translational process puts us in a better position for further collaborations in the future.

Lastly, the Centre invests time in engaging postgraduate and undergraduate students to conduct research on offender rehabilitation and child protection topics. We share our data with the students or facilitate them in data collection with regards to our vulnerable clients (with strict data governance procedures in place), but an important objective in this process is to arm our future generations of researchers with good research skills as well as substantive knowledge about offender rehabilitation and

child protection. We aim to sow seeds in these young minds, with the hope that they will propagate the knowledge and conduct further research in these areas.

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Chapter 8

The Role of VWOs – Charities Capability Fund (VCF) in Generating Innovation and Raising Productivity

THE ROLE OF VWOS – CHARITIES CAPABILITIES FUND (VCF) IN GENERATING INNOVATION AND RAISING PRODUCTIVITY

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As a general rule, “government” and “innovation” are not concepts that typically go hand in hand. However in Singapore, across multiple sectors, the government has positioned itself to play a supportive and facilitative role in the generation and encouragement of innovation. For the social service sector, I will talk about the role of the VWO Capability Building Fund (VCF), administered by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), in seeding innovation.

PURPOSE AND HISTORY OF VCF

The VCF was established in 2002 and we are currently in our third tranche, with each tranche lasting the duration of five years. Government has been steadily increasing the amount of investment in VCF throughout the years, from S$30 million in the first tranche in 2002, to S$53 million in the second tranche, to S$106 million in the latest tranche, amounting to about a doubling of injections to VCF every five years. This is a strong indication of the government’s support of the sector and its commitment to develop VWOs.

The latest tranche of VCF is organised into three grants to reflect the three focal areas. The first is the professional capability grant, which funds scholarships and training. The second is the organisational development grant, to improve processes and organisational functions such as HR and finance. The third is the Innovation & Productivity Grant to support and catalyse initiatives improving productivity.
The VCF aims to achieve: 1) a more professional and skilled workforce; 2) stronger organisations and 3) greater productivity for the sector at large. The Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and NCSS have increased the focus on manpower development over the past four years. Key initiatives have been put in place to enhance professional development and skills upgrading of different occupational groups; and the attraction, retention and engagement of talent — and we will continue to focus resources in this important area. While the “many helping hands” approach has been and will remain a powerful guiding principle, as social needs grow in scale, scope and complexity, it is now opportune to think

about how to help “make the hands stronger” as we move into a new phase in the maturity of the social service sector. Therefore, we have also focused on making VWOs stronger and better organisations. At the system level, it is also important for the sector to raise its productivity, even though it is a concept that may not always get a positive response from VWOs. Feedback from several VWOs suggested that, in general, VWOs already feel that they are very productive given that they operate in an environment of scarce resources. Some VWOs also feel that productivity may be more relevant for profit making entities where the bottom line is the top priority. With support from the National Productivity Fund, an Innovation and Research Office (IRO) in NCSS will take on the challenge of adapting and implementing productivity solutions within the sector.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH AS PART OF THE VALUE CHAIN OF INNOVATION

Research is a critical success factor for innovation and VCF funding has enabled VWOs to undertake research to: 1) Support and validate service improvements; 2) Enhance current service delivery to better meet social needs; 3) Project emerging social trends to help in the planning of prevention or intervention services.

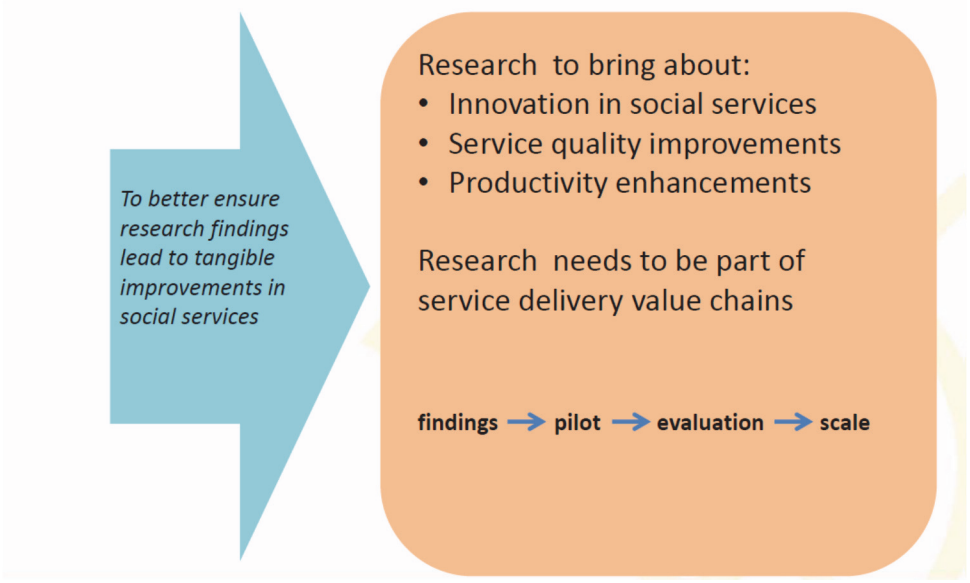
To-date, 41 research projects have received supported from VCF. While this number may be relatively low compared to other industries, it is because we are starting from a much lower base. Currently, VWOs are often not well-equipped to conduct rigorous research unless they collaborate with academics. With the setup of the IRO, I am optimistic that the quantity and more importantly, the quality of research will rise.

While the VCF has always supported research, in the latest tranche we wanted to make sure that research is more closely linked to service improvement, so that clients can ultimately benefit. In the first tranche, we examined very exploratory issues — what was actually out there. Therefore, there were a lot of studies that focused on understanding needs. In the second tranche we encouraged more pilot programmes that sought to improve organisational capabilities so that clients can benefit. In the last tranche, we want to move towards impact or outcome evaluation. This will become increasingly critical as the demand for social services is expected to increase significantly. In the evolution of the VCF in terms of research we are still grappling with what kind of research is useful to support and encourage.

What I would like to focus on is how research can generate innovation that produces tangible improvements such that clients can be served better.

Research findings can inform innovation in the social services, point to how to improve service quality or make productivity enhancements. However, research needs to be part of the service delivery value chain. Findings alone are merely the beginning, and findings need to translate into pilots which are then properly evaluated and, if found to be effective, services should be scaled. This is very important because from the policy perspective, even if innovation is done well, the impact is actually very minimal if implemented by only one VWO. The challenge is how to scale it across the sector.

Figure 1: Ensuring research translates into outcomes



The form of innovation can be varied. It can range from supporting the helping professionals to become more productive and focused so that they are able to spend more time with the clients, or allow them to provide added services to the client. Or, some technology can be used to improve organisational capability. For example, we have piloted the use of mobile technology where we are trying to bring mobile devices out to our social service professionals.

MSF and NCSS have also been trying to engage multiple VWO partners to execute various pilots. For example, we have piloted a video-monitoring system in collaboration with Thye Hwa Kwan Moral Society to improve outreach to vulnerable clients without increasing the burden on social workers. The video-monitoring system pilot used technology that allows the social workers to check in with clients without having to physically travel to

their homes. This has allowed social workers to serve a larger base of clients more effectively, and helps them to manage their time and work load better. When technology is leveraged properly, it can be very useful for the clients and for the professional. The intention is to evaluate it and to scale up such initiatives.

COMPLEMENTING BOTTOM-UP WITH TOP-DOWN APPROACHES TO INNOVATION

Finally, I would like to emphasise that VCF has and will continue to support ground-up initiatives. This has not changed. However, to better ensure scale and the replication of best in class solutions, it is important to have a mixture of top-down and bottom-up approaches. Such top-down, centrally-led projects allow MSF and NCSS to provide guidance and direction when working with VWOs. This is also something we have started to experiment with, for example, SGenable is putting in place a pilot to have a centralised transport system to link up people with disabilities with transportation providers and volunteers. This is an example where the government takes the lead and we work together with the VWOs to scale it across the sector. These are exemplary examples of collaboration that can benefit the sector at large, and I want to make a call to action for more of such collaborative efforts to tap VCF funding for research.

Chapter 9

A Strategy For Scaling Up Research-led Innovations Which are Practitioner-enacted – A Case Study of Diffusing Learning Innovation Across Singapore Schools

A STRATEGY FOR SCALING UP RESEARCH-LED INNOVATIONS WHICH ARE PRACTITIONER-ENACTED — A CASE STUDY OF DIFFUSING LEARNING INNOVATION ACROSS SINGAPORE SCHOOLS

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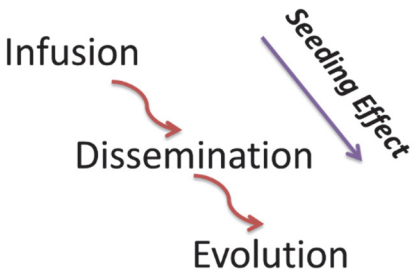
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The challenge of how to diffuse and scale-up effective educational innovations has received increasing attention in recent years. Researchers spent efforts developing educational innovation and proving its efficacy and effectiveness in pilot studies in small scale, but when the innovation is put into practice and especially when the context of use is broadened, the designed principles of the innovation need to be refined iteratively to work well through a process of design-based implementation research. Scaling up successful educational innovation not only draws interests from the researchers, but also education policymakers and practitioners, as they all aim to create deep and sustainable changes in the processes of teaching and learning.

In our study, we proposed a model of scaling that revolves around the concept of “seeding” effect (Figure 1), with the three phases of infusion, dissemination and evolution. By infusion, we refer to the intentional design for training of seeding practitioners, including teachers and school administrators etc., to take an active part in the actual social participation of the instantiations of research projects and develop an embodied understanding that may or may not be explicit. Subsequently, such programmes proceed to dissemination, which means the need for participants and going back to respective institutions, to constantly interflow around and disseminate the reifications. Through the process of dissemination, misconceptions can be elucidated and understandings evolved. Participants newer to the process can also be gradually enculturated through interflow with different members of community of practice, such as researchers and practitioners. As a whole, outcomes of the seeding effect, consisting of infusion, dissemination and evolution, to echo the points of Barab and Luehmann (2003), must be important and feasible to practitioners of multiple contexts, and addressing issues of local circumstances.

Figure 1: A model of scaling with seeding effect



The study is situated in a programme of research as a start to specially study both of the spread and evolution dimensions of scaling, leading to a better understanding of how the outcomes arising from researcher-driven interventions may be scaled across schools into wider practitioner-driven enactments, in context of the education system in Singapore. It studies closely the process of how a school's experiences in designing and practising an innovation can be spread to and then evolved in a few other schools. Our objective is to propose a model of scaling that can be operationalised and validated to understand how innovations can be spread and evolved across schools, which are generally not well understood.

The key driving research question is: *how does this model of spreading an innovation from one school to other schools work?* Unpacking this further, what are the social relations, resources and expertise to achieve dissemination and spread? What are the processes and mechanisms that can help disseminate practices related to designing and implementing a new innovation — from one school where the innovation is being enacted to a few other schools with different contextual conditions?

Innovation and scaling strategy

The innovation that we are trying to scale up is Inquiry-Based Seamless Learning (IBSL). The seamless learning notion views learning as distributed across different learning processes (emergent or planned) as well as across different spaces (in or out of class). Mobile devices are used as mediating tools to facilitate the seamless integration of different types of learning processes. Students are assigned a mobile device with 24x7 access in order to mediate a variety of learning activities such as in-class small-group activities, field trips, data collection and geo-tagging in the neighbourhood, home-based experiments involving parents, online

information search and peer discussions, and digital student artefact creation, among others.

To facilitate the IBSL, MyDesk mobile learning environment, which runs on a Microsoft Windows Mobile operating system was developed (Looi *et al*., 2010) for teachers to create curriculum-based lessons which embed multiple media (i.e., text, graphical, animations)and applications (KWL for students' reflection, NotePad for data collection, Sketchbook for drawing, MapIT for constructing concept map). Students' assignments and artefacts can be easily accessed and evaluated by the teacher for immediate feedback and comments.

The innovative curriculum also incorporates the 5E (Engagement-Exploration-Explanation-Elaboration-Evaluation) instructional model (Bybee, 2009), which has been pervasively employed in the instruction of science in Singapore schools. Teachers are encouraged to apply constructivist teaching approaches to ask questions, conduct mobile and non-mobile activities, interact with students and scaffold the students' learning (Zhang *et al*., 2010). Equipped with mobile devices, individual students may carry out the learning activities in their own pace and pursue their preferred learning paths. The innovative curriculum was proved to be effective in engaging students to learn science in personal, deep and engaging ways as well as developing students' positive attitudes towards mobile learning (Looi *et al*., 2011).

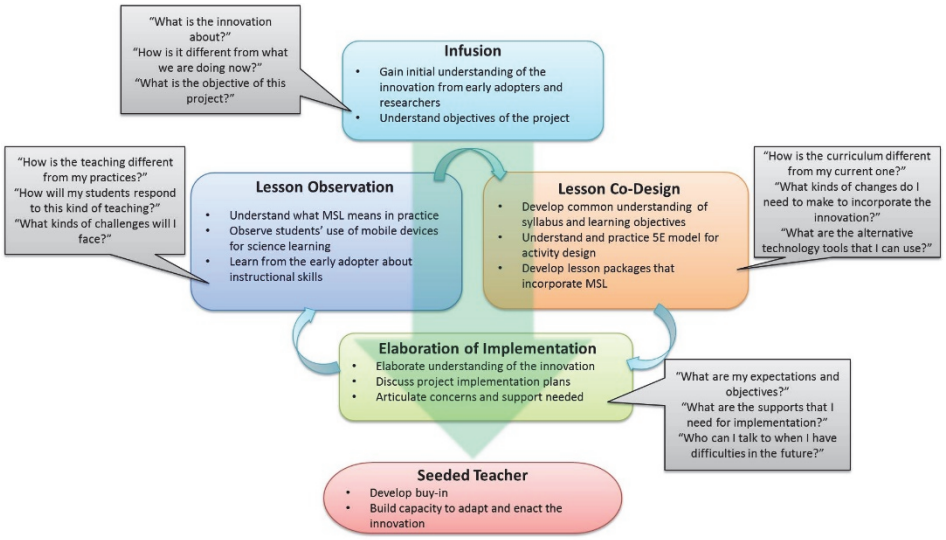
Infusion phase

In the infusion phase, some design principles for the seeding process were proposed for teachers' capacity building. There are several design principles we put forward for the professional development sessions across the learning journey: 1) Sharing of the Early Adopter teacher (EAT) to the Seeded Teachers (STs) from other schools should be participatory; 2) STs will also have a chance to have an lived in or embodied experience of what it means to teach such lessons during implementation stage; 3) STs have the flexibility to personalise the curricular innovation considering the local needs of their own schools; 4) EATs also benefit from a reflective practitioner stance of re-looking and adapting their own innovation and innovation approaches through their active participation and sharing with STs; 5) Communities of practice for EATs, STs and non-seeded teachers to share experiences, challenges, tips and constraints of how to enact a classroom innovation (with researchers as meso-level catalysts but to eventually fade away).

Based on the design principles, a model for teachers' preflective learning is proposed as shown in Figure 2. It consists of four types of activities, as well

as the preflection prompts to scaffold teachers' reflection-for-implementation. In the first activity which we call "infusion", or the kick-off meeting, different parties in the project, including all the teachers and school administrators from the seeded schools, as well as the MOE officers, gather for initial understanding of the innovation about "what it is" and "whether it works" from perspectives of both researchers and pioneer practitioners. In the meeting, the effectiveness of for mobile seamless learning (MSL) on students learning was presented to teachers, especially students' improvement on semester assessments in answering multiple-choice questions (MCQs), open-ended (OE) questions and the total scores. The objective of the project was made clear to all the parties, as well as the responsibility and key performance indicators.

Figure 2: Model of teacher's preflective learning with preflection prompts in the infusion phase



Implementation phase

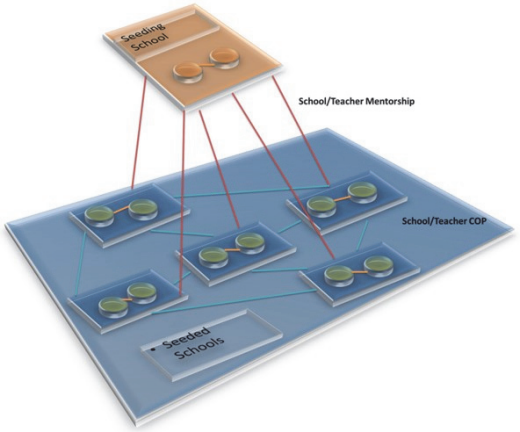
In the implementation phase, teachers implemented the co-designed lessons with certain degree of adaptation. The co-design session continued during the stage, and at the same time lesson observation in the five schools and the post-observation discussions formed another type of teacher professional development. The observation team was comprised of the EAT, the MOE officers and the researchers, and went for fortnightly observations. After every lesson, the observation team would feedback on teacher's teaching and students' responses in classroom, with special focus on the aspects like teacher's strategies of inquiry teaching, the lesson design and areas for improvement.

Dissemination phase

In the dissemination phase, we hope to see the five schools to take more ownership of spreading the innovation within their own schools. However, due to the readiness of the software (i.e., MyDesk learning platform), there were little lessons involving the use of the learning platform. What's more, three out of five schools discontinued the use of the mobile devices within school due to parents' concerns, so we could not see the full effectiveness of the IBSL so far. Nonetheless, as we have foreseen in the beginning of the project, there would be varied trajectory and pace of different schools' uptake of the innovation. In the findings, we will delineate various progress and specify the influences of the context variables on the uptake process.

The scaling-up work has gone to its third year, and the five schools are at different stages of use of IBSL. During the diffusion of IBSL, we formed a seeding-seeded relationship between school N and the five schools, as shown in Figure 3. The school N played a pivotal role in leading the spread of IBSL, through sharing the experiences of adopting an innovative pedagogy, success and challenges in the process, suggestions on making adaptions for school's context. The ties between the seeding school and the seeded schools are not one of leadership, but more importantly the establishment of teachers' learning community, which will be discussed in the second part. The five schools also formed a community where sharing of resources, communicating success and failure, and reflecting practices could take place.

Figure 3: The seeding-seeded relationship in diffusion of IBSL



We categorised the stages of the five schools in the process of adopting of the innovation according the framework of Hall *et al*. (1975), and explained how the interactions between the contextual conditions within the school affect the school's process.

Summary

The conditions in every school differed. The result in the level of use of IBSL was a consequence of interactions among the factors. We positioned the support from meso-level in school context as the supports contributed to the following dimensions: firstly, we formed a platform where teachers with similar experiences could interact and reflect. Secondly, we identified the difficulties in teaching and provided professional development in both theory and practice. Thirdly, during implementation, we provided feedback on teacher's practices, at the same time encouraged them to take ownership in spreading the innovation. Lastly, we observed the process with a systemic lens, detected the problems in project conduction and connected relative personnel to solve the problems.

FINDINGS

Contextual factors

These contextual factors include, but not limited to, school's characteristics in curriculum and assessment, school culture in learning and teaching, demographic, school leaders' perception of the innovation (its effectiveness, feasibility, compatibility, trialability in the school context), their level of commitment, their ability in prevision and problem solving, school's professional learning community (PLC), organisational structure and culture in PLC, teachers' perceptions, their teaching experiences and

competency in inquiry-based teaching, their belief in technology in learning, and their social capital, supports from meso-level, etc.

Figure 4: Organisational characteristics

A1. School culture in learning (e.g., characteristics of the existing curriculum, normal pedagogy and assessment practices)

A2. Technology-related characteristics: ICT infrastructure, usual learning platform etc.

A3. Culture in professional development and professional learning community (PLC) structure (e.g., teachers' PD opportunities, within school PLC themes, across schools PLC)

A4. School demographic (e.g., students' population, percentage of students under FAS)

The role of various stakeholders: administrators, early adopters, teachers and students

We found that while following the main structure and flow of the curriculum package, they adapted and detailed the curriculum in different ways. In instantiating the lesson package, teachers applied pedagogical approaches, and we identified teachers having different pedagogical orientations. Some teachers were more skilful in questioning and facilitating, while others were learning to improve their strategies to probe students' deeper conceptual understanding. When integrating the technology into lessons, teachers designed tasks and conducted differently.

Figure 5: Actors in school

B1. Administrative leaders (e.g., Principal, Science/ICT Head of Department)

- Perception of the innovation (effectiveness, compatibility, simplicity, cost, trialability, observability)
- Level of commitment
- Recognition of staff work

- Ability in prevision, planning and problem solving
- Obtaining resources (e.g., for research funding, equipment, training)

B2. Teachers

- Perception of the innovation
- Belief in technology in teaching and learning
- Teaching experiences, especially experiences in inquiry-based teaching
- Teaching competencies (i.e., Content Knowledge, Pedagogical Content Knowledge, Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge)
- Social capital (social network structure, access to expertise, trust to early adopter teacher of innovation, participating in communities of practice and interaction depth) (Coburn & Russell, 2008)

B3. Early adopter, innovation developer and/or researcher's supports

- Supports in social network building
- Provision of Professional Development sessions
- Onsite support and feedback (e.g., trouble shooting for technical issue, activity design, students' responses)
- Suggestions on strategies for adoption and adaptation
- Mediating between levels of actors within school or across schools to address emerging issues

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B4. Students (e.g., attitudes towards learning, and technology for learning, media literacy)

- Perception of the innovation
- Belief in technology for learning
- Inquiry-based learning experiences
- Learning competencies

IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE

To scale up a researcher-driven intervention in Singapore education system, this study proposed a model of scaling with seeding effect, including the process of infusion, dissemination and evolution. In this model, an early adopter school took the leadership in spreading the innovation to more schools, with intensive efforts spent on seeded teachers' capacity building and establishment of systematic supporting structure. The model is a combination of ground-up and top-down strategies, aiming to produce sustainable and scalable change in school contexts.

It is suggested that organisations seeking to adopt an innovation should achieve: 1) Understanding the innovation thoroughly, and making sure the school learning culture is aligned with the one that the innovation designers advocate; 2) Understanding that the school leaders need to establish systemic supporting structure for diffusion of an innovation; 3) Establishing an effective teacher professional learning community for sustainable and scalable use of the innovation; and 4) selecting the teachers with more teaching experiences and who are more competent in inquiry-based teaching to lead the project.

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Chapter 10

Building a Conducive Ecosystem for Social Service Research in Singapore

BUILDING A CONDUCIVE ECOSYSTEM FOR SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH IN SINGAPORE

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This concluding chapter discusses the complex and ambitious problem of how we might build a vibrant research ecosystem in order to improve policies, services and professional practice in the Singapore social service sector. This requires looking at upstream issues of improving the supply of relevant evidence, the downstream applications of the findings, as well as all the necessary steps in between. The focus in this paper is to understand and develop the social conditions, institutional norms and organisational structures that can help facilitate such work. That is, we need to determine: who is best placed to produce what kinds of evidence; what should the different roles be for the diverse and multiple players; how do we determine what research agenda is worth pursuing; and how should we accomplish such an agenda?

The chapter is divided into four sections: 1) We provide some background on the evidence-based movement and its relevance to the social services; 2) characterise our national R&D strategy and the place of social service research within it; 3) analyse the needs and gaps of the social service research ecosystem; and 4) establish a roadmap on how to build research capability, ensure the relevance of the research agenda and translate findings into policy and practice.

RESEARCH AS KEY TO EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY AND PRACTICE

There have been constant calls for the better use of rigorous evidence to improve public services and even a proliferation of guides on how to do so (see e.g. Cartwright & Hardie 2012). As a means of improving evidence-based policy and practice, proponents have paid particular attention to robust research (see for example, Nutley *et al*. [2010]).

Because a wide variety of activities are relevant for increasing the evidence base of the sector, it is useful to take an encompassing definition of research to include broader forms of evidence production work — such as simple environmental scans or community engagement sessions to understand some social issues or problems; interviews with clients or practitioners to understand their needs; and the routine monitoring of

programmes to track outputs and outcomes. These activities may not always be considered as "research" because of the influence of dominant academic archetypes of basic research (done by academic scientists in universities) and the more applied "R&D" archetype (done by technologists and engineers in large corporations).[24] While formal research has the reputation of being more systematic and transparent than other forms of evidence production[25], it is useful to include routine programme management activities, stakeholder consultations and less formalised forms of fact-finding that are nonetheless part of the evidence-production industry.

Origins of the evidence-based movement and applicability to the social services

The evidence-based movement was first developed in the context of improving medical practice, which was prone to errors in reasoning and utilisation of evidence. Defined by Sackett *et al.* (1996) as "the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients", evidence-based medicine subsequently created an impetus for other fields and professions — from nursing to psychology to social work — to systematically generate and review the effectiveness of their interventions.[26] The quality of evidence became a primary focus of this enterprise, where randomised controlled trials occupied the top of the evidence hierarchy for scientific rigour. A key focus for the movement is to ensure that clinical practice keeps up with the best available evidence generated by such research. This has resulted in increasing the academic supply of rigorous studies, encouraging a healthy demand (and respect) for research by practitioners as consumers of research, and various attempts to overcome the research-

24. Example of a broad definition of research: "as any systematic process of critical investigation and evaluation, theory building, data collection, analysis and codification" (Davies *et al.*, 2010, p. 201).

25. "Research differs from other ways of knowing by being more careful and deliberative in how observations and inferences are made, by acknowledging the need for a degree of robustness and replicability, and by opening itself up to peer scrutiny and appraisal" (Davies *et al.*, 2010, p. 201).

26. The term "evidence-based" has since become an adjective used to describe all sorts of professional practice, e.g., evidence-based management, evidence-based policy, that appeal to scientific rigour to legitimise their credibility, sometimes resulting in meaningless terms such as "evidence-based research". All formal research is based on evidence.

practice gap by compiling, assessing and disseminating evidence to practitioners.[27]

Many regard healthcare as being ahead of other policy domains in setting standards of evidence on which to base clinical decisions (Nutley, 2013, p. 5). However, the application of this approach to *social* care is not so straightforward because the "evidence" there is more highly contested. The social science knowledge supporting and informing social care is characterised by multiple and often competing paradigms and a marked absence of consensus, compared to the high degree of analytic consensus in medical etiology that has generated rapid progress in medical discoveries and interventions.

There are complex reasons why research programmes in the social sciences differ so starkly from those in the natural sciences, which Collins (1994) describe as "high consensus" and "rapid discovery". I can only briefly discuss some of them here: First, *what even counts as a problem or an issue* is contentious depending on the ideology or focus of the defining stakeholders. Are single-parent, same-sex or reconstituted families dysfunctional, viable, or desirable alternatives? Choosing to define alternative family forms as problematic and therefore reasonable candidates for social intervention presumes that the traditional nuclear family form is ideal — an assertion highly dependent on cultural values and ideological positions and less so upon scientific evidence itself. The social sciences typically have critical debates and challenge assumptions on how to even frame and understand a problem.[28]

Second, *how to determine the cause of a problem is not a straightforward technical issue*. For example, is disability the result of individual traits and functional impairments or due to structural causes such as the cultural reluctance of the community and lack of infrastructure to accommodate differences? Those who take a medical model of disability select different causal factors compared to those who adopt a social model of disability (Oliver, 1996). It is therefore not that easy to separate politics and professional values from what seems to be a purely technical issue of

27. See for example, the Cochrane Collaboration (http://www.cochrane.org/) and Campbell Collaboration (http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/).

28. This is what Weiss (1980) referred to as the "enlightenment" function of research. Social science reframes the way professionals or policymakers understand the problems they are trying to resolve, and implications for how they should be addressed.

determining the cause of a social problem. Therefore, even on foundational and etiological matters such as determining the causes of a social problem, there are deep ideological divides that cannot be cleanly or analytically bracketed away.

Third, even in areas where we can achieve sufficient consensus in problem definition and causal analysis, the broad nature of many desired social outcomes means that there is likely to be *multiple pathways and multiple mechanisms* to achieve them. For example, getting youth-at-risk to be meaningfully engaged in school could appeal to mentoring, leadership courses, scare tactics, etc. When a particular intervention fails to work, we are unable to dismiss it like a drug that has failed its clinical trials. For example, if a mentoring programme fails, it may be because it is more suitable for mildly disengaged youths, not those with severe behavioural problems. Or, using "scare tactics" as a mechanism may work for those motivated by fear or consensus, but may back-fire for risk-loving youths. Therefore, social interventions are more highly context-dependent than medical interventions, and "effectiveness" cannot be clearly determined in a laboratory.[29] A curriculum that is wildly successful for intelligent kids may be a terrible failure for those who do not have the same foundations. Or, failure could be due to problems with implementation, and services might have worked if mentors had been properly trained, or if the programme had been carried out with greater fidelity to its original design. This creates the familiar dilemmas that are often raised in social care: interventions that show evidence of success may not work in a different context or client group; and also, interventions that have not worked cannot be summarily dismissed because they may just need the right conditions or some proper tweaking.

Given the complexity inherent in understanding the success of social interventions, a meaningful approach for policymakers and practitioners in the social services is to find out "what works for whom, and under what conditions".[30] As a result, the task of improving the quality of social scientific research generate better evidence, and translating such findings

29. This is especially so since social interventions are often *services*, where the quality depends on a co-production process with the user.

30. See the tradition of Realist evaluation for this nifty formulation of how to advance the theoretical underpinnings of interventions. This sophistication is preferred to more simplistic assessments of interventions that make snap or generalising judgments to dismiss or defend services based on singular dimensions or evidence.

into practice also becomes a lot more complex even if we focus on it purely as a *technical* problem.[31]

Taking a systems approach to evidence-production in the social services

While researchers of the social services need to figure out the *technical* problem of "what works for whom under what conditions", the focus in this paper is to understand and develop the *social* conditions, institutional norms and organisational structures that can help facilitate such work. Therefore, we are aspiring to the much more challenging problem of how to improve the whole ecosystem, and this begins by first understanding the organisational and professional base of such work and the industry structure it is embedded within.

Having a holistic system-wide view is challenging not just because of the multiple players, motivations and behaviours interacting with one another in complex ways. It is therefore important to consider the connections between the components of the larger research industry supporting the social services, and this includes examining the fuller set of issues related to:

- *supply* (capability, focus of the research agenda, access to data, quality of research, mode of production);
- *demand* (absorptive capacity of organisations, utilisation, application);
- *connections between supply and demand* (dissemination, intermediaries, networks, knowledge management); and
- the eventual *usability and impact* of research.

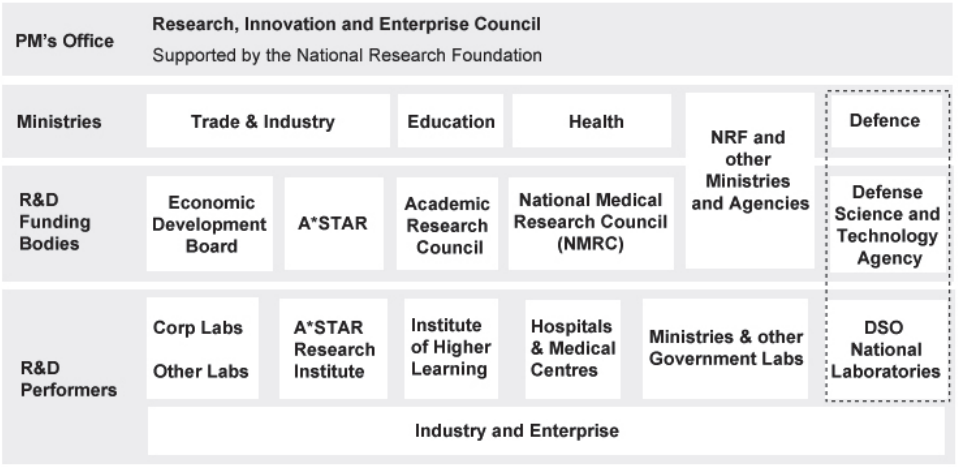
31. For example, it will not be possible to put evidence into a hierarchy of rigour where some are clearly "better" than others, which was the inclination of the earlier attempts to import evidence-base movement into social services. This uni-dimensional way to appraise what counts as good evidence in the social sciences is too narrowly-defined (Rutter *et al.*; 2010, Sempik *et al.*, 2007; Nutley, 2013), because there are many other purposes and analytic tasks that research may do, and we do not want to make a genre mistake, e.g., criticising a qualitative study for being inferior because it is not generalisable misses the point about what it is supposed to do — possibly to interpret and explicate, rather than making a generalisable causal explanation. It is akin to watching a horror movie and pronouncing it as a bad one because it did not make you laugh. These other tasks require separate means of determining their worth, and there can be better and worse forms of interpretations and explications (Lee, 2014).

It is not possible to focus on improving some narrow dimension in this larger system and expect to make systematic change. For example, even if we focus on improving the *quality* of research (a supply issue), but do not ensure the translation or implementation of findings, the usefulness of the research will be limited. Conversely, if we focus on creating more and more networks to share information but do not attend to their relevance to policymakers or implementability to practitioners, they will be of limited usefulness. Therefore, we hope to offer strategic recommendations that focus on systematic change instead of piecemeal solutions to specific problems.

CURRENT RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM: NATIONAL R&D STRATEGY DOES NOT COVER SOCIAL SERVICE

In this section, we provide a characterisation of some of the key research players and their research and other evidence-generating activities. There is a national strategic framework for generating R&D in Singapore overseen by a Research, Innovation and Enterprise Council (RIEC). The RIEC is supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF) housed under the Prime Minister's Office. (See Figure 1 on how Ministry has imagined the roles and linkages between a broad range of institutions).

Figure 1: National R&D ecosystem[32]



32. http://www.nrf.gov.sg/research/r-d-ecosystem/r-d-framework

In general, the national R&D strategy seeks to encourage research and generate innovations that can improve Singapore's competitive advantage, improve enterprise and promote economic growth. The focus is on building up the scientific and technological capabilities and the priorities identified are in the areas of biomedical sciences, interactive and digital media, and the physical sciences and engineering. (See key thrusts of RIE 2015[33]). In the areas of trade & industry, education, health and defence, there are government ministries overseeing research councils and agencies that provide not just funding but also strategic direction and policy for R&D in that domain.

R&D in certain sectors are therefore highly developed and well structured, part of the agenda of the national R&D framework and complemented by institutions that provide direction, policies and capability building in order to bring innovations to market. For example, A*STAR under the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) has 20 public research institutes that conduct R&D with an industry focus and is also involved in translating the research outcomes into innovative products and services.[34] Separate research councils within A*STAR — the Biomedical Research Council (BMPRC) and a Science and Engineering Research Council — oversee their own consortia of research agencies and centres. Through this infrastructure, A*STAR supports Singapore's key economic clusters by providing intellectual, human and industrial capital to its partners in industry. It also supports extramural research in the universities, hospitals, research centres, and with other local and international partners.[35]

Perhaps as a result of the focus on "industry-oriented R&D with economic outcomes" (nrf.gov.sg, 2015), it is the social services and social sciences that are neglected. In fact, it is particularly telling that the National Survey of R&D in Singapore conducted by A*Star does not include R&D done in the social services. Looking at the broader research ecosystem, we can see that organisations engaged in research typically have oversight and funding from some research council or its functional equivalent, and falls within the purview of a Ministry, except for social service research, which falls into a residual category of "other ministries". R&D in the social services presumably falls within the purview of the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF). However, while MSF has a research division

33.[33] http://www.nrf.gov.sg/research/r-d-ecosystem/rie-2015

34. See http://www.nrf.gov.sg/research/r-d-ecosystem/r-d-framework

35. See http://www.a-star.edu.sg/About-A-STAR.aspx

and many policy divisions generating their own research, none of them acts in the capacity of a research council to oversee research agenda or build capability for the sector. NCSS does seek to build the research capability of their VWO members, but has limited ability to mobilise other research players in the sector.

NEEDS & GAPS OF THE SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM

The following is an analysis of the needs and gaps of the research ecosystem based on the extensive experience that NCSS and IPS has in conducting and supporting research in the sector; the contributions of the panellists; and also the insights drawn from participants at SSRN. It is classified into three broad areas: 1) capability building to ensure adequate resources and skills to conduct research; 2) a strategically defined research agenda to guide evidence-production; and 3) "knowledge brokerage" to forge productive connections among diverse communities of professionals, grow a knowledge base coherently, and translate findings into practice.

Table 1: Needs and gaps in research ecosystem

	Needs	Current Gaps
CAPABILITY BUILDING	[**TOOLS**] ➢ Need for access to research tools & technical resources ➢ Need to make sense of the relevance and utility of these resources	➢ Limited access to journals for VWOs and researchers outside of academic contexts ➢ A lot of useful and free resources remain untapped because they are not well known or publicised (e.g., outcome indicator banks, evidence review databases, etc.) ➢ Plethora of tools in the marketplace, but challenge is to understand what tools are suited for what purposes
	[**TRAINING**] ➢ Need for *practitioner*s to be savvy consumers of research; and potentially as producers of	➢ Even though applied research skills can improve service delivery, existing university programmes and those from the professional body SASW are practice-centric. ➢ For continuing education, SSI has previously focused on

	knowledge ➢ Need for *researchers* to have specialist training and continual update of skills	standard introductory research courses that most social workers would have already done in university (e.g., introduction to quantitative methods; introduction to qualitative methods). These efforts are unable to create deep expertise and hands-on experience required for research. ➢ A specialist research track is now in the works based on competency framework that MSF is developing for social workers.
	[**RESEARCH PRODUCERS**] ➢ Need for a quality supply of diverse research units, organisations and pipeline of researchers that can meet demand for evidence production	➢ Mainly only larger organisations have research capability to run their own projects ➢ For those who need external help, academics are typically not incentivised to work with smaller VWOs because their projects tend to be low in social significance or publication value. ➢ Unlike US or UK where there is a vibrant proliferation of evaluation firms, design labs and policy research centres, there are few research players outside of academia who can support the demand for quality applied research projects.
	[**FUNDING**] ➢ Need for consistent source of funding that allows for independence and impartiality of research findings	➢ Over-reliance on the government to fund research & innovation. VCF is currently focused on productivity improvements and effectively no longer funds the kind of applied research that VWOs do. ➢ Private foundations and corporations do offer alternative sources of funding to create healthy diversity that gives researchers more options, but these are also not consistently

		available. ➢ Furthermore, researchers may be constrained by sponsor interests, especially evaluation studies that excavate evidence that is perceived to be "incriminating" to competency of the sponsor. There is no consistent source of funding that allows for independence and impartiality of research findings.
STRATEGIC RESEARCH AGENDA (To guide evidence production)	[**R&D FOR SERVICES**] ➢ Need for more R&D projects to improve service delivery	➢ Systematic neglect of solutioning or design forms of research because it is not well understood
	[**STRATEGIC PLANNNG**] ➢ Need for more macro level research to inform strategic planning and investments across the sector	➢ Lack commanding oversight of key needs and challenges faced, and to rigorously prioritise gaps that the sector should attend to. ➢ Lack of a coherent and rational sector-wide or national investment strategy or masterplan that encompasses all subsectors. Domain-centric departmentalisation in government agencies create entrenched interests that makes it harder to have a meaningful sector-wide strategy ➢ Unable to coherently demonstrate impact across diverse portfolio of services and how they add up
	[**TAKE STOCK OF ASSETS**] -Need for comprehensive overview of various asset classes in the	➢ No overview of the state of the social service sector. Most research focused on needs and social problems, but not on the "assets"—VWOs, social enterprises, NGOs, community groups, etc., that operate in the

	sector	sector. ➢ There is no specialised research centre to house this research agenda and no existing incentives for regulatory agencies to do so.
KNOWLEDGE BROKERAGE	[**SHARING**] ➢ Need for easier sharing & dissemination of interests and findings ➢ Need for knowledge exchange and engagement ➢ Need for more access to analysable data from government agencies and NGOs	➢ While there is a proliferation of networks, understanding the research interests and on-going projects of various agencies remains ad hoc amongst the researcher units. Often, a meeting is convened between two research units to communicate projects and objectives, but due to the dynamic changes in such work, updates to changing interests and projects are not well shared. The existing dialogue between organisations is therefore inefficient and often not timely enough. ➢ Government and NGOs often grant access to reports, but not to analysable data. This can restrict the ability to produce more varied and sophisticated analyses. ➢ Government agencies are overly careful with data and do not tap into the larger community of researchers to help in analysis of complex and big data-sets even though the community is ready and willing.
	[**TRANSLATION & SCALING**] ➢ Need for translation, scaling and disseminating innovations to the larger	➢ VWOs lack the ability to innovate, much less scale and bring the innovations to market. ➢ There is a strong supporting infrastructure for market innovations — such as various university-based enterprise offices and incubators — but not

	sector	enough infrastructure to support social service innovations. The newly formed VWO Development Team in NCSS seeks to provide some support in this area.
	[**KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**] ➢ Need for a coherent accumulation of sector information	➢ Existing information is fragmented and owned by many separate agencies and researchers and not organised in such a way as to facilitate ease of understanding or oversight; and does not allow "contributability" so as to facilitate the coherent accumulation of knowledge. ➢ -The knowledge base therefore does not grow coherently and intentionally through the collective efforts of the research community.
	[**PARTNERSHIPS**] ➢ Need to forge productive connections and collaborations among diverse communities of professionals and those with specialist expertise who can bring new solutions to the sector	➢ Lack of connection between those who have the problems (VWOs, clients) with those who are good at solutions (researchers, innovators). We have also not tapped into communities such as arts community, game designers, etc.) ➢ While many such efforts exist, there is no overall alignment of these efforts, and partnerships and collaborations may often piecemeal instead of productive

Here, we provide a synopsis of the areas of needs and gaps identified above:

Capability building

In terms of the general area of capability building, it is clear that we need tools, but also the skills to use those tools. Therefore, training is fundamental to create better consumers who can absorb research, as well

as producers who can generate more evidence to improve practice. We can establish a broader range of research organisations and pipeline of researchers to meet the knowledge needs of the sector at large. However, researchers without funds are unable to produce quality research, and we should consider more diverse sources beyond government support. Foundations and private philanthropy can be engaged to fund applied research projects that can inform their broader investment strategies.

As a whole, the sector has uneven capacity to produce and absorb research. VWOs are typically ill-equipped to produce much research, and very few have specialist research teams or staff. At best, some of them have professionals who are interested in research, and take it on as a kind of peripheral project, but their main priority is still running programmes or clinical practice. Only bigger organisations like government ministries, NCSS and larger VWOs or NPOs have the ability to hire specialist researchers or form research units to complement the other evidence-production work done in departments organised by domains. However, academics are not always interested in partnership when it is a small clientele, or to evaluate a small programme. While they are interested in working with ministries — when national level data exists — sometimes the inability to publish creates a disincentive for academics in research universities. Even where academics are interested to collaborate, organisations may have to spend an extensive time explaining their service or sector to academics that may not be familiar with it. Therefore, external research expertise is not always readily available to support service providers and government agencies.

There is lack of clarity in terms of the kinds of capability building roles that MSF and NCSS should be playing, i.e., whether NCSS or MSF should care, and if so, *how much* should they care about building research capability of VWOs, and of social workers, given the other pressing priorities? As a membership organisation and council, NCSS is interested in capability building of VWOs, but has too many other areas to take care off — manpower, premises, funding, etc. —to focus on research capability specifically. Their Advocacy and Research Team is still new and will be focused on conducting research rather than building research capability of the sector. Therefore, there is a lack of an overall capability building strategy for the sector at large, with no agency capable or interested in coordinating this.

Strategic research agenda

We reiterate the analyses in Chapter 2 on the misplaced and often diffuse research agenda of the sector at large. First, there is a tendency to neglect “solutioning” forms of research because understanding needs and

programme evaluation are more familiar and self-evident to VWOs, NCSS and government ministries. We have focused on whether our existing solutions work much more than how to come up with good solutions so that we can try whether they work. In other fields like medicine, there is a research-practice divide whereby practice does not keep up to pace with the current best evidence. In the Singapore social services, we do not even have a sense of what the good solutions are. Therefore, we should adapt from overseas, but also innovate vigorously.

Second, we do not have a strong, commanding overview of the sector needs and overall strategy to address them. Sector-wide research to understand landscape of needs, develop sector-wide solutions and measure social impact is an important area of growth where different agencies are starting to attempt, largely due to greater accountability pressures from funders and government to demonstrate impact at the community or social level beyond merely client outcomes.

Lastly, there is insufficient understanding of the various “asset classes” of the sector. Without a sense of the value, worth and unique skills from different types of organisations, we will be impoverished by always going back to the “usual suspects” to address social service problems.

Knowledge brokerage

Sharing of information, interests, and projects is easy. Timely and effective communication is difficult. Finding out what each research unit does still depends on ad hoc meetings with different agencies, and such sharing is not yet a routine part of the work of the key research units. As Dr Chu Chi Meng mentioned during SSRN, even sharing of information across government agencies is not always easy.

While dissemination of information or research findings can be improved, what is really missing is translation. Decision-makers may not fully understand the implications or significance of findings in order to fully utilise or apply them. Dr Wu Longkai asserts the translation and scaling of innovations is a difficult process; even when you have a solution, the path to scaling it is tough.

Currently, knowledge of the sector does not accumulate in a coherent fashion. A student or researcher interested in any domain typically has to start virtually from scratch to piece together a sense of the landscape, compiling even basic information such as the agencies and services that exist, determine what the needs and gaps of the sector are. This is because there is no definitive state of the art in each domain area that is accessible and already indicates what information exists, how to get them,

and what information and knowledge gaps are worth exploring. Part of the reason is because landscape and overviews are held by academics, or individual agencies, and are not publicly accessible. However, this is not a problem with sharing and access because sharing itself can be improved. The problem is creating an infrastructure that allows the knowledge base to be *contributable* to.

As a whole, while there is some coordination across government agencies, there is much less collaboration or co-production of research. Agencies mainly find their own resources, work on their own research agenda, and hire their own consultants or researchers, and answer to their own board or stakeholders. There is no clear consensus on how best to integrate all these diverse players and efforts so that research efforts can be aligned, or at least coordinated.

RESEARCH ROADMAP & STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Direction and role of research: applied and practical

We suggest that the research in the social service sector should be predominantly applied and practical, so as to produce evidence that can generate responsive, innovative and effective solutions. Here, “solutions” are taken to be much broader than just the services that VWOs are typically comfortable with, and can be in the form of technology, social innovations, advocacy and policy changes. This is not to say that there is no role for “basic” research, but that those forms of research are better housed in academia, where studies on the deep structural causes of social problems are best studied by academics.

Having a practical focus also ensures a clearer connection between research and the means of addressing social problems. However, the focus of research and its supporting institutional infrastructures also cannot be narrowly practical, such that the focus on a specific dimension detracts from a more holistic understanding of the needs of the sector at large. For example, if designated government funds focuses on supporting only research projects that can demonstrate productivity gains, then many other useful forms of research — those that seek to better understand needs, those that take risks in devising innovative solutions — will be forgone.

Research Council or functional equivalent

It is timely to consider the role of a research council or its functional equivalent that can provide strategic oversight of the research agenda of the sector, while at the same time focus on building research capability by engaging, funding and coordinating a network of research producers to fulfil the collectively defined research agenda. The council can also broker

relationships with different partners, support the translation and scaling of solutions, and manage the knowledge base of the sector so that it grows coherently through the collective efforts of different research players.

The core functions of the council can be classified into three broad areas: a) capability building, b) research agenda and c) knowledge brokerage (see below). Capability building of a whole network of research players will create resources and expertise able to conduct research for the sector. This will be able to support the research agenda that is relevant and responsive to sector needs, so that rigorous knowledge and proper oversight of the sector can be achieved. Once research is done and evidence generated, the findings should be shared and translated to practice, and inform policy. However, beyond translating findings to practice, it is also crucial to engage a broad community of partners in and beyond the sector, so that new expertise and solutions can be brought to address social issues. The knowledge base should also be managed such that it accumulates coherently so that the community of partners can share the knowledge, but also are enabled to contribute to it. Therefore, to capture these functions, we use the concept of "brokerage".

Table 2: Functions of a social service research council

Produce High Quality Research that can Generate Responsive, Innovative & Effective Solutions								
Create a Conducive Ecosystem for Research			Create Knowledge & Develop Oversight			Share, Adopt Findings & Implement Solutions		
Capability Building			Research Agenda			Knowledge Brokerage		
Tools	Training	Funding	R&D for Service Delivery	Sector-wide	Assets	Sharing & Networking	Translation/ Advocacy	Engagement & Knowledge Management

Capability building

At a basic level of creating access to tools and research resources, the council can oversee the development of guides and resource directories to improve research skills of practitioners. For more sustained training, more

specialised courses or "master classes'" on key areas such as needs assessments, programme planning, and evaluation research can be developed.[36] This is because generic research training has already been conducted as part of the professional training of many VWO practitioners, and there is no point repeating introductory courses as part of adult education. To create learning opportunities for time scarce practitioners, modular and bite-sized e-learning platforms for basic research skills can also reduce the need for formal or classroom learning. Communities of practice and interest groups can be established to sustain those who already have basic expertise.

Furthermore, the council can oversee longer-terms plans such as creating research fellowships, graduate student awards and training to groom and cultivate a pipeline of researchers. Research mentorships can be established between VWO practitioners and academics in Institutes of Higher Learning. While social work as a discipline is a natural partner of the social services, with the National University of Singapore and SIM University producing new generations of social work researchers, there is potential to reach out to other disciplines and schools who have skill sets that are relevant to the sector. The Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) has expertise in design that can be fruitfully applied to services. The Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP) faculty and students already work with many VWOs on policy assessment exercises. Yale-NUS undergraduates also conducted public opinion surveys on various vulnerable groups for NCSS as part of their coursework on quantitative analysis. There is also likely to be an army of sociology students from the various universities with a heart for the social services.

One possibility for creating research-capable professionals is to incorporate research as a key part of professional training. While some professions like clinical psychology in the United States have gone the route of developing "researcher-practitioners", this may not be feasible for the professions here just yet. While aspirational, the whole educational infrastructure and curriculum has to shift, and the profession as a whole has to agree that such an investment is worthwhile. Some professionals may care to work with clients and not care to do policy or research work. This is why there are PsyD programme in the US, as a compromise for psychologists in doctorate programmes who want to focus on practice.

36. These have been variously covered in more general programme planning courses but can be expanded to create deeper expertise.

To secure the future of capability building initiatives, which can take many years to bear fruit, diverse funding streams should be mobilised. Instead of the sole reliance on government funding, private philanthropy or the corporate sector can contribute in many significant ways. They can be encouraged to setting up professorships in social service research or support institutionalised research programmes instead of just specific research projects.

Seed funding can also be sought to develop research units or set up research programmes in existing institutions. Over time, these research labs may become self-sustaining. The behavioural economics “nudge-unit” in the UK is currently cost recovery and now independent from the government. There is a role for more evaluation firms and design labs to create a more vibrant ecosystem of diverse skills to provide a ready pool of expertise to meet demand. The setting up of new research centres such as the Social Service Research Centre (SSR) has contributed to a more vibrant field but the market can accommodate a lot more players.

Strategic research agenda

In general, the research agenda needs to be relevant and responsive, to evolve with the sector needs, and to level up as the sector becomes more equipped. (See Chapter 2 for a more detailed recommendation on the shape and direction of the research agenda).

The council should extend the frontier of knowledge in priority areas as the sector and its research units “catch up”. For example, where programme evaluation is competently exercised, seek to calculate social returns on investment and evaluate the impact of a portfolio of services on the community. Where needs assessments are done by individual agencies, seek open collaboration to grow the knowledge base. Where strong organisations already run good programmes, try out collective impact projects that attack wicked problems that need to collaboration of multiple agencies. Opportunity areas such as those in asset based community development, gamification, behavioural economics, etc., should be identified and encouraged. Where useful, an organisational base — a research programme or research centre —can be established for those approaches.

Knowledge brokerage

In the simplest function of sharing research findings and the evidence-base, small existing networks can evolve to larger conferences and symposiums with a broader regional reach. In terms of online presence, existing research websites can evolve from one-way to two-way timely communication between the community of researchers (Web 2.0). Such

technologies can even help in creating a better skill profile of researchers so that instead of linear "searches" for one another, they may "discover" one another like how one discovers similar artists on popular music streaming services.

Sharing of information proliferates in the various platforms and networks that are organised annually, but what is important is a way for knowledge to accumulate year on year, coherently, following an overall strategic plan and priorities, and an ability to make relevant information accessible to decision-makers as and when they need it, because they are likely to be overwhelmed by information. Besides capability building, the research council can play the important role of managing the coherent accumulation of knowledge so that it can be shared, but also *contributable* to.[37]

Given the practical and applied focus on social service research, the Council can and should measure research impact in different ways so as to encourage the right behaviour. For example, measuring *utilisation*, instead of publication will change the whole way research is conceptualised and performed. For one, it will force researchers to engage more closely with their stakeholders to ensure relevance, write with less technical jargon, and draw out the implications of findings more thoughtfully.

While sharing is easy, brokering relationships is tough. Intermediaries can help draw out implications of research and facilitate policy forums where implementable findings are not just discussed but seen through. Brokering between existing and alternative players will create a more vibrant ecosystem. The research councils can focus on funding priority research areas, growing academic research centres and grooming young scholars while encouraging the flourishing of private research players in the larger marketplace. There are many design labs, evaluation firms and specialised research centres in the UK and US which offer much needed research expertise and service to the non-profit sector. A more concerted effort to draw upon strengths of multiple research players and partners will bring value to the social services.

DISCUSSION

We have made both specific and strategic recommendations. Given that strategy is about making tough decisions on what trade-offs are

37. An analogy on the principle would be what is behind wikispaces, where expert users both access but also add on to the knowledge, which gets refined and updated constantly.

acceptable, there are many areas left to consider more carefully for a vibrant ecosystem to take off. For example, what are the trade-offs of such a council being government or independent of government? What are the conditions for success? What needs to be in place for it to be able to successfully mobilise other research players? If not a council, can its functional equivalents be located in MSF, NCSS, or an NGO?

A research council can provide much needed strategic oversight and central planning, but can also create another level of bureaucracy. An NGO that takes on such a role will be able to create a more network model of collaborative governance, but will unlikely have the muscle that state apparatus can muster. In Singapore, because the research players are fewer and not well developed, network models may not work as well as a more centralised model of governance for the research ecosystem. Changes should therefore be made based on a careful consideration of their feasibility in our local circumstances — the structure of our research landscape, the relationship between government and service providers, and the capabilities and resources available to social service agencies and the professionals they hire, amongst many other factors. Therefore, we have to take reference but critically appraise international practices for their relevance in the local context.

So, *who* should do *what*? The respective roles that different parties play in research should draw upon their strengths, mandate and resources available to them. VWOs are service providers and should therefore focus on R&D work that can improve service delivery. Advocacy groups, research centres and think tanks rightly focus on a specific social problem, issue or client type in order to understand the needs, service or policy gaps. Academics can afford to go slightly deeper than these research centres in basic research that identifies the causes of those issues. To the extent that NCSS seeks to improve services or advocate for certain causes, they are rightly placed to conduct or support applied research. However, as a VWO membership organisation, they can focus on understanding the profile, characteristics and developments their VWOs are going through. Alternatively, this can be helmed by an independent research institute like IPS, where more impartial analyses of the “state of the social service sector” can be produced annually. While MSF has focused on national level service planning, they are better equipped to focus on sector-wide strategic planning using administrative data from a wide diversity of services that only they have access to.

The soon-to-be set up Social Science Research Council, if it does not focus specifically on social service research within its purview, may not be able to galvanise the whole sector. Perhaps a more specific and subsidiary

Social *Service* Research Council may need to be established to take on these roles in our local context.

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Annex A: Research players and the types of research

Research Actors	Types/Area of Research	Other Functions & Roles
1. Research, Innovation and Enterprise Council (REIC) /National Research Foundation (NRF)		Strategic Direction for R&D Capability Building
2. Government Ministries & Statutory Bodies **MSF** ➢ Strategic Planning, Research and Development Division (SPRD) ➢ Policy Divisions (covers family, elderly, disability, youth at risk, ex-offenders, problem gambling, low-income)	**Masterplans & National Committee Reports** (e.g., on ageing, family, disability) **National Surveys** ➢ Senior citizens ➢ Informal caregiving ➢ Attitudes on family ➢ Gambling perceptions and participation ➢ Work-life harmony ➢ Low-income **R&D for programme type**, e.g., SACs, FSCs	**Funding**—VCF (VWO Capability Development Fund) **Resources**—Research Room (online resource) **Networks**—Family Research Network (with IPS)
NCSS ➢ Advocacy and Research Team ➢ Service Planning Teams (Elderly; Mental Health; Disability; Children, Youth & Family)	➢ **Sector-wide** issues for planning & advocacy ➢ **R&D for programmes & programme types**: needs assessments, programme design, programme evaluation (e.g., EIPIC, SPMF)	**Training**—SSI training courses **Resources**—Research Gateway (online portal); subscribes to journal database accessible to VWOs **Networks**-Social Service Research Network (coordinated jointly with IPS from

		2014)
SGEnable **MCCY** ➢ Charities Unit and Commissioner of Charities (charities & non-profits) ➢ NYC (youth) **Civil Service College (CSC)** ➢ Institute of Governance and Policy (IGP Social) **MHA** ➢ Singapore Prisons ➢ Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE) **MOH** ➢ Ageing Planning Office (APO) **MOE** (on special schools)	➢ Statistics on disability & social inclusion of persons with disability ➢ Statistics on charities & governance ➢ Statistics on youth in general (not youth-at-risk) ➢ Research on social policy issues ➢ Statistics on offenders ➢ Statistics on seniors ➢ Statistics on students with special needs (with NCSS)	**Training**—for Civil Servants
3. NGOs & Philanthropic Foundations For example ➢ Lien ➢ Tsao ➢ NVPC	**Issue or cause-based research** ➢ End of life, preschool education (Lien); ➢ Ageing (Tsao); ➢ Volunteerism and philanthropy (NVPC)	Support for postgraduate training
4. VWOs	**R&D for programmes**: Needs assessments,	

	programme design, programme evaluation Research for advocacy	
5. Professional Associations ➢ Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) ➢ Singapore Psychological Society ➢ Singapore Association for Counselling ➢ Singapore Association of Occupational Therapists, etc.		Research Capability Building ➢ SASW has training academy but courses are casework or counselling related and not research
6. Academic Research Centres & Think Tanks ➢ Centre for Social Development Asia, or CSDA (NUS Dept. of Social Work) ➢ Social Service Research Centre (NUS Dept. of Social Work) ➢ Institute of Policy Studies (LKYSPP) ➢ Opportunity Lab, or O-lab (SUTD) ➢ Lien Centre for Social Innovation, or LCSI (SMU)	➢ Asset building, accountability & governance (CSDA) ➢ R&D, evaluation (SSR) ➢ Sector-wide research (IPS) ➢ Design research (O-Lab) ➢ Social Innovation (LCSI)	
7. Private Sector ➢ market research companies ➢ consulting firms		

ACRONYMS

ART	Advocacy and Research Team
BMPRC	Biomedical Research Council
COC	Commissioner of Charities
CSDA	Centre for Social Development Asia
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EAT	Early Adopter teacher
EIPIC	Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children
FSC	Family Service Centre
ILC	International Longevity Centre
IBSL	Inquiry-Based Seamless Learning
IPS	Institute of Policy Studies
IRO	Innovation and Research Office
KKH	KK Women's and Children's Hospital
LCPC	Lien Centre for Palliative Care
LKYSPP	Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy
MCCY	Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
MSF	Ministry of Social and Family Development
MTI	Ministry of Trade & Industry
NRF	National Research Foundation
NCSS	National Council of Social Service
NVPC	National Volunteer and Philanthropic Centre
PLC	professional learning community
RPG	Rehabilitation and Protection Group
SAC	Senior Activities Centre
SPMF	School Pocket Money Fund
SSO	Social Service Office
SSR	Social Service Research Centre
SSRN	Social Service Research Network
ST	Seeded Teacher
SUTD	Singapore University of Technology and Design
SPRD	Strategic Planning, Research and Development Division
TSRC	Third Sector Research Centre
VCF	VWO-Capability Development Fund
VWO	Voluntary Welfare Organisation

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