

Surveying the pulse of society



By *Dr Leong Chan-Hoong*

The Social Lab is an independent centre for social indicators research. Using the most robust standards in survey methodology and statistical analyses, the centre conducts research on social perceptions and attitudes in Singapore. The newest research cluster in the IPS network, the Social Lab seeks to understand society through survey-based research.

Helmed by Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser from the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore and me, the Social Lab aims to support informed decision-making and policy formulation through social science research based on sense-making.

The changing social landscape of Singapore has highlighted the need for reliable data and high-quality analysis to track and evaluate shifts in demographic trends and adaptive processes. Insights gained through objective social science research enhance our understanding of societal attitudes and social resilience. This in turn advances our knowledge of emerging socio-economic challenges confronting Singapore, and helps make sense of the evolving population discourse in a new multi-cultural milieu.

The Social Lab's flagship project is a panel study on social dynamics. Researchers at the centre will conduct a longitudinal study of a panel of 5,000 households – comprising 10,000 individuals – representative of the Singapore population.



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Richard Foo TH

The study will track changes in the lives of the same people over time. The purpose is to measure family dynamics, societal values and attitudes relevant to national identity and social mobility over a period of at least 10 years. The panel study will be the first in Singapore to be conducted by an independent research team.

The centre collects and analyses panel data to complement the collection of cross-sectional and other longitudinal time-series data. The aim is to build an independent survey research unit with the expertise, experience, technology and hardware to facilitate the collection and management of data.

In addition to the panel study, the centre may be engaged to do consulting work on behalf of government ministries and agencies. This will enable policymakers to carry out high-impact, cross-sectional studies, including opinion polls conducted in the wake of significant policy announcements.

Among its completed projects is a study on the education, career and work aspirations of Singaporeans, aimed at understanding the texture of the Singapore workforce in the year 2030. The Social Lab's researchers also participated in a study conducted in conjunction with the Our Singapore Conversation Secretariat, which surveyed 4,000 Singaporeans on social values and attitudes. In addition, the centre contributed to a study on the relevance of National Service in nation building.

The Social Lab is committed to serving the public interest as a national resource centre for longitudinal data. Policymakers can also tap on the Social Lab to broaden their research capability. The centre is situated within a university environment to benefit from interdisciplinary interaction with members of the academic community. It is advised by consultants with expertise in fields such as sociology, psychology, statistics and research methodology.

In summary, the Social Lab seeks to contribute to policy-oriented sense-making; build sense-making capabilities as a trusted professional partner; and ensure academic rigour, reliability and consistency in the survey methodology.