

Case Studies

Building Communities in Singapore

Edited by June Gwee



ISBN: 978-981-09-5818-3 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-981-09-5819-0 (ebk)

©2015 Civil Service College, Singapore

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, modified, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission from the Civil Service College, Singapore.

For feedback or comments, please email cscollege_publishing@cscollege.gov.sg

Civil Service College

31 North Buona Vista Road, Singapore 275983

www.cscollege.gov.sg

About the Civil Service College

The Civil Service College, Singapore is a statutory board under the Public Service Division with a mission to develop people for a first-class Public Service. As the public sector's core institution for training, learning, research and staff development, the College builds strategic capacity in governance, leadership, public administration and management for a networked government in Singapore.

National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Case studies: building communities in Singapore / edited by June Gwee. – Singapore: Civil Service College, [2015]

pages cm

Includes index.

ISBN : 978-981-09-5818-3 (paperback)

1. Public administration – Singapore – Citizen participation – Case studies.
 2. Human services – Singapore – Citizen participation – Case studies.
 3. Human services – Singapore – Management – Case studies.
- I. Gwee, June, editor. II. Civil Service College, Singapore, publisher.

JQ1063

351.5957 -- dc23 OCN919070204



Introduction

June GWEE

The business of government is changing. Over the past decade, contemporary theories of public governance are giving greater emphasis to citizen-centred solutioning. Public governance is no longer about what governments can do to achieve objectives that they set for themselves. Instead, the role of government is becoming more of a convener which brings together the community to harness community resources to deliver common goals established through consensus.

Such an evolution in the role of government is described in the research findings of Jocelyne Bourgon's "The New Synthesis Project", which developed a framework and tool to help public officers address the challenges of public administration in the 21st century. The New Synthesis Project holds that a key difference in the role of government in the 21st century is to serve people in a different way—to enable citizens to be the co-creators of public value.¹ Beyond co-creation, public agencies, by exploring the potential of co-production arrangements—which refers to the shared and reciprocal activities of public agencies and people to deliver public value—can increase the range of options open to government.² Instead of owning the problem and relying on the public sector alone to design and deliver solutions, governments can reframe problems in the wider context of desired system-wide and societal outcomes. This will lead naturally to partnership with the community, thereby leveraging the insights and resources outside of government.

The new model of citizen-centric governance lends itself to building communities that take ownership of certain aspects of public services. Such a sense of ownership helps develop individuals who care for their community and create social resilience as communities develop a culture of learning and adapting to challenges that arise along the way.

Singapore's Public Service has gradually evolved towards a citizen-centric model of governance where citizens are actively co-creating and delivering public goods and services. Some public agencies are also experimenting with human-centred design solutions.

In August 2012, the Public Service Division spearheaded the Public Sector Transformation (PST) push. At its core, the PST exercise was a shift from a transactional mode of governance to a more relational one. Peter Ong, Head of Singapore's Civil Service, explained that PST meant:

Our people trust that we are competent, that we have integrity, that we understand and empathise with them, and that we are acting not in our self-interest, but in the interests of Singapore and Singaporeans.³

To achieve the aim of "One Trusted Public Service with Citizens at the Centre", PST urged public officers to be empathetic to citizens' concerns and work towards meaningful engagement such as jointly developing solutions for problems.

The aim of PST was to bring public agencies to a new level of public service delivery—to deliver services efficiently and with empathy for the well-being of citizens. It hoped for public officers and their agencies to achieve a service-wide change that is coherent, concerted, sustainable and significant. Within the 10 action areas that were identified to spark shifts in mindsets, behaviours, systems and processes, some of the PST priorities were: Improving Staff Engagement, Preventing Fraudulent Behaviour and Misconduct, Strengthening Service Capabilities, Improving Government Communications, Joint-solutioning for Better Outcomes, and Engaging the Public.

In September 2012, the Government launched the major outreach initiative "Our Singapore Conversation" (OSC)—a national conversation among Singaporeans—to engage Singaporeans on their desired future for their country. Over a span of eight months, from October 2012

to June 2013, 47,000 Singaporeans participated in more than 600 dialogue sessions. At the end of the conversations, the OSC committee discovered that the five core national aspirations of Singaporeans were: Opportunities, Purpose, Assurance, Spirit and Trust. The OSC was a first national-level engagement by the Singapore Government, using different formats to reach out to a wide cross-section of society. Analysts and observers noted that OSC was uncharted territory in the context of Singapore's public governance in two ways:

One, that the OSC concept is driven by the still-developing idea of "co-creation": a partnership between those who govern and those who are governed. Public policy created through the participatory foresight praxis becomes very much a collective enterprise, and less the elite-driven phenomenon it typically is. Two, insofar as it is a dialogue, an often messy and dynamic process of articulations, negotiations, compromises, persuasions and concessions, it suggests that OSC may be valued more as a process, rather than the outcomes that it generates.⁴

Building communities through citizen-centric governance is about delivering public goods and services that emphasise citizen well-being, sustainability and meaningful living. This can take various forms.

In this book, we present readers with case studies that highlight two forms of citizen-centric governance. In its most basic form, citizen-centric governance in Singapore is about how public agencies design solutions to improve the quality of life for individuals and society by listening, observing and being empathetic to the needs of people. Through sense-making and a deep-seated belief that people and the community must be the beneficiaries, public agencies then develop solutions to meet their needs and improve society as a whole. In another form, citizen-centric governance means sharing the ownership and delivery of public goods and services with citizens themselves. Reminiscent of *kampong spirit*, it is an avenue for citizens to lead, manage and work together with others to collectively create public value, with the added benefit that social

resilience can potentially develop. For both forms of citizen-centricity to work, public officers would have to change mindsets, inspire innovation and motivate people to participate in a cause larger than themselves.

While inviting citizens to solve problems with the government creates ownership in individuals, communities and society, this experimentation carries uncertainty initially because it changes the perceived roles of government and citizen. Should public governance become a form of collective governance where public value is created by citizens themselves? If citizens are part and parcel of policy development, how does that change the responsibility of the government in terms of policy outcomes? Even as citizens play a larger role in policy development, their involvement requires both citizens and government to have mutual trust, common vision for maximising public value and immense patience to continually dialogue about issues. If this is the future of governance, under what conditions does this work? How sustainable is co-creation and what are the opportunity costs?

Navigating this Book

The four case studies in this book help readers think about these questions and invite them to form their own views about the future of Singapore's governance. Unlike the first Civil Service College publication of case studies on building institutions, which explored the development of large institutions through strong leadership, robust systems, and progressive culture, this second book focuses on the innovations of people in the areas of ideas, process, and relationship building, in order to build communities.

These case studies reveal different facets of community building. For public agencies, it requires a change in the organisation's strategy, operations and service delivery; for public officers, it is about having empathy for people and being passionate towards creating a better society; and for individuals in the community, it gives them an opportunity to participate in meaningful projects that benefit themselves and their community.

A common thread found in these case studies is that in order to succeed in challenging boundaries, we first need to change people's mindset. One of the ways to do this is through relationships—to develop a relationship with the people who would feel the impact of public policies. Getting to know the people involved changes how public agencies understand issues and close the gap between government and citizens. The case studies featured were chosen because each represents specific challenges that are pertinent to that sector. They also illustrate how communities are built and what it means to be people-centric in terms of designing solutions, changing social norms, creating systems and developing a culture to sustain citizen participation.

The Singapore Prison Service (SPS) solved the problem of an overcrowded prison and shortage of prison officers by believing in the humanity of society. In *Towards a Society without Re-offending* (see **Chapter 1**, page 11), SPS was convinced that ex-offenders could be effectively rehabilitated and integrated into society. To do this, SPS needed prison officers, the inmates, the inmates' community and society as a whole to believe that ex-offenders should be given a second chance in life. The "Yellow Ribbon Project" was one of the programmes started to create awareness, generate acceptance and inspire community action towards the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-offenders into the community. This case study traces key milestones of this initiative to show the vision and bold experiments of SPS and its partners. It highlights the intuition and commitment of public officers and public agencies to create sustainable behavioural change in society, as well as the challenges that they faced and how they overcame those challenges. This is a story about how passionate individuals changed the perception of the community.

Ageing-in-Place: A Community-Centric Health-Social Programme (see **Chapter 2**, page 39) describes how the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, a public hospital with one of the highest bed occupancy rates, came up with innovative ideas to curb bed demand, especially by repeat patients. Using analytics and hotspotting methods, the hospital started to look

into the needs of elderly repeat patients to help them manage their health in their homes. By visiting the homes of elderly repeat patients and listening to their needs, the hospital managed to reframe the problem. A multi-disciplinary team comprising administrators and healthcare workers came up with a solution that redefined the role of nurses and pushed the boundaries of the primary healthcare ecosystem. Although the hospital started off with an operational challenge, it found a solution that looked beyond technical solutions to tackle the problem upstream and in the process, delivered healthcare that better addressed the needs of patients. This case study reveals how innovation by the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital benefited the community it served.

Beyond just solving problems with people in mind, public agencies are also experimenting with opportunities to cultivate active citizenry and have citizens own some parts of the public space. *Creating Space for Community Ownership* (see **Chapter 3**, page 57) describes the Community in Bloom (CIB) programme, an initiative of the National Parks Board (NParks) to promote civic ownership by getting citizens to participate in community gardening. Through trial and error, NParks learnt that to grow and sustain a gardening culture requires both the tangibles and intangibles—money and manpower—as well as skills to engage individuals, organisations and communities. After 10 years, there are now over 700 CIB gardens throughout Singapore. Hailed as a success in nurturing citizen participation in greening their neighbourhoods, managing the CIB programme remains a process of continuous learning for NParks. This case study describes the rationale of the programme and the systems and processes set up, highlights the challenges of generating interest, and presents the lessons learnt from working with different stakeholders to implement and sustain the programme.

In *A Library by the People, for the People* (see **Chapter 4**, page 79), the National Library Board (NLB) was pleasantly surprised by the eagerness of organisations, institutions and individuals to develop and run a public library. After 20 years of designing new library experiences for Singaporeans, NLB had been gradually relinquishing control over the

development and management of public libraries and taking on the role of a facilitator. This case study describes how NLB enlarged the space in which it operated and allowed the community—a business partner, a non-governmental organisation, cultural experts and volunteers—to lead, initiate, develop and manage *library@chinatown* for the community.

Case Studies for Learning

At the Civil Service College, we continue to use case studies as a tool for classroom teaching and learning. The case study—a self-contained description of a specific situation or issue, with conflicts and decisions—is written with the purpose of engaging learners by situating them in real events with real dilemmas. Case studies exist in multiple forms. Stoyko (2006) classified case studies into four main categories according to methodology and practice: traditional method, business school method, learning history method and best practice method.⁵ Gill (2011), on the other hand, classified them according to their learning objectives: decision-making (for making a decision), knowledge (conveys knowledge to reader), showcase (illustrate and exemplary handling of a problem or situation), fable (ties a series to actions to a particular observed consequence), and mixed (a combination of abovementioned types).⁶

Public sector case studies are complex and dynamic. They exist within the forms outlined by Stoyko and Gill, ranging from a simple decision-making story to a multi-layer narrative of how the government develops, communicates and implements policies, to the complex development of institutions, communities and national culture. In order to capture the implicit knowledge and rationales of governments, as well as to understand their behaviour and actions, the narrative form, which is typical of case studies, is a powerful method to present perspectives and insights of the key players in government, political office, and the public sector in general.

For the benefit of case writers who are new to the method or who are experimenting on the form, the case studies in this book were composed with brevity in mind, adjusted to suit changes in reader patterns.

Ranging from 10 to 28 pages, their purpose is to tell clear and concise, yet engaging stories.

Finally, I would like to thank the authors who listened to the stories told by individuals and organisations, then skilfully weaved the data and insights into engaging case studies for others to learn from. I would also like to acknowledge that the idea of this second book of case studies came from Premarani Somasundram, who believed that these case studies would be an effective way to support the Public Sector Transformation initiative. She read the manuscript of this book and provided useful feedback.

As Singapore celebrates its 50th year of independence this year, we hope that these case studies will bring insights and inspire those who are trying to bring about change in their lives, their work, their organisations, and their community.

Notes

- 1 Jocelyne Bourgon, *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 25.
- 2 Ibid., 114.
- 3 Peter Ong, "Head Civil Service's Opening Remarks for the Change Leaders Workshop" (opening remarks, Singapore, October 14, 2013).
- 4 Adrian W. J. Kuah and Lim Seok Hui, "After Our Singapore Conversation: The Futures of Governance", *Ethos*, Issue 13, June 2014, 19.
- 5 Peter Stoyko, "Case Study Methodology: An Overview of the State of the Field" (powerpoint presentation, Canada School of Public Service, version March 6, 2009).
- 6 T. Grandon Gill, *Informing with the Case Method: A Guide to Case Method Research, Writing and Facilitation* (Informing Science Press: 2011).