

## Governance & Management of VWOs: Conflict of Interest and Disclosure Issues



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Recent revelations about the affairs of VWOs in Singapore have raised concerns about their governance and management. Whatever the legal structure of VWOs, they can all be viewed as a trust, whereby money is generated, held in trust and deployed to benefit beneficiaries for whom the VWO is set up. Most VWOs are dependent on money provided by donors to fund their activities that are ultimately aimed at targeted beneficiaries. This 'trustee' view implies that VWOs should ensure that the funds raised are used in a manner consistent with the objectives and mission of the VWO.

**This article touches on two areas that are central to good governance and management of VWOs: managing conflict of interests and disclosure to stakeholders.**

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## Managing Conflict of Interests

Those charged with the stewardship and management of VWOs are essentially trustees and therefore fiduciaries, with the accompanying duties and liabilities of fiduciaries. Avoiding conflict of interests is critical to the fiduciary's duty of loyalty to the organisation. While a fiduciary has to avoid real conflict of interests, the importance of public trust and confidence to VWOs (and other entities with public accountability) means that he/she should also minimise the risk of any apparent conflict of interest.

Let us first look at some examples of real conflict of interests. For example, if the CEO of the VWO mandates that all overseas travel must be sourced from a particular travel agent and the CEO receives free travel for his family and himself, there is a clear case of conflict of interest because the CEO's ability to make good decisions for the VWO is compromised by the personal benefit he receives.



Another example is competition against the organisation. As Board members of VWOs are volunteers who often have their own businesses, these businesses could be competing with the VWO. Take the case of a general practitioner sitting on the Board of a healthcare VWO who votes against the VWO providing certain services because it may affect his own business. Further, a scenario of a Board member seeking preferential business relationships between the VWO and his private business would also constitute

a conflict of interests. Another example is the use of the VWO's resources - be they assets, information or manpower - for one's own business.

Sometimes, real conflict of interests is more subtle and, on the surface, may not appear to be detrimental to the VWO. Take the example of a Board member who sits on the tender committee. After the committee has reviewed tenders submitted, the Board member offers to supply the services through his own company at a 10% discount from the lowest bid price without any compromise to the qualitative aspects of the tender. On the surface, the VWO has benefited in terms of getting the service at a better price. The VWO may not appear to be any worse off, but in reality, such practices are unethical and the reputation and practices of the VWO will be tarnished if this becomes known. Potential vendors will also be skeptical about putting in tenders for future projects for this VWO.

Let us now look at apparent conflict of interest. Apparent conflict of interest is more subtle and difficult to deal with because what may appear to be a conflict to one person may not appear to be the case to another. Common sense and informed judgement then become important. For example, some view any business relationship between a VWO and any Board member as constituting a conflict of interest. However, if there are some strong checks and balances, the Board member has declared his interests, and the business relationship is advantageous to the VWO, such apparent conflicts of interest should not necessarily be used as an argument to deprive the VWO of an economically advantageous relationship. A practical example is when a Board member is a wholesaler of stationery and supplies the stationery needs of the VWO at a wholesale price that the VWO can never obtain because of the limited quantities of stationery purchased. If due diligence in the sourcing of the stationery has been performed, the Board member has duly declared his interests and he does not participate in making the decision as to whether

to purchase the stationery from his own firm, the VWO should not be forced to purchase stationery at the retail price just to avoid an apparent conflict of interest. It is precisely because such so-called related party transactions can be beneficial to organisations that they are not barred in the commercial world.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the above discussion suggests that actual and apparent conflict of interests must be carefully managed. Full disclosure and proper procedures for reviewing and approving transactions are particularly important for managing conflict of interests.

#### a. Full disclosure

Full disclosure is an important safeguard against any perceived conflict of interest. This would include disclosure of outside business interests, employment relationships and directorships with other entities. This should apply at least to all Board members and managers, although many organisations increasingly expect all employees to comply with codes of conduct that require them to disclose such outside interests. Any interest in specific transactions should also be disclosed to the Board or senior management, as appropriate. All material related party transactions should also be disclosed in the financial statements of the VWO. The accounting standard on related party transactions, Financial Reporting Standard 24 (FRS24) recommends that minimum disclosures should include the nature of the related party relationship; the amount of the transactions; the amount of outstanding balances (including their terms and conditions and details of any guarantees given or received); provisions for doubtful debts related to the amount of outstanding balances; and the expense recognised during the period in respect of bad or doubtful debts due from related parties among others.

#### b. Proper procedures for review and approval

Another important practice for dealing with possible conflict of interests is to have a formal procedure in place for reviewing and approving all proposals, contracts, business relationships and employment contracts. This should be in place before any transaction occurs. For example, Board members who want to tender for a contract with the VWO should, in addition to declaring their business interest, excuse themselves from all discussions pertaining to the contract. They should never be included in any committee to evaluate and recommend the contract.

Recent corporate scandals were mostly caused by the ethical failures on the part of senior management and directors, and the failure of checks and balances. At the end of the day, avoiding conflict of interests is a matter of “doing the right thing”. VWO Boards must inculcate a strong ethical culture within their organisations that recognises and rewards individuals not only for good performance, but also for “doing the right thing”. A strong ethical culture is the best safeguard against conflict of interests and VWO Boards need to put ethics and integrity at the top of their list of qualities when recruiting a CEO. Once the tone at the top is right, this will transcend the entire organisation. VWO Board members must also ensure that they discharge their duty to act as checks and balances. They must not fall into the trap of becoming enamoured by a charismatic CEO or Board member and failing to ask questions where necessary.

### Disclosure to Stakeholders

Traditionally, most donors do not expect VWOs to give a full account of how the VWO is governed and managed. Donors give because they believe in the objectives and mission of the VWO and they rely on the good faith of the VWO Board and management

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<sup>1</sup> A related party transaction is defined in Financial Reporting Standard 24 (FRS 24) as “a transfer of resources, services or obligations between related parties, regardless of whether a price is charged.” Parties are generally considered as related if one party has the ability, either directly or indirectly, to control the other party or exercise significant influence over the other party in making financial and operating decisions. See FRS24 para 9 for a detailed definition of related parties.

to ensure that the donated funds will be put to good use to benefit the beneficiaries.

However, the increased emphasis on disclosure and transparency which started in the corporate sector, coupled with recent revelations about problems in certain VWOs, have dramatically altered the landscape. Nevertheless, VWOs should do their utmost to meet the increased demands for disclosure

and transparency with the mindset that it is “the right thing to do”, not because they are forced to do it. At the end of the day, VWO Boards and management must recognise that without donors and beneficiaries, there is no reason for their existence. Therefore, all VWOs have a certain degree of public accountability.

We recommend that VWOs consider making the following key disclosures on an annual basis.

Type of Information	Use of Information
Total amount of funds raised and related fund-raising expenses	This gives the donors some understanding of the ability and efficiency of the VWO in raising funds.
Total expenses, broken down into appropriate categories such as patient care and administrative expenses	This allows the donors to see how funds are spent in accordance with the objectives and mission of the VWO and to assess the operational efficiency of the VWO.
Surplus / Deficit for the period	This indicates the overall “performance” of the VWO for the period. However, we note that unlike a for-profit organisation, a surplus is not necessarily a good thing and a deficit a bad thing for a VWO. A surplus may merely indicate limited subsidies to beneficiaries of the VWO while a deficit could be due to operational inefficiencies or generous subsidies to beneficiaries. This again reinforces the importance of appropriate breakdown of VWO expenses as discussed above.
Activities and funding for the activities	This allows donors to know whether the VWO is carrying out activities in accordance with its mission and how those activities are funded.
Number of Service Users	This allows donors to see the number of service users being catered for by the funds that they have donated.
Number of Employees	This allows donors to assess whether the VWO is appropriately staffed and whether the VWO is operating efficiently.
Salary Structure of Key Executives	This makes the VWO accountable for the salaries of its senior executives. We believe that VWOs should at least emulate the current salary disclosures for the top 5 executives of Singapore listed companies, i.e., number of executives in each salary band together with percentage breakdown into basic salary, bonuses and other benefits. Bands chosen should be sufficiently granular to convey meaningful information.
Amount of Reserves	This allows donors to assess how long the VWO will be able to fund its activities if no further funds are raised.
Categories of Assets	This provides additional information on the stewardship of the VWO. By showing amounts invested in land, buildings and improvements, equipment, motor vehicles, inventories and other assets, it will allow donors to further assess whether funds are prudently used.

There are often concerns that too much disclosure may not be in the best interests of the VWO. For example, it is often argued that disclosing salary details may lead to pay escalation, morale problems, poaching of staff and the like. In our opinion, the correct approach is to make sufficient disclosures so that the information is correctly understood and used, rather than not to make disclosures for fear that disclosures will be misunderstood or used inappropriately. For example, disclosure of salary details should be accompanied by additional disclosures about the performance measures that are used and the range of performance bonuses that can be earned for

different levels of performance. Lack of transparency is not a good strategy for the long-term survivability of VWOs.

## Conclusion

Conflict of interest and disclosure are two major issues related to the governance and management of a VWO. Failure to adequately manage these issues can lead to diminished trust from donors and other stakeholders. We hope that this article has provided some useful ideas as to how VWOs can approach the issue of conflict of interest and disclosure.

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### Editor's comment:

To some extent, the social service sector has taken public trust as a given. The recent events have shown us how delicate and fragile this is. While there may be guidelines promoted by the various governing bodies, the success of good governance rests with the VWOs, its Board and staff to put them into practice to assure transparency and accountability that the public so much expects. (Readers may wish to refer to the Council on Governance of IPCs' recommendations as accepted by the government at <http://app.mof.gov.sg/data/AnnexB200505.pdf>. The NCSS Code of Governance and Management can be found at [www.ncss.org.sg/code](http://www.ncss.org.sg/code)).

### Relevant SSTI Courses:

Board Governance Series for VWO Boards

- (1) **Building a Power Board (For Board Members)** Please see Pg 7 for more details.
- (2) **Accountable Governance Seminar : Financial Management for VWOs**
- (3) **Accountable Governance Seminar : Risk Management & Internal Controls**

Related Courses for VWO Executives

- (4) **Working the Board (For Executive Directors)**
- (5) **Internal Control Guidelines & Application (For Social Managers and Executives)**

To apply for the training courses, please visit [www.ssti.org.sg](http://www.ssti.org.sg).

# The Source: Twelve Principles of Governance That Power Exceptional Boards



Exceptional Boards add significant value to their organisations, making a discernible difference in their advance on mission. Good governance requires a Board to balance its role as an oversight body with its role as a force supporting the organisation. The difference between responsible and exceptional Boards lies in thoughtfulness and intentionality, action and engagement, knowledge and communication. The following twelve principles offer chief executives a description of an empowered Board that is a strategic asset to be leveraged. They provide Board members with a vision of what is possible and a way to add lasting value to the organisations they lead.

## 1. CONSTRUCTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Exceptional Boards govern in constructive partnership with the chief executive, recognising that the effectiveness of the Board and chief executive are interdependent. They build this partnership through trust, candor, respect, and honest communication.

## 2. MISSION DRIVEN

Exceptional Boards shape and uphold the mission, articulate a compelling vision, and ensure the congruence between decisions and core values. They treat questions of mission, vision, and core values not as exercises to be done once, but as statements of crucial importance to be drilled down and folded into deliberations.

## 3. STRATEGIC THINKING

Exceptional Boards allocate time to what matters most and continuously engage in strategic thinking to hone the organization's direction. They not only align agendas and goals with strategic priorities, but also use them for assessing the chief executive, driving meeting agendas, and shaping Board recruitment.

## 4. CULTURE OF INQUIRY

Exceptional Boards institutionalise a culture of inquiry, mutual respect, and constructive debate that leads to sound and shared decision making. They seek more information, question assumptions, and challenge conclusions so that they may advocate for solutions based on analysis.

## 5. INDEPENDENT-MINDEDNESS

Exceptional Boards are independent-minded. They apply rigorous conflict-of-interest procedures, and their Board members put the interests of the organisation above all else when making decisions. They do not allow their votes to be unduly influenced by loyalty to the chief executive or by seniority, position, or reputation of fellow board members, staff, or donors.

## 6. ETHOS OF TRANSPARENCY

Exceptional Boards promote an ethos of transparency by ensuring that donors, stakeholders, and interested members of the public have access to appropriate and accurate information regarding finances, operations, and results. They also extend transparency internally, ensuring that every Board member has equal access to relevant materials when making decisions.

## 7. COMPLIANCE WITH INTEGRITY

Exceptional Boards promote strong ethical values and disciplined compliance by establishing appropriate mechanisms for active oversight. They use these mechanisms, such as independent audits, to ensure accountability and sufficient controls; to deepen their understanding of the organisation; and to reduce the risk of waste, fraud and abuse.

## 8. SUSTAINING RESOURCES

Exceptional Boards link bold visions and ambitious plans to financial support, expertise, and networks of influence. Linking budgeting to strategic planning, they approve activities that can be realistically financed with existing or attainable resources, while ensuring that the organisation has the infrastructure and internal capacity it needs.

## 9. RESULTS-ORIENTED

Exceptional Boards are results-oriented. They measure the organisation's progress towards mission and evaluate the performance of major programmes and services. They gauge efficiency, effectiveness, and impact, while simultaneously assessing the quality of service delivery, integrating benchmarks against peers, and calculating the return on investment.

## 10. INTENTIONAL BOARD PRACTICES

Exceptional Boards purposefully structure themselves to fulfill essential governance duties and to support organisational priorities. Making governance intentional, not incidental, exceptional boards invest in structures and practices that can be thoughtfully adapted to changing circumstances.

## 11. CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Exceptional Boards embrace the qualities of a continuous learning organisation, evaluating their own performance and assessing the value they add to the organisation. They embed learning opportunities into routine governance work and in activities outside of the boardroom.

## 12. REVITALISATION

Exceptional Boards energise themselves through planned turnover, thoughtful recruitment, and inclusiveness. They see the correlation between mission, strategy, and board composition, and they understand the importance of fresh perspectives and the risks of closed groups. They revitalise themselves through diversity of experience and through continuous recruitment.

Excerpted from The Source: Twelve Principles of Governance That Power Exceptional Boards. Washington, DC: BoardSource 2005. For more information or to order a copy of the complete book, please visit [www.boardsource.org](http://www.boardsource.org) or call 800-883-6262

### Relevant SSTI Courses on Board Governance:

1. Building a Power Board (For Board Members)
2. Working the Board (For Executive Directors)

These governance workshops, facilitated by Mr Benedict Cheong, Chief Executive Officer of NCSS, are specially designed for VVO Board Members and Executive Heads respectively. These highly interactive programmes use case studies, role plays and simulation exercises to enhance their knowledge and skills to work towards an effective strategic partnership to govern their organisations effectively. To apply for training courses, please visit [www.ssti.org.sg](http://www.ssti.org.sg).

# Outcome Thinking: The New World Order

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## The Outcome Movement in the United States

The outcome movement in the United States was in large part triggered by the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act and propelled by stakeholders seeking greater assurance that public dollars are being purposefully utilised. This initiative continued to grow and spread and has been adopted and adapted by many state and local government entities, as well as by private and public foundations. There are likely few leaders or managers of non-profit enterprises, governmental agencies, or philanthropic foundations who have not witnessed the growing use of the concept of “outcomes” over the past 10 to 15 years. First quietly appearing on the scene more than 20 years ago and initially embraced by a few hearty souls, outcomes became a buzzword of the '90s, and a fact of life today for those in the public service sector.

## Why the Focus on Outcomes?

What brought about this shift? Why is the “outcome” question being asked now, when much more forgiving

standards have been applied for so many years? Several forces have been at play:

- The “Reinventing Government” movement stimulated by David Osborne and fast tracked by the passage of the federal Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) in 1993. With GPRA requirements beginning in 1994, by the year 2000, performance standards - and the outcome focus they required - were a fact of life for most government programs and the groups they support.<sup>1</sup>
- Taxpayer revolts and legislative “looking for results” movements, particularly at the state level, which raised questions about what the public is “buying” with resources expended to address public problems and particularly those designed to ameliorate persistent problem issues.
- The “trickling down” of funding and program responsibility of many former federally-led efforts to the state and local levels, in particular those designed to address poverty and health-related issues.
- The movement in the health care industry towards managing systems that emphasise service and cost controls.

<sup>1</sup> The GPRA required that; beginning in FY 1994, there were to be among federally funded programs at least 10 three-year pilot projects in program performance goal setting, measurement, and reporting, and at least 5 two-year pilot projects in greater managerial flexibility in return for commitments to greater program performance. In 1997, the Office of Management and Budget and the General Accounting Office were to report on the results of the pilot projects. By FY 1998, the requirements of the Act for five-year strategic planning, annual program performance plans, and annual program performance reports were scheduled to come into force government-wide. For more details, see <http://www.conginst.org/resultsact/introduction/gpraprpt.html>.

More recently other factors have come into play, including:

- The growing acceptance that government and non-profit groups can and should be run more like a business, both from a financial management perspective and for mission accomplishment.
- The rise of venture philanthropy as an alternative approach to charitable giving, one that challenges conventional perspectives on both the giving and getting of charitable funds.
- The effect the economic downturn has had on the ability of government and the philanthropic community to support the wide range of socially directed programs that have developed over the past 40 years.
- And very recently, the increased competition for public and charitable funds brought about as a result of the post-9/11/2001 world in which we now live.

Based on these factors, most observers of the non-profit and government worlds agree that an emphasis on outcomes is here to stay - having gone well beyond the fad status to become an undeniable trend. The fact that it has even survived a change in political party affiliation within the federal administration is clear evidence of its permanence on the national scene.

Many leaders of public service programmes believe that an outcome orientation should be applied to public service efforts. "There is an awesome ethical responsibility [for nonprofits] to provide results," one expert has said<sup>2</sup>. Most nonprofits serve the most fragile

and disadvantaged populations, he notes, and "There is a great moral burden to be honest and really provide results for these people. It is an ethical issue".



Centre stage is no longer dominated by a debate over the question of whether an outcome approach is appropriate for the public service sector. Instead, the question occupying most of the attention today is how do leaders and managers go about implementing an approach that best fits their environment and interests?

<sup>2</sup>Dr. David Hunter, Director of Evaluation, Edna McConnell, Clark Foundation, Telephone interview 8/29/02.

## What is Outcome Thinking?

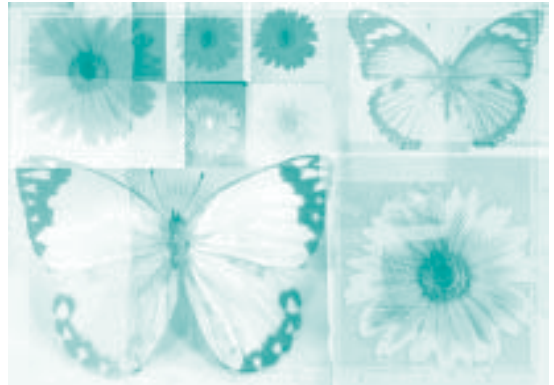
First, however, we must be clear in our language. What is Outcome Thinking? In defining Outcome Thinking, author and management guru Stephen Covey probably is the most concise with his advice to “begin with the end in mind.”<sup>3</sup> Clawson and Bostrom summarise the relevant research this way<sup>4</sup>:

*“Highly effective people invest little energy on their existing problem situations. Instead, they focus other attention and energy on their desired outcome or on what they want instead of these problems... A key to high performance across all these research contexts has been the ability to develop, articulate and stay focused on a compelling outcome.”*

Clawson and Bostrom demonstrate the power of Outcome Thinking through this simple exercise:

- 1** Think of a moderately serious problem at work or in your life.
- 2** Pose and answer these questions:
  - a. Why do you have the problem?
  - b. What caused it?
  - c. Who is to blame for it?
  - d. What obstacles are there to solving it?
- 3** Now take the same situation and answer these questions:
  - a. What do you want instead of the problem? (Be sure to go beyond merely eliminating the problem.)
  - b. What would things be like if the problem was solved? What would we see, hear and feel?
  - c. Imagine that the problem is solved, what has been gained?

The difference between focusing on problem-



reinforcing questions and outcome-directed ones is palpable, in terms of optimism, energy and hopefulness. This is the essence of outcome thinking. It is much more than mere goal or objective setting. It is a mindset that changes perceptions and the actions that follow. It is a way of envisioning that lifts energy levels and brings new possibilities.

While Clawson and Bostrom stress the critical and important distinction between outcome-directed thinking and problem-focused thinking, a subtler and less acknowledged distinction is between outcome thinking and process or activity thinking. Consider the difference between these two conversations with a non-profit practitioner.

### Process-focused interview:

- Q:** What does your organisation do?  
**A:** We provide services to low income residents of our community.
- Q:** What kinds of services?  
**A:** We provide group and individual family counselling services.

<sup>3</sup>Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 95-114.

<sup>4</sup>Vikki K. Clawson, and Robert P. Bostrom and Associates. *Outcome-Directed Thinking: Questions That Turn Things Around* <http://www.negia.net/~bostrom/bahome.htm>, 4th Edition, 2003.

**Q:** How many people do you serve?

**A:** Last year we provided 500 counselling hours to 125 families.

**Compare this with the following outcome-focused interview:**

**Q:** What is your organisation hoping to accomplish?

**A:** We are working to improve the parenting skills of abusive families.

**Q:** What kind of skill improvements are you working toward?

**A:** Reductions in use of corporal punishment and increases in uses of positive reinforcers of good behaviour, among others.

**Q:** How many families do you help each year?

**A:** Last year we served 500 families and helped 175 to maintain positive changes in their parenting behaviours for at least 6 months.

**Q:** For the coming year, what level of results would make the year a success?

**A:** For the coming year, we are working to improve parenting behaviour in 200 families.

The first set of questions focuses largely on what goes on inside the organisation, while the second centres on what impact these services have outside its doors. While it is certainly helpful to understand what services are offered, that information is only truly useful within the context of what is to be accomplished. Too often, however, the conversations in the public service sector are stuck in the process or activity realm.

## Conclusion

Author Anne Warfield emphasises that Outcome Thinking forces individuals to have accountability, to learn the skills they need to reach their desired outcomes in life, whether it is at work, home, or in the community<sup>5</sup>. A true outcome goes beyond what an organisation does, and rests upon what it accomplishes. An outcome is properly defined in terms of customer focus, what consultant Lucy Knight has called **BACKS** measures. These are changes in customer **B**ehaviour, **A**ttitude, **C**ondition, **K**nowledge, or **S**tatus<sup>6</sup>. In other words, **outcomes are not what a programme does. Rather, they happen for those being served because of what a programme does.**

At its best, **outcomes bring greater clarity and focus to programs, build staff moral, improve interaction between investors and providers, and ensure a stronger customer service focus.**



### Editor's note:

NCSS has embarked on an Outcome Thinking journey with VWOs. Over the next few years, there will be much to learn not only from the experience of other countries, but also from the building up of local applications through training and learning sessions. Over time, with a greater focus on outcomes, not only will service users benefit, but the public and donors would also have at hand outcome information advising the impact that their investments have made.



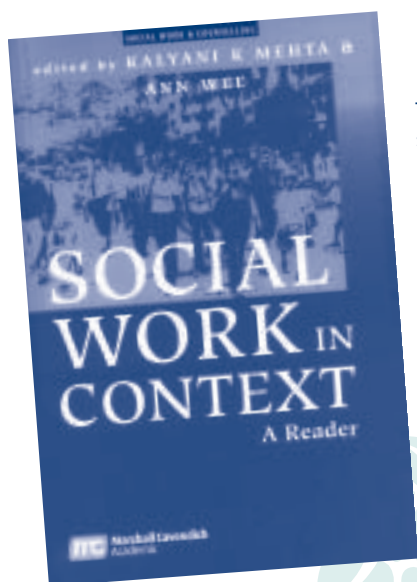
<sup>5</sup> Anne Warfield, Outcome Thinking: Getting Results without the Boxing Gloves, (Retrouvaille Publishing, 2000), <http://www.augsburg.edu/pmi/articles/StacyBrandt.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Lucy Knight, Outcome Evaluation: Three Workshops, (Evanston, IL: Knight Consulting, 2002).

# Book Review on “Social Work in Context - A Reader”

Edited by Kalyani K Mehta & Ann Wee

By K.V.Veloo



This book brings out the best in the latest theories, concepts and approaches and shows how they are integrated in social work provision at the macro and client-centred levels. These are explained in a clear and systematic manner. It is near impossible to consider in-depth all the articles in a single review. Each article deserves a place in the better understanding of social development and social work. I have taken the liberty to review the three chapters in Part I and chapter 5 of Part II as they are to a large extent inter-connected. They set the stage in the training and professional development of social workers.

Part I of the reader is on social work and development. It considers the elements of social work as a profession and concepts in context. Part II is given to a discussion of current welfare policy at the macro level - the various social security and financial aid schemes, some of which are unique to Singapore. Part III considers the issues of social work practice. Part IV introduces the undergraduate to social work practice across a range of service sectors and client groups.

## Concepts in Context

The Concepts in Social Work (Chapter 2) is a must-read not only for undergraduates but also for those engaged in social policy, social planning and administration. It is an excellent treatise on concepts at the macro socio-economic perspective and draws examples from local orientation. The six areas of need for social functioning drawn from Kahn and Kamerman (1977) and the three policy models help in a better understanding of governmental social policies.

Although concepts are very necessary to remove vagueness and confusion and bring some order into

an understanding of social systems, one may even go further. They facilitate communication among professionals. There are no doubts or clarifications among professionals when concepts are used in context. A wide range of theoretical concepts also help in the development of a growing profession like social work.

It is also interesting to find that the author has discussed the concept of a “welfare state”, a term that probably has outlived its usefulness in the Singapore context. Nevertheless, it has been given rightful prominence. **Singapore looks**

askance at "consumptive welfarism" and appears to reject the usage of the term "welfare". Hence, one finds that the welfare services of the past have now become "social services".

One wonders when the term voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) coined in the 1980s will be replaced by a more euphemistic name in order to avoid the word "welfare". One thing is certain, if the Government takes on the responsibility to provide all the needs of their people, a dependency or crutch mentality will set in and the challenge to do something for themselves will be replaced by a preference for the dole.

### Where We are Coming from

It is the historical perspective of the development of social work in Singapore (1819-1959) that may appeal immensely to undergraduates and many others in social administration and direct social work practice. A great deal has so far remained unwritten or captured in oral history in the annals of the history of social services in Singapore. Many of the first generation of social administrators, social workers and welfare workers will recall nostalgically their varied contributions in the many areas of social welfare provision in an era when Singapore was finding its way through massive poverty, unemployment and moral decay. Squatter housing, vagrancy and begging were rampant, so were the high exposure of young women and children to moral danger.

The creation of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in 1946 after World War II was the beginning of a structured approach to deal with the social welfare problems of the aftermath of the War. The author describes with insight the welfare services that were developed under the first SWD Five-Year Plan - firstly, to provide "first-aid" welfare such as aid in cash and

kind to tide over those who were in desperate need and secondly, to tackle the concerns of vulnerable individuals and groups through the progressive establishment of community, welfare, protective and rehabilitative services.

Although today many of the services are designed to meet the social consequences of affluence, some of the early services of the past are still with us in different forms. Hence, there are valuable lessons to be gained in the author's social considerations of the past welfare scene.

### Methods of Social Work Practice

In the chapter on the Methods of Social Work Practice, a subject akin to the introductory chapter on Social Work and Development, the author covers the ethics and basics of the "traditional methods of social work", that is, casework, group work and community development. One can perhaps ask why "traditional"? Is there a modern or current view on the methods of social work? There are of course new models of practice that "help to guide social workers in their professional job" (Mehta, page 109).

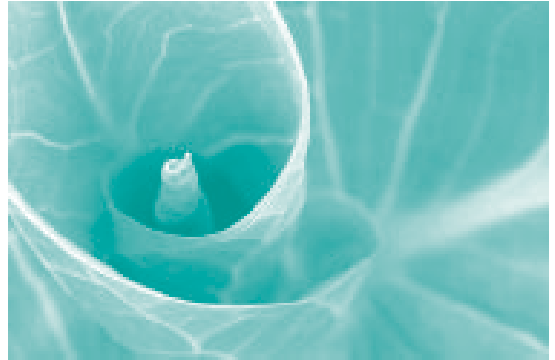
Detached work, such as working with youth at risk, layabouts or the homeless, deserves a place in the methods of social work practice. Contact work with unattached youth, youth on the verge of delinquency and young women in moral danger has its own unique approaches and methods and would, therefore deserve recognition as a method of social work.

Among the three methods of social work, casework is best understood and practised in Singapore. Lately, there has been an emphasis on community development. Social group work unfortunately has not been a preferred choice for group interaction and dynamics with a view to helping an individual to achieve set goals. Generally, as Asians, we are less

vocal and not given to sharing our personal problems in a group situation, even though the group is made up of a same ethnic group with common problems. Another difficulty is the language barrier among a mixed ethnic group.

One of the confusions that surround casework is the emergence of counselling as a method in dealing with the personal and emotional problems of people with difficulties and who are unable to solve their problems without professional help. It would be useful to distinguish the core characteristics of advice, counselling and casework. Does not casework encompass advice, counselling and practical assistance?

The discussion on community development in the local urban context of Singapore is socially relevant and current. **Community development, as a method and process in an urban setting, will continue to gain prominence in Singapore to help people to decide, plan and take action to meet their own needs with the help of government financial support.** Hence, the author has rightfully given a higher coverage on community development



or community organisation. One important consideration in the context of community development is the increased role of community work performed by a host of volunteers as opposed to community development work and the participation of politicians in the decision making process. The social worker often has to work with these groups without upsetting them or usurping their roles.

### Concluding Comments

Social Work in Context is a comprehensive introductory text of social work in theory, spirit and action. It will be invaluable reading for not only undergraduates and social workers but also for non-social work trained staff in positions that are normally held by social workers in Government, Statutory Boards and Voluntary Welfare Organisations.

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#### Reference:

Mehta, Kalyani K. & Wee, Ann (eds.) (2004), "Social Work in Context - A Reader", Marshall Cavendish Academic: Singapore.

This book is available at the NCSS Resource Centre (Call no. 361. 95957 21)

## SSTI PROGRAMME CALENDAR (MID OCTOBER - MID DECEMBER 2005)

	COURSE TITLE	TRAINER / INSTITUTION	DATE
OCTOBER'05	Framework for Working with People with Disabilities (Children/Adults)	Mrs June Tham, Mr Sivaraj Mahindra	15 Oct & 22 Oct
	Working with Youths - An Introduction	Mr Mike Garland, Mr Darryl Gardiner	17 Oct - 21 Oct
	Effective Presentation Skills for Trainers	Mr Andre Misso	24 Oct & 25 Oct
	Planning Programmes - From Needs Assessment to Evaluation	Ms Lori Rubenstein	26 Oct - 28 Oct
	Accountable Governance Seminar : Risk Management & Internal Controls for VWO	Ms Leornie Quek	27 Oct
	Building a Power Board	Mr Benedict Cheong	29 Oct
NOVEMBER'05	Individualised Care Planning (2nd run)	Mr Pal Abhimanyua	1 - 3 & 8 Nov
	Building and Implementing a Non-Profit Balanced Scorecard	Mr Nigel Penny	10 - 11 Nov
	Fundraising Events Organisation & Management	Ms Usha Menon	11 Nov
	Introduction to Narrative Therapy	Dr Roger Lowe, Mr Glen Guy	14 Nov & 15 Nov
	Memory Training for Seniors	Dana Steinova, Monica Lindenberg-Kaiser	14 Nov - 18 Nov
	Collaborative Approaches to Supervision in Narrative & Solution-focused Therapies	Dr Roger Lowe, Mr Glen Guy	17 Nov & 18 Nov
	6th ISPCAN Asia Regional - Post Conference Workshop: Working Professionally with Children Who Have Been Abused	Prof Chris Goddard, Dr Neerosh Mudaly	19 Nov
	Management of Family Violence Cases: Prevention, Protection and Possibilities in Elder Abuse Work	Mrs Yee-Chow Choy Yin, Ms Chan Lay Lin	23 Nov & 24 Nov
	Assessment & Treatment of Children with Handwriting Difficulties	Mr Sidney Chu	23 Nov - 25 Nov
	Assessment & Treatment of Children with Developmental Perceptual Disorder	Mr Sidney Chu	28 Nov - 30 Nov
	Revisiting Group Psychotherapy for Deeper Human Connection	Dr Philip Tsui	29 Nov
	Case Management: Effective Approach To Working with Systems	Dr Philip Tsui	30 Nov
	Theatre Interventions in Life (Bullying & Gangsterism in Youth)	TBC	Nov
DECEMBER'05	Overview of Programme Evaluation System (2nd run)	Mr Chan Whee Peng, Ms Becky Hoo	Dec
	Strategic Governance: Strategic Planning (2nd run)	Mr Khoo Oon Theam	13 Dec

To apply for the training courses, please visit our website at [www.ssti.org.sg](http://www.ssti.org.sg). Please feel free to contact SSTI at (65) 6210 2664/5 or email: [nccs\\_ssti@nccs.gov.sg](mailto:nccs_ssti@nccs.gov.sg) if you have any enquiries. As part of SSTI's commitment in building capabilities and bringing affordable training programmes to the social service sector, we will be happy to organise any of the courses on a customised, block-booked basis, scheduled on a convenient date for the agency. This is applicable to any agency with a minimum of 15 participants.

**COURSE HIGHLIGHTS**



**6th ISPCAN Asian Regional Conference Post Conference Workshop:  
WORKING PROFESSIONALLY WITH CHILDREN  
WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED**



**Date:** 19 November 2005 (Saturday)  
**Time:** 9am - 5pm  
**Duration:** 7 hours (1 Day)  
**Venue:** SSTI, NCSS Centre  
**Closing Date:** 24 October 2005



This one-day workshop will present the theoretical and experiential foundation for working professionally with children who have been abused. It will begin with a historical exploration of the failure to recognise the child in child abuse interventions. This is largely a skill-based workshop and participants will have the opportunity to enhance their skills and explore strategies to engage children.

*Organised in partnership with Monash University, in conjunction with 6th ISPCAN Asian Regional Conference on Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention hosted by Singapore Children's Society*



For more details, please contact SSTI at (65) 6210 2664/2665 or email: [nccs\\_ssti@nccs.gov.sg](mailto:nccs_ssti@nccs.gov.sg) for any enquiries.

**BOOKS AT THE SOCIAL SERVICE TRAINING INSTITUTE RESOURCE CENTRE**



**Presence: Human Purpose and The Field of the Future**  
Author: Peter Senge  
Call Number: 302.35 PRE 2005

Through a series of informal meetings, the four authors, all established organizational learning leaders explore and enrich their understanding of the concept of "presence", the "Theory of the U", a seven capacity model for deep individual and collective change, as well as how profound collective change occurs by illustrating the core concepts of intention, self-reflection, and awareness of the whole. They examine organizations by exploring their own experiences and those of 150 scientists and social and business entrepreneurs. This book synthesizes leading-edge thinking, first-hand knowledge, and ancient wisdom to explore the living fields.



**The Skilled Facilitator (New & Revised) : A Comprehensive Resource for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Trainers and Coaches**  
Author: Roger Schwarz  
Call number: 658.4036 SCH 2002-Ref

Roger Schwarz shows that there is more to techniques, theories and methodologies in facilitation. The very thinking, motives or mental models of the facilitator is an important part of the chemistry of the whole group. In this book, he provides an overview, with countless meaningful examples, of how facilitators can most effectively help groups develop their capacity for improvement using the Basic Facilitation and Developmental Facilitation skills. There are seven chapters on intervening effectively in groups. The author also offers advice on how to intervene, meeting management, group problem solving, following ground rules, and dealing with emotions.

For more information on the SSTI Resource Centre, please call (65) 6210 2697/ 2699 or email: [nccs\\_resource\\_centre@nccs.gov.sg](mailto:nccs_resource_centre@nccs.gov.sg) for enquiries.

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