



POWER TO PARTICIPATE: BUILDING YOUNG VOICES, CHOICES & EXPERIENCES

Research Partnership between **National Trades Union Congress (NTUC)** and
Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities at the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD)

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Centre for Innovative Cities

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Executive Summary

Challenge and Paradox

The central challenge National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) has to overcome to attract more young members is also faced by unions worldwide. The services/products unions can offer their members face increasing competition from the public sector, commercial services, and well-funded finance and technology platforms. The intense competition consequently causes confusion and scepticism amongst workers on the role and value of unions. This is especially so for younger workers who perceive unions as caring for "dusty old men" and are thus deterred from joining.

NTUC faces the same challenge as unions worldwide is paradoxical. NTUC works within a unique and highly successful tripartite model. NTUC has also a longstanding commitment and track record in helping workers. NTUC should not be facing the same challenge as unions in other countries. But paradoxically, it is.

Power to Participate for Different Generations

The paradox points to a deep generational shift that has been inadequately accounted for worldwide. What is this shift? It is that across an ever-expanding range of careers, causes, and consumption choices – increasing in tandem with increasingly diverse demographics — the younger generation wants to have an active voice. And they want to exercise that voice across a similarly expanding spectrum of meanings, means, and modalities.

To resolve the paradox, NTUC's 4 Ps (Protection, Progression, Placement and Privileges) must thus account for these multiplying meanings, means, and modalities of power and participation, and how they are evolving for the young generation. At the same time, NTUC must do so without losing the strengths drawn from the tripartite model and its track record, and without side-lining its existing members.



Barbell Strategy

NTUC can resolve the paradox, build on strengths, and stay inclusive with a Barbell Strategy. Adapted from ideas on resilience and robustness, the Barbell Strategy enables NTUC to

- Deepen its strengths in helping workers stay resilient, so that crises do not cripple them personally and professionally (akin to an "Insurance" role).
- Create new differentiation in helping members capture new opportunities that attract the younger generation and are also inclusive (akin to an "Investment" role).

The Barbell Strategy has several added benefits. The "Investment" end balances the "Insurance" end — which NTUC is most often associated with e.g., retrenchment help — without diminishing it. This preserves a vital NTUC strength. The "Investment" focus also establishes a commitment to build an active long-term relationship with members, where the interactivity is sustained instead of being once-off or episodic (such as in a crisis). This deliberately active long-term relationship in turn reduces the risk of members developing a transactional mentality defined by ever more perks. Such a mentality can be detrimental to NTUC's resources as intense competition with well-funded commercial providers can deteriorate into a never-ending expensive race and chase for the next shiny perk. On the other hand, building long term means NTUC can invest its resources over time, in ways that demonstrate its continued commitment.

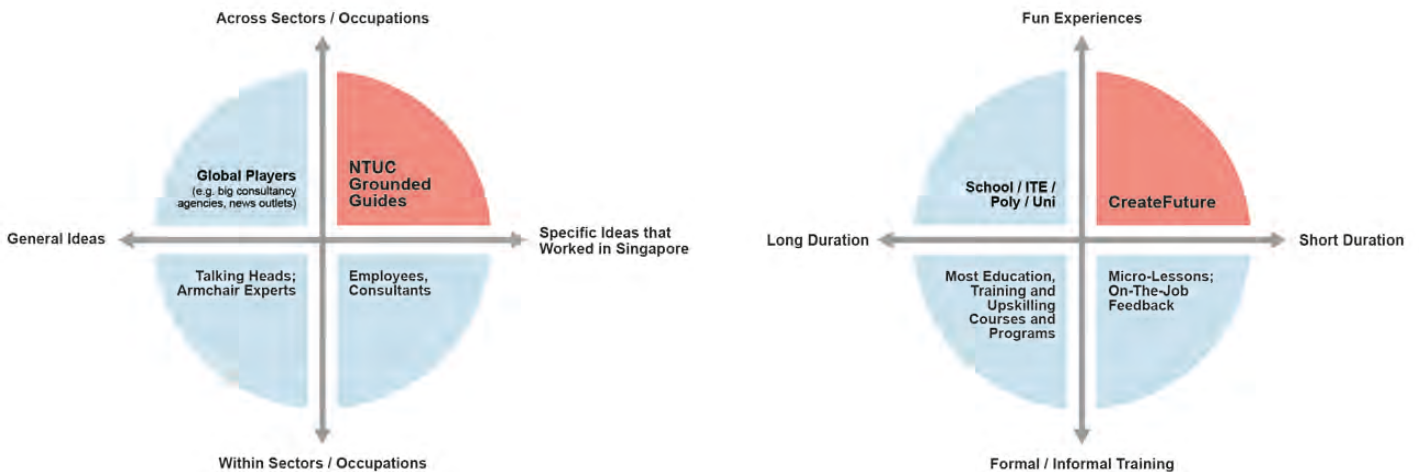
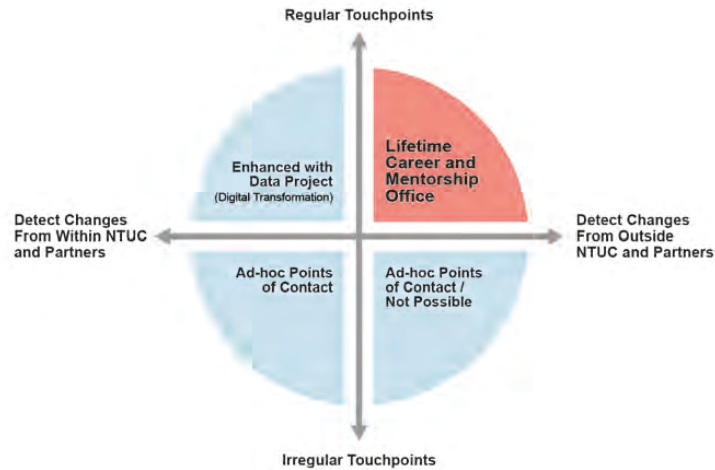
Recommendations: Practical Through Integration

Based on the Barbell Strategy, the recommended initiatives are:

- Lifetime Career and Mentorship Office: In-Step With Changes
- Grounded Guides: Voices and Choices From the Labour Movement
- CreateFuture: Micro-Experiences for Self-Exploration
- Feelers: Offline-to-Online and Online-to-Offline Intelligence

These recommendations together with how these are positioned vis-a-vis existing internal and external initiatives (e.g., see thumbnails below for three examples) are summarised in Chapter 2.2. They are subsequently detailed in Chapter 3.1 to 3.4.





It is important to note that these recommendations are designed to integrate NTUC’s 4Ps. For example, more than offering another transaction, or episodic/one-off help (e.g., a standalone career talk), they propose building on the many individual 4P offerings by integrating them into a more holistic offering (e.g., a lifetime career office that also actively keeps tabs on both the successes and setbacks in members’ careers). Importantly, these initiatives comprise an element of “investment” in the members’ and/or Singapore’s future, giving NTUC an additional positioning and expanding the perceived value of its offerings thereby drawing people to continually engage with NTUC’s offerings.

Moreover, deliberately integrating existing initiatives is also more likely to succeed compared to a major pivot or fundamental rewiring. This is because it is more practical, as all that is needed is conscientious integration over the long term, which NTUC — given the ties within and across, and long-standing commitment to workers — is fully capable of.

Chapter 1: Background/Literature Review

1.1 Labour Movement Models: Past and Present

The global labour movement is not homogeneous — rather, it comprises a toolkit of strategies, especially in response to global membership decline. Over the years, unions have tried a variety of models to cope with changing worker demands. Some utilise a mixture of models to do this. The overall character of a nation's labour movement will depend on the degree to which each model/strategy is exercised.

In this report, we will focus primarily on three standard models of labour movement.

The Organising Model

The organising model is the historical origin of most union activity. In this model, the union functions to collectivise the interests of labour, with an emphasis on expanding membership and encouraging a degree of self-reliance i.e., unions teach workers how to use organising tactics to resolve their problems without appealing to external institutions. For example: UK's Trades Union Congress runs an 'Organising Academy', which offers diplomas in organising strategies.

The core of the organising approach is not a set of specific strategies, but a general vision for empowerment of the individual worker by giving them channels (e.g., networks, communities, campaigning, etc.) to express and productively work on their grievances.

The Service Model

In the early days of the labour movement, trade unions existed to organise members democratically and put a strong focus on collective action. However, towards the mid-to-late 20th century, unions worldwide began to shift away from the organising model in favour of being service providers to their members. This shift coincided with a decline in union membership globally but it remains contentious if the decline was caused by the shift between models.

Instead of prioritising traditional industrial action, the unions looked to providing services to its members, such as legal advice, skills training and so forth. This approach aimed to fulfil members' needs for resolving grievances and securing benefits using an indirect method rather than exerting direct pressure on employers.

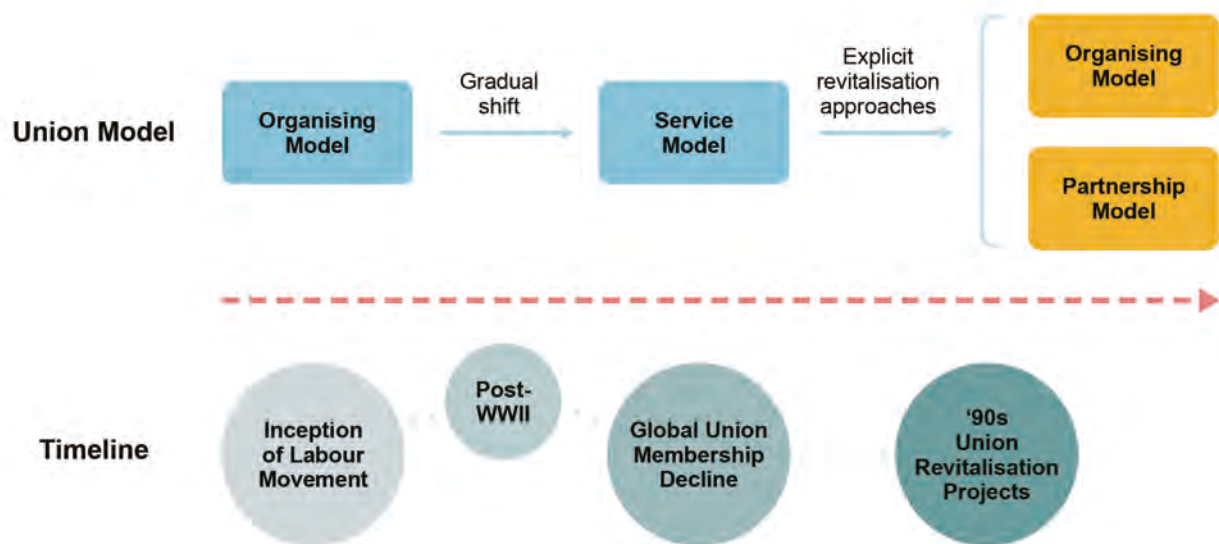
The Nordic Ghent system instantiates the services model (though it's unclear whether it operates only as a services model), in which unions act as providers of social welfare and benefits.



The Partnership Model

The partnership model aims to secure workers' rights by negotiating agreements with employers as opposed to using collective action. The approach demands that unions, employers and employees work together to improve workers' lives. These agreements often require compromise between parties and trade-off worker protections in some areas (e.g., benefits, employment security, etc.) against others (e.g., employer flexibility).

1.2 Summary of Labour Movement Models and Timeline



1.3 Drawbacks of the Labour Models

Each union model has its advantages and disadvantages. No one model has proven to be more effective than another and some unions utilise a combination of models.

Competition

Under the service model, unions act as service providers to fulfil members' needs. However, this role is in competition with private service providers in the market, such as private insurance providers, law firms, and so forth. Denmark (which operates the Ghent system) saw a decline in union membership following the liberalisation of unemployment insurance.

Confusion

The service model de-emphasises the role of unions in workforce relations as it shifts its focus from collective action to service provision. This creates an impression that the union operates solely as a service provider and muddles peoples' understanding of the role of a labour union. People start to confuse unions with other service providers, seeing them as wholly akin to an insurance company and so forth.

Stagnation

Service and partnership models tend to cater to the needs of existing union members, as opposed to the organising model which focuses on enlarging membership. This often leads to unions caring for older workers' needs as few young workers join without the union's active recruitment. The union's membership profile, services and policy eventually stagnate, as its members remain largely unchanging. This results in unions caring for "old dusty men" (Hodder, 2015), entrenching generational interests, which deters younger workers from joining.

Scepticism

Studies on the partnership model show that people express a diminished belief in the efficacy of unions in campaigning for workers' needs. This phenomenon is sometimes attributed to the "supposed" close relationship between unions and employers.

1.4 Singapore's Labour Movement

Some may argue that Singapore's labour movement is too dissimilar in form and function from others in the world. For example, Barr's nominalist fallacy expounds that Singapore's unions cannot be treated as unions just because they are called a union in name.

Nevertheless, we argue that Singapore's labour movement is not that dissimilar from other nations' labour movements. This is because, broken down into parts, the different union models are really about different goals and strategies. In our examination of Singapore's union activity, we have found similar strategies and methods.

Singapore's labour movement at a glance, appears to be a blend of the partnership and service models — the first because of tripartism, the second because of NTUC's explicit emphasis on becoming an institutional provider of social goods. This leads to NTUC facing the above-mentioned disadvantages of Competition, Confusion, Stagnation and Scepticism.

Power to Participate: From Modernization Seminar to the xth IR



Singapore has conventionally chosen to avoid the aggressive and confrontational dimension of power (e.g., strikes, go-slows, provocations, etc.). Instead, it has chosen to give Singaporeans the power to participate in the good life.

As Lee Kuan Yew stated in his speech at Singapore Insurance Companies Employees' Union's 10th anniversary celebrations on 30th October 1965, "Everybody wants a good life and everybody wants a happy life; but not everybody knows that unless you organise yourselves whether it be in Insurance Employees' Unions, in trade unions or in political societies and ensure effective government, there will not be good life for all."

Aristotle put forth that the good life comprises all things that are good for the physical body and the soul, such as health, food, shelter, wealth, knowledge, love, aesthetic enjoyment, virtue and so forth. Different individuals will have varying preferences for what the good life means to them. Nevertheless, many of these goods will overlap. Unions have tried to help people achieve the good life through different methods, whether it is by giving people tools to organise themselves, providing services to achieve such goods or securing partnerships to give people means to access such goods.

In NTUC FairPrice’s FairPrice Moments: Celebrating 40 Years of Service from the Heart publication, the seventh significant moment highlighted was titled “Defining the Good Life” (FairPrice, 2013). It shared that in 2007, FairPrice recognised the need to re-examine what the definition of good life now included as Singapore’s population grew more affluent. In response, FairPrice Finest was launched to cater to these changing lifestyles, meeting new demand for goods that extended beyond daily necessities, while still continuing to ensure that customers got value for their money even with these goods so that more can live the good life.

Since the Modernization Seminar till NTUC’s current vision/mission, the 4 Ps (Protection, Progression, Placement and Privileges) of its membership model are really about the Power to Participate. That is, these four dimensions employed individually and in tandem, give Singaporeans the Power to Participate in the good life. This is where Singapore’s labour movement is similar to other nations’ labour movements, as the common thread running through all the models is empowering members to have a good life.

This has guided our work and our recommendations. It also means we account for how the meaning, means, and modalities of power and participation have evolved and continue to evolve.



The meaning of participation will now include the young having an active voice in new union initiatives. The means through which they can actively participate will include new technological innovations from social media and online activism, to new ways of designing and creating unions. For example, in the recent efforts to unionise in Google, the

unionisation was initiated by employees that organised themselves using online and offline means, coming together to work on ethical principles in the company instead of solely for workers' rights (Dickey, 2021). The modalities will now include how different generations may engage each other to create the future. The 4 Ps will have to evolve along with these factors.

Furthermore, NTUC's vision, mission, and values emphasise the need to cater to all ages and backgrounds. This means the goal of attracting young members must avoid any perceptions of the older members being side-lined or worse, ageist. Hence, initiatives must be designed to be inclusive of all — attract youth and involve others.

While NTUC's offerings each contain an aspect of at least one of the 4 Ps, and at times a combination, it is the light in which these offerings have been framed that have coloured its perceived value and appeal. In this report, our recommendations will illustrate how NTUC can utilise different forms of offerings that still embrace the 4 Ps and engage and attract younger union members at the same time.

Vision A better and more meaningful life where workers of all collars, ages, and nationalities can work, live and play together in Singapore.

Mission We help workers to earn a better living and live a better life.

Our Values

- Caring — We care for U**
We are caring, understanding and extend a helping hand to all working people and their families.
- Trustworthy — We trust in U**
We always act in the best interests of working people.
- Passionate — We believe in U**
We believe in what we do, and we do what we believe wholeheartedly.
- Working-people Centric — We are working for U**
We protect and enhance the livelihood of all working people.



Chapter 2: The Barbell Strategy

2.1 A Strategy to Stay Robust-Resilient

To attract younger union members, avoid ageist perceptions, overcome drawbacks challenging unions worldwide, while sustaining NTUC's existing strengths, NTUC requires a strategy that stays resilient and relevant in an ever-changing future.

We propose the Barbell Strategy which will enable NTUC to:

- Deepen its role in helping to ensure workers stay resilient and avoid being crippled personally and professionally by tough times; and
- Create a new differentiating role for itself to help its members become robust in capturing high-growth opportunities earlier rather than later.

The Barbell Strategy is adapted from the books *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*, and *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, both of which are written by Nicholas Nassim Taleb. According to Nicholas Nassim Taleb, such a strategy will pursue safety at one end and speculation at the other, so that one is resilient to negative events and robust to capture new opportunities that have the highest growth, especially Black Swan-types of events and opportunities. The possibilities of minimising the downside and maximising the upside are why the Barbell Strategy has been adopted by financial institutions (e.g., (DBS, 2021)).

We believe such a Barbell Strategy can be similarly adapted to NTUC's mission. On one hand, NTUC provides "safety" to ensure disruptions, restructurings, and crises do not cripple workers' livelihoods and careers i.e., to stay resilient.

On the other hand, through the course of this project, we have identified a new opportunity on the "speculative" end where NTUC can help workers probe, experiment, explore and potentially pursue new high-return opportunities i.e., to be robust to capture high-reward possibilities. We believe that this "speculative" role will help NTUC to differentiate itself, and rise above the challenges of confusion, competition, stagnation and scepticism.

We outline how we arrived at this Barbell Strategy below. For simplicity, we refer to the safety end as "Insurance", and the speculation end as "Investment", for reasons that will be obvious below and that are based on what we found during our project.

2.2 A Strategy Based on “Insurance” and “Investment”

To develop the Barbell Strategy above, we used various research methods to uncover the insights to inform the strategy framework detailed in the book *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy* by UCLA Professor Richard Rumelt. Richard Rumelt, whom McKinsey Quarterly has called “strategy’s strategist”, has developed an “underlying structure” for crafting good strategies. A good strategy must have (McKinsey & Company, 2011):

- A diagnosis: an explanation of the nature of the challenge. A good diagnosis simplifies the often overwhelming complexity of reality by identifying certain aspects of the situation as being the critical ones.
- A guiding policy: an overall approach chosen to cope with or overcome the obstacles identified in the diagnosis.
- Coherent actions: steps that are coordinated with one another to support the accomplishment of the guiding policy.

At the same, a good strategy must also avoid the following pitfalls of bad strategy: failure to face the problem, mistaking goals for strategy, bad objectives (e.g., a laundry list of things to do), and fluff (e.g., buzzwords that state the obvious) (McKinsey & Company, 2011).

Diagnosis

Using the above framework, we diagnosed that NTUC’s critical challenge can be summarised into one word: “Insurance”. Across interviews, focus group discussions, survey as well as research and grey literature review, we found that if there were youth and young workers who did not confuse NTUC with another organisation, they were likely to see NTUC’s services and resources as ones they would turn to — and in some cases actually turned to — in times of crisis or need, such as during a work dispute or retrenchment.

While the youth and young workers recognised and appreciated that these were important and crucial to safeguarding workers, it did mean that NTUC had become synonymous with insurance and crisis. Our interviews, focus groups and survey, however, suggest that the concept of ‘insurance’ has perceived limits in NTUC’s efforts to attract more youth to become union members. It is limiting because like any insurance, it is seen as only needed by some at certain points in their working lives, as opposed to a constant need. It thus boxes NTUC into a much smaller role than how it actually serves workers, or even how it could, diminishing its perceived value.

At the same time, with the government and even companies becoming increasingly active in safeguarding workers' jobs, this 'insurance' role is increasingly crowded out and confused with these other efforts. NTUC thus finds itself "competing" with these in positioning its role to the public. It is thus key for NTUC to adopt an additional positioning of 'investment', which will be elaborated on in the next section. This is in line with nEbO (stands for nobody Enjoys being Ordinary) and Young NTUC's attempts to avoid emphasising workplace protection in their offerings and instead highlighting Progression, Privileges and Placement, as these appeal to youth and young workers more. As such, perhaps the first touch-point for youth and young workers with NTUC could be nEbO and/or Young NTUC, rather than directly with NTUC.

Guiding Policy/Approach and Coherent Actions

NTUC thus needs to overcome this increasingly limiting perception. To attract more members to NTUC and encourage their continued subscription, efforts must be made to strategically position NTUC by building on the perception that joining a union is like 'insurance'.

Instead of seeing the 'insurance' feature as limiting, we suggest turning it into a strength. This is done by positioning NTUC as an organisation that not only helps "insure" your working life but also helps you to "invest" in it.

This is where adapting Barbell Strategy as a guiding policy and overall approach is useful. Insurance and investment are merely two sides of the same coin of risk, resilience and robustness. NTUC already has much going for it on the "insure" end. With "invest", NTUC can provide opportunities for its members to take on both types of risk, on a spectrum.

For example, one of our recommended initiatives below is for NTUC to offer short fun experiences in exciting emerging sectors. We have deliberately identified "short", "fun", and "experiences" as the features whereby NTUC can differentiate itself from others. This is because while there are many public and private initiatives to encourage, train, and/or convert workers between sectors, these often take months (sometimes even beyond a year). These classes are also often communicated as requiring sacrifice and are ultimately forms of training (which are usually not associated with being enjoyable). However, what many youth and young professionals want is to first try their hand at different possibilities, before committing to one or two. They may understand that they will need to commit their time and hard work at some point, but asking them to do so upfront is arguably analogous to asking them to marry before dating (See discussion of career research by the late Stanford professor John D. Krumboltz in (Lim, 2021)). Once they have experimented and identified which areas they are most keen on and have the most aptitude for, they will likely pursue those new growth areas with more energy and enthusiasm, and go further and faster as a result.

The insurance end of the barbell will continue to cater to workers in crisis, whereas the investment end gives NTUC ways to be relevant to workers constantly for high growth opportunities.



A Barbell Strategy builds on NTUC's 'insurance' role (protects workers) to position itself as helping workers to invest actively and aggressively in their future.

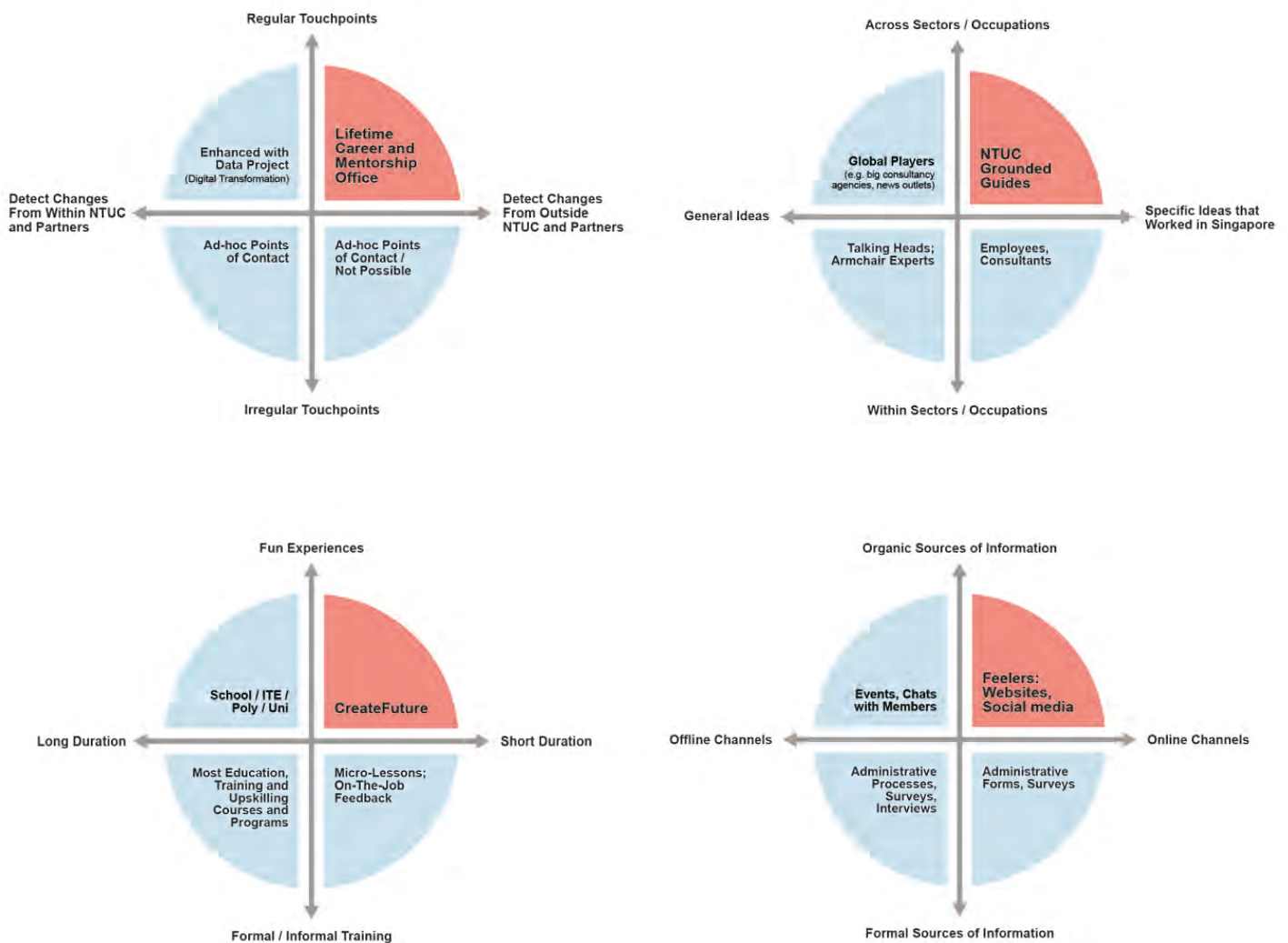
Having a Barbell Strategy spanning insurance and investment so that NTUC can better prepare its workers/members to be both Robust and Resilient, is one of the objectives we set out in our original proposal. Resilience is needed when one has faced difficulties and has to recover (e.g., after a crisis) and hence this is where insurance helps. Robust ensures we also keep workers/members going strong when the going is good. This is where investment comes in.



How all these translate into coherent actions, as per the strategy framework, are detailed as the following Recommended Initiatives in the next chapter, and summarised with the strategic positioning matrices below, to be elaborated in the subsequent sections.

- Lifetime Career and Mentorship Office: In-Step With Changes
- Grounded Guides: Voices and Choices From the Labour Movement
- CreateFuture: Micro-Experiences for Self-Exploration
- Feelers: Offline-to-Online and Online-to-Offline Intelligence

Instead of a major pivot and fundamental rewiring, these initiatives are implementable through deliberate integration within and across NTUC, and leveraging existing resources of NTUC, in partnership with tripartite partners.



Chapter 3: Recommended Initiatives

The following recommended initiatives focus on practical actions through deliberate integration within and across NTUC, leveraging existing resources and partnership with tripartite partners.

3.1 Lifetime Career and Mentorship Office

In-Step With Changes

The Concept

A designated Lifetime Career and Mentorship Office can be established by building upon existing NTUC resources for career advice and mentorship (e.g., Lit.sg, Employment and Employability Institute (e2i), etc.). This service can be piloted amongst young workers first and then slowly extended to older workers.

Key features of this service should include:

- Being open to all ages and industries
- Offering resume reviewing and refreshing services at regular intervals (e.g., annually) in an individual's career
- Proactively reaching out to members at regular intervals with career tips, event invitations, etc.
- Offering industry-specific advice, whether in the form of mentorship programmes or advisory from experienced workers for the role and/or industry
- An 'investment' commitment from the member
 - For example, a price plan structure using a 1-for-1-Life campaign drive where individuals can add on \$1 to the base NTUC membership price, just for the first year, so they can receive access to this service for Life.

To determine the scale and set-up for this concept, larger ground surveys can be carried out and relevant NTUC business units should come together to explore strategies for operationalisation, addressing potential challenges in implementation.

The Rationale

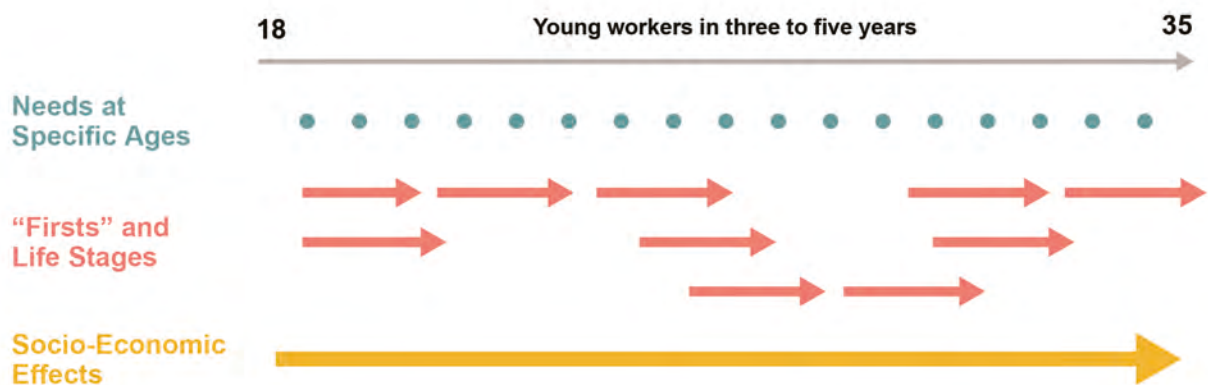
Strategic Positioning

To invest is to prepare ahead of time by sowing small seeds to reap big benefits later on. However, identifying when to start investing and what to prepare for is not as straightforward as it seems. A natural approach would be to determine the needs of individuals of different ages, but this approach results in a highly diversified profile of needs to cater to. It is not only unrealistic but also inefficient to try to cater to all these needs.

Through our research, we identified that using personas as a basis for NTUC’s strategies may be ineffective. The diversity of youth (from behaviours to beliefs to backgrounds), coupled with the findings from the focus group discussion and other research projects that were done by the research team suggests that finding a small number of representative personas that can be the focal points for NTUC’s strategies might be contrived — we either end up with personas that are too broad, or with too many personas. We might end up missing out on small pockets of the curve that make up the long tail (which may take up a significant proportion of the population as a whole).

Furthermore, it is not just the youth who have such diverse opinions and interests but the population as a whole are increasingly fragmented and nuanced in their beliefs. Generational differences give rise to differences in thinking and behaviour. Life stages may also influence views of the same concept. For instance, to someone planning to start a family, having insurance is of a higher priority. These factors are social.

As life expectancy extends and healthcare improves, people are getting married and having children later and higher education could continue for years. It is increasingly difficult to define what ages a life stage will typically span. A life stage of ‘first marriage’ could capture anyone between 18 and 35. A strategy targeting ‘first marriage’ is likely to be more specific and effective than a strategy targeting individuals aged 18 to 35, as it would be difficult to identify and cater to all needs of such a large age group. Using a socio-economic approach, NTUC can identify seminal changes in one’s life and the needs of an individual going through each change and devise its strategies based on those needs.



Thus, a better approach to determining when to start ‘investing’ may be to use the seminal changes in career and life for all ages as a baseline.

One way to cater to these seminal changes in life is to provide a Lifetime Career and Mentorship Office service. Beyond graduation from tertiary institutions, young workers have no “Career Office” to help with their resumes and professional development (and may also not know what to expect, what to do and who to ask). They might also need more help due to the dislocation from COVID-19.

In large, this is because career offices at tertiary institutions are meant to help students prepare for their first jobs. Hence, their services are to provide general resume drafting tips and reviews, interview advice, and assist students with internship placements. The needs of a fresh graduate and a mid-career individual are vastly different. Professional and industry-specific advice from experienced workers is often needed to advise mid-career individuals on their career needs. These individuals want to know how to leverage their career experience to appeal to employers, whereas fresh graduates are mostly applying using education qualifications. This is especially so for those looking to make a career transition between industries and/or roles.

Furthermore, the backgrounds of these individuals will be wide-ranging, whether in age or sectors, and more likely than not the commonality that they would share would be seminal changes in life. For example, a new or expecting parent may seek to look for new employment to secure a better work schedule.

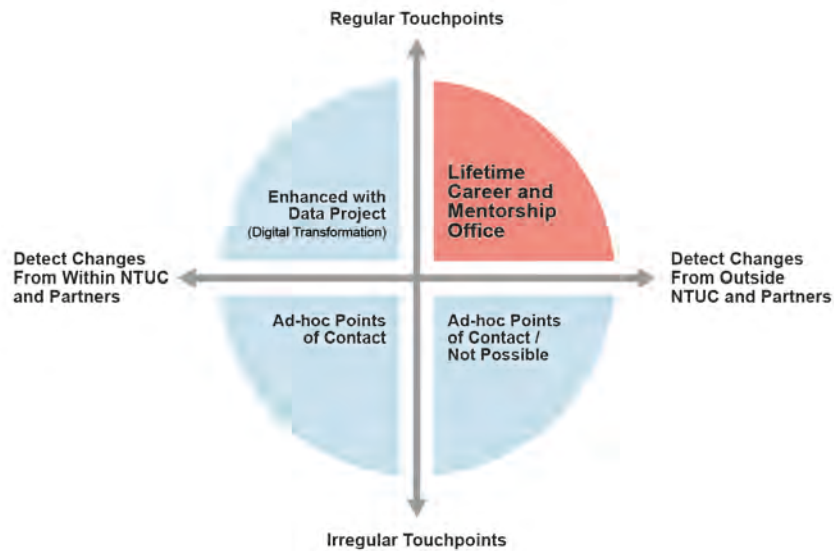
Young workers may also require advice on professional development, in that they are looking to be promoted or desire a raise. In such cases, they require not just guidance on how to approach and negotiate with their supervisors but also on how they can enhance their skill sets or portfolios to bolster their chances of making a strong case. These are needs that existing university career offices are ill-equipped to provide for.

NTUC's access to workers across a multitude of sectors and roles, as well as its existing experience in providing career guidance (e.g., e2i and Young NTUC), makes it uniquely positioned to enter this new space and become the prevailing organisation to approach for career guidance.

Steady Presence and Proactive Reach

At present, NTUC has few means to regularly interact with members or detect changes happening outside of NTUC and its partners. Beyond the point when members first sign up, NTUC rarely gets the opportunity to contact them again, unless they are members of a unionised company. It is even less likely that they are able to find out what is happening in a member's life thereafter.





With the establishment of this service, NTUC will have opportunities for continued and regular active communication with their members when the office reaches out to offer its resume services. These can be timed for various occasions such as annually (at the start or end of the year), as this is when people will tend to take stock of what is happening in their life and plan for the future. Another signal for when such communications can be disseminated is when there are major economic announcements and disruptions. During these times, people will be concerned with whether they have to alter their methods to mitigate negative consequences. It is at these touchpoints that NTUC can find out more about changes happening in members' lives. Having said so, these timings will also depend on the nature and activities in different industries, sectors and professions. As NTUC observes their members and gathers more empirical data, it may be able to better determine suitable timings for the different groups of members.

During these touchpoints, members may mention that they are looking for a new job or considering professional development in preparation for a career transition. In such instances, NTUC can proactively offer advice on a course of action and introduce them to the NTUC training and placement ecosystem by providing information from the NTUC Job Security Council and Employment and Employability Institute (e2i). In this way, the member is further integrated into NTUC and sees the value of their membership in returns from a multitude of services and partnerships provided by NTUC.

This in turn let NTUC understands its members better, accumulating a wealth of information on their needs and desires. This enables NTUC to anticipate members' needs or offer other NTUC services that they might not have considered or known. Furthermore, this service can be utilised and sought out in times of growth and crisis; it is both robust and resilient. This will help establish NTUC as a steady and reliable presence in members' minds.

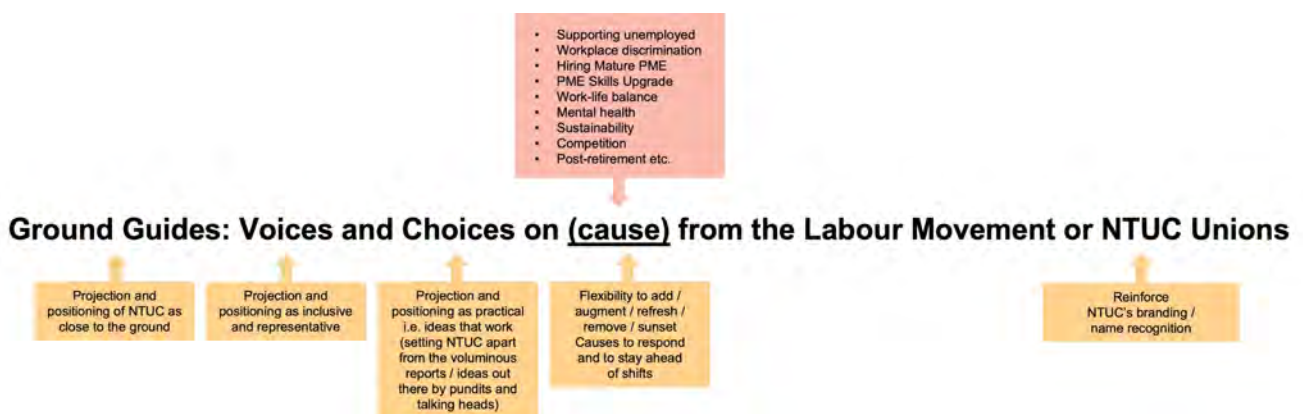
Investment

This service also drives home the message that NTUC is dedicated to investing in workers' futures. By offering continued guidance and a touchpoint for times of crisis, NTUC demonstrates its commitment to preparing members and Singapore for whatever the future may bring.

3.2 Grounded Guides

Voices and Choices From the Labour Movement

The Concept



'Grounded'

A series of comprehensive and integrated guides focused on concrete actions that have been taken by NTUC leaders and members for specific causes/issues can be produced. These guides will detail the specific steps taken and resources used, if any. The crux of it should be more informative and actionable than existing guidelines. They should contain tried and tested solutions for issues that have already been addressed/resolved.

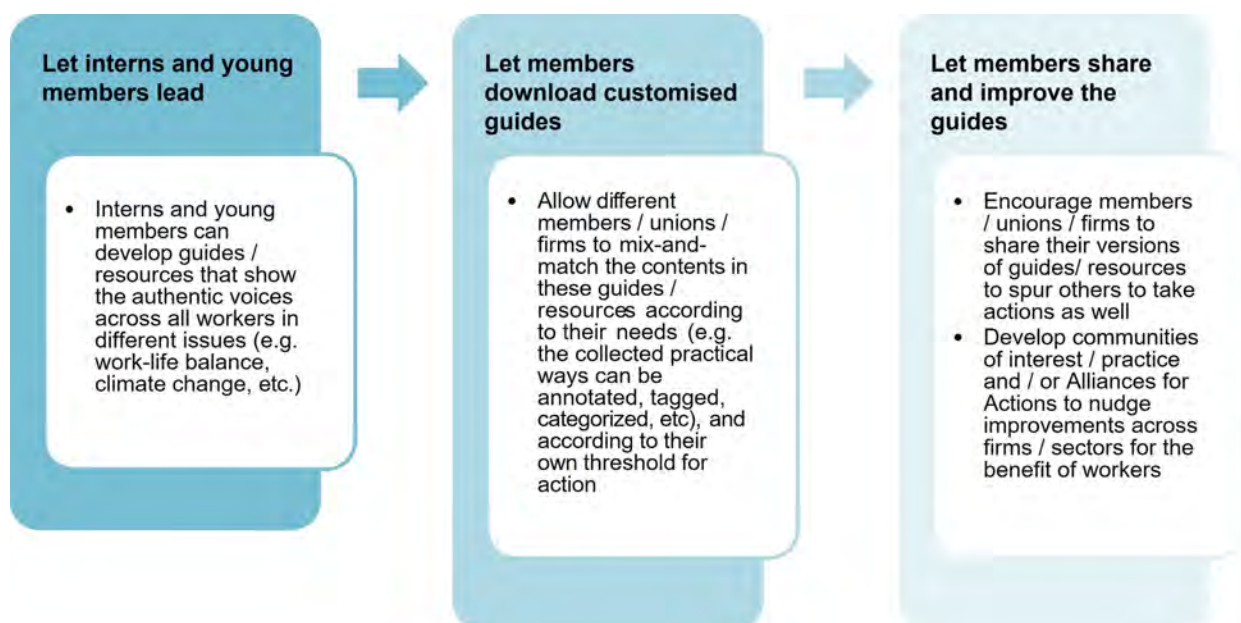
'Voices and Choices on Causes'

Youth members can be tasked to work together for guides on causes they are passionate about, that have already been addressed in some way by someone in NTUC, this likely means that most issues will be regarding the workplace or some aspect of running a business or organisation. They can lead the effort and tap on the expertise of veteran union leaders/experienced union members to craft these guides. The focus should be on empowering younger members to have a choice in what they wish to share with the public and what causes they want to champion. Sharers from within NTUC can be anonymous if they prefer and this may encourage more people to contribute. For example, an immediate opportunity that youth can actively pursue is to develop a guide and/or workshop on work-

life balance in Pre-Employment Training (PET) or Continuing Education and Training (CET) for youth and young professionals. These guides can take whatever format is appropriate and be distributed through suitable means whether online or offline.

The minimum manpower requirement to get started on such a guide is low — as long as one person is interested, they can get the ball rolling. For instance, a study on work-life balance was conducted by just three undergraduate interns, over a period of two and a half months during their internship (see Annex C), canvassing perspectives from close to 15 young professionals. The process for conducting such a study can be easily adapted for the guides, working with youth, young professionals, industry stakeholders, and possibly even with Institutes of Higher Learning. In addition, there can be several such processes happening at the same time for different causes. The idea is for youth to come in and out of the process easily, as we understand that youth have many interests that can change quickly as their life stages evolve. These guides would focus on tried and tested solutions, necessitating that youth who begin a project for a grounded guide would approach NTUC leaders, staff and members who can provide information for such solutions. By providing a process of initiative where multiple causes are happening, youth can rotate and only a core group of employees or volunteers within NTUC would need to champion or supervise it, in addition to the key personnel that provided the information on their tried and test solutions.

Building a Community



The guides and resources developed by the youth members can then be systematically stored such that other members, firms and unions can easily access and assemble their own customised guides and resources suited to their specific needs.

The sharing and accumulation of guides as they are continually improved will help to naturally establish a network of individuals who can offer advice and explain the rationale behind their own guides. These groups of individuals with similar interests or who face similar issues may eventually wish to formalise their community into an alliance to work together on certain causes.

The Rationale

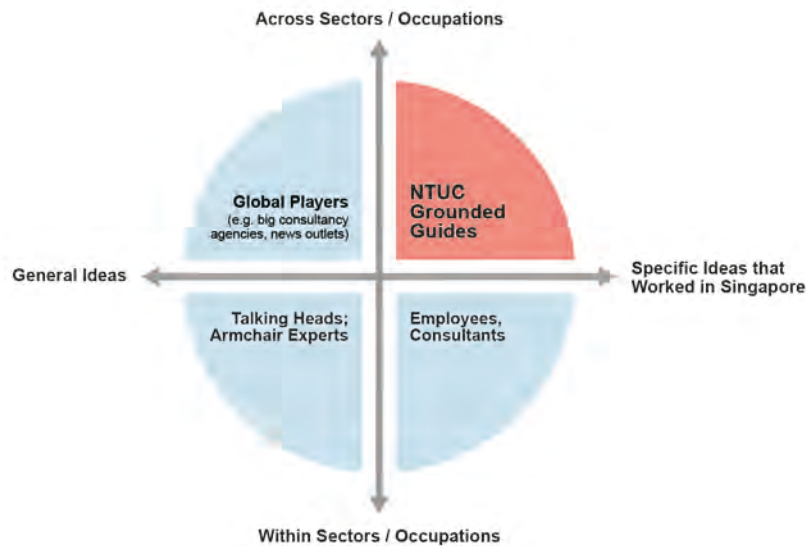
Strategic Positioning

To invest also means to prepare ahead of time for shifts in the broader socio-economic and environmental landscape as these changes will have substantial effects on each person. Youth are particularly engaged by shifts, treating them as causes to champion. It is important for NTUC to keep pace with society by also preparing for these shifts.



A way for NTUC to do this is to become a hub and source for young people to turn to when they encounter a cause they want to champion or an issue they wish to resolve. Although there are existing means through which young people have been empowered to take action (e.g., schools, non-profit organisations, etc.), there is yet to be a central source to approach for help or reference when youth undertake their initiatives. In the absence of such a central source, youth have taken to social media to attempt to organise action. However, social media is highly fragmented, and it is also difficult to identify reliable sources on these platforms. As an authoritative source, NTUC can leverage these platforms instead and build an online-to-offline presence (See Chapter 3.4: Feelers).

Furthermore, existing sources of information are at times lacking in guidance in that they are too general or vague to apply in context. Advice from experts and professionals on the internet are easily accessible by youth but hardly provide workable solutions that are suitable for their individual situations. Additionally, guidelines currently in circulation, whether produced by organisations or news outlets, have been devised to give general direction and are not particularly helpful when it comes to resolving specific issues (e.g., how to engage a recycling partner and set up a schedule/system for collection). The practical concerns on implementation and execution are often overlooked or lacking in these guidelines.



This is where NTUC comes in, as a representative for tried and tested methods used in the workforce and society to resolve practical concerns. NTUC can tap on its exclusive knowledge from its unions, leaders and members across a multitude of industries and functions to provide grounded and practical insights while also demonstrating its dedication to uplifting the workforce and Singapore. NTUC is uniquely positioned to become the hub for such information on actions and causes as it is one of the few organisations, or the only organisation in Singapore that has such vast collective knowledge on solutions and initiatives that have worked in Singapore’s context across sectors and professions. Early adopters and innovators across the 58 affiliated unions may be keen to step forward to share their knowledge and this should be encouraged.

Steady Presence and Proactive Reach

By establishing itself as a hub for social movement and action, NTUC also places itself in a position where it remains a steady presence and point of reference to youth and other individuals on this subject, as well as in a position where it can observe the beginnings of any social shifts.



It is often difficult to determine when social movements will emerge. Historically, revolutions and huge social movements have occurred with little forewarning. Cass Sunstein, a Professor at Harvard University, proposes that there are 3 factors that play a big role in the emergence of social movements: preference falsification, diverse threshold and interdependencies (Sunstein, 2019).

Preference falsification refers to when people conceal or do not reveal their true thoughts and feelings, to the extent that a community may live in “pluralistic ignorance” in which they do not know the preference of others because no one is willing to show their cards. Diverse thresholds mean that various people need different levels of social support to feel confident enough to rebel or speak and act truthfully. Interdependencies refer to the behaviour where people will only speak or act depending on who, if anyone else, has been seen to have spoken or done something. A combination of the three is usually the spark for social movement.

In encouraging young members and interns to take charge and propose their ideas, regardless of how trivial they may seem, the process of social movement is set into motion. By paying attention to which of these ideas are taking off and proceeding to the second stage, NTUC can detect social shifts ahead of their eruption in society at large. This will allow NTUC to prepare ahead for such shifts, devising strategies to cater to the workforce. In other words, NTUC can help take action before the action even needs to be taken to support these social needs, minimising the potential chaos and consequences sudden large-scale social movements may bring, if and when they occur in Singapore.

Investment

This initiative demonstrates NTUC’s commitment to aiding the workforce and Singapore by sharing information and providing resources to address social needs. As a hub for social change and practical solutions, it will be a centre of activity during both times of calm and crisis, helping Singaporeans to be both robust and resilient.

3.3 CreateFuture

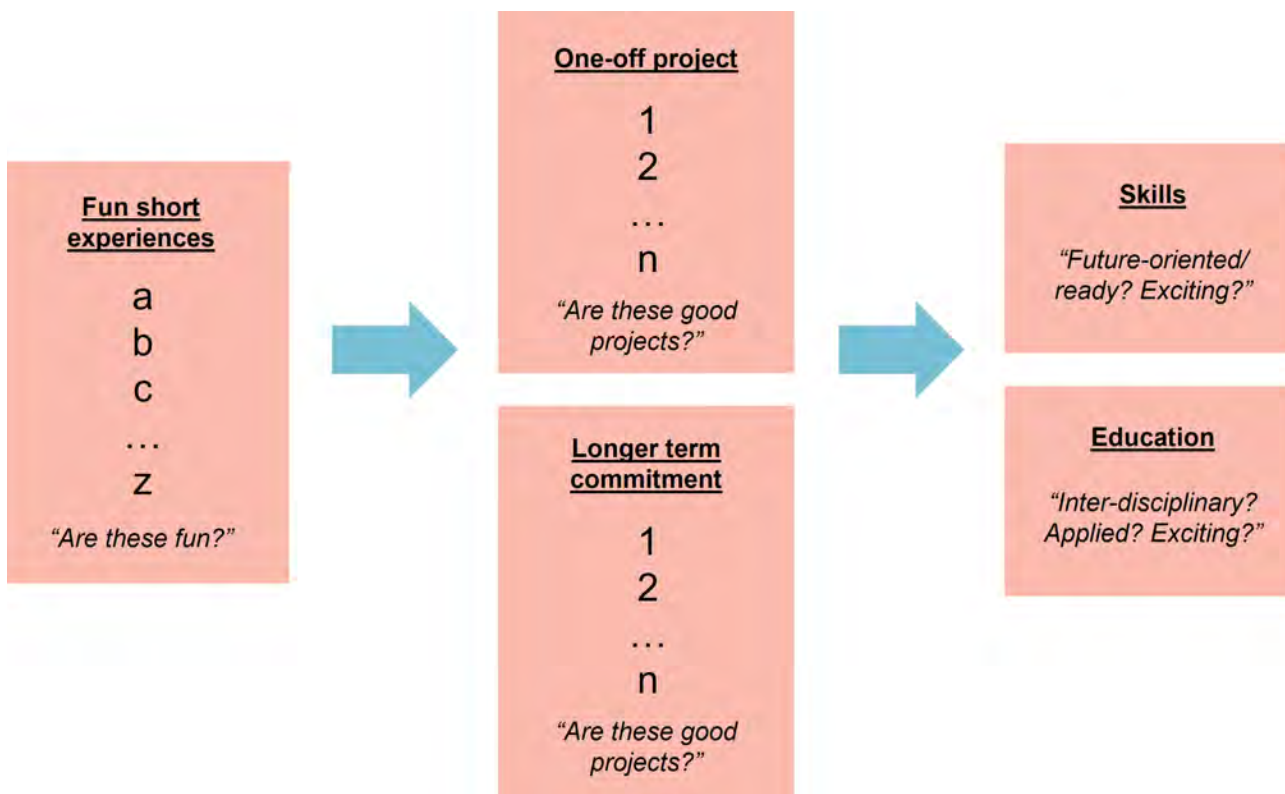
Micro-Experiences for Self-Exploration

The Concept

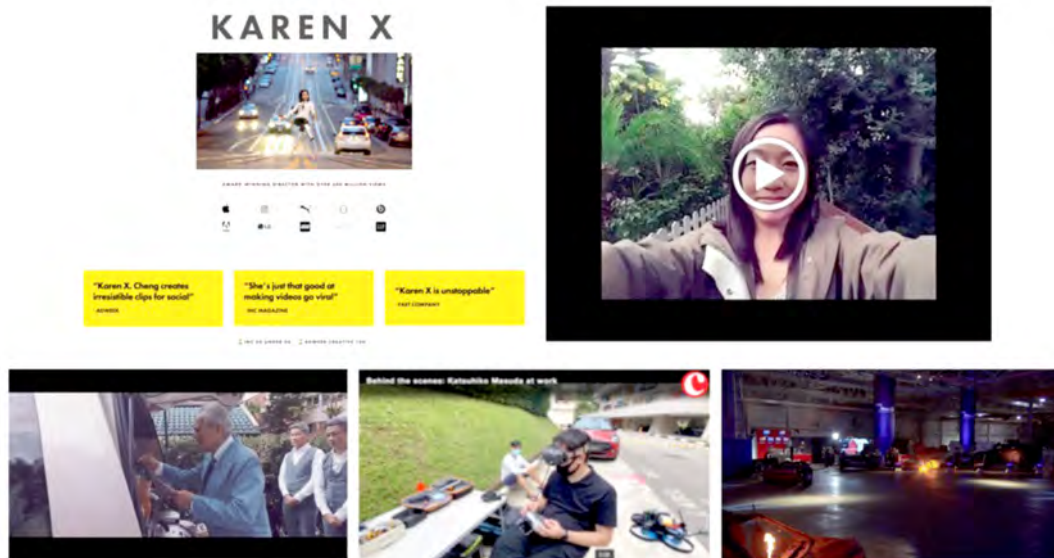
The late Stanford education and psychology professor John D. Krumboltz described the process of exploring options and finding a good career as akin to marriage. He said, “Don’t marry a job before your first date” (Lim, 2021).

Similarly, CreateFuture is about offering youth and young professionals many opportunities by letting them try their hand at different short fun experiences, exploring multiple possibilities, before committing to a longer-term personal or professional pursuit. This reverses the conventional approach where they have to first commit to the latter upfront (as is the case when signing up for most courses).

A task-based experience or course can be introduced by NTUC to attract the youth. NTUC can focus on skills as fun experiences as opposed to the general impression that skills are a stepping stone and one “must do it or else”, which is unmotivating, transactional and a chore.



Experiences must necessarily revolve around doing things i.e. tasks. Focusing on a set of meaningful, enjoyable, social, impactful tasks also means these could become the basis of micro-portfolios, new skills, new lifestyles and even future professions. These tasks should cover a broad range of topics and skills. For example, drone precision-flying or using everyday tools to create interesting camera effects. These can be one-off experiences that may lead to workshops or longer courses. Course maps that provide information (such as a flow chart) on how each fun experience may be furthered by additional experiences/workshops/courses provided by NTUC and indicate where these can lead to professional or life goals.



These fun experiences can be curated by asking youth themselves what they are interested in, asking innovators in different industries, and discovering trends on social media or in youth communities. The modes of these experiences could vary depending on what suits the activity and both online and offline means should be considered.

The Rationale

Strategic Positioning

Currently, most workshops and skills training are result-based as they are seen as something that can help further one's career or earn an income. Even things that could be seen as fun and a hobby, like baking, are coupled with certificates to incentivise people to participate. These become a 'chore' to people — they feel that they 'should' and 'have to' attend these courses and lessons to better themselves, otherwise they fall behind or are at risk of being judged inadequate by others. These courses thus become unsatisfying and unappealing to them. People continue to go for such courses only because of the potential long-term benefits but this is hardly enough to appeal to everyone, much less to build a habit or lifestyle (Milkman, 2021) of pursuing such courses amongst those who even start.





At the end of the day, what people really want to do is to have fun while learning something new and/or pursuing their goals. Psychologists Ayelet Fishbach and Kaitlin Woolley found that when people made their pursuit of long-term goals more enjoyable in the short-term, they would be more successful in sticking to their pursuit (Woolley & Fishbach, 2017). In one of their studies, they encouraged participants to eat healthy foods and, in another, they encouraged to exercise. In both studies, they encouraged a chosen group to pick healthy foods or exercises they enjoyed, while the others were asked to pick healthy foods and exercises that would benefit them most. They found that the group asked to find the fun in healthy activities had persisted longer in their exercises and eaten more healthy food.

The Mary Poppins approach — ‘a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down’ — uses ‘fun’ or instant gratification to appeal to us to take on or overcome seemingly laborious or unenjoyable activities (Milkman, 2021). Young people like fun experiences, and have a wide variety of interests, which will also be useful in preparing them for whatever the future brings on. Fun has also been shown to be a good way to get people started on change (e.g., habits) for the better/future as Fishbach and Woolley have discovered.

Furthermore, we have seen in the focus group and survey conducted that youth were willing to try their hand at short fun experiences and exploring their options after. Their interests in the same topic were also varied. For instance, when presented with the idea of urban farming some were more interested in doing the harvesting while others were more interested in the distribution or use of the harvest. As such, sharing a similar starting point on the same topic and then branching out on different learning paths and activities would be logical and practical. It also separates the topic into different snippets such that there is something for everyone whether they feel that the topic at hand is something that is “good to know” or something that they “have to know”.

As other skills training providers and organisations market their programmes for skills enrichment, NTUC can be the provider of pure enrichment. Through such fun first experiences, NTUC can introduce new opportunities and possibilities to their young

members, increasing the odds they will find something that makes them more resilient and robust through ages, life stages, and socio-economic shifts.

By leveraging existing partnerships, NTUC can identify appropriate activities for this purpose. It is also in a position to make use of these 'trained' individuals upon completing the experiences, tapping on their skills for short social media projects, etc.

For example, a fun first experience over a weekend in urban farming becomes the catalyst for young people to want to pick up more skills and knowledge in farming, IoT, robotics, nutrition, etc via a short course and/or online learning. These in turn build a passion and motivation to undergo extended training and conversion to a career in urban farming and/or agri-tech (such as the programmes offered by NTUC LearningHub).

Another example would be video games. A fun tournament could lead to different follow-up activities for those who are interested in e-sport, streaming or game development. It is unsurprising to hear of youth who have turned their passion for video games into a career or longer life goal, with many becoming professional e-sport players, commentators or live streamers. Some may enter game development by becoming designers, coders or work on the business side of things.

Steady Presence and Proactive Reach

By curating tasks/topics that are focused first on being meaningful, enjoyable, social and impactful, NTUC provides versatility to how members can apply the skills and knowledge that they gain and also assist them in building a lifestyle that they desire. Through CreateFuture, members can explore their interests with minimal commitment unlike long courses or costly workshops. They get a choice in how they wish to apply their skills to their lives, whether for personal use or professional development. These skills can be adapted and applied throughout their lives and individuals can keep going back to learn more on the same subject or seek a new topic.

Investment

NTUC can present itself as a partner that is invested in helping you invest in your life, whether it is for personal or career growth. Furthermore, NTUC can identify the gaps in the market where few individuals possess skills in a certain area in Singapore, and help individuals become pioneers in the area. NTUC can also recognise these 'informal' skill sets in different ways, whether it be by getting a community together for a project or asking for them to pass on their knowledge by conducting their own workshops. It will also help bolster the workforce and community by ensuring varied skills, and consequently opportunities for income in a multitude of areas.

3.4 Feelers

Offline-to-Online and Online-to-Offline Intelligence



The Concept

Online means can be used to capture important information about current and potential NTUC members, while also supporting offline channels of acquisition and outreach and creating new channels for revenue streams/services.

A set-up for data collection from NTUC’s online properties, such as Lit.sg, and a framework for the important kinds of data to collect, and how it informs different organisation or business goals, will aid the crafting of efficient and fruitful strategies. In our deep dive into Lit.sg, we identified that to understand how successful NTUC’s efforts in acquiring customers for Lit.sg is, data such as the number of people landing on the Lit.sg page will need to be collected, as well as how these people came to find Lit.sg (i.e. where they were ‘referred’ from, such as through social media or eDMs).

Business Objectives	Goals	Metrics
Customer Acquisition	Increase awareness of Lit.sg	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of users and new users across website and other online channels 2. Number of referrals 3. Number of landings for each page
	Increase awareness of NTUC events and initiatives (excl. LIT events and initiatives)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of redirects to other NTUC sites for events or initiatives not related to Lit.sg 2. Number of redirects to other NTUC resources pages
	Increase awareness of Young NTUC social media channels	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of redirects to social media channels

The website and/or content design and development should complement the data points that have been identified for collection. For example, if NTUC would like to know which of the 4 Ps is of more interest at first sight to site visitors, then they would have to design a page with the 4 Ps as separate 'elements' for visitors to click on.



Progression



Placement



Protection



Privileges

By leveraging analytics tools such as Google Analytics, site activity can be tracked to provide key information such as how many people are interested in signing up for an NTUC membership, and how many do not complete the sign-up process. This will give insights on where the drop-offs have occurred and an opportunity for NTUC to address the gap.

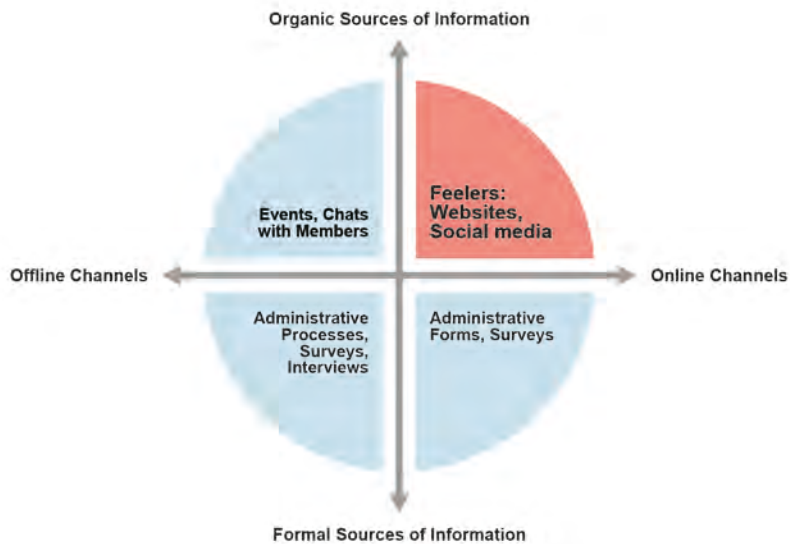
Different online properties across varying platforms like a website or social media, even if created for different purposes or initiatives should embrace the above-mentioned ideas to fully utilise their potential.

The Rationale

Strategic Positioning

Traditionally, NTUC has been covering the ground through numerous offline channels like roadshows, partnered events and community outreach groups. As the use of technology grew, it also introduced online channels to meet this change. Many of these online channels exist as a means to support offline activities but there is greater potential to grow them as their own service or revenue stream and also leverage their existence to gather valuable insights. Support for offline activities can continue to be one of the goals for such online channels but better integration of offline and online activity can boost success.

Growing NTUC's digital presence and creating services/revenue streams through online channels will help bring NTUC into the future and aid it in its provision of services for people to achieve the good life.



Notably, a substantial cache of insights and information can be gathered through these online channels given that NTUC has a significant number of members and hence potential users of these online channels. Surveys, whether conducted online or offline, are still one of the key ways information from the ground is being collected. However, actions and input online are just as capable of providing vital sources of information. Particularly so when the input is thought of as given organically, without the bias of a structured prompt like a survey question. Organic searches and clicks are often driven almost entirely by a person’s interest. In comparison, surveys are structured such that participants have to provide an opinion within narrow boundaries. The two methods are efficient at collecting different kinds of information.

Where there are capacity and time limits for offline activities, online channels are not bounded by the same restrictions. By leveraging such features and NTUC’s large membership base, much can be achieved through online channels.



Steady Presence and Proactive Reach

These online channels will also remain a constant source and means through which NTUC and existing and potential members can interact, as well as provide and access services. By leveraging data collection and analytics tools, NTUC will be able to deliver resources and services on their online channels that they know people are interested in or that will help further organisation goals. In building a strong digital presence across multiple online platforms that are perceived as 'useful' in people's eyes, NTUC can also further establish themselves in people's minds as a legitimate, accessible and valuable source for resources and services. Through these online channels, NTUC can also initiate contact with members by hosting polls, online events and so forth, which would not only boost outreach but also help to further collect insights.

Investment

Laying the foundation for such digital means is both an investment in the future for NTUC and its members. For NTUC, it is an investment to stay ahead by consistently being aware of people's needs through the insights they can gather and keeping up with technological advances for provision of services. For members, it is a signal that NTUC is providing channels through which they can invest in future services and services that would help with their future.



Chapter 4: Conclusion

We have identified that NTUC's challenge in attracting more, and younger, members to join the Labour Movement is due to NTUC being strongly associated with the idea of 'insurance', and therefore causing people to likely only turn to NTUC in times of crises or need.

We proposed that to attract youth to join the Labour Movement, NTUC should adopt the Barbell Strategy to further cement its role in ensuring workers stay resilient and to establish a new role for itself to help its members become robust in capturing high growth opportunities.

We recommended four initiatives through which NTUC can apply the strategy into coherent actions as follows in partnership with tripartite partners.

- Lifetime Career and Mentorship Office: In-Step With Changes
- Grounded Guides: Voices and Choices From the Labour Movement
- CreateFuture: Micro-Experiences for Self-Exploration
- Feelers: Offline-to-Online and Online-to-Offline Intelligence

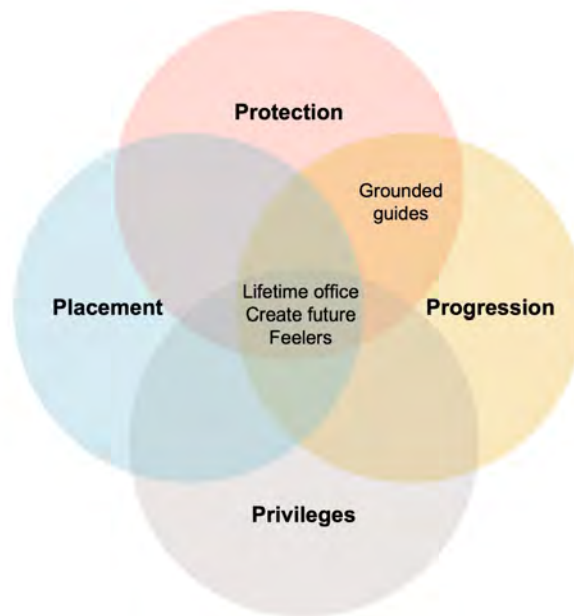
4.1 Embracing the 4 Ps

Furthermore, in the spirit of NTUC's membership model, the initiatives each touch on an aspect of one or more of the 4 Ps. They illustrate how the 4 Ps may continue to be embraced through different types of offerings and positioning.

From NTUC's existing frameworks and initiatives, we understand the 4 Ps to encompass the following, non-exhaustive, meanings and associations:

- Protection: job security, workers' rights, "insurance", sense of security (for Singapore and/or member's future)
- Progression: opportunities for personal and/or professional development, supporting Singapore's development
- Placement: opportunities for education and/or work placement/experience
- Privileges: perks and benefits

The 4 Ps are not mutually exclusive and at times can be complementary. Though NTUC offerings may display one of them more strongly than others, the offerings may also touch on one or more of the other Ps.



Lifetime Career and Mentorship Office

- Protection is provided as members can use the service to ensure their continued employment or seek new jobs.
- Progression is provided as members can use the service for professional development or mentoring opportunities.
- Placement is provided as members can use the service to seek employment.
- Privilege is provided as members receive resume reviewing services; career services as a perk/benefit of their membership.

Grounded Guides

- Protection is provided as the resources gathered will aid members in anticipating future needs and issues, and also provide them with the knowledge to resolve them.
- Progression is provided as members can make headway on issues and support developments in workplaces and Singapore's workforce.

CreateFuture

- Protection is provided as members can use skills learnt to secure their future, whether through employment or fulfilling other needs.
- Progression is provided as members can use the service for professional and/or personal development.
- Placement is provided as skills gained from the sessions can be used to seek employment.
- Privilege is provided as these fun experiences are a perk/benefit of the membership.

Feelers

- Protection is provided as it helps NTUC identify areas in which members need support or protection in the future.
- Progression is provided as it helps NTUC identify areas in which members seek professional or personal development.
- Placement is provided as it helps NTUC identify areas of interest to members for employment and offer relevant resources and opportunities.
- Privilege is provided as it helps NTUC identify perks and benefits members seek and offer them as needed.

These initiatives capitalise on NTUC's strengths and exemplify how NTUC can demonstrate to Singaporeans that they are interested in helping them "insure" their working lives and "invest" in them — a first step in showing the masses that NTUC can offer support consistently and throughout their lives, no matter their age or life stage.

4.2 Developing Mindshare and Value Capture for NTUC

Additionally, these initiatives will also help create 'stickiness' to NTUC by building a sustained relationship with them i.e. interactions are oriented to the long term. Many of the initiatives give rise to opportunities or necessitate consistent interaction with members, keeping NTUC in their minds and growing its presence in their lives. For instance, the Lifetime Career and Mentorship Office assists members throughout their career and youth would have to work closely with union leaders and NTUC personnel on the Grounded Guides. As members pursue sessions with CreateFuture, they will also go back for more, whether to build on the same skill set or discover other fun experiences, making NTUC the 'go-to' hub for their development. Feelers help to support and reinforce the mindshare created by the other initiatives by monitoring sentiment and relaying information timely.

The current mindshare for NTUC (i.e. 'insurance') is one that is easily confused, crowded, and out-competed with others. To create a greater and clearer mindset of what NTUC offers, these recommendations will help establish an additional positioning of 'investment'. This additional positioning creates a higher perceived value of NTUC and its offerings, which can appeal to a greater number of people, thereby increasing membership.



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Annex

Annex A: Methodology of Study and Profile of Participants

Methodology of Study



The study was conducted over four stages that built on each other:

- I. Stage A sets the Archetypes of changes and impact on young workers;
- II. These archetypes fed into Stage B where we developed a deeper understanding of young workers and their needs.
- III. Stage C used these insights to identify Portfolios of Progression, Protection, Placement and Privileges that are relevant.
- IV. Stage D integrated all the previous stages and evaluated the information gathered to develop the Recommendations required by the project.

The stages were iterative as each successive stage was used to refine findings from earlier stages. Participants for each stage comprised a mix of participants from previous stages as well as new participants. The former provided continuity so that a group of participants will be able to build deeper understanding as the project progressed, and hence increased the likelihood that they will offer better insights and ideas too.

The report is structured using the strategy framework detailed in the book *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy* by UCLA professor Richard Rumelt:

1. A diagnosis: an explanation of the nature of the challenge. A good diagnosis simplifies the often overwhelming complexity of reality by identifying certain aspects of the situation as being the critical ones.
2. A guiding policy: an overall approach chosen to cope with or overcome the obstacles identified in the diagnosis.

3. Coherent actions: steps that are coordinated with one another to support the accomplishment of the guiding policy.

Subsequently, a survey with the intention of validating the insights surfaced from this study was conducted. The survey served to provide a more holistic approach for identifying and developing a better understanding of the needs, aspirations and challenges of the youth today. Furthermore, we sought to determine youth and young working professionals' understanding and awareness of the Labour Movement and the relevant support/initiatives available.

Profile of Participants for Surveys, Interviews and Focus Groups

1. Pre-Focus Group/Workshop Interviews/Meetings

Interviews were conducted with eight youth/young professionals who had different experiences and levels of involvement with NTUC's initiatives (such as nEbO alumni/staff/members, former members, non-members and those that recently returned to help out). They were all male except for one female. Their age groups ranged from late teens to early 30s, with a mix of educational and work backgrounds.

In addition, we also had meetings with staff from Young NTUC, including a deep dive on Lit.sg that concluded with a set of recommendations and ideas for them. This offered us a look into Young NTUC's latest and popular initiatives.

2. April and September 2021 Workshops/Focus Groups (Focusing on What Youth/Young Professionals Desire)

Two focus groups were held, with two participants from the first focus group returning for the second to help us connect ideas across the two sessions. There was a total of ten participants, aged 18 to mid-40s, with 50:50 male/female ratio. The two older participants (around 40s) were included in the second focus as they were business/social/educational entrepreneurs and volunteers focusing on new ways to energise the community and provided concrete focal points for the younger participants to discuss ideas concretely instead of abstractly. The younger participants had a range of backgrounds to ensure diversity (e.g., educational qualifications, served National Service, work experiences and relationship/marital status, etc.)

3. June to August 2021 Focus Groups (Focusing on Work-Life Balance)

Four focus groups were held with twenty-one participants aged 18 to 35, with about 30% males and 70% females. Two groups focused on university students and another two on young working adults. The working adults included different professional backgrounds as well as relationship/marital statuses, and life priorities.

4. Survey With Youth and Young Working Professionals

The survey was conducted in April 2022 with 1,000 youth and young working professionals, aged 18–35 years old. More than 70% of the sample consisted of employed youth across various industries.

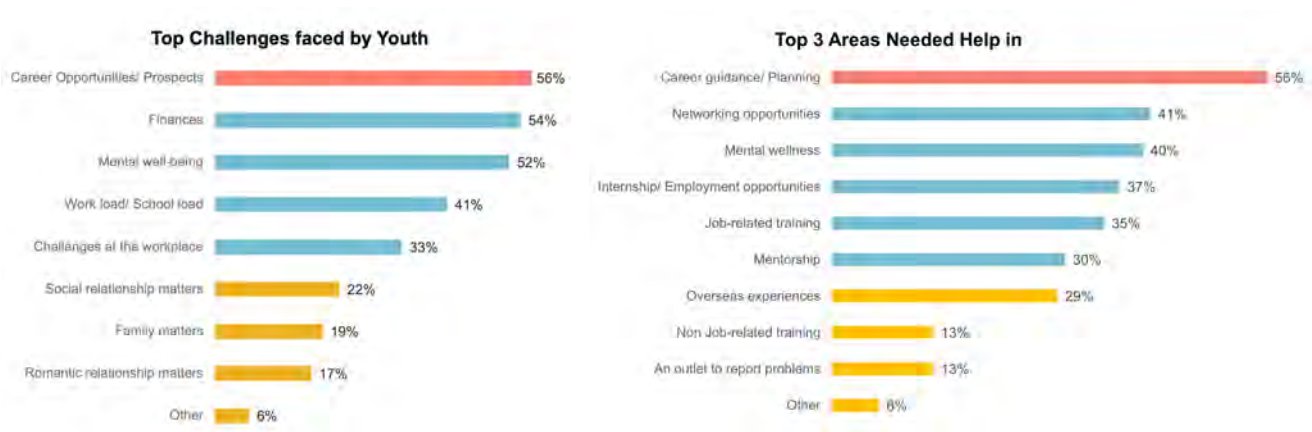
Annex B: Youth/Young Professionals — Key Observations

Summary of Key Insights Drawn from Survey, Interviews and Focus Group Sessions

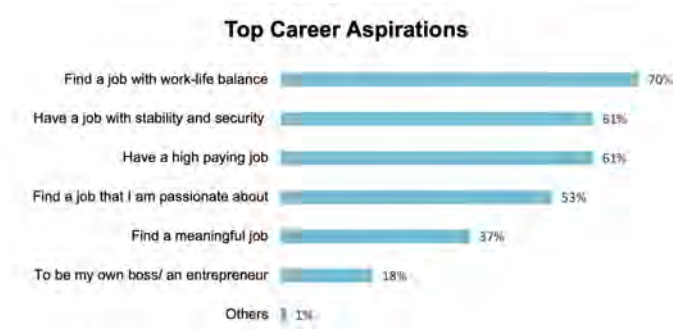
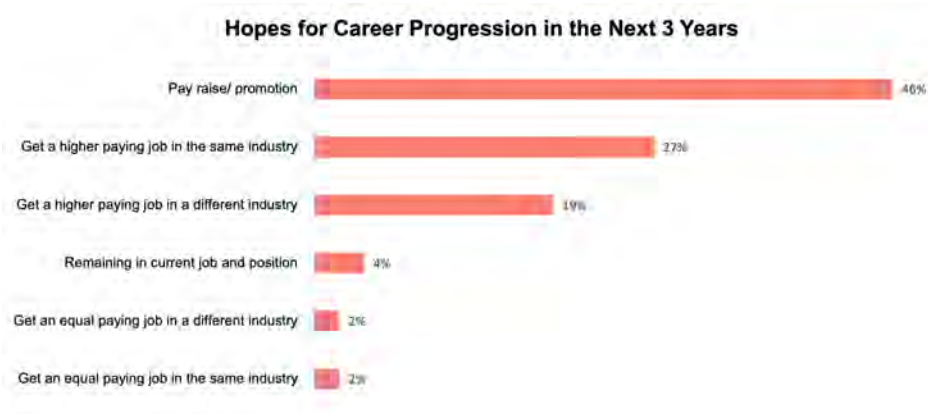
1. Views, desires, needs, etc., are as diverse as they come, and evolving.
2. Most youth did not know about the challenges they could run into at the workplace before their first job.
3. They did not realise they may need to learn when and how to ask for help on work-related matters. They prefer to resolve such problems on their own or seek help from friends, colleagues and family members instead of approaching authority figures/ organisations.
4. Today's youth are more concerned with job security/workers' rights (Protection) and opportunities for education and/or work placement/experience (Placement)
5. Many of them (mostly the males) felt that they need to 'protect' their family from financial worry, emotional turmoil and pain.
6. While youth have high hopes for career progression, the majority (92%) are hoping to earn more in the next three years. Only 4 out of every 100 youth intend to remain in their current jobs and positions.
7. More than 7 in 10 found that Lifetime Career and Mentorship and CreateFuture are useful and are willing to pay more than \$10 per month to enjoy benefits from these initiatives.

Key Insights of Survey, Interviews and Focus Group Sessions

The survey highlighted that **career-related matters, finances and mental well-being are the top challenges of youth**. More than 1 in 2 faced challenges in career opportunities/prospects and hoped for greater support in career guidance/planning.



Today's youth hold **high hopes for career progression**, the majority (92%) are hoping to receive a pay raise or a promotion in the next three years. Only 4 out of every 100 youth intend to remain in their current jobs and positions. Despite that, 7 in 10 ranked **work-life balance as their top career aspiration**.

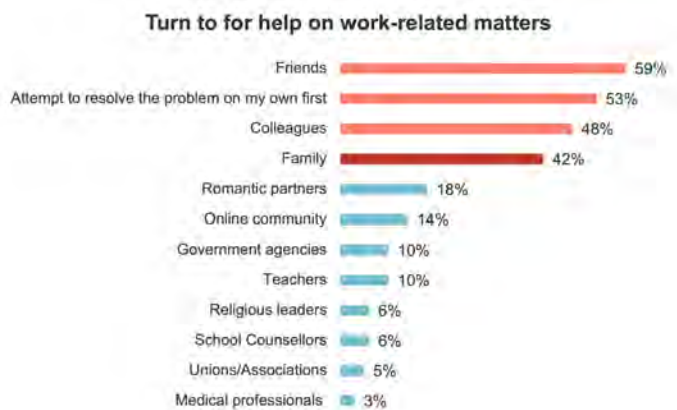


Most youth did not know about the challenges they could run into at the workplace and would **prefer solving these problems themselves or seeking help from family, colleagues and friends instead of authority figures/organisations**.

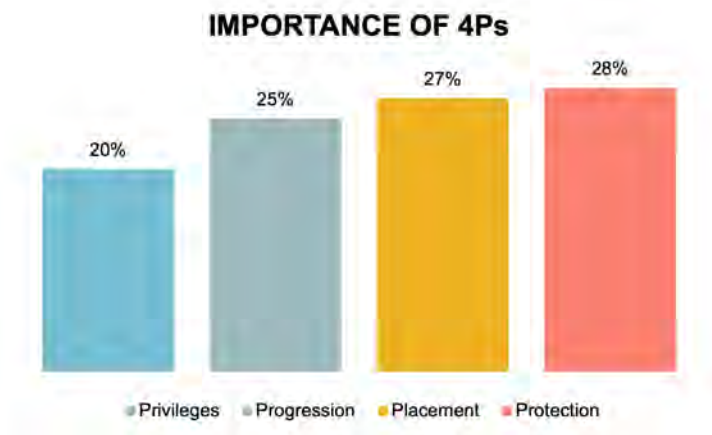
"I wasn't aware I would run into such problems in the future." 21-year-old Male

"At my previous workplace, I was doing something related to quality assurance and my boss tasked us to do something we were uncomfortable with. At that point of time, we just did what we were told and we didn't think of leaving the company because of our contract, and possibly because we thought no one could help us. We only shared our problems with our friends/ clients and that was when I realised there was the Tripartite Alliance who looks into these kind of matters." 30-year-old Female

"If I have to ask for help, I usually look for people I trust or who has had similar experiences before." 21-year-old Male

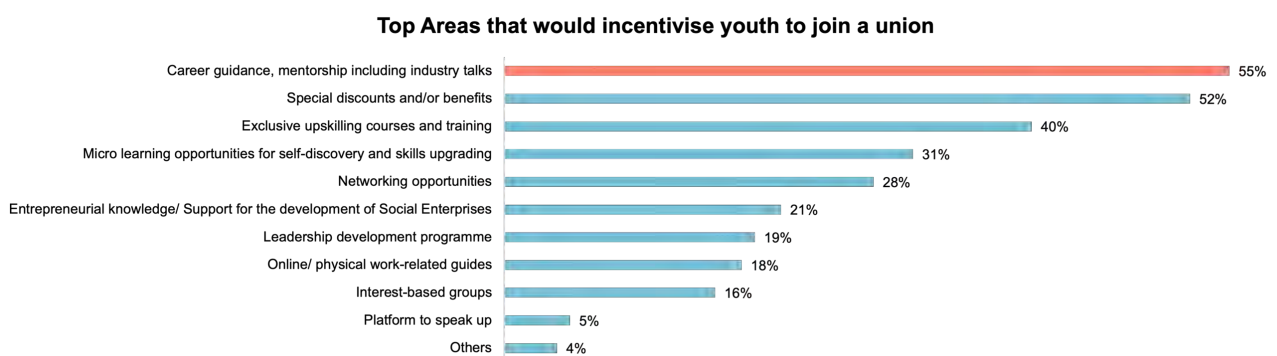


Youth regard job security/workers' rights (Protection) and opportunities for education and/or work placement/ experience (Placement) as the top two most important areas they need support in.



Across the various initiatives proposed in this study, more than 7 in 10 youth find the **Lifetime Career and Mentorship Office and CreateFuture** useful. In addition, they are prepared to pay more than \$10 per month to enjoy these services, with youth willing to pay \$12 per month for CreateFuture and \$11 per month for the Lifetime Career and Mentorship Office.

Youth also find **career guidance and mentorship most appealing** and would be more incentivised to join a union if these services are provided. 55% of the youth surveyed agree that career guidance, mentorship including industry talks are the top areas that would incentivise them to join a union.



Other than **networking and mentorship opportunities as career support** that youth are looking for from unions, they are also hoping for greater support in **mental wellness, achieving work life balance for their personal development** and hope to enjoy **greater discounts** in terms of lifestyle benefits.

Annex C: Sample of an Exploratory Study by Youth on Work-Life Balance

Title

How can Singaporean youth balance work and personal life better? An exploratory study.

Authors¹

Tan Han Wei Joshua, Tan Ann Qi Justina, Claire Pang Qing Hui

With

Goh Zi An Galvyn, Darion Hotan, and Poon King Wang

Background

Since the inception of the term ‘work-life balance’ into organisational literature, researchers and practitioners have expended great effort into understanding the impact of work-life balance, both on an organisational level and an individual level. The general consensus remains that work-life balance largely benefits both workers and organisations. Employees with greater work-life balance tend to have better mental and physical health than their counterparts who struggle in that domain (Haar et al., 2014). Having workers with a work-life balance has also been shown to be advantageous for employers. Employees with good work-life balance have higher job satisfaction, in turn leading to greater organisational commitment and lower turnover and absenteeism rates, boosting workplace productivity and profitability (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014).

Unfortunately, Singapore does not seem to have embraced work-life balance as much as other countries have. According to Kisi (2019), out of 40 countries, Singapore ranks 32 for work-life balance. Considering the positive outcomes of work-life balance, this position can mean a less healthy workforce and signify the potential for greater organisational performance. This appears to be a particularly pressing issue for young Singaporean workers. The Credit Suisse Youth Barometer (2018) found that work-life balance is important to 71% of Singaporean youth respondents. However, millennials in Singapore actually work the second-longest hours in the world (Tang, 2018). The gap between the desire for work-life balance and the actual state of work-life balance in the country indicates a mismatch for many young Singaporean workers that needs to be addressed.

In addition, the lack of work-life balance specifically for working women has important broader societal implications. Singapore has long been concerned about the ageing population, with half of the population expected to be aged 65 and above by 2030 (Siau, 2017). Research suggests that this could potentially be at least partially attributed to long

¹ This study was conducted, developed and written by Joshua Tan, Tan Ann Qi Justina and Claire Pang; who were interns attached to the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of Technology and Design in Summer 2021.

The study was supervised by the following staff at the LKYCIC, SUTD: Goh Zi An Galvyn, Darion Hotan, and LKYCIC Director Poon King Wang. Please contact galvyn_goh@sutd.edu.sg if you have any feedback about our research.

working hours, and a lack of work-life balance in general. More women are choosing to stay single or have fewer children, as managing high demands at work while also fulfilling expectations of taking care of household duties proves to be a herculean task (Tan, 2020). As a result, Singapore's fertility rate has continued to trend downwards through the years, despite the government's many efforts to encourage couples to have children (Tang, 2018).

The time benefits of improving work-life balance are thus two-fold for working women. Increased work-life balance among women allows them to have more personal time, making both holistic growth and family expansion more feasible. Moreover, since greater work-life balance achieved can result in increased workplace productivity, further time savings are generated, favouring the pursuit of starting a family. Of course, these advantages in greater workplace performance extend to the company and the economy as a whole.

Currently, there is little research done in Singapore specific to young working adults. We believe that it is especially pertinent and important to study the challenges faced specifically by this generation, as surveys and reports suggest that the younger generation holds somewhat different ideals and goals from the older generations (Tee, 2020), meaning that the solutions of the past may no longer be sufficient or applicable. As the future parents and emergent workforce of this nation, it is crucial to ensure that we can build a sustainable workforce for the future.

The Current Study

The current study aims to understand the youth's perceptions of work-life balance, so as to propose recommendations for areas of improvement. The main aspects explored were decided on after the researchers explored existing conversation on work-life balance in Singapore based on a review of newspaper articles (e.g., The Straits Times, Channel News Asia, etc.), government statements (e.g., Ministry of Manpower), social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, etc.) and audiovisual material (i.e., Youtube and podcasts) that mostly consisted of anecdotal recounts and interviews. The review revealed that the conversation surrounding work-life balance in Singapore revolved around three topics: (1) how work-life balance is defined, (2) challenges faced in attaining work-life balance, and (3) ways to achieve work-life balance.

How Work-Life Balance is Defined

Traditionally, work-life balance describes the division of time and space between work and interests outside of that (Alton, 2018). However, as Alton (2018) explains, there is a new shift to work-life integration, where work and life are not seen as two distinctly separated parts of life. Instead, workers acknowledge that work and life can mix, and they aim to manage their work and outside interests concurrently to attain their ideal lifestyle. Singapore appears to adopt this idea of work-life integration, where the Ministry of Manpower's website provides guidelines on 'work-life harmony' (Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 2019). The notion of 'balance' was also commonly rejected as individuals no longer saw work and life as "opposing forces" (Simon Sinek, 2019) whereby one could "achieve perfect equilibrium"

(Oppenheimer, 2017) with. As Chan et al. (2018) argue, various institutions (i.e., government, industry and academia) continue to discuss work-life balance issues even as their idea of it is lacking definition. As such, one of the study objectives explores how Singaporean youth define work-life balance.

Challenges Faced

Two obstacles to work-life balance mentioned across all media sources were social influence and the erosion of boundaries due to advances in technology. There exists a pressure to continue working past stipulated working hours if coworkers were doing so, indicating an effect of social norms (Ong, 2019). Ong (2019) further describes how the pervasiveness of technology causes a lack of boundaries between work and leisure time since “everything is interconnected” (Walters, 2017). The blurring of boundaries is especially relevant due to changes in working arrangements as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, where working from home has become the default (Tan, 2021). As the home becomes the office, it is increasingly easier to work overtime as the lack of no clear physical boundaries makes it hard to separate work and outside duties (Wu, 2020). Accordingly, the phenomenon of “work-from-home burnout” has surfaced (Tsipursky, 2021). This phenomenon has been blamed on a growing “always-on” culture during remote working, where more Singaporeans felt the need to constantly attend to work during the circuit breaker period in April 2020 as compared to January of the same year (Entrepreneur’s Digest, 2020; Loh, 2021). This poses a greater challenge to young Singaporean workers, who have been found to experience greater anxiety and perceive themselves to be less mentally resilient than their older counterparts (Teo, 2020). Thus, it is relevant to investigate the challenges faced by young workers, and the part the pandemic has to play with regard to shifts to working from home.

The current research study thus aims to explore three main questions:

1. *How do young workers define work-life balance?*
2. *What are the challenges faced by young workers who wish to pursue work-life balance?*
3. *What are some ways that work-life balance can be improved for young workers?*

In addition, two additional questions were looked into to understand possible existing norms and social influence as well as the unique environmental circumstances for work brought about by COVID-19:

1. *What is the current state of work-life balance in Singapore?*
2. *How have challenges to work-life balance changed since the shift to working from home?*

Understanding the perceived current state of work-life balance is essential as evidence from individual accounts suggest that one’s level of work-life balance is largely dependent on their work environment. More specifically, if one’s workplace accepts and perhaps unintentionally encourages disruptions to work-life balance, one is more likely to engage in similar behaviours that prevent achieving work-life balance. As Bandura’s (1977) Social

Learning Theory explains, individuals pick up behaviours based on observing others. The social environment serves as a guide for one's attitudes, beliefs and what is the norm. The norm is then maintained by operant conditioning (Skinner, 1953). For instance, normative barriers to work-life balance can be described by positive reinforcement (i.e., an increase in behaviour after receiving a reward; e.g., staying overtime more often after receiving praise for keeping oneself busy with work) or positive punishment (i.e., a decrease in behaviour after an unfavourable outcome; e.g., reducing leaving work on time as coworkers make unpleasant remarks about one being less hardworking). As such, asking the first additional question can inform on how much one's pursuit of the 'ideal' work-life balance is influenced by the perception of how common work-life balance is in Singapore.

Exploring the home working environment takes relevance from Ashforth et al.'s (2000) boundary theory. According to this view, work and family exist as two separate domains. When the boundary between the two becomes unclear, the roles in both domains are integrated. This can lead to conflict between work and family and can confuse the individual in performing duties with respect to either role. Thus, with a great move towards working from home, this phenomenon can be investigated more deeply. The research team would like to emphasise that this study is intended to push the conversation forward regarding work-life balance in Singapore, particularly in the context of Singaporean youth transitioning to the workforce. We hope this will encourage other citizens, workers, researchers and policy makers to embark on further theoretical and applied research into this topic, with the ultimate aim of helping Singaporeans work and live better.

Method

Research Design and Participants

A total of four focus group discussions were held, each consisting of five to six participants for a diversity of views. A multiple-category design was employed, with two groups of university students and two groups of young working adults. The views of university students are relevant as they will soon enter the workforce. All sessions were conducted in English.

Participants were recruited by purposeful sampling, with the inclusion criteria being aged 18 to 35, and either a current university student or working full-time. Working adults in higher management roles were excluded from the study as we focused on the views of the general working class. Using word-of-mouth (convenience sampling), a total of 21 participants were recruited. Incentives for participation were offered in the form of supermarket vouchers to encourage participation. 11 of them were students while 10 of them were working adults. Of the 10 working adults, 9 held office jobs. 6 of the participants were male and the remaining 15 were female.

Logistics

Due to legal restrictions and to safeguard participants' health during the pandemic, the focus group sessions were held online via the Zoom platform. Sessions were recorded

using the record function in the software for ease of transcription. The sessions lasted between 1h40min to 2h10min.

Moderating Team and Guide

The moderating team consisted of three researchers. All three researchers were present at all the sessions. The team rotated between two roles — one researcher would be the main moderator while the other two researchers assisted in ensuring the session ran smoothly. One took notes to ensure all participant viewpoints were captured while the other sent the moderator's questions into the Zoom chat for participants to refer to in case they missed the question. The questions asked between sessions were largely the same, based on a moderator's guide created by the team. The guide for the students and working adults only differed slightly in wording, with working adults asked to focus on their own experiences while questions for the students drew on any of their past work experiences or their general impression of work.

Procedure

After the participants were selected for the study, the researchers confirmed their participation via text. A day before each focus group session, a reminder with the Zoom link and details was sent to each participant. At the same time, to ensure the session would be conducive to discussion, participants were asked to join the session in a quiet room if possible. Informed consent was obtained prior to the study via an online form.

Each focus group session was video recorded using the Zoom record function. At the start of the session, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and made aware that the session would be recorded. At the end of the session, participants are debriefed and the study incentive was arranged to be sent to them electronically. The focus group discussions were spaced at least 3 days apart. The buffer between the sessions allowed the research team to review the responses to determine if any improvements to the study design and focus group questions were necessary. The discussion sessions for the two groups of students were held first, followed by the two sessions for the working adults. Based on the very first session, some questions were combined for the following sessions as participants tended to respond similarly to the questions. This process ensured the quality of data collected for the study.

Thematic Analysis

The video recordings were all transcribed verbatim by the researchers, and each transcript was proof-read twice by separate researchers to ensure accuracy. Thematic analysis was conducted by first dividing the transcripts into three sections, with each researcher being assigned to code responses from two sections so that every section would be coded twice by separate researchers. The researchers would then compare their codings to ensure inter-rater reliability, with the third researcher acting as the tie-breaker in cases where there were disagreements.

Following the coding of each response that carried meaning to it, the coded responses were classified into different categories based on an affinity diagram process. Codes that were similar to each other were placed under the same group. After all the codes were grouped, the categories were named. Codes that did not fall into any particular group were labelled under ‘others’. This avoided any bias of prematurely biasing codes into particular themes. From this process, four main themes were identified. Responses that pertained specifically to ways of improving Work-Life Balance were grouped separately. A simple frequency count of the responses was then conducted, to assist in identifying stronger themes.

Findings

Themes

Our focus group findings uncovered three main themes pertaining to the pursuit of work-life balance, namely: Priorities and Boundaries, Work Environment — Social and Structural aspects, and Internal Factors (Figure 1).

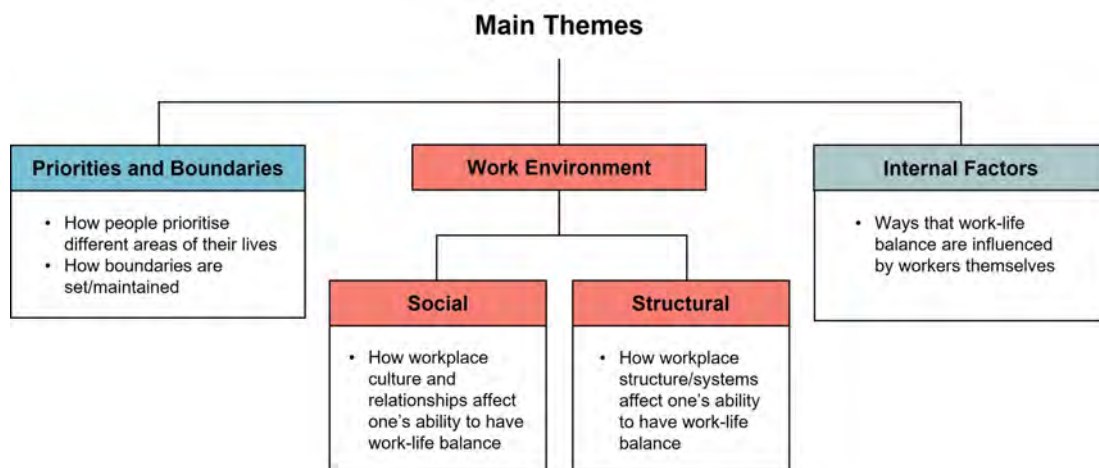


Figure 1: Flowchart of Main Themes

As mentioned in the Method section, the main themes are derived from an amalgamation of sub-themes coded from the participants' responses. Figure 2 details the categorisation and frequency of sub-themes identified from participants' responses across the focus group sessions. Sub-themes that did not fit under any of the main themes are placed in the "Others" section.

Priorities and Boundaries		Work Environment (Social)		Work Environment (Structural)		Internal Factors		Others	
Sub-themes	F	Sub-themes	F	Sub-themes	F	Sub-themes	F	Sub-themes	F
Personal time and boundaries	41	Clear expectations and communication	24	Reasonable expectations	27	Passion for job is important for WLB	24	Personal development	11
Clear mental boundaries	17	Competitiveness and negative perceptions	15	WLB depends on nature of job	13	Employees must establish their own boundaries	10	Less need when reward is expected	3
Clear priorities	16	Competitive environment / Peer pressure	12	Flexibility	12	Job fit	10	Many distractions from work / Unproductivity	3
WLB is a mindset	13	Personal connection	10	WLB depends on superiors	10	Parental Influence on perceptions of WLB	10	WLB essential for sustainable career	3
Work more early in career	11	Good relationships with colleagues	9	Welfare policies	9	Time management	10	Generational differences	2
Self-discipline	10	Trust between parties	9	Flexibility in emergency situations	6	Rest	8	More physically able when younger	2
Relationships as a priority	8	Cultural environment	4	Workers rights	4	Internal pressure	7	Expectations based on experience	1
Health as a priority	7	Employers empathising with employees	3	Company values employees	3	Moral obligation to work	7	Exposure to other companies widen perception of WLB	1
Importance of personal relationships in WLB	7	Employers expressing concern for employees	3	Enforcing policies	3	Sufficient rest	6	Job security	1
More to life than work	7	Professional boundaries	3	Working hours	2	Internal motivation	5	Learning curve	1
Finances as a priority	6	Social norms	3	Manageable stress	1	WLB is a deepset value	3	Poor school life balance	1
Ability to have other commitments	5	Importance of social aspect in workplace	2	Productivity based assessments	1	Justified pursuit of WLB as long as one has shown to be an effective worker	2	Understanding employer's perspectives	1
Family as a priority	5	Awareness of mutual suffering	1			WLB increases productivity	2	WFH equally productive	1
Blocking out time for rest	3	Superiors setting example for WLB	1			Manage own and others' expectations	1		
WLB is a choice	3					Personal choice to OT	1		
Balancing priorities	2					Personality	1		
Work as a priority	2								
Ability to maintain relationships outside of work	1								
Changing views on work-life balance with life phases (importance)	1								
Hobbies as a priority	1								
Less commitments early in career	1								
Mental wellbeing	1								
Other commitments as priority	1								
Practicing WLB	1								
Work is work	1								
Work life harmony / intergration	1								

Abbreviations
F: Frequency
WLB: Work-Life Balance
OT: Overtime

Figure 2: List of Sub-themes and Frequency across Focus Group Discussions

Additionally, Figure 3 details the sub-themes and their respective frequencies across focus group discussions when participants were asked specifically about what improvements they would like to see being made to improve young Singaporean workers' work-life balance.

Sub-themes	F	Sub-themes	F
Personal time and boundaries	34	Set positive norms	3
Reasonable expectations	24	Workers rights	2
Clear expectations and communication	23	Destigmatising healthy work attitudes	2
Clear priorities	14	Clear mental boundaries	1
Job fit	10	Superiors setting example for WLB	1
Time management	10	Education	1
Personal connection	9	Implement benefits that encourage rest	1
Good relationships with colleagues	8	Implement broad guidelines	1
Self-discipline	8	Industry-specific guidelines	1
Trust between parties	8	Manage own and others' expectations	1
Health as a priority	6	Practice wellness tools and techniques	1
Conversations	5	Prioritising health (mental)	1
Raising awareness	5	Productivity-based assessments	1
Advocacy	4	Ranking organisations based on welfare levels	1
Employers expressing concern for employees	4	Specific policies	1
Blocking out time for rest	3	Taking time off deliberately	1
Employers empathising with employees	3	Understanding current state of WLB	1
Enforcing policies	3	Understanding employers' perspectives	1
Professional boundaries	3	Voice for the people/more active stance	1

Figure 3: List of Sub-themes and Frequency on Improvement of Work-Life Balance. The themes are arranged in decreasing frequency of mention.

Implications

Analysing the above-mentioned themes revealed four key problems impeding young Singaporean workers from achieving work-life balance: lack of clear communication between employer and employee, insufficient work-from-home policies, negative stigma surrounding the pursuit of work-life balance and young workers' limited understanding of their ideal work-life balance.

Unreasonable Expectations and Demands from Employers

A common thread in the participants' responses across all four focus group discussions was the need for workloads and deadlines to be reasonable. Rather than explicitly being asked to work overtime, participants reported that the work assigned to them would be excessive, or the deadlines would be too short to be able to complete within the official

working hours, forcing them to work overtime in order to complete the work. As one participant recounted:

“Sometimes there are some unrealistic deadlines, like your boss tells you in 3 days time I need this, then after that they’ll tell you ‘oh no, actually in 1 days time I need this’, and you just have to churn it out by then” (Interviewee S, 18 July 2021).

While it was not clear if their superiors were cognizant of this when they were given these assignments, it remains an issue regardless. This is especially because of fears tied to the negative stigmas surrounding the pursuit of work-life balance, which will be discussed further below. Additionally, participants expressed an internal need to live up to expectations, both real and perceived, that drive them to complete the given assignments at the expense of their own personal time. Social norms theory can be used to partially explain this phenomenon, specifically injunctive norms, a facet of social norms that concerns the perceived approval of behaviours.

Insufficient Work-from-Home Policies

In the course of the discussions, the attitudes towards telecommuting were quite positive as a whole. However, many of the participants, particularly from the working adult groups, expressed their desire for a hybrid policy in the long term, suggesting that working from home presents some unresolved challenges. The first challenge was the social isolation from their colleagues, which some participants felt had exacerbated existing pressures.

“I feel there is that pressure to measure up to other people, like ‘if they can do it why can’t I’ kind of thing. But I think that builds an unhealthy culture, where nobody speaks up. Actually I found out that most of them are struggling with their workload, and nobody says because everybody thinks this is just the normal amount that people should be doing because of the workloads that we have” (Interviewee S, 18 July 2021)

In this instance, the participant and her co-workers only realised they were all overworked by chance, and they had previously just assumed that everyone else was coping well with similar workloads. They had built up this social norm unintentionally, which the participant believed was catalysed by the social isolation of working from home, as they could not gauge how their colleagues were, and how they themselves were doing by comparison. This isolation also makes it more difficult for employers and employees to build personal relationships and mutual trust, both of which were identified as important factors in building an environment where employees feel they are able to pursue Work-Life Balance.

Another challenge identified was the blurring or elimination of work-life boundaries, which was in alignment with what was discussed in the introduction. Participants noted that the lack of a physical boundary of leaving the office made it difficult to enforce a mental boundary, as their work space and personal space overlapped. They also reported that as virtual meetings and online communication became the norm, work-related communication outside of working hours became far more common as well, even though the technology had already existed beforehand.

Finally, some participants reported that working from home also saw people taking on additional roles, such as parents who now needed to take care of their children while also doing their day job. However, this was most likely a feature of the circumstances of the pandemic, where the implementation of work from home was sudden, schools were closed, and people could only go out for essential needs.

Negative Stigma Surrounding the Pursuit of Work-Life Balance

During the focus group discussions, many participants revealed that they were afraid of pursuing work-life balance. One reason cited was the fear of looking less competitive compared to their peers. Many participants believed that asking for extensions, leave, or other actions comprising the pursuit of work-life balance would cause their bosses to negatively perceive their efficacy as a worker:

“They probably don’t ask for it [work-life balance] because maybe their peers are not asking for it... if you ask for it, then they are afraid that, so my boss will think that I’m not as competent as the rest of my peers.” (Interviewee C, 6 July 2021)

Another reason cited by the participants was the feelings of guilt from not working as much as everyone else. The moral obligation to continue working when seeing peers extending their working hours hence impedes young workers from achieving work-life balance:

“You will feel bad if you leave early but then it’s also very difficult to say no because your colleagues are there, working hard...” (Interviewee M, 15 July 2021).

This reflects a larger, more entrenched mindset: the ever-present negative stigma surrounding the pursuit of work-life balance. Given the perceived negative effects of pursuing work-life balance, this mindset impedes young workers from taking charge in establishing their desired boundaries between work and personal time, preventing them from achieving their ideal work-life balance.

Young Workers’ Limited Understanding of their Ideal Work-Life Balance

Another common sentiment brought up during the discussions was that healthy work-life balance is a mindset; ultimately, it is up to the individual to realise it for themselves. For young workers to feel satisfied with their work-life balance, they must first realise what their ideal work-life balance looks like.

Given the lack of working experience, many young workers enter the workforce without a clear grasp of their personal definitions of work-life balance. Consequently, young workers are unable to assess why they feel like they do not have work-life balance, and cannot take action to pursue it:

“I realised I had no personal definition [of work-life balance]. After defining work-life balance for myself, then I was able to assess why ... I feel like I have no work-life balance.” (Interviewee T, 18 July 2021).

Furthermore, our focus group discussions revealed a trend supporting this narrative: participants with a clearer understanding of their ideal work-life balance showed better

perceptions of their work-life balance and work-life satisfaction. For instance, the focus groups comprising students were generally more worried about pursuing work-life balance out of fear of looking less competitive to their superiors. Hence, they feel that they would not have a proper work-life balance. Conversely, working adult participants revealed that they were not as concerned about possible negative perceptions from their peers and superiors. This is likely due to the difference in personal experiences on the matter.

Another consequence of the relative inexperience and lack of confidence of young workers, especially those in their first full-time jobs, was that they did not know what they could ask or fight for. As one participant recounted,

“When I entered my first job, then I realised oh no, things are getting a lot tougher, then that’s when I realised I had no work-life balance. But my second job opened my eyes and then I realised that... if you believe in work-life balance it’s something that you can fight for” (Interviewee M, 15 July 2021).

This stood in contrast with the responses of the older, more experienced workers in the groups, who expressed more confidence in negotiating with their employers.

Recommendations

Considering the aforementioned problems impeding young Singaporean workers from achieving their desired work-life balance, we propose the following recommendations, broadly split into two categories: establishing clear and reasonable expectations, and advocacy, raising awareness and education about work-life balance.

The following recommendations are not meant to directly address specific issues within companies and relevant institutions, but rather broad recommendations that could contribute to current research gaps. These recommendations are made to the best of the researchers’ knowledge.

1. Establishing Clear and Reasonable Expectations

Closing the Information Gap

Guiding Principle

The guiding principle behind this recommendation is that we are aiming to close the information gap, to empower employees to make better decisions for themselves in applying for jobs. This information will also give them more leverage in negotiating the terms of their contract, with the long-term goal of pushing companies to place emphasis on having reasonable expectations and honoring their employees’ time in order to stay attractive to potential applicants.

Recommended Steps

Based on the sharing of the focus group discussions, we recommend the implementation of a certification system to incentivise companies to have reasonable expectations of their

employees, and more critically to respect the agreed upon expectations. This is similar to the Tripartite Standards, and could conceivably be an addition to the current requirements for attaining the Work-Life Harmony standard.

Justification

The Tripartite Standards (TS) system offers a way for job seekers to find employers that offer certain assurances, such as age-friendly practices and Work-Life Harmony practices. While the latter includes a set of comprehensive requirements that employers must fulfil to obtain the standard, there was no mention of anything relating to the workload and deadlines given to the employees. While the benefits and additional support programmes were viewed positively by the participants, the workload and deadlines were arguably more crucial, because as we discussed in the Findings section, these are two significant factors forcing workers to work overtime. Additionally workers need to have the time and ability to take advantage of these programmes to help them achieve Work-Life Harmony.

If this is not deemed to be an appropriate addition to the TS, one possibility would be to create a platform to receive feedback from the employees and use that feedback to rank or rate the companies. An example we can look towards is Glassdoor, an online platform where current and former employees can review their working experiences in a company. However, one criticism of Glassdoor that might be addressed by such an initiative is that Glassdoor does not verify the identity of contributors beyond asking for an active email address and agreeing to the terms and conditions, which is essentially an honor system. This has made it vulnerable to abuse, both by disgruntled employees making multiple accounts to post bad reviews, and fake positive reviews by companies looking to make it a more attractive place of work. Minimally, this system could require reviewers to link their accounts to their LinkedIn pages, which will allow for internal verification while keeping the reviews anonymous to the public. We believe this will help in creating a trustworthy source of information.

However, we also recognise that creating and administering a platform from scratch would be a costly option, and so as far as possible we would like to build upon existing structures to include these or similar functionalities.

[Reviewing Work-from Home Policies/Guidelines](#)

Guiding Principle

Our aim is to update the current Flexi-Work Arrangement (FWA) guidelines put out by the Tripartite Alliance, to reflect the current reality that work-from-home arrangements are no longer given based on the basis of suitability, but are the new norm for almost all employees. We also aim to see measures that take into account the psychological factors that make Work-Life balance harder to attain when working from home.

Recommended Steps

We do not have concrete policies or guidelines to offer in this paper, as we believe that more research needs to be done into this issue. We would recommend a dedicated study focusing on the impact of different forms of FWAs (e.g., hybrid, full-time telecommuting), and the effectiveness of existing and proposed policies in helping workers maintain Work-Life Balance while working from home. Based on feedback from the focus group discussions, we would suggest looking into the effectiveness of enforcing strict working hours on the productivity and work-life harmony that workers can attain.

Justification

As the pandemic forced almost every company to adopt work-from-home policies and the sceptics' fears of an unproductive workforce were shown to be unfounded, acceptance of FWAs has risen. Many companies have stated their intent to carry on allowing remote working beyond the circumstances of the pandemic, a move that surveys suggest is popular among workers. However, the same report cites working longer hours and working outside office hours as employees' top complaints about working from home. This highlights the importance of empowering employers and employees with this information to help ensure the long-term sustainability of a hybrid workforce, especially given that Singaporeans were already reported to be among the most overworked workers in the world before the pandemic.

During the focus group discussions, one notion that participants repeatedly brought across was that they worked beyond their stipulated working hours because they could, and so for some, they felt that they should. At the same time, participants also reported being encouraged when their superiors or colleagues demonstrated their commitment to their established boundaries, setting the example through consistent action.

This is consistent with the concept of injunctive norms, a facet of social norms that concerns the perceived approval of behaviours. Especially for young workers who are inexperienced and uncertain of what is acceptable in the workplace, the actions of older colleagues and supervisors would be a valuable source of information into the injunctive norms of that company, and work culture in general.

With FWAs severely reducing these kinds of social interactions, one way for companies to establish norms to encourage workers to have good work-life harmony is to enforce strict working hours, with exceptions having to be approved by their supervisors. However, we understand that this policy requires buy-in from both employers and employees, as it would likely not be difficult to covertly do work at home. Despite this, we believe that it is worth exploring, in recognition of the many internal factors that push people to overwork, which as previously discussed suggests that people may need a push in pursuing Work-Life Harmony. Current guidelines do already suggest that employees should establish clear boundaries, but based on the reports of the current challenges that workers face as well as the focus group discussions, we believe that more can be done on the employers' end to address this issue.

2. Advocacy, Raising Awareness and Education

Advocacy and Raising Awareness of Work-life Balance

Guiding Principle

We aim to raise awareness about the benefits and importance of work-life balance, while also alleviating the existing negative stigma surrounding the pursuit of work-life balance in the workplace.

Recommended Steps

One way to raise awareness is through public outreach campaigns targeted at the general public, including both employers and young workers. Campaigns can detail the benefits of work-life balance, including higher life and job satisfaction, greater productivity and improved mental and physical health. They can also normalise the pursuit of work-life balance by affirming young workers in taking charge of setting their own boundaries between work and personal time.

Considering the current restrictions in social gatherings due to COVID-19, online campaigns using social media platforms can be adopted. This will also ensure wider reach to young workers — a key target audience — due to their extensive consumption of social media compared to other forms of media.

Justification

An existing initiative to spark conversation regarding work-life balance includes the Citizen's Panel on Work-Life Harmony. The Citizen's Panel comprises 55 Singaporean working adults from all walks of life, convening to discuss current issues and formulated recommendations to improve work-life harmony for Singaporeans (Seow, 2019; Ng, 2019). While this did spark some conversation regarding work-life balance amongst Singaporeans, the bulk of the discussion was limited to the individuals that were chosen to participate in the panel. Also, the recommendations largely tackled the issue from a top-down approach via guidelines for companies to adhere to. The Citizens' Panel is hence limited in raising awareness and disseminating information to the general public. Thus, introducing a campaign on a wider scale can complement pre-existing work-life balance guidelines by emphasising the importance of ensuring work-life balance for a company's workers.

Furthermore, there are no existing public outreach initiatives that aim to change the mindset surrounding the pursuit of work-life balance, to the best of the researchers' knowledge. Hence, this is an existing gap in the research that can be addressed.

Education on Work-Life Balance

Guiding Principle

We aim to provide resources through education for young workers to gain a deeper understanding of their ideal work-life balance, such that they are able to take appropriate steps towards this goal.

Recommended Steps

A viable option is for tertiary institutions — including junior colleges, polytechnics, centralised institutions and universities — to incorporate modules that provide resources for students to understand what work-life balance is, its importance and how to go about achieving it for themselves. As such, youth will not only be exposed to the concept of work-life balance before formally entering the workforce, but also have a safe space to experiment with the concept.

To accommodate students' varying workloads depending on educational institutions and level of study, the module's length and amount of content can be tailored accordingly. The details of the module can also be adjusted according to each institution's needs.

Justification

While a variety of career guidance resources are available at higher level educational institutions, most only advise students on career choices, with little focus on work-life balance. Considering the dearth of support for young workers to explore their personal definitions of work-life balance, providing education facilitating youth to do so prior to them entering the workforce could improve the current situation.

Furthermore, even with the limited range of participants, the discussions already indicate a wide variety of definitions and preferences for work-life balance. Considering this sheer diversity, education should be targeted at facilitating students to ascertain their personal definitions of work-life balance, accounting for the nuances of each individual.

Theoretical Implications

The findings also reflect some important implications for existing theories. First, there is support for how work-life balance related behaviours are related to learning and maintenance from norms. From the larger theme of 'Work Environment (Social)', 'Competitiveness and Negative Perceptions' was one of the most commonly mentioned factors that is important to work-life balance. This sub-theme describes a work environment that discourages work-life balance because of a company culture that frowns upon behaviours that place other commitments above work. This illustrates the norm-following behaviour of young Singaporean workers and how pervasive norms are to learning and behaviour.

Second, supporting what Ashforth et al. (2000) posit in boundary theory, working from home does result in work-family conflict. Most of the participants had to work from home and could not avoid role integration. This led to work encroaching on the home and private space. The ease of connecting to work due to technological advancements contributed a great deal to this situation. However, it is worth noting that most of the literature on boundary theory elaborate on how 'work invades family', but participants commonly cited instances of how 'home invades work', in that work productivity is negatively affected due to the home environment. Thus, the blurring of work and family or home boundaries makes for a very relevant study in an increasingly connected world, with an under-exploration of how the home affects work direction.

Last but not least, the main theme of 'Internal Factors' suggests the importance of person-environment fit as proposed by Edwards et al. (1988). According to Edwards and colleagues, one's performance and satisfaction with their job depend on how well-aligned they are with their working environment. To this point, job-fit emerged as an important theme with regard to work-life balance. Most participants believed that achieving one's ideal work-life balance is possible with the right job for oneself. This provides support to organisational literature and current recruitment practices in identifying individuals that fit within the company culture. Furthermore, with work-from-home becoming more common and some participants revealing preferences for fixed working hours, the idea of McNamara et al.'s (2013) flexibility-fit is given greater relevance and importance.

Limitations

Although the current research has highlighted various areas of work that can be improved for young workers to achieve a greater work-life balance, there is one main limitation that needs to be addressed.

The profile of the working adult participants was skewed towards middle-income individuals who held white-collar jobs. As such, the sample is unable to be entirely representative of the entire workforce. However, this is also a strength of the current research, as Singapore has a very large working class majority. On top of that, issues that have surfaced in recent times regarding the shift to working from home are more applicable to work that can take place remotely, a problem which is likely to be more worrying for white-collared employment due to the nature of the jobs.

The profile of the participants may also be skewed partly because of selection bias inherent to the main topic of discussion, work-life balance. By its definition, if one has too much work and little time for external commitments or activities, they are less likely to attend a focus group discussion. To get around this issue, the moderators took note to ask participants to not only draw from their own experiences but also from others around them who may not have what is perceived to be work-life balance. However, to access and gather first-hand opinions from participants who struggle with work-life balance, participant recruitment may have to come from receiving cooperation from companies or industries that are known for having long working hours. This means a deliberate effort on the companies' part to nominate individuals to attend such focus group sessions. Alternatively, survey-based

open-ended questions can be used to explore the thoughts of this hard-to-reach group as they are more likely to be able to participate as a survey is more flexible and can be done in their own time.

Next Steps

Short term

This report has focused on reviewing the literature and using qualitative methods to paint a broad picture of the current state of, the challenges and the future of Work-Life Harmony among young workers in Singapore.

Future lines of research into this topic can look into conducting research on the viability and effectiveness of the recommended steps that we have outlined above. For ideas such as advocacy and education programmes, pilot programmes can be developed and tested, to get a better sense of the effectiveness of such measures, and the interest of the youth. More research needs to be conducted into pushing for more reasonable expectations and reviewing Work From Home guidelines, as well as dialogues with the relevant stakeholders (e.g., industry leaders, unions, workers) to better understand what would and would not be feasible and helpful.

Long Term

In the long run, we believe that it would be highly beneficial to consider promoting work-life balance from an earlier schooling age. Many participants cited national culture as one of the reasons why we do not have Work-Life Harmony. For example,

“I think Singaporeans aim for high quality of work, standards of excellence... It’s very ingrained in our identities and culture, very much so. And I think that plays out in the work from home very much in that then we struggle and strive, then it results in that greater challenge in stopping work” (Interviewee S, 18 July 2021).

Some participants also shared that even before working, they had trouble maintaining Work-Life Harmony in university. Additionally, there is an abundance of literature that clearly shows that Singaporean students are overworked, even as early as primary school (Teo, 2017). This is reflected in high levels of anxiety over academic performance (Davie, 2017), and the long hours spent in school, tuition, and homework.

We are by no means the first to suggest that the heavy demands of the school system should be reassessed. However, we believe there is an additional case to be made for promoting school-life harmony, as a long-term plan to shape a workforce that highly values life outside of work, and is well practised at managing the different aspects of life through years of practical application in school life.

We hope that this exploratory study will encourage other citizens, workers, researchers and policy makers to embark on further theoretical and applied research into this topic, with the ultimate aim of helping Singaporeans work and live better.

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