Research Collaboratory Client Series:
"Policy Making 2010 –Emergent Technologies"

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How will emergent technologies shape policy making? This theme was pertinent enough to attract more than 100 representatives from mostly government agencies to the inaugural Research Collaboratory Client Series in December last year

Participants listening with rapt attention to the speakers.

at the National Library Building. Hosted by the Publishing and Research Services (PRS) of the National Library Board (NLB), this public forum showcased divergent perspectives of experts from various disciplines.

In her welcome speech, NLB's Deputy Chief Executive, Ms Ngian Lek Choh, said that with the ubiquitous acceptance of Web 2.0, policymakers and institutions can benefit from this environment by interchanging the role of proponent and recipient.

Mr Peter Lim, former Straits Times chief editor and media consultant, opened with a video from his most recent publication to illustrate changes in social policies over the years. Using the family planning agenda in the 1960s, Mr Lim described how the government had changed mindsets on marriage and children by the 1980s. Although pol-

icy-making is not supposed to be "cast in stone", he noted that the changes in social policies aptly reflect our nation's evolving social strata.

As technology evolves from Web 2.0 to cloud computing, barriers have been lifted and possibilities seem limitless. In his keynote address, Prof Paul Gandel suggested that such a transition presented both opportunities and challenges for organisations. The acting chief information officer of the Singapore Management University also explained how technological trends and learning has impacted businesses in America and globally by using three case studies from his experiences in developing private computing clouds, green computing and learning through global engagement.

Mr Nicholas Aaron Khoo, co-founder of Cybersports and Online Gaming Association (SCOGA), revealed that Singapore boasted 1.37 million online gamers in 2009. With a large proportion of these online gamers being children and youths, SCOGA has been using outreach events in helping parents to bridge the digital divide and grapple with the challenges that gaming poses. Some of these outreach programmes include: the Singapore Arcade Showdown (November 2008), the MDA Media Fiesta 2009 Gamer' Forum, Licence2Play and National Family Celebrations 2009.

In its quest to transform Singapore into a knowledge-based economy, NLB has been one of the key

Mr Panicker…skills for an uncertain world.

agents of knowledge creation. Mr Samuel Sng, a research associate, showed how PRS can benefit organisations through research and consultancy. In line with NLB's role to facilitate knowledge creation, PRS would be launching the Research Collaboratory platform in early 2010. Aptly called "Ideapolis", this online site provides researchers with the latest domain-specific information, social networking tools, a directory of researchers, project spaces and a document repository.

After the recent economic crisis, corporate leaders require a new management compass to steer their organisations through uncharted waters. Mr Ramesh Panicker, regional creative director of Soundview and Executive Resources (S) Pte Ltd, expounded on the "10 new leadership skills for an uncertain

The speakers (From left):
Ms La Marca, Prof Gandel, Ms Fung, Mr Lim and Mr Khoo during the panel discussion… insightful.

world". These attributes are: (1) maker instinct, (2) clarity, (3) dilemma flipping, (4) immersive learning ability, (5) bio-empathy, (6) constructive depolarisation, (7) quiet transparency, (8) rapid prototyping, (9) smart mob organising, and (10) commons creating.

Social media has become a powerful business tool for enhancing public relations, customer service, product development, brand awareness, marketing and competitive analysis. Ms Daniela La Marca, co-founder and managing director of MediaBUZZ Pte Ltd and editor of Asian eMarketing, revealed that a recent consumer survey has shown that 78% of respondents trusted peer recommendations more than advertisements (14%). She also delved into the 5 Ws (why, what, who, where and when) of social media policy and championed the need for a code of ethics to regulate the use of social media.

In a lively floor exchange with Dr Leong Mun Kew, Deputy Chief Information Officer of NLB, the audience brainstormed and voted on the 10 most critical information needs in 2010. The top three areas identified were: (1) quality of information,

(2) performance measurement, and (3) striking a balance between information sharing and security.

As information grows, so will the opportunity to find answers to fundamental questions. Ms Cheryl Fung from the Futures-Group (Ministry of Trade and Industry) argued how Singapore could use data to gain a competitive edge for its economy. In the next decade, creative economies must not only be able to process, comprehend and extract value from data, they must also be able to visualise and communicate it effectively. She cited case studies from America and Singapore to illustrate how these two countries were able to use data creatively to improve society and the economy.

The day's proceedings culminated with an insightful panel discussion by the speakers, moderated by Dr Leong. Here are excerpts from four questions posed by the audience:

Q: It appears that social data is not easily available. This poses a problem for social policy-making. What can be done about this?
Considering the amount of data that is available on the Internet, policy-makers need to be creative when they are searching for social data. They can study what people are searching in Google to ascertain issues that are of interest to people. Unemployment data could also be used to gauge social problems in society while surveys could be conducted to find out more information about people.

Q: How big a part does Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) play in the Asian context?
CSR is a Western concept. Giving is not considered to be a "big thing" in Asia as it is in the West. If there are enough incentives for giving, people might be motivated to give.

Q: Does the content in social media "touch the heart"? Are people emotionally engaged in what they write, or is social networking a shallow pursuit?
Social media such as Facebook have brought out a lot of caring and feelings from people. Social networking is like any other social interaction and the conversations and connections can be meaningful.

Q: What will be considered the "sexiest" jobs in the next five years?
Games developer, new generation social worker, statistician, data visualiser and librarian. ■

Dr Leong...striking a balance. Join IDEAPOLIS (Research Collaboratory) at ideapolis.sg.