THE FUTURE OF A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION: A CAUSAL LAYERED PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation submitted to

CQUniversity Australia

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Professional Doctorate (Transdisciplinary Studies)

by

Kam Tong FAN, Gilbert

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This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of:

my father,

Thiều Kiều Đại

my adoptive parents,

Fan Cheok Lum

&

Chan Kit Fong

This dedication deserves mention as I have spent two years in search of my roots while undertaking this professional doctorate. I am proud that as I come close to completing this doctorate programme, I have also ascertained my roots. This affirmation ends years of curiosity and strengthens my bond with my two families, particularly my 2nd maternal cousins, Travis Loh Kok Wah and Ethan Loh Guopeng.

Fan Kam Tong, Gilbert
(Phạm Văn Hoa)

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the level of alliance of social workers in Singapore with their professional association, the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW). Currently, there is a lack of studies exploring, in some depth, membership issues amongst professional social work associations and their probable future.

This study utilised a futures methodology framework, namely the 'Causal Layered Analysis' (CLA) as its main research tools. A face-to-face semi-structured interview was administered to a non-proportional stratified sample of 27 qualified social workers. The main objective was to suggest strategies that would strengthen the current level of alliance between social workers and SASW, resolve some pertinent professional issues, and develop a new future for the Association.

The findings suggested that respondents' views of alliances were highly influenced by broader personal, national and even global, structural and systemic issues as well as inherent organizational issues faced by the professional association. Despite social workers being critical of their own professional association, they were hopeful that it could effect positive changes for the profession. Many did not consider themselves as part of the change process; instead, they adopted a bystander stance and would only come to the rescue of SASW should it face serious threats of being dissolved. Factors that drew social workers to join and remain with SASW lie in the extent of how the Association's services, events and projects were being targeted, personalized and carried through sufficiently to add value to their current workplace achievements. There was a

call for SASW to adopt strong bonding strategies that would interconnect as well as integrate social workers into a strong professional force.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iii

LIST OF TABLES ix

LIST OF FIGURES xii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT xiii

DECLARATION xvii

PERSONAL PRELUDE xviii

THE FUTURE OF A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION:
A CAUSAL LAYERED PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER ONE:
The Changing Face Of Social Work And Its Impact On Social Workers And Professional Associations

1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 A Brief History Of The Development Of Social Work 1
1.3 The Current Challenges In Social Work 8
1.4 Social Workers' Identification With Social Work Practice 16
1.5 Social Workers' Identification With SASW: Current Scenario 20
1.6 Futuring Social Work: Recent Developments 27
1.7 Transdisciplinarity In Futures Studies: The Future Of SASW 34
1.8 Summary 36

CHAPTER TWO:

Method: A Causal Layered Perspective

2.1	Introduction	37
2.2	Research Methodology	37
2.3	Causal Layered Analysis	39
2.4	Research Framework	45
2.5	CLA Framework & Methodology: Deconstructing & Reconstructing The Issues	52
2.6	Concluding Remarks	56

CHAPTER THREE:

Results

3.1	Introduction	59
3.2	Profile Of Respondents	60
3.3	The Level Of Alliance With Professional Associations	70
3.4	Social Workers' Motivation To Join Their Professional Association	88
3.5	The Purpose Of Having A Professional Association	91
3.6	The Need For A Professional Association Like SASW	98
3.7	Preliminary Classification Of Social Workers' Attitudinal-types	110
3.8	Level Of Identification Of Social Workers With Their Profession	112
3.9	What Are The Challenges Facing SASW?	124
3.10	What Would Be The Future Of SASW?	130
3.11	Concluding Remarks	135

CHAPTER FOUR:

CLA Application

4.1 Introduction 136

4.2 Level Of Alliance Between Social Workers And SASW 138

4.3 Social Workers' Perception Of The Purpose Of Having A Professional Body 143

4.4 Social Workers' Level Of Identification With Their Profession 153

4.5 Social Workers' Level Of Awareness Of The Challenges And The Future Of SASW 161

4.6 The Future Of SASW: Re-envisioning, Recasting The Issues & Possible Solutions 164

CHAPTER FIVE:

Uncovering Deep Narratives And Locating Alternative And Preferred Futures

5.1 Introduction 174

5.2 Uncovering Deep Narratives On Social Workers' Alliance With SASW 174

5.3 The Futures Triangle 176

5.4 Alternative Futures 182

5.5 Preferred Futures 183

5.6 Concluding Remarks 187

CHAPTER SIX:

Significance And Implications Of The Study

6.1 Introduction 188

6.2 Limitations Of The Study 190

6.3 Concluding Remarks 192

REFERENCES 195

APPENDICES

Appendix A: The Research Questionnaire Framework 214

Appendix B: The Research Interview 223

Appendix C: CQUniversity Approval 230

Appendix D: SASW In-principle Approval 232

Appendix E: Letters To Prospective Participants 233

Appendix F: Consent Form 237

Appendix G: Code Book, Face & Identifier Sheet Template 239

ATTACHMENTS

Term Papers:

1. Advocacy For Social Workers: SASW's Role 251

2. Social Change And Social Issues In Singapore: SASW's Response 273

3. Repositioning Social Work And SASW 297

4. Scenario Planning: The Future Of Social Work And SASW 319

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	The Relationships Between Social Work, Social Workers & Their Professional Association	46
Table 2.2	SASW Membership & Registration Statistics As Of 15th October 2004	48
Table 2.3	Sampling Statistics Finalized As Of January 2005	49
Table 2.4	Issues With Recognition & Identification With Social Work Practice	56
Table 3.1	Age Range Of Respondents	60
Table 3.2	Marital Status Of Respondents	61
Table 3.3	Religious Affiliations Of Respondents	62
Table 3.4	Race Of Respondents	62
Table 3.5	Membership-type Of Respondents	63
Table 3.6	Highest Social Work Qualification Of Respondents	64
Table 3.7	Other Related Professional Qualifications Of Respondents	65
Table 3.8	Years Of Social Work Experience By Years Of Membership With SASW	66
Table 3.9	Reasons For Not Renewing Membership With SASW	67
Table 3.10	Involvement As A Committee Member With SASW By Years Of SASW Membership And Membership-type	68
Table 3.11	Rating Of Professionals' Alliance With Their Professional Bodies	71
Table 3.12	Reasons For Rating Social Workers' Alliance With SASW As 'Don't Know'	73
Table 3.13	Reasons For Rating Social Workers' Alliance With SASW As 'Weak To Very Weak'	77
Table 3.14	Reasons For Rating Social Workers' Alliance With SASW As 'Satisfactory'	80
Table 3.15	Reasons For Rating Social Workers' Alliance With SASW As 'Good To Very Good'	81
Table 3.16	Reasons For Rating Other Professionals' Alliance With Their Professional Associations	84
Table 3.17	The Purpose Of Professional Associations	91
Table 3.18	Who Are The Stakeholders Of Professional Associations?	93

Table 3.19 Who Should Set Up The Professional Association? 94

Table 3.20 Who Should Regulate The Professional Association? 96

Table 3.21 Who Should Finance The Professional Association? 96

Table 3.22 Do Social Workers Need A Professional Association Like SASW To Help Them To Develop Professionalism In Social Work? 98

Table 3.23 Reasons For Respondents' Need To 'Have' Or 'Not To Have' A Professional Association To Help Develop Professionalism In Social Work 99

Table 3.24 Did Social Workers Benefit From SASW? 102

Table 3.25 What Social Workers Benefited From SASW? 103

Table 3.26 What Could Be The Factors Influencing Social Workers' Level Of Involvement With SASW? 107

Table 3.27 What Are Social Workers' Views On SASW's Current Membership Rate? 108

Table 3.28 What Are Social Workers' Views On Free Riders Who Have Benefited From SASW Indirectly? 110

Table 3.29 Is Social Work A Profession? 113

Table 3.30 Identification As Social Workers To Their Clients 115

Table 3.31 Respondents' Views On Social Workers Not Taking Up Social Work Positions 118

Table 3.32 Respondents' Views On The Application Of Social Work Knowledge & Skills 119

Table 3.33 Respondents' Views On The Job Performance Of Non-Social Work Trained Personnel In Social Work Positions 121

Table 3.34 Respondents' Views On The Need To Safeguard And To Further Professionalize Social Work 123

Table 3.35 Respondents' Views On The Current Challenges Facing SASW 125

Table 3.36 Respondents' Responses From A List Of 'Challenges Facing SASW' Read Out To Them 126

Table 3.37 Respondents' Views On Changing The Title Of 'Social Worker' 129

Table 3.38 Respondents' Reasons For Their Views On Changing The Title Of 'Social Worker' 130

Table 3.39	Respondents' Views On The Future Of SASW	131
Table 3.40	Respondents' Responses From A List Of 'Probable Futures Of SASW' Read Out To Them	132
Table 3.41	Respondents' Views On Regulating Social Workers To Further Enhance The Recognition Of SASW	134
Table 3.42	Respondents' Views On The Circumstances That Would Make SASW Obsolete	134
Table 4.1	Social Workers' Overall View On The Level Of Alliance With SASW	141
Table 4.2	Social Workers' Perception Of The Purpose Of Having A Professional Body Like SASW	145
Table 4.3	Social Workers' Need For A Professional Body Like SASW	148
Table 4.4	Litany Level Of Analysis Of Social Workers' Alliance With SASW	149
Table 4.5	Systemic Level Of Analysis Of Social Workers' Alliance With SASW	150
Table 4.6	Worldview Level Of Analysis Of Social Workers' Alliance With SASW	151
Table 4.7	Myth Level Of Analysis Of Social Workers' Alliance With SASW	152
Table 4.8	Social Workers' Views On Their Identification With Their Profession	155
Table 4.9	Social Workers' Views On Their Identification As Social Workers To Their Clients	156
Table 4.10	An Ideology Of The 'Social Worker' Title	159
Table 4.11	Social Workers' Views On The Challenges Faced By SASW	162
Table 4.12	Social Workers' Views On The Future Of SASW	163
Table 4.13	A Critical Analysis Of Key Issues Faced By SASW & Their Underlying Ideologies	165
Table 4.14	Reframing The Issues	167
Table 4.15	Recasting Key Issues & Possible Solutions	169
Table 5.1	Uncovering Deep Narratives & Metaphors On Social Workers' Alliance With SASW	175

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 The CLA Framework & Method (Inayatullah 2004b) 42

Figure 2.2 Linear Layers & Deep Lateral Perspectives (Russo 2004) 44

Figure 5.1 The Futures Triangle: Remapping The Issues Facing SASW 178

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I would like to acknowledge all social workers in the field and those who have volunteered their services with SASW despite the Association's lack of representation of social workers. I sincerely thank all 27 social workers who most graciously participated in my study. Their ideals, hopes, contributions, feedback and recommendations have been incorporated in this doctoral dissertation. They have helped to open up new possibilities for the Association and I look forward to being part of the social work fraternity in realizing a new future for SASW and the profession.

Most of all, I would like to thank my two academic supervisors, the late A/Prof Frances Killion and A/Prof Les Killion and my industry advisor, Dr Goh Soon Noi. It was a privilege for me to know both Frances and Les. I was very touched by Frances' sheer determination and stamina in supervising me and reading my term papers despite

her having a serious medical condition then. A/Prof Les Killion wrote this note to me in one of my term papers: "I have been reading the assignment to her, gathering and collating her comments, and then writing up the feedback as over page…". I can imagine the difficulties she had in reading my term papers at that time. Thank you, Frances.

To A/Prof Les Killion, I am deeply touched by his patience, kind understanding, encouragement and support throughout my doctoral studies. One of the most difficult times of my life occurred during my course of study when I needed to spend time searching for my roots. This, together with some work and professional challenges, delayed my study by at least two years. Les had been very supportive and I, telepathically, seemed to have received a very strong connection with him that 'I must do what I needed most now'. I am also very pleased to have Les as my academic supervisor and I am indeed very amazed by his insights and familiarity with social work issues despite that his academic and professional training had been in tourism. This merely shows how Frances had rubbed her interest in social work onto him.

To Dr Goh Soon Noi, I am very grateful for her professional guidance that stretched over fifteen years; from that of a senior mentoring me in my early years as a beginning social worker to being my immediate supervisor and boss. Prior to my involvement with SASW, I had often pondered the reason for Soon Noi's constant heavy involvement in professional matters at SASW and in various professional networks. Now, I am fully aware of the reason for her commitment. I learned from her the skills of advocacy and the importance of networking. Even when she was away at the University of Melbourne pursuing her PhD in Social Work, she never failed to pass on relevant

articles on research methodologies to me. Her familiarity with SASW, professional issues, social policy and national concerns helped me rethink my professional views and ideas in my doctoral dissertation.

I would like to thank Joan Khng, Brandon Goh and Alvin Goh for proof-reading the dissertation. Special thanks to Dr Sohail Inayatullah who conceptualized the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) framework, which I used for this doctoral dissertation. We had the chance to meet up once in 2004, which gave me the great opportunity to clarify with him the conceptual framework and the application of the methodology.

Last but not least, I wish to dedicate this doctoral dissertation to my family especially Barry, Alex, David, Travis, Ethan, Marcus, Nicholas, Alvin, Jared and Jean for believing in me and supporting me through my studies and to my brother, Henry for understanding why we were not able to spend time together whenever he returned for vacations; to Ivan Woo, Joan Khng, Judy Seow, Daniel Thien and Brandon Goh, aspiring social workers whom I have mentored and who have given me the motivation to persevere; to Shawn Koh for his constant support as Vice-President of SASW; to all my social work colleagues at the Department of Psychosocial Oncology, National Cancer Centre Singapore for their continuous encouragement and support during my term of office as President of SASW and in my studies; to my immediate supervisor and boss, Mr Wee Ann Chong, Director for Clinical Support & Ambulatory Services for his unwavering support in my professional undertakings and for mentoring me in my managerial role; and to my buddies and valued friends – Kong Meng, Larry Tan, Edwin Phua, Reinaldo Wong, Alex Tan, Shankar Menon, Edward Kwan, Daniel Wong,

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Signed on 1st September 2010.

PERSONAL PRELUDE

1. A social worker for life

What has kept me going in my 22 years in social work has been the desire to learn about life. As a young lad, I was exposed to living near the poor and the less fortunate. I lived near a 'kampong' (village) where I witnessed two very different tales of children living their lives. I could not understand then why there were social classes in our society. Why some people have to be poor. Why some children lived within strict family rules. I also wondered why some very elderly folks were still ploughing the streets in Chinatown with their bullock carts collecting used cardboard to sell. I told myself at that early age that I wanted to understand people - about their problems and about their lives. Choosing to do social work at university was partly by chance. A few of my Hong Kong friends influenced me to take up social work as a course of study. But I believed that I could not be that easily influenced unless there is something in me to be influenced. I must have something to offer in social work.

I witnessed death at a very early age; my adoptive father died when I was 5 years old. My late adoptive mother often took me to the wakes of her relatives and friends. I learned early in my life that death was inescapable. But I was afraid of death. I found it to be cruel. I blamed God for taking away loved ones. I soon realized that to conquer any fear is to face it. To live one's life fully is to learn about life – to learn from the people you walk with. Dealing with patients with terminal cancers and death was the last thing I really wanted to do in my social work career. I needed that much time to muster

the courage to face it. And I did. I am now more ready for God to take me away; I am also more prepared to face losses of any kind. I now understand what impermanence is and the painful truth that no one totally accepts death. Social work has put me in good stead: it helped to strengthen me and further developed me to be a people's helper.

2. My relationship with the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW)

As a young social worker, I was fortunate to have had many opportunities to learn the ropes from my seniors. I worked for a government department where I had many committed senior social workers who were unselfish in their teachings. There were many opportunities to attend workshops and courses to become competent in what I do. But no one talked to me about SASW at that time. I knew of its existence as I came across this familiar name when I was part of the secretariat of an advisory council. However, it was almost absent in my vocabulary until I was in my fifth year as a social worker. That year, I moved on in my career to be a medical social worker in a public hospital. Even then, as a beginning medical social worker I was too busy learning the ropes and did not pay much attention to SASW.

It was not until my 12th year in social work in 2000 that I actively supported the medical social workers' drive towards setting up a Medical Social Work Chapter within SASW. Soon Noi, the industry advisor to my dissertation, was an instrumental part of that movement. It was on that fateful day at the 31st AGM in 2001 that I was elected President of SASW. It was my biggest surprise that a newcomer like me was elected to

the highest office in the Association. I was surprised that members of SASW voted into the highest office, someone about whom they did not know much. That was really scary.

3. The study of my choice

I spent many months pondering over my desire to embark on a doctoral study, be it a PhD or a professional doctorate. Pursuing a doctoral study was a natural thing to do for me as I have always aspired to excel in my profession as a social worker. I know very well that as a practitioner, I do not need to pursue a doctorate since having a clinical specialization would be more apt for the work I do as a social work practitioner.

I completed my Master in Education in 1997 and clinical studies in the Satir Model (an experiential psychotherapy and family therapy) in 2000. I was concurrently pursuing my Diploma in Clinical Supervision (Satir Model) from Oct 2004 to Dec 2006 whilst enrolled in the Professional Doctorate programme with CQUniversity (Central Queensland University) from 2002 to present. It was also a tough decision then to be enrolled in two equally challenging and yet totally unrelated study programmes: a clinical and an academic-industry-based programme. That decision to take up the clinical supervision programme stemmed from my desire to learn from two of the most renowned Satir psychotherapists / family therapists, Dr John Banmen and Kathlyn Maki-Banmen before they retired.

What attracted me to the Professional Doctorate programme was its practicality and focus. It was industry-based and industry driven. I learned about the Professional Doctorate programme a year after I was elected President of SASW. Within a year into

my term of office, I was overwhelmed with the problems faced by the Association. I had already begun working on improving the image of the Association and was pleased that members and social workers were positive towards the initiatives that I rolled out then. I was perplexed with the many issues that I had to face as President of SASW and not knowing exactly how to resolve them. The Professional Doctorate was timely as I saw in it the potential to excavate deep issues and view them from a different lens in a real-time industry setting. My active involvement with SASW took my attention and focus away from my clinical work. The problems in SASW were more pressing and complex than the clinical interests that I developed in my practice then.

4. The doctoral coursework

While futures studies has emerged as an acknowledged contemporary approach to research, it was an unknown field to me when I first embarked on the doctoral programme. The courses were abstract to me ranging from very scientific paradigms such as learning about the 'black-hole' and 'nanotechnology' to the ideologies of futuristic methodologies. There were so many developments in futures studies that I was afraid that I could not follow through learning all of them in a reasonable fashion expected of a graduate student. What if I could not articulate any of its concepts well? How can I ever acknowledge that I was schooled in futures studies?

I took a deliberate attempt to apply two futures methodologies in two of my term papers; methodologies such as the strategic analysis model of scenario planning as outlined by Fahey and Randall (1999) and a brand positioning framework like market

segmentation of SMART (Strategic Marketing and Research Techniques © 1992-2001). With these methodologies, I was able to brand SASW successfully as 'the people professionals … the career that makes a difference', a tag-line that is still being used today. As for the doctoral dissertation, I selected Causal Layered Analysis as my research methodology.

5. Causal Layered Analysis as research methodology

It was not by chance that I stumbled onto Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) as a methodology for my study. As a graduate student in futures studies, I explored in some depth the range of futures methodologies available but found CLA to be the most relevant methodology for the issues I was studying. Even before applying the CLA methodology, I was already amazed with the unquestioned realities that abound in social work and the social worker identity. CLA broadened my thinking to look deeper into the breadth and depth of these issues.

I knew from the beginning that CLA was not an easy methodology to apply. Its theoretical foundation and concepts appeared to be difficult to grasp, especially for first-timers. I saw value in it that it studies perspectives by redefining them. It does not throw out any perspectives but attempts to view perspectives in their own right. It studies the underlying paradigms supporting each perspective and issue. It critically re-examines and recasts perspectives and issues for problem solving. Social work issues and the Association's issues contain differing perspectives and ideologies where CLA would probably be the right methodology as an investigative tool.

To understand its application, I read and re-read the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) Reader (2004) by Inayatullah and its documented case studies as many times as I could afford to do so. I found it difficult to fully comprehend most of the case studies documented in the reader, particularly the processes of the CLA application. I also searched the journals for more case studies in order to have a better grasp of the CLA methodology. There was one article I found which provided me with new insights into the processes and the application of CLA. This article was entitled 'What is the Debate around Paid Maternity Leave Really about? Using CLA to Delve under the Surface…' (Morrow, 2007).

Critics of CLA had deemed it to be impractical because it is far too complex to use. It differs sharply from single variable approaches as it uses a multi-faceted methodology. CLA has been alleged to be biased as it is anti-empirical, describing the empirical as the litany – the unquestioned assumptions of the real. The empirical is seen in its context and thus needs to be critically analyzed. CLA is often used in workshops with real-time participants where ideas evolve through intense discussions and deliberations. While using CLA in a doctoral study was destined to be challenging, ultimately my ability to explain the theory, design the questionnaire and apply CLA meaningfully has been one of my best gifts from this doctoral programme.

6. Interviewing the respondents

Sampling of prospective participants went smoothly with few hiccoughs. Interviewing the respondents was exciting for me. I found in them so much zeal

and commitment to their profession irrespective of their working status. Many of them could remember the good old days in social work. I learned a lot from the retirees as well as from those who had a reason to complain about the Association. I went to interview the respondents with an open mind as I already knew that SASW was not that popular with some social workers. Though I made many trips and spent about 2 hours for each interview on average, the data I gathered was simply too rich and valuable to dismiss. The most time consuming aspect of the dissertation was in transcribing the interviews and learning to use the qualitative software The Ethnograph Version 5.

7. Analyzing the data

This was the most challenging but rewarding part of the doctoral dissertation. I sat on the coded results for days without a clue as to how to utilize the massive amount of data collected. Though the data gathered were substantial, not all the data could be used meaningfully in the broader analysis of my research – that is, the study of social workers' alliance with SASW, their level of identification with their profession and their awareness of the challenges and probable futures of SASW. These 3 inter-relationships that influence the future of SASW became the foundation stone of Chapter Four of my dissertation with CLA as the methodology. Care was taken to ensure that I clearly understood all 4 levels of analysis of CLA and in the interpretations and critical analyses of the data.

8. Writing the dissertation

Initially, I was unclear regarding the expectations of the dissertation of a Professional Doctorate compared to a PhD. However, through the completion of the required coursework subjects prior to undertaking the investigation and writing the dissertation I have been grounded in the notion that applied research underpins the inherent nature and philosophy of the Professional Doctorate. The project investigation that forms a partial requirement for the Professional Doctorate is both a futures-oriented and a solutions-focused research into pertinent industry issues. It is necessary that Professional Doctorates utilize scientific methods in their investigations and embody a theoretical framework and methodology.

I came to understand that in contrast to the PhD which requires searching discussion of theoretical paradigms and detailing of all theories and concepts relevant to the study, the Professional Doctorate places a greater and more direct emphasis on reaching an understanding of the issues faced by the industry being studied with a lesser need to explain and justify theories and concepts. Hence, for example, had my dissertation been a thesis submitted for a PhD programme it would be reasonably expected that the candidate provide detailed explanations and justifications of the theories and concepts of CLA. Within a Professional Doctorate I came to understand that the more critical purpose has been to develop an awareness of the nature and procedures of such theories and concepts, while demonstrating an acquired ability to apply these in order to illuminate the industry-relevant issues and their possible solutions that formed the focus of the investigation.

9. Discipline and perseverance

My entire life, since taking up the doctoral study, had been revolving around my clinical and academic studies, my search for my roots, my work, my involvement with SASW and my family. Whilst social workers in my study had cited work and family commitments as reasons for a lack of their participation in the activities of the Association, I had accorded my family the lowest of all priorities for the last 8 years. This is not something that I am proud of nor do I regret my decision to remain committed to my doctoral programme. It is just one of the many realities of life.

Throughout my studies, training to be a clinical supervisor was tough going and required a great deal of self-reflection and growth. The clinical grounding was good but it came with much emotional turmoil and deep personal realization. Many a time, I needed to put my doctoral studies behind everything else that I do as I was too overwhelmed attending to handle too many tasks simultaneously. I questioned why I had placed myself in such a predicament. I wished so much to give up on either of my studies but close friends and my family encouraged me to persevere. Having an understanding academic supervisor helped for Les continuously supported me without giving up on me. Soon Noi had also talked me out of quitting from my studies. Throughout my doctoral studies, I had to restart and rework on my research a couple of times because I had laid-off from my studies for too long. Continuous effort and focus on the dissertation is critical towards completing it.

10. Becoming a researching professional

Today, I have successfully established myself as an Oncology Social Worker and as a Satir Therapist and Supervisor. Opportunities abound for me to embark on local research in psychosocial oncology, psychotherapy and social work issues. The Professional Doctorate has put me in good stead to do this even more. It has empowered me to think and act differently.

11. Planning ahead

Upon this final reflection of my personal and professional life and my doctoral studies, I have one other wish to fulfil. I wish very much to reconnect with my roots. Since young, I have always wanted to work in and learn from different communities, especially from developing countries in South East Asia. All along, I have wanted to do this in my later life when I no longer need to concern myself that much with financial concerns. Having searched for my roots helped me to determine the region and community of my choice.

My deep paternal ancestral roots are in South East Asia, of Viet-Tai descent (affiliated to the Tai group of the Tai-Kadai language family); my deep maternal roots are in East Asia, of Chinese descent. I am already working with healthcare professionals from cancer institutions in Hanoi (Vietnam) under a Singapore International Foundation project to train them in psychosocial oncology. Since 2008, I have been making two trips there annually and will be completing my project by April 2010. It is my wish to continue working with the Vietnamese community to develop medical social work

practice and research. The knowledge and skills I gained from my Professional Doctorate programme have positioned me well to do this.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Changing Face Of Social Work And Its Impact On Social Workers And Professional Associations

1.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature in four key areas that are central to the study of the future of a professional association by examining the level of alliance of social workers in Singapore with their professional association, the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) namely: the history of the development of social work; some pertinent challenges the profession faces; social workers' identification with their profession; and recent development in social work in Singapore and that of its professional body, the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW).

1.2 A Brief History Of The Development Of Social Work

Social work as a profession has been in existence for slightly more than a century. It has evolved throughout its history especially in the last 50 years. Social work is a helping profession and its theoretical base has expanded from a philosophical orientation and casework methodology towards helping the needy to that of a holistic and systemic approach to helping all people who are displaced by their social environment.

1.2.1 The Four Developmental Periods in Social Work

Social work has gone through four developmental periods in its efforts to professionalize itself: the moral period; the fact-gathering and practice-wisdom period; the psychodynamic period; and, the empirical period (Olson, 2001). First, by the late 1890s social work moved away from its moralistic beginnings of the friendly visiting service (1863-1897) to resolving vices and eradicating poor social conduct among the lower class (Olson, 2001). This change of focus was evident in the recognition that structural conditions could impact on how the poor lived (Axinn & Levin, 1992). Then began the fact-gathering period (1898-1930) during which scientific investigations through social casework methodology determined the needs of the poor and in this there surfaced emerging social issues that could have been fuelled by urbanization and modernization at that time (Olson, 2001).

Traditionally, a social worker's calling has had to do with addressing deviant behaviours and social disorganization. Counselling, on top of mediation and advocacy skills have inevitably become an important function in reintegrating individuals to their social environments (Siporin, 1975). The counselling movement gave rise to the psychodynamic period (1930-1973) which formed the third developmental period in social work's history and focused on understanding the individual and personality, a domain occupied by psychiatry and psychology (Olson, 2001). The beginning of the psychodynamic period can be traced to the contributions of Mary Cromwell Jarvett (1877-1961) when she initiated a specialty in psychiatric social work and shifted social work's focus from a person-in-situation fit to the internal and personal distress of the

individual. Furthermore, Coyle's book on 'Social Process in Organized Groups' (1930) and her emphasis on using creative group experiences as a vehicle for change also marked the importance of group work as an acceptable social work method. Increasingly, much more emphasis has been placed on clinical social work than on advocacy for social change (Specht & Courtney, 1994; Jacobson, 2001).

As a result of the growing interest in clinical social work, social work practices have further expanded from psychoanalytical approaches in the 1920s to encompassing institutional approaches, group work and community organizing, social reforms, and systems and ecological perspectives of the 1980s (Dubios & Miley, 2002). Other perspectives that focus on individuality and subjective reality came under the influence of post-modernism (Hudson, 1997). Thus, although the mission and purpose of social work have rarely changed, the nature of social work activities have differed throughout social work's development as an approach to resolving diverse social problems (Dubios & Miley, 2002).

The essence of social work, as outlined in the historical Hollis-Taylor Report (1951), is to combine the dual perspective of the individual personality and his / her social situation (as cited in Dubios & Miley, 2002). Supporters for a dual perspective or an integrated approach valued its usefulness in preventing clinical practice from deemphasizing oppression and social injustice by individualizing social problems (Schneider & Netting, 1999; Dietz, 2000). Well integrated professional values guide the application of effective social work practice (Levy, 1993; Knezevic, 1999; Schneider & Netting, 1999; Tsang, 2000) and there is a need to gather more evidence for theory-

practice integration in social work practice through empirical research. With the emphasis on evident-based practices, Fischer (1993) envisaged that empirically based practice models would dominate social work in the 1990s.

The empirical period (1973-present) formed the fourth developmental period in social work's effort to professionalize itself. Empirical studies that integrate theory with practice began to gain popularity. This period shifted the focus from professional practice to research (Hartman, 1990; Olson, 2001). Research into social work practice enables and guides new applications in intervention strategies, and helps younger social workers to better understand the clinical wisdom of the more experienced social workers (Proctor, 2003).

Critics of empiricism warned that empirical studies would have much difficulty teasing out the complex real life experiences of both the practitioner and the client (Klein & Bloom, 1995). Martinez-Brawley (1999) argued that social work's commitment to scientific knowledge and in upholding worldviews, including alternative views, is in contradiction because "social work clients were neither unidimensional nor did they share a single world view. Their problems and concerns were holistic and difficult to dissect" (Martinez-Brawley, 1999, p. 337). Brawley and Martinez-Brawley (1996) further argued that "the perceptions, assessments and interventions of social workers, among others, are, in fact, influenced as much by the unintended learnings of daily exposure to market forces, the press and television as by professional preparation" (as quoted in Martinez-Brawley, 1999, p. 343). Today, empirical evidence in social work research supports many truths and many worldviews as well as many methods of practice.

1.2.2 Is Social Work a Profession?

In the early 1900s, Flexner (1915) acknowledged that social work lacked the power or responsibility of a true profession as its knowledge and skills were easily accessible. Siporin (1975) held a similar view that social workers "do not have 'exclusive monopoly' of knowledge or functions" (p. 12). A common viewpoint was that social work lacks specialized knowledge and skills that characterize most professions (Etzioni, 1969; Miller, 1977; Gibelman, 1999; Thyer, 2002).

Critics such as Greenwood (1957b), Siporin (1975) and Dubios & Miley (2002) held the view that social workers failed to monopolize and exert control over their profession. One probable explanation for this could be the lack of a unified method in social work practice. Hudson (2000) added that rapid developments in related fields have also contributed to the slow progress of social work in attaining a unifying practice framework. Dubios and Miley (2002) asserted that the generalist nature of social work called for a "unified approach to problem-oriented social work practice" (p. 43) but over the years, various professional methods have been deployed by social workers to promote self-sufficiency, social integration and social change. Drucker (2003) further argued that it was this multifaceted uniqueness in social work that "combines and adapts borrowed and contributed knowledge" (pp. 70-71).

But very early in the development of the profession, Devine (1922) wrote that the "unifying element in social work lies in common social problems with which it is concerned, rather than in a common method or motive" (p. 19). Critics of this viewpoint

argued that social casework first focused on methods rather than theories in its early years (Reisch, 1998). Greenwood (1957b) supported the notion that social work is not a science but a technology that can be applied to resolving social problems. Karpf (1931) noted that social workers then did not have the skills to apply knowledge developed by the social, psychological and biological sciences. Without validations by the methods of the social sciences at that time, casework's effectiveness remained in question (Fischer, 1973).

Social workers subsequently justified methods by inferring theories of the social sciences to form social facts (Riis, 1996). Klein and Bloom's (1994) review of social work publications from 1870 to 1990 concluded that "there appears to be a major reconstituting of social work as an applied social science" (p. 430) and disputed the research-practice dichotomy. However, in another review of 13 social work publications from 1993 to 1997 by Rosen, there were very few published articles on social work interventions (Rosen, Proctor, & Staudt, 1999). Rosen concluded that social work's emphasis has been on descriptive and explanatory knowledge. In Rosen's view there remained many gaps in this aspect of social work knowledge about what works or what would be most effective (Rosen et al., 1999).

Etzioni (1969) preferred to use the term 'semi-profession' to describe the status of social work in its early and formative years. The term 'semi-profession' was used in the 1950s by Carr-Saunders (1955) as one of four major types of professions: the 'old established professions' based on the study of a theoretical structure of learning; the 'new professions' based on their own fundamental studies; the 'semi-professions' that are

based on technical practice and knowledge; and the 'would-be-professions' centred on business and administration practices. The first two types of professions are deemed as full-fledged professions whilst the latter two are considered to be emerging professions.

Social work would be at the crossroads between that of an emerging profession and a new profession as it develops its own fundamental knowledge base. Greenwood (1957a) postulated that professions align along a continuum with the well-established ones at one end and the least skilled at the opposite end. Greenwood further expounded that well-established professions would possess systematic theory, authority, community sanction, ethical codes and a professional culture. Social work seems to be lacking in some of the characteristics of a well-established profession that Greenwood outlined.

Supporters of social work as a profession argued that it has achieved theoretical knowledge and skills by utilizing a biopsychosocial approach and a multidimensional intervention orientation in understanding and working with clients who have complex problems (Reamer, 1994; Leon, 1999). Social workers often cite the works of Mary Richmond in support of social work having its own methods. Richmond (1917) published her social evidence methodology in social casework in her book entitled 'Social Diagnosis'. In the 1930s, the diagnostic and functional schools of thought in casework practice competed for dominance (Kemp, 1994). Social work method has also evolved from a casework method to encompass social group work in the 1970s. What seems to be important is that different social work approaches bring forth different interventions that would benefit clients in unique ways (Mattaini, 1995).

1.2.3 The Uniqueness of Social Work

Gibelman (1999) defended social work as unique in its focus on the 'fit' between person and environment which no other professions have expounded. Social work had its pride in addressing the needs of populations, the needs of disadvantaged individuals and communities through advocacy and reform (Goldstein, 1990). Social work's strength lies in its advocacy for, and understanding of, the connections between people and their social environments (Stuart, 1999). Political influences and society's values are important as "these shape paradigms and the resulting social work interventions" (Skerret, 2000, p. 63).

1.3 The Current Challenges Of Social Work

1.3.1 Limitations in Resolving Society's Multi-faceted Problems

The practice of social work has been undermined by budget cuts and the commoditization of many aspects of social work (McDonald & Chenoweth, 2009). Social workers have been constantly challenged by new public policies and the proliferation of other helping professions. Social workers were marginalized and devalued (Drucker, 2003). They were also inhibited by multiple and conflicting roles and needs (Siporin, 1975; Abramovitz, 1998). Most social workers lacked the zeal in advocating for social action as they tended to accept the status quo (Weiss, Gal, Cnaan, & Majlaglic 2002). They were not well prepared to advocate for human rights (Witkin, 1998; George, 1999). Johnson (1972) has described social work as a 'state-mediated profession' and it is the state that "intervenes in the relationship between practitioner and

client in order to define needs and/or the manner in which such needs are catered for" (p. 77).

On an international scale, this is reflected in apparent differences in the approaches and roles adopted by social workers in their work with clients. In referring to the Irish social work scene, Powell (1998, as cited in Skehill, 1999) pointed out that trust, risk, fragmentation and polarization restrict social workers' effectiveness in helping their clients. Larson (1977) advocated for the need to 'reprofessionalize' in which social workers need to earn the trust of their service users. Social workers should focus on empowering their clients and facilitating community partnership (Powell, 1998, as cited in Skehill, 1999). Given its limited resources, the social reality of social work in South Africa is its focus on communal work, in developmental and prevention programmes, rather than on individual inadequacies (Hutton & Mwansa, 1996, as cited in Drower, 2002; Bak, 2004). The concept of individuality is deemed to be inappropriate in African culture and value systems and thus casework is not a preferred social work method (Silavwe, 1995, as cited in Daniels, 2001).

In contrast, Caragata & Sanchez (2002) observed that Latin American social workers were more actively involved in empowering their clients by "strengthening personal capacities and political awareness, and the initiatives focused on were to be directed by the poor themselves" (p. 222). In Poland, social workers were seen as educators and enablers who helped to battle oppression by empowering the oppressed (Brainerd, 2001).

Generally, as evident from the differing perspectives held in each country, social workers do not practice from the same theoretical base and a social worker's knowledge in social policy and the social forces determines one's practice orientation (Mattaini, 1995). This notion is most evident in some Asian countries like Singapore and China where the responsibilities of individuals and families are affirmed, as opposed to a welfare state orientation found in most European countries (Wu, 2003, as cited in Yip, 2007). Skerret (2000) expounded that "it is these interactions between values, the resulting laws (legislation), application (method) and instrumentation (practice) that create social work paradigms which evolve and shift" (p. 64). This has been most evident in the way that social work practice differed in the 1950s between U.S.A. and U.K. where the former focused on individual change and the latter on social change (Hollis & Taylor, 1951). European social work practice was said to be linked to specific historical traditions (Flanagan, 1999). For example, whilst social workers in Denmark had to tackle unequal power relations at the national level, British social workers had to address individual differences in their struggles for equality (Hatton, 2001). Social policy reforms in Europe were generally geared towards a community partnership concept in the design and delivery of welfare services (Krzyszkowski, 2001).

Singapore modelled its social work education and practice after the British model (Wee, 2002). As a result of a lack of social workers, social service agencies in Singapore resorted to employing personnel not trained in social work as social service workers. The emergence of social service workers marked the beginning of the paraprofessional movement in the 1960s and threw social workers into an identity crisis (Austin, 1978).

Some of these social service workers received on-the-job training by senior social workers and senior social service workers. In Singapore, social work as a profession and social workers being professionally trained were matters yet to gain public acknowledgement (Goh, K.S., 1971; Fan, 2003).

Even up to today, most social work curricula have been grounded in a broad knowledge of the liberal arts (Mattaini, 1995). Likewise, a professional social work curriculum that incorporates ethical counselling practice at the National University of Singapore (NUS) is constrained by the university's effort to promote a generalist and a liberal arts education (Chong, L.H. & Ow, 2003). A social worker's education is thus deemed to be broad in its scope of studies. This development differs from the traditional conception of a profession in which a monopoly of specialized knowledge and skills, autonomy of practice, collegial authority, and a commitment to serve within a professional code of ethics were deemed essential (Anleu, 1992).

Different levels and standards of social work practice co-exist, especially between developed countries and developing countries. Social work practice is culturally-specific (Mohan, 2008). Social work's strong reliance on cultural values, economic resources and political ideologies makes it difficult to accommodate to new ways of service delivery under new managerial paradigms and economic rationalism (Ife, 1999). Thus social work is often challenged in its propensity to be both versatile and responsive in solving societal problems and in meeting the ever-changing needs of society. The strong inherent force for the profession to evolve and to seek solutions to societal problems poses a fundamental question as to what the future of social work

would be. Though its future beyond 2009 is left to be discovered, Reisch and Jarman-Rohde (2000) postulated four trends that have been shaping social work in recent times:

> ... marked increase in social and economic inequalities, growing insecurity of employment coupled with a sharp decline in the average worker's wages and benefits, decline in the social character of work, and the growing inability of 20th century government institutions to influence 21st century forms of economic organization, production and distribution (p. 202).

As social work relies heavily on external factors such as the political, socio-economic and cultural development of the society it serves there appears to be a certain element of powerlessness within the profession (Ife, 1999; Skerret, 2000). Bardill and Hurn (1994) argued that social work has not changed much in its effort to develop its own professional paradigm. They further expounded on how people tried to solve problems with old familiar methods while expecting a different outcome instead of making a paradigm shift. This makes it difficult for the public to recognize the full contributions of the profession. Hence, the client would largely attribute any effectiveness in the helping outcome to the resources they received through the social worker, rather than to the social worker's knowledge and skills. Tsang (2000) explained that "if it [social work] is a profession, it is a diffuse profession in which the professional elements of values, principles and skills are often embedded in non-professional activities" (p. 431). To put it differently, the client often does not realize how the rationalization of public policy, for example, can hinder any help that can be accorded.

This seems to occur less frequently in medicine and law where there is usually direct recognition of the knowledge and skills of the profession. But increasingly, as evident from media reports, the practices of medicine and of law have also been subject to external control by insurance companies and government sanctions respectively.

1.3.2 Social Work as Volunteer Work

The Singapore government's emphasis on volunteerism and the 'many helping hands' approach has created resounding misconceptions among the general public of social work as volunteer work. Volunteerism mushroomed alongside the development of social work in Singapore but it was volunteerism that was highly publicized both by the government and the media. This is an interesting development given that social work arose out of the charity organizations movement wherein volunteers were fielded to provide welfare services (Dubios & Miley, 2002). Abbott (1995) introduced the concept of 'structuration' of tasks when boundaries are formed between "different kinds of people doing the same kinds of work or between different styles of work with roughly similar clients, or between one workplace and another" (p. 557). He also elaborated on how "external forces directly disturb the system by opening new task areas for jurisdiction and by destroying old jurisdictions" (Abbott, 1988, p. 91).

The blurring of boundaries between volunteers and social workers arose when both were 'appraised' by their commitment and devotion in helping others. These virtues and qualities soon over-shadowed the essential elements of a systematic body of knowledge and skills in social work. Social workers and volunteers are often seen in the

same light as being 'helpers', and in their ability to form a meaningful 'helping relationship'. Most people do not immediately comprehend the specialized knowledge and skills that social workers possess since volunteers can more or less efficiently perform similar roles. To know the difference, one has to understand the kinds of assessment and psychosocial interventions that a social worker does.

With the proliferation of the helping professions, social workers also need to contend with the public's lack of understanding of the job differences between social workers, counsellors, therapists and psychologists. Many social workers are trained in more than one professional field and possess dual specializations. Due to the generic nature of social work and the public's lack of understanding of the training of a social worker, social workers in Singapore may be called counsellors / therapists in order for one to boost his / her status.

Consistent with what Abbott (1988) had identified in his work on 'professions', social workers have to juggle with competitions within and outside the profession over jurisdictions, in particular over theory and competencies. Nevertheless, clients may still prefer a casual and friendly volunteer who is boundary-free over a competent social worker who is bound by professional practice standards and norms. There are tasks that volunteers do that social workers do not. Claiborne's (2004) study of 20 international non-government organizations found that social workers have been underused in both leadership and direct services. Increasingly, social workers risk losing their foothold in providing direct care and services when they take on care management functions which reduce them to "becoming technical advisors of services and fund-holders, whilst

working within limited budgets and restricted service provision" (Skerret, 2000, p. 68). Social workers' emphasis might then shift from clients to services, outcomes and care plans (Skerret, 2000). A U.S. study on the effects of privatization and reductions in funds found that this trend inevitably affects the quality of service provision and leads to burn-out and low morale among social workers (Motenko, 1995). Drucker (2003) was amazed at the emphasis on private practice by some social workers instead of practising where the poor are. Van Heugten and Daniels (2001) explained that social workers who took up private practice were disillusioned with the social welfare system and were increasingly attracted to family therapy and counselling that were gaining popularity.

Abbott (1988) cautioned that abstract theory and knowledge attract interpretations for practice from competing professions. This brings forth the old and familiar argument that skirts around the notion of what it is in a social worker's tasks that another profession cannot do. Pardeck and Meinert (1999) argued that claiming of jurisdiction would be an important aspect of any profession's mission. Two types of jurisdictions were named: academic knowledge with its inherent values of rationality, logic and science; and practice knowledge with its emphasis on the processes of diagnosis, inference and treatment. Germain (1971) who advocated for a stronger emphasis on social work practice wrote about the tension between theory and practice in social work especially when not enough assistance was accorded to the very poor and needy class. Inter-recognition of both the academic and practice jurisdictions would thus be necessary in order to legitimize the profession of social work (Abbott 1988). Marsh (2002) highlighted that social work's knowledge should:

> contribute to distinguishing it from other professions. Knowledge that is relevant to social work practice is knowledge that stakes out claims to substantive areas … [such as] poverty, health, substance abuse, child and family welfare, and social intervention at individual, group, family, community, program and policy levels (p. 198).

Marsh (2002) went on to elaborate that the effectiveness and authenticity of a profession's knowledge lies in its capability in resolving problems and the public's acceptance of its contributions and competencies.

1.4 Social Workers' Identification With Social Work Practice

Social work is an ethically oriented profession with its core values and mission. However, the value of its practice is often determined by the political and moral values of the society it serves. Social work is thus able to wholly own its mission and values as these are distinctive to the profession, but not its methodologies and skills in helping. Any ethical and moral tensions would create dichotomies in the profession with the societies it serves. Nevertheless, the mission and values of social work are not unique to itself. Since social work values are also human values, they also appeal to, and are shared by, many others who are philanthropists and volunteers (Tan, N.T. & Envall, 2000). Thus, both the conceptualization and image of social work are often not wholly formulated by social workers themselves but rather by lay people who significantly contributed towards its image-building through their perception of what social work is (Varzinskiene, 2009).

Many basic and task-based functions of social work practice could be effectively performed by paraprofessionals and bachelors degree level staff (Mattaini, 1995). This ambiguity of what constitutes social work practice could be a probable reason why many younger social workers in Singapore do not identify themselves wholly with the profession as they may have found it difficult to attribute their competencies to being purely social work based. Many interventions by social workers have gone beyond the three classical social work functions of "restoration of impaired capacity, provision of individual and social resources, and prevention of social dysfunction" that have long been ingrained in social workers since the 1950s (Boehm, 1958, p. 18). However, a major characteristic of social work, is what Askeland and Payne (2001) defined as one which:

> Influences the validation process [validating knowledge], is its unique position of operating at the crossroads of management and treatment, of professional work and politics, and of multidisciplinary theories and approaches. Social workers therefore need to have a broad knowledge base, rather than an in-depth one. Consequently, professionals from other disciplines may easily deny or underestimate social workers' knowledge bases (p. 14).

Not all beginning social workers have trained social workers as supervisors. Some beginning social workers practice alone and so could not meaningfully comprehend what social work practice is. They have to struggle with assessment and intervention. Rosen (2003) opined how social workers use intuition over research-based knowledge in their practice, and uphold strong reliance on authority and the self as

rationale for decisions. Social workers are pressured to show competence not only by their employers but also by their clients. Their on-the-job learning becomes skewed to what works for them and whomsoever imparted the necessary knowledge and skills to them. Social work practice is thus often not understood nor acknowledged under such circumstances. This further leads to under-identification with social work practice and the profession (Fan, 2003).

The training of social workers in counselling and group work skills in undergraduate social work programmes remain insufficient. Beginning social workers in Singapore seem to identify with their counterparts in the United Kingdom where "the lack of professional status [in the U.K.] was in part due to the confusion about the qualifying standards in social work education and training for beginning social workers" (Orme & Rennie, 2006, p. 335). Social workers exist alongside many other helping professionals, namely psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors, family therapists and many other new and emerging mental health professions.

Social work lags behind other helping professions in terms of prestige and this in turn negatively affects any recruitment effort. The public is still not clear of what the social worker's roles and competencies are, and many hold stereotypical views of what social workers do (LeCroy & Stinson, 2004). The attractiveness of having a higher social status and skills as in some other helping professions soon pulled many prominent social workers away from their profession. Reamer (1992) noted an increase of 35,000 social workers taking up private practice as counsellors and psychotherapists in the U.S.A.. In Singapore, one notable pull factor has been the availability of specialized courses in some

of the other helping professions whereas there was little opportunity for educational advancement in social work before 2000. Specialist courses in social work were not that readily available then. For many years, the only opportunity for social work education enhancement in Singapore was by undertaking a research degree at the master's level (Fan, 2003).

Since social workers are still largely depicted to be volunteers by both the public and the media in Singapore, they are generally perceived to be working or helping out at social service agencies and social work departments of public hospitals. Many are of the view that social work is mainly about providing financial relief to the poor and helping the needy with their livelihood, a crucial role as depicted by social work pioneers (Siporin, 1975). Social work is thus perceived by many to be a generalist occupation with many committed and devoted helpers in many sectors of society, and further, that social work requires only minimal training. The general public places an intrinsic value on social work and social workers but knows very little about the profession. Social workers are therefore frustrated by the lack of recognition of their profession and having to tolerate poor working conditions such as a lack of autonomy and training opportunities, and low pay (Goh, K.S., 1971; Francozo & Cassorla, 2004). Cotton (2006) not only reported familiar issues with social workers' low pay, high caseloads, restrictive funding and staff cutbacks but also highlighted the danger of an aging population of social workers without the accompanying replacements.

1.5 Social Workers' Identification With SASW: Current Scenario

This study has a specific focus on social work in Singapore, and more directly on SASW as the professional body. Given the dearth of pertinent published material, it is important to acknowledge at the outset that the discussion of the development of SASW, especially from 2001 to present, is based on the researcher's role as a former president of the Association. SASW has a loose collection of policy documents, reports and minutes of meetings. There were few documents that report on the development of the Association after the late 1980s. Henceforth, when the researcher reports that SASW is making rapid progress in its effort to professionalize social workers in Singapore, this evidence is pulled together from the activity and project reports kept by the Association, and from one report written by the researcher for the Association in 2003 entitled 'SASW's Professional Capability Action Plan' submitted to the Singapore government. The researcher has taken on the role as the Association's 'spokesperson' and 'historian' whom government officials, heads of social service agencies, social workers and staff of the Association would consult on SASW's strategic plans, achievements and progress made in the last ten years. For the first time, this research thus formally documents the development of SASW as a professional association, from 2003 to the present.

1.5.1 The Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW)

SASW is into its 39th year of existence, having taken over from its predecessors, the Malayan Association of Almoners (MAA), the Association of Professional Social Workers (APSW) and the Singapore Association of Medical Social Workers (SAMSW).

The Family Resource & Training Centre (FRTC) was set up under the Association in 1992 to provide family life education and to support, nurture and strengthen families through leadership in research, training, public education, consultancy and advocacy. SASW has received its funding largely from public donations to run training programmes for the professional development of social workers. Only a small fraction of funding comes from membership dues. The FRTC is funded separately through public donations and corporate sponsorships to run specific training programmes and public education in the local community. The Centre also has its own By-laws and has been operating quite independently from the Association except that its Chairman and Management Committee must be appointed and endorsed by the Association.

1.5.2 The Association's Mission and Development

SASW's mission (SASW, 2004) is to:

1. advance social work as a profession and foster a high standard of social work in the country;
2. participate in activities which promote social work and social welfare on a national or an international level;
3. participate in and provide community and social services to the public; and,
4. promote the welfare of social workers.

SASW has been slow in professionalizing its members and social workers at large. Its early efforts were placed recruiting members, establishing basic practice ethics

and responding to emerging social needs and new services. Since almost all of SASW's committee members and volunteers were also practitioners, its early tasks revolved around the sharing of service expertise and steering training programmes to meet existing needs. Contributions from fellow social workers have been on an ad hoc basis with little provision for long-term planning.

Throughout the last decade, especially over the last eight years, SASW has attempted to be more visionary. Perhaps this was the stage of service development when more social work graduates entered the profession and when service provisions were more stabilized and the focus shifted to setting standards and competency in service delivery. The then Singapore Council of Social Service and the current National Council of Social Service (NCSS) played a pivotal role in this aspect. Whilst social agencies offering similar services come together to discuss practice norms and standards, agencies having some common core norms have varying sets of practice. SASW contributed in smaller ways as not all heads of social service agencies positions were filled by social workers (Fan, 2003).

1.5.3 Agency-focused Needs versus the Professional Association's Needs

Today, social work in Singapore is still very much agency-focused though efforts have been undertaken by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) to co-ordinate services, standards and training among its affiliates. The professional development of social workers is still very much an agency's responsibility and its importance varies from agency to agency (Fan, 2003). Blau and Scott (1962) opined that a professional's

commitment is related to an organization's auspice, and a professional is likely to support an organization that values them. In Singapore, social workers value their contributions to their organizations and the professional development opportunities offered by their employers.

Many social workers do not find the time to support the activities of the Association. This trend arises because of the competing needs and demands between social service agencies and the profession as represented by the Association (Goh, K.S., 1971; Fan, 2003). Mansbach and Kaufman (2003) noted that social workers' associations "function within organizational, political, cultural and other constraints" (p. 304). The passive attitude of social workers towards their professional association has to change if the importance of a SASW-Social Workers partnership in furthering social work is deemed to be essential.

Social work associations like SASW may have to re-evaluate their role to better reflect today's rapidly changing and uncertain world. Professionalizing social work can only be achieved at the national level. Social workers and SASW are in fact interdependent. When SASW does well, it would have a national impact greater then when an agency does well. With the current emphasis on developing the social service sector and in strengthening the social fabric and defence of Singapore, SASW is now in a pivotal position to make significant contributions to both the profession and the social service sector (Fan, 2003).

Many social workers self-select into the profession as they were influenced by their prior experience and personality traits, and they are more likely to look forward to

developing a high standard of morality in their social work practice (Kottler, 1993; Wallace, 1995). Similarly in a Hong Kong study by Kwok (1990), nearly half of her 54 respondents intended to become social workers even before they embarked on a social work education. Reamer (1992) noted that whilst social workers are ideologically supportive of the profession's traditional values in social justice and public welfare, they are more attracted to professional advancement, status and financial security. Thus while prior exposure and personality traits are important in attracting prospective social workers to join the profession, career advancement and financial stability are equally crucial factors in retaining them.

What is deemed to be of priority for SASW is to ensure that social work students and beginning social workers get the necessary professional support for their professional growth and personal development (Goh, K.S., 1971; Fan, 2003). Social work students need to be given the opportunity to acquire all the necessary ethical values, knowledge and skills in order to practice efficiently (Shera & Bogo, 2001). Students have a strong need for personal and professional development and the opportunity to actualize professional values (Knezevic, 1999; Reisch & Jarman-Rohde, 2000). SASW needs to work closely with universities and social service agencies to ensure adequate and effective placement opportunities for students. Organizational commitment and support is crucial for social workers, in particular beginning social workers as agencies increasingly define the social workers' work-norms (Globerman & Bogo, 2003).

Many social workers join the profession because of their idealism and altruism in helping others, thus having satisfying professional experiences are essential in retaining

them (Francozo & Cassorla, 2004). Beginning social workers may need additional support from fellow professionals to better assimilate into their professional roles. Social workers working in isolation can tap into this community of professionals for mutual sharing and networking. The direct benefits would be to promote and enhance interest in social work practice and training, and in bringing down the attrition rate in social work occupations – particularly of those who leave because of a lack of support for professional growth and development.

1.5.4 Sustaining Growth in the Representation of Practising Social Workers in Singapore

It is interesting to note that whilst social workers in Singapore do not depend on trade unions to represent them, they expect their professional association to be their voice in improving work conditions such as pay and workload. Social workers generally do not believe in using unions to fight for their cause as they have an obligation to serve their clients (Rosenberg, J. & Rosenberg, S., 2006). This is in great contrast to the nursing profession in which associations like the American Nurses Association find collective bargaining helpful in achieving both personal and professional goals (Scott, 1993). Prandy (1965) attempted to distinguish trade unions from professional associations in that the former are "class bodies" whilst the latter are "status bodies" (p. 44). Both are collective organizations that serve to protect their members (Kleingartner, 1973). It is quite apparent that social workers join SASW for both status (qualifications oriented) and class (work oriented) representations.

By early 2003, SASW managed to capture about 65% membership from the estimated 600 practicing social workers and a smaller number of those who have left the profession but maintained their affiliations with the Association. There was close to a 15% growth in membership from 2001 to 2002 (Fan, 2003). In U.S.A., the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) managed to capture about 50% membership from the nation's pool of social workers in the 1990s (Meinert, 1994). NASW's membership rate was estimated to be between 30-50% in a survey conducted in 2000 (Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, 2004). In U.K., the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has yet to attract effective mass-membership amongst social workers to move the profession forward (Lymbery, 2001).

Aranya, Pollack, and Amernic (1981), in their study of accountants, noted that their professional commitment included "(1) the belief in, and acceptance of the goals and values of the profession, (2) the willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the profession, and (3) a definite desire to maintain membership in the profession" (p. 272). Social workers seem to lack the professional commitment to effect change for themselves. Lazar, Cohen, and Guttermann (1995) outlined two dimensions in professional commitment, namely affective and continuous commitment. Affective commitment refers to a professional's attitude and feelings toward the profession, and continuous commitment refers to tangible outcomes or rewards by remaining in the profession.

SASW hopes to see an upward trend in membership as it attempts to uphold standards of practice and advocates for members' professional development. However,

after restructuring, both SASW and the Family Resource and Training Centre (FRTC) faced serious manpower crises as they were not successful in attracting suitably qualified candidates to fill all their vacant positions including the top posts of Executive Director and Training Manager. This hindered FRTC's efforts to be efficient operationally and in developing training and outreach programmes for members.

1.6 Futuring Social Work: Recent Developments

Recent social work development worldwide and social and economic developments in Singapore posed many challenges as well as opportunities to the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) in its effort to represent and advocate for social workers in the country.

1.6.1 VWO Capability Funds (VCF)

New schemes of funding such as the VWO Capability Funds (VCF) for voluntary welfare organizations (VWOs) can be used to fund manpower, pilot projects, new services and consultancy services in the social service sector. In a short space of five years, the social service sector became vibrant and gained national publicity. Job fairs for the social service sector held over the past few years attracted thousands of job seekers for social work positions. Not only was there an increase in social work positions and programmes, two new social work degree programmes were initiated in Singapore by the University of the Singapore Institute of Management (UniSIM) and Monash University.

1.6.2 Two Future Socio-economic Developments

The two future socio-economic developments in the public limelight in Singapore today are: gambling addiction with the setting up of the Integrated Resorts by 2010 and a greying population by 2030. Whilst much has been done to provide preventive and remedial support to individuals and families affected by gambling addiction, the future implications of a greying population will have a more serious and long-term impact on Singapore. There will be an increasing burden and stress in providing for the sick aged in smaller families and, correspondingly, a higher reliance on community support networks for elder care (Vasoo, 2002). Social workers in Singapore are expected to play a major role in helping individuals and families displaced by gambling addiction and in providing a wide range of community-based programmes to keep the elderly healthy and active.

1.6.3 Occupational Social Work and Employment Issues

Iversen (2001) had written on occupational social work and how this specialization helped to address structural and personal conditions relating to employment and unemployment. Economic restructuring and welfare cutbacks increased social isolation and inequality among the employed and unemployed. Therefore, occupational social workers "could use an employment-focused social activist role to initiate and support policy changes essential to poor workers" (Iversen, 1998, p. 555). Occupational social work has not been extremely popular with social workers in Singapore although most social workers would have handled employment and unemployment issues as part of their work. In the mid-1980s when Singapore plunged

into recession, SASW initiated a task force to look at the social implications of unemployment and retrenchment and came up with a guide for employers and workers to look into individual and family well-being in a time of crisis. Since 2003, SASW was involved in promoting manpower conversion programmes initiated by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth & Sports (MCYS) to boost the expansion and growth in social service jobs including social work (Fan, 2003). There is yet to be any concerted effort by SASW to actively promote and enhance occupational social work in the country.

1.6.4 Social Work and the Law

The concept of 'therapeutic jurisprudence' was expounded by Madden and Wayne (2003) in which social workers could review, analyze and influence the law through social work knowledge and skills. Social workers must be acquainted with the legal system in order to effectively participate in it. Therapeutic jurisprudence "asks policy makers, judges, lawyers, and other legal actors to examine all the ways the law affects individuals, families and communities and to evaluate the effects of the legal process, and ultimately to improve legal outcomes" (Wexler & Winick, 1996, as quoted in Madden & Wayne, 2003, p. 340). Social workers have successfully influenced social policies and legislatures on child abuse, domestic violence and the elderly. More recently as a result of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003, medical social workers at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (the government designated SARS hospital) looked into the impact of SARS on healthcare workers and have documented their

experiences handling the epidemic. SASW was also asked by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) to provide safe-practice guidelines at the workplace for social workers during the SARS outbreak. In support of the Singapore government's effort to have a new vision for the country, SASW made representations to the Remaking Singapore Committee on its vision on social planning and social welfare, particularly in the area of developing the human capital (SASW's Submission to the Remaking Singapore Committee, 2002).

1.6.5 International Social Work

Lyons (2002) appeals to social work national associations to think and act globally beyond their national frameworks. For example, poverty has moved beyond national boundaries and is a global issue requiring international problem-solving strategies to curb it (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002). The dominance of economic policy such as the impact of free market, global competitiveness and freedom of movement spearheaded by the European Union would negatively impact on social life, social provision of welfare services and social policies (Pfaffenberger, 2001). Globalization of the economy may lead to hyper-competition resulting in low wages and socio-political tension (Queiro-Tajalli, Campbell, & McNutt, 2003). With the exception of academia, social workers are generally not familiar with the international perspective in social work (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002).

As in the case of England, Singapore social workers were still more likely to be 'fire-fighting' over high caseloads, high turnover, and staff cutbacks than to be equipped

with advocacy at the national and international fronts (Dickens & Serghi, 2000). It has only been in recent years that SASW has paid more attention to promoting interests in international social work. In 2003, SASW officially formed an international relations committee for the purpose of networking with social workers all over the world. This was a follow-up to 2001 when SASW together with the National University of Singapore (NUS), the International Federation of Social Workers (Asia Pacific) hosted the 16th Asia-Pacific Social Work Conference bringing many delegates from all over the world to Singapore. Playing co-host to foreign social workers, SASW thus planted the seeds for more opportunities for attachment, exchange programmes and study trips (Fan, 2003). Currently, NUS has a team of social work lecturers and social workers who are involved in a project mission to a third world country.

1.6.6 Advocacy for the Profession, Leadership Issues in the Profession and Leadership Succession in SASW

Advocacy for the profession should be the central mission of social work professional associations (Haynes & Mickelson, 2000, as cited in Queiro-Tajalli et al., 2003). SASW has taken steps to be inclusive in as many aspects of social work as far as possible. SASW hopes to inculcate in members and all social workers the value and importance of advocacy for the profession and leadership succession for SASW. Through advocacies by social workers themselves, committees have been set up to look into standards of practice, voluntary registration of social workers, and interest groups have been formed for family work, school social work and geriatric social work. These

committees and task forces look into the future of social work in these specializations (Fan, 2003). SASW's current challenge is to ensure that the profession will not be deprofessionalized and deskilled as a result of privatization and routinization of social work tasks (Healy & Meagher, 2004).

Social workers have not readily taken up leadership and managerial positions. Neither were there many opportunities for them to occupy chief executive positions. Social workers remain largely direct service agents. For those who took up leadership positions, many lacked in mentoring and training for the job (Rank & Hutchison, 2000). Rank and Hutchison (2000) raised five essential leadership elements in social work: proaction, values and ethics, empowerment, vision and communication. Cook, Reid, & Edwards (1995) outlined leadership skills of social work leaders to include "managing environmental relationships, such as effective agency or program representation and positioning, networking, coalition building, negotiating hostile environments and dealing with multiple customer and stakeholder groups" (Cook et al., 1995, as quoted in Cooke, Reid, & Edwards, 1997, p. 240).

A related concern pertaining to leadership issues among social workers in Singapore is leadership succession. Leadership succession in SASW has been a serious concern for years as the Association failed to have sufficient members nominating to fill its committees including the Executive Committee. To ensure and to sustain social work leaders, SASW needs to train and inculcate leadership and managerial skills not taught in undergraduate and graduate social work programmes.

1.6.7 Social Workers' Day

Social workers in Singapore celebrated their first Social Workers' Day on 20th January 2007. In this nationwide celebration with well supported fringe events by social service agencies and hospitals, social workers received warm media publicity and government support for a pay rise, increase in manpower, funding for further studies and leadership advancement (termed as the 'Social Work Professionalization Package' worth SD 1 million). Altogether, the government agreed to pump SD 80 million a year to support voluntary welfare organizations (Sim, 2007). A social worker's caseload is estimated to be more than 50 cases at any one time (Personal communications with Heads of Social Service Agencies in Singapore, 2007). This is considered high in view of the intensity of complex cases to be handled, thus more social workers are needed in the field.

The pay rise for social workers was expected to be at least 20%. Social workers wished the government to peg their pay to teachers and nurses who have in recent years been given substantial focus by their respective ministries (Sim, 2007). SASW estimated that social workers' pay failed to increase very much despite their many years of service. SASW estimated that a social worker with five years of work experience receives between SD 2,500 and SD 3,000 per month in contrast to that of a nurse manager with five years of work experience who would probably earn between SD 3,000 and SD 5,000 per month (Tan, T., 2007). In the same report, A/Prof Ngiam, Head of the Department of Social Work at the National University of Singapore (NUS) was cited as stating that less than half of its 80 to 100 graduates join the profession upon graduation each year, and up

to half of those who join the profession leave after five years. The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) estimated that an additional 100 social workers are needed each year to run new services (Fan, 2003).

1.7 Transdisciplinarity In Futures Studies: The Future Of SASW

Evidence seems to point toward an integration of the knowledge base from the social sciences and the application of knowledge that fundamentally forms the practice base of social work. This view explains the broad perspective of social work. The application of knowledge, resulting in social work interventions, can be eclectic, a fusion of relevant and related intervention strategies from the helping professions. As there is more than one view explaining the cause of a social problem, there must also be more than one methodology in resolving it.

Tepperman and Curtis (2003) viewed social problems as interconnected, dynamic and changeable but they are tied to some historical bases. They forecast that future social problems would probably involve science and technology, travel and communications, war and inter-group conflicts. Humanity's problems will increasingly be global in scope, especially in the areas of community health and illnesses. Emerging and new social problems would give rise to new challenges and new resolutions that would change the way existing professions work.

A transdisciplinary futures oriented approach is therefore selected to study how professional associations like SASW would help to resolve critical professional issues

arising out of changing social trends and chart a new future for the profession of social work. As aptly stated by Gold, Rodgers, & Smith (2002), "professional status is always contingent and unfinished" (p. 47) as new occupations may emerge to satisfy new complexities faced by clients.

Furthermore, Goorhuis (2000) explained that societal problems are both complex and interdependent and thus they should not be isolated or partitioned according to disciplines (as cited in Klein, 2004). Kahn (1973) warned that decision-makers cannot afford to study social reality on disciplinary lines without addressing the potential challenges of the future (as cited in Aligica, 2004). The lack of collaboration between scientists, professionals and policy decision-makers has led to an 'applicability gap' (Lawrence & Despres, 2004). Transdisciplinarity makes linkages across disciplinary boundaries and between theoretical development and professional practice, and thus challenges knowledge fragmentation (Lawrence, 2004, as cited in Lawrence & Despres, 2004). Nicholescu (1996) in her essay on the 'New Vision of the World' identified three pillars of transdisciplinarity: complexity, multiple levels of reality, and the logic of the middle. Transdisciplinarity acknowledges multidimensionality, different levels of reality including the principle of relativity and bridges different areas of knowledge and different beings (Nicholescu, 1996, as cited in Klein, 2004). It requires the deconstruction of meanings made by social workers about their profession and their professional association to surface contradictions, paradoxes and conflicts.

1.8 Summary

SASW has come a long way in its effort to register social workers and embarked on having its first Social Workers' Day (SWD) in January 2007 with tremendous success. Based on the publicity by the press and the attendance rate by social workers at the SWD event, this event appears to improve the image and status of SASW despite it suffering from low morale as a result of its recent restructuring exercise with many social workers losing confidence in its leadership and direction. In light of the current situation, it is extremely crucial for SASW to strategize its approach and take advantage of the Singapore government's call for 'professional reforms' in order to raise the status and recognition of social work in the country. This futures study of SASW is thus very apt and its contributions perfectly timely. The next chapter documents the methodology used to study the future of SASW.

CHAPTER TWO

Method:

A Causal Layered Perspective

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One uncovered and outlined issues such as the diversity and low status of the profession of social work. That chapter also considered the related problems of professional legitimacy and a lack of qualified social workers on the one hand, and weakness of the professional association, in particular, the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) and the related problems of social workers having a lack of identification with their professional body on the other. An analysis of the inter-relationships between social workers, the profession of social work, and the professional association will help to uncover issues impacting on the alliance between social workers and their professional body and help to forecast possible futures for SASW. The outcomes of this study contribute to the development of a set of 'preferred futures' strategies to help build and maintain strong alliance between social workers and their professional association, and for SASW to legitimize its role and functions.

2.2 Research Methodology

Qualitative research is generally seen as seeking out key conceptual issues and potential hypotheses for future research (Padgett, 1998). Interpretive and critical research paradigms are the two key research paradigms in qualitative research that explore

meanings of human actions and experiences of those being studied (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002).

Interpretive approaches place emphasis on discovering patterns and order in social realities which are often embedded in meanings behind textual materials such as in transcripts of conversations, the written texts and in pictures. There are many socially constructed realities that are defined by the participants in any particular studies (Neuman, 1994). According to Neuman (1994), "each person's interpretation of the survey question must be placed in a context (example, survey interview situation), and the true meaning of a person's answer will vary according to the interview or questioning context" (p. 65).

Critical approaches on the other hand focus on inquiry that goes beyond observable surface reality – that is the immediate responses of participants of a study. The primary underlying assumption of such approaches is that there are layers of truths to be uncovered from identifying myths and surface realities of contextual responses of participants of a study. It examines multiple layers of social realities and offers alternative views of knowing (Neuman, 1994). Critical approaches "emphasize the social and historical origins and contexts of meaning, regardless of the individual or collective forms of embodiment and expression they might take" (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 720).

This investigation serves as an exploratory study of the level of alliance of social workers in Singapore with their professional association and the probable future of the Association. An interpretive and critical approach to the study utilizing the framework of Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) serves to uncover layers of truths that are intended to

help in formulating alternative futures for the Association. The findings of this study are neither to be generalized nor duplicated, as they are specific to a particular context and time. That is, this study is specific to the current socio-economic and political factors impacting on SASW and the status of the social work movement in Singapore at the time of the study. However, the findings serve to provide strategies in resolving some pertinent industry problems unique to SASW. The rigour of the research is in the application of a futures methodology, namely CLA that is itself a complex futures research methodology in dealing with real-time industry issues.

As a researcher heavily involved in leading SASW for the past eight years, there is an issue of reflexivity in the research in that the researcher is part of the social world of the participants being studied (Punch, 2005). The researcher's familiarity with the profession of social work, SASW and social workers in Singapore helped to guide interpretive and critical analyses by constantly referring back to the contextual framework of the research, seeking clarifications on multiple meanings of textual responses, and bringing into the research privileged knowledge on social and public policies and insider knowledge of the Association. The researcher was therefore able to integrate many social realities arising from having knowledge of SASW, stakeholders of the Association and social workers in the study.

2.3 Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) was selected as both the theoretical and methodological framework for this study. The theoretical framework and methodology

of CLA was formalized by Sohail Inayatullah in the 1990s though its conceptualization goes back to the 1980s (Inayatullah, 2004a). CLA as a method postulates possible futures by examining the depth and breadth of issues, concerns or problems primarily in the context of critical theory and a post-structural theory framework (Inayatullah, 2004a). Critical theory recognizes that social reality evolves over time and by intentionally raising and identifying more problems, critical theory inquires beyond observable surface realities to uncover deeper meanings that are not directly observable. By so doing, critical theory attempts to explain how by achieving deep changes that goes beyond surface realities, it would be possible to lay out the vision of possible futures. Knowledge, according to post-structural theory, takes on numerous forms and is unique to particular people or specific communities. Post-structural theory seeks to demystify the social world by deconstructing observable surface realities to reveal those that are hidden (Neuman, 1994).

Reduction in qualitative research facilitates analysis as parts of texts are partitioned or clustered according to new groupings of meanings that address the research questions (Huberman & Miles, 1983). In CLA, deconstruction has the similar connotation of breaking apart a text and exploring what is visible and what is emerging and not as obvious. In the analysis of texts, deconstruction not only questions prevailing knowledge and prominent players but also examines any censored knowledge and any less prominent players [losers] (Inayatullah, 2004a). Deconstruction aids understanding of the history of a communicated text in order to generate the perspective held at a given

time (Russo, 2004). Using the CLA technique in deconstruction, the use of the title of 'social worker' can be deconstructed to locate the prevailing perspective of that title.

In CLA, there are four layers of analysis, namely Litany, Systemic (Social Causes), Worldview and Myth or Metaphor. These four levels intertwine as one level of analysis impacts on another. All four levels of analysis when deconstructed and reconstructed will uncover alternative ways of knowing and alternative solutions (Inayatullah, 2004a; Riedy, 2008). Russo (2004) used the word 'layering' to denote construction and reconstruction. It is a process in which the researcher questions how perspectives were developed through the CLA layers to gain broader understanding and new perspectives of the issues in question. Layering or constructing / reconstructing were heavily utilized in this investigation.

Figure 2.1 depicts the CLA framework and method as adapted from Burke (Inayatullah, 2004b, p. 544):

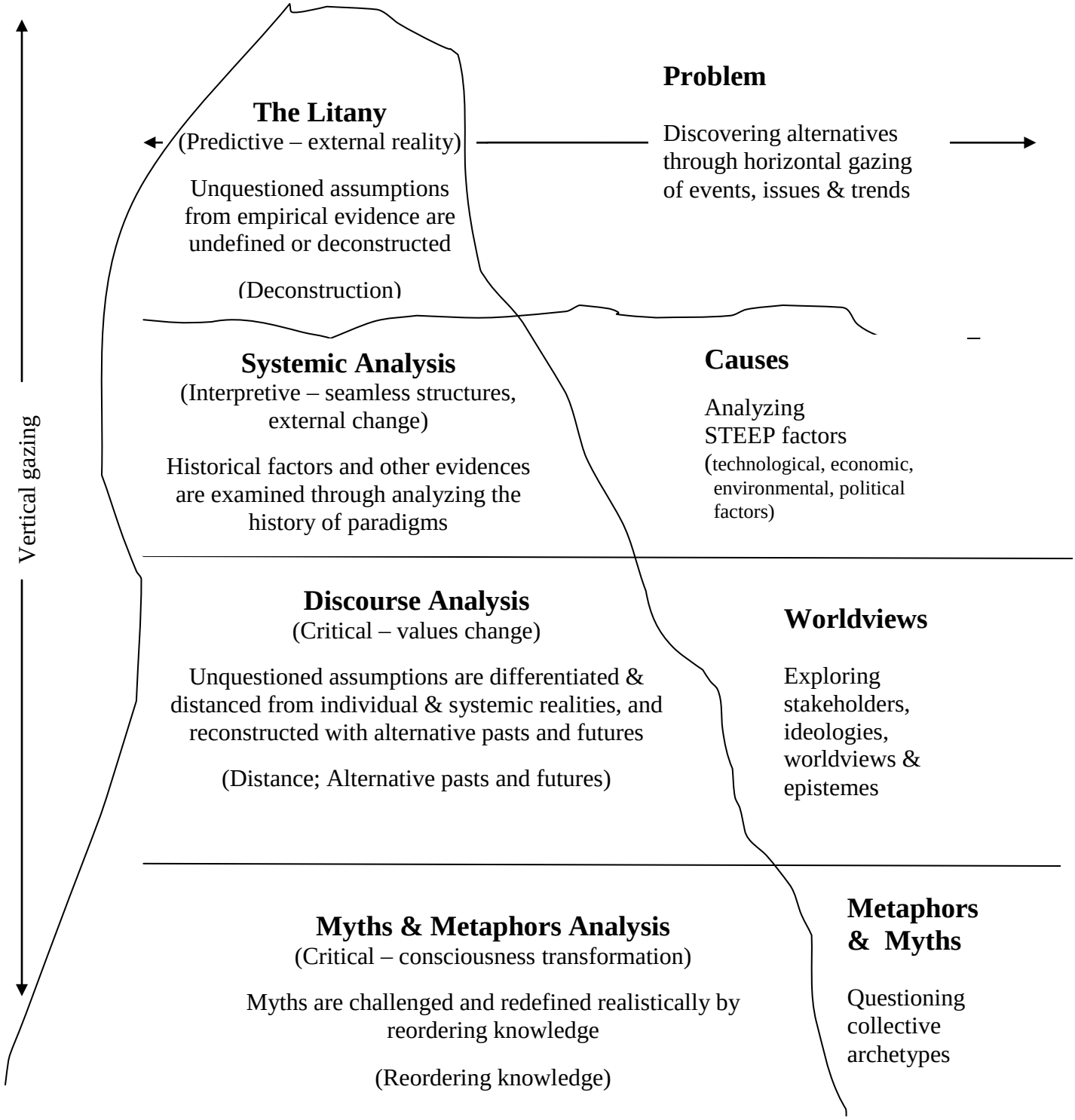

Figure 2.1 The CLA Framework & Method (Inayatullah, 2004b)

The CLA approach hinges on both interpretive and critical analyses. The empirical and interpretive analyses of CLA are commonly found within the Litany and Systemic Levels of analysis. The Litany Level provides empirical data or evidence for deconstruction whereas the Systemic Level provides the researcher with interpretive data where meanings inherent in human experience and action are scrutinized. At the level of the Worldview, meanings, social and historical origins are contextualized and differentiated. Knowledge is then reordered at the Metaphors and Myths Level (Russo, 2004).

The analysis in CLA is framed in such a manner that broad perspectives, such as individual to world perspectives are analyzed within the linear layers of analysis as depicted in Figure 2.2 (Russo, 2004, p. 508). All concepts of time, economics, politics, ideologies, cultures, structures, values, languages and meanings are assumed to be the epistemological assumption of the real as they are all socially constructed (Inayatullah, 2004c). A post-structural position of language and meaning as social constructs is adopted in this study where "meaning is in the site of the linguistic structure in which subjects find themselves" (Inayatullah, 2004c, p. 56).

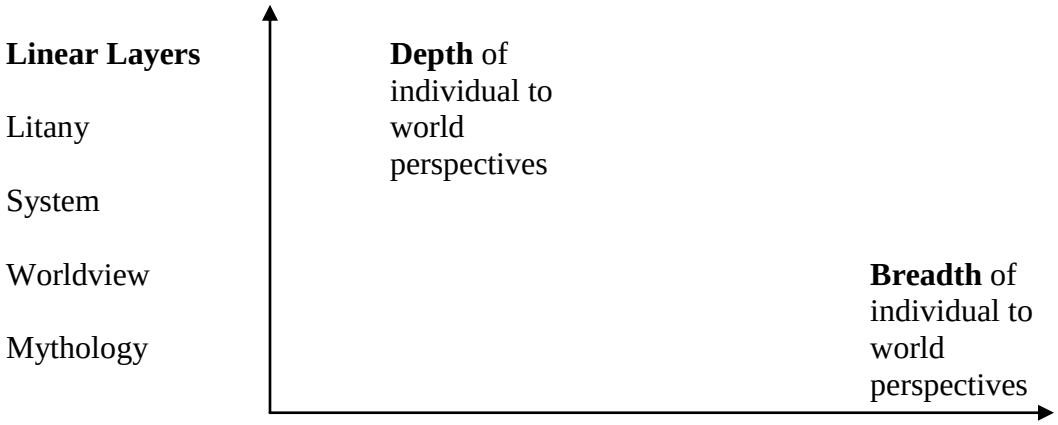

Figure 2.2 Linear layers and deep lateral perspectives (Russo, 2004)

CLA, a futures research methodology, is well suited for this investigation for three important reasons:

(1) the profession of social work is highly diverse and is subject to varying interpretations by individuals, localities, states and the world;

(2) the role, functions and recognition of the social work professional association also differs across localities, states and countries; and

(3) this study is futures oriented and generating alternative and preferred futures would be important.

The CLA framework thus has the potential to offer integrative and deeper levels of analysis of the issues being studied.

2.4 Research Framework

2.4.1 Framing the Research Questionnaire using CLA

According to Tesch (1990), in qualitative investigation, research questions focus on three areas:

> language as a means to explore processes of communication and patterns of interaction within particular social groups; description and interpretation of subjective meanings attributed to situations and actions; and theory-building through discovering patterns and connections in qualitative data (as quoted in Fossey et al., 2002, p. 723).

In order to reflect the aims of the research and to achieve depth of understanding of the issues being studied, questions may be refined in response to emerging issues and themes as the research progresses. In qualitative research, broad questions rather than hypotheses are typically used (Fossey et al., 2002).

2.4.2 The Research Questions

The key research question was to explore the level of alliance of social workers in Singapore with their professional association, SASW. The main objectives were to explore the probable futures of SASW and suggest strategies that would strengthen the current level of alliance between social workers and SASW. The broad questions in the research were:

1. How do social workers perceive their alliance with their profession?
2. How do social workers perceive their alliance with SASW?

3. How aware are social workers of the challenges and the future of SASW?

Fundamental to understanding social workers' level of alliance with their professional body entails understanding social workers' level of identification with their profession. Whilst social workers who have weak identification with their profession are unlikely to have strong alliance with their professional association, it would be invaluable to understand why social workers who hold strong identification with their profession do not also hold strong alliance with their professional association.

Three fundamental relationships arising from the key research question were postulated to explore the alliance of social workers with their professional association and what they saw as the future of SASW. These relationships were formulated and surveyed with corresponding issues (variables) within each relationship analyzed (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1

The Relationships Between Social Work, Social Workers And Their Professional Association

The Relationships:		Corresponding Issues:
I	Level of alliance between social workers and their professional association	alliance with the professional body the purpose of having a professional body the need for a professional body
II	Level of identification of social workers with their profession	perception of social work as a profession identification with the profession perception of the level of professionalism
III	Level of awareness amongst social workers of the challenges and future of their professional association	perceived challenges and possible solutions perceived future and probable direction

2.4.3 The Research Questionnaire Framework

The three relationships between social work, social workers and their professional association formed the basis for developing the research questionnaire (see Appendix A). Some questions were rephrased after the tenth interview, with the original phrases contained in brackets. The refined questions did not change the purpose of the questions. Question 12.4.10 is an additional question raised by the researcher after the seventh interview. This question explored respondents' perception on the need to change the title of 'social worker' and is significant to the research. As a result, the researcher re-interviewed the first seven interviewees with this additional question via e-mail or telecommunication.

2.4.4 Population of the Study

It was expected that there would be difficulties contacting qualified social workers who have never joined SASW to participate in the study. Neither was it plausible to obtain up-to-date contact information of all past social work graduates from the National University of Singapore (NUS). As was noted in Chapter One, by 2003 SASW had managed to capture about 65% membership of the estimated 600 practicing social workers and a smaller number of those who have left the profession but maintain their affiliations with the Association (Fan, 2003). To simplify sampling of the population of social workers, the SASW Membership Database was used as the population for this study as it is by far the most comprehensive database on former and current practicing social workers.

A futures interview (see Appendix B), incorporating a brief version of the research questionnaire, was administered to a non-proportional stratified and purposive sample of 33 qualified social workers (about 6% of the SASW Membership Database with 564 qualified social workers as of Oct 2004) as follows:

(1) Eleven current registered social workers (RSWs) of SASW;

(2) Eleven current non-registered social workers (Non-RSWs) of SASW; and

(3) Eleven former or inactive members (Former Members) of SASW.

The stratified and purposive sampling covered a wide range of perspectives based on possible differences in respondents' attitude towards the professional association and the profession of social work. Purposive sampling enables appropriate selection of information sources covering people, situations and processes (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, as cited in Fossey et al., 2002). The SASW Membership Database as of Oct 2004 (the time at which data were collected) is shown in Table 2.2 below:

Table 2.2

SASW Membership And Registration Statistics As Of 15th October 2004

Total no. of qualified social workers in database*:	564	100%
Current Members (Active status; current members): 302 full/ordinary/fellow/life members are RSWs 43 full/ordinary/fellow/life members are Non-RSWs	345	61.2%
Former Members (Inactive status; membership not renewed)	219	38.8%

*Qualified social workers refer to persons who possess formal tertiary qualification in Social Work.

No fixed minimum number of participants is necessary for qualitative research (Fossey et al., 2002).

2.4.5 Procedures of Sampling and Data Collection

Two SASW administration staff helped to extract the non-proportional stratified and purposive sample from the SASW Membership Database of 15th Oct 2004. Thirty-three names (11 from each of the three strata) on the database were selected using the random sampling table from Research Randomizer Version 3 (http://www.randomizer.org.). Given that the study was based on voluntary participation, not all 33 prospective participants initially selected participated. Altogether, 115 invitations to participate in the study were mailed out in four batches between October 2004 and January 2005 in an attempt to achieve the desired sample size for each of the three strata (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3

Sampling Statistics Finalized As Of January 2005

BATCH	NO. OF PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS	STRATA (REPLY – AGREED)			TOTAL
		ACTIVE		INACTIVE (FORMER)	
		RSW	NON-RSW*		
1st	33	5	5	2	12
2nd	51	5	2	2-1	9-1
3rd	21	0	0	0	0
4th	10	1	0	7-1	8-1
TOTAL	115	11	7	11-2**=9	29-2=27

* All 43 Non-RSWs (full/ordinary/fellow/life members) were invited to participate in the sample

** Two former members were found to be unsuitable as they had only been inactive for a transitional period of 3 months (between renewal of membership); they had been active members for many years.

Approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of CQUniversity (Central Queensland University) to conduct the study was obtained on 18th November 2004 (See Appendix C). A letter of approval from SASW to conduct the study (see Appendix D) together with a letter from the researcher outlining the purpose of the study and a reply slip (see Appendix E) were mailed out to prospective participants. Only the reply slips of prospective participants who agreed to participate in the study were returned to the researcher. These research participants were then contacted via phone or e-mail for an interview appointment. The first research interview was conducted in early February 2005. Clarification of the purpose of the study and consent for the study (see Appendices E & F) as well as personal data (see Appendix B) were routinely administered and updated at the start of each interview. With the agreement of interviewees, each interview was audiotaped for researcher's reference.

As shown in Table 2.3, following the procedures outlined eventually a total of 27 participants took part in this study. The full sampling quota of 11 was fulfilled for the 'RSW' strata. In the event, only 9 were interviewed from the 'Inactive / Former Member' strata since 2 inactive members were found to be misclassified as they were only inactive for a period of less than three months; this is within the grace period by SASW for membership renewal. Thus, they had to be removed from the sample. As for Non-RSWs (43) on the database, only 7 agreed to participate in the study. When interviewed, some Non-RSWs and Inactive/Former Members had by then registered to be

either RSWs or Full Members. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, these research participants remained categorized in their original strata from the research database.

Each of the individual face-to-face interviews, using the semi-structured CLA Questionnaire designed for this study, took an average of about one and a half hours to conduct. The length of interviews seemed to follow a consistent pattern where interviews with senior social workers took about two hours to conduct whereas beginning social workers and former members took an average of one and a quarter hour.

The researcher recognized the unique experiences of each research participant and remained mindful that only the perspectives of the research participants would be authentically represented. The researcher made provision for follow-up interviews with respective research participants for further clarifications of contents, viewpoints and any interpretations made that appeared to be unclear. As it is inevitable that all researchers are affected by observers' bias, the researcher tried to limit personal biases by accounting for it in his field notes in which he recorded any incidences of his own subjective viewpoints when conducting the interviews (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The data were analyzed using the qualitative research software 'The Ethnograph' Version 5.08 by Qualis Research Associates July 1, 2001.

All collected data were coded, sorted and organized to look for patterns and connections within each level and across all levels within a post-structural framework of Causal Layered Analysis (see Appendix G for Code Book, Face & Identifier Information. Appendix G provides a detailed definition of the codes developed and used during the

interpretive analysis of the data. Appendix G also documents examples of each level of analysis). In coding, unique labels were assigned to text passages that contained references to particular research questions. Coding forms the initial part of analysis and it can be both descriptive and interpretive. Multiple codes can be developed for single segments of text. Coding also allows for clarification of information data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

2.5 CLA Framework & Methodology: Deconstructing & Reconstructing The Issues

In CLA, the challenge is to question the future by undefining it. Thus to question the future of the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) is to undefine or reinterpret, by deconstructing empirical evidence as to what a professional association is and to ascertain what SASW needs to meet its future mission. The obvious units of analysis would be the profession of social work (in terms of its theory, principles and niche markets), social workers (in terms of their identity, competencies and practice standards), and the Association (in terms of its mission, role and structure). Broader units of analysis could include stakeholders such as government (eg. funding, public policy and social legislation), employers of social workers (eg. scope of job functions, work conditions and practice standards), clients and the public (eg. recognition of service, fee for service and future markets), and other helping professionals (eg. knowledge and skills, competencies and niche markets). These units of analysis form the breadth (horizontal) of analysis. The primary task is to understand and challenge how respondents' views are constructed and linked.

In a systematic fashion, unquestioned views of reality are examined at the first layer of analysis of CLA, the Litany Level. Superficial and unquestioned views of reality for social work could be: 'it is a low-paying job'; 'anyone who volunteers is a social worker'; and 'social workers tend to be ruled by their hearts'. These superficial views of reality when put together form the unquestioned views of the **'social worker identity'** at the Litany Level. These unquestioned views are easily verified comments that denote whether a problem exists. These comments about the issue by specific individuals or the public may be fuelled by the news media or popular literature (Heilesen, 2004). These comments "can be exaggerated, distorted and politicized, and usually present as discontinuous issues and 'sound bites'. At this level, thinking is unchallenged, and the general sense is that 'someone' [eg. Government] should do something about this'" (Conway, 2007, p. 1).

The social worker identity issue is then interpreted at the second layer of analysis, the Systemic Level where historical factors and other evidences are uncovered as possible causal variables through the application of genealogical analysis, an analysis of the development of discourses. At the Systemic Level of analysis, actors, objects and their interrelations are identified to ascertain how social, technical economic, environmental and political influences may be involved (Heilesen, 2004). The analysis at the Systemic Level is done through "rational analysis and the quantitative interpretation of data" (Fricker, 2000, "CLA has four levels", para. 2). Thus, at the Systemic Level lies the **'development of social work discourse'** of what social work has been in the past and is at present. This discourse traces the essence and development of social work. To further

illustrate this point, one historical truth about the humble beginning of social work is that it evolved from the work of volunteers of settlement houses and charitable organizations who offered their services to help the poor and the needy (Dubios & Miley, 2002). Politicians and the mass media often make reference to this historical context of social work practice which continues to fuel the notion of social work as charitable work in the minds of the public.

Interestingly, although social work has evolved tremendously in the late 20th Century, the Worldview (the third layer of analysis) of social work has changed little. It appears that social work's humble beginnings in serving the poor had a greater and more enduring impact than its current development. It might be that politicians and governments have vested interest in maintaining the status quo of how the poor and the needy could be helped; that the poor and needy would be helped with subsistence living and yet retain their motivation to work for their own advancement. At the Worldview Level, the "world view that supports and legitimates these systems of social organization itself is challenged. The task here is to discern the assumptions, contradictions and prejudices and to find deeper social, linguistic, and cultural structures that are independent of the actors" (Fricker, 2000, "CLA has four levels", para. 3). Thus, at the Worldview Level, the **'professional discourse'** debates the essence of social work as volunteer work or as a generalist or specialist vocation. It is at this level where such ideological and subconscious assumptions are differentiated and distanced from individual and systemic realities, and critically reframed by reconstructing alternative pasts and alternative futures. The likely outcome of such worldviews about social work

is that it not only created one historical perspective of social work but it also reinforced a myth (the fourth layer of analysis) that social workers are ‘helpers’, ‘carers’ or ‘volunteers’ as they only serve the disadvantaged in society and those who are not coping with their problems. These myths have created some discomfort amongst middle-income families and the rich from seeking the services of a social worker. Even when the services of a social worker are essential to their well-being, they would probably want to conceal the truth that they have received services from a social worker. The ‘lay’ occupational title of **‘social worker’** also further reinforces these myths. Myths are “the deep stories of experience and perceptions of reality. The unconscious dimensions of the problem or the paradox find expression – seeing it not in quantitative terms but in terms of community where people are creative resources and in terms of what ultimately sustains us” (Fricker, 2000, "CLA has four levels", para. 4). Myths are thus challenged and redefined realistically by reordering knowledge at this level of analysis (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4

Issues With Recognition And Identification With Social Work Practice

Litany	**social worker identity** – low status, low emphasis on skills & high on compassion, can be performed by anyone who has a heart, lowly paid; need to enhance social worker identity
Systemic causes	**the development of social work discourse** – recognition of practice and methodologies – historical influences hinders professionalization; with the proliferation of helping professions, professional boundaries blurred as helping professions borrow practice principles and methods from one another and strive to be recognized as the elite profession
Worldview	**professional discourse** – volunteer work, generalist, specialist; unclear views of social work further hinders professional image; whether social work is a profession is in question – who calls the shot?
Myth	**professional title and roles** – as helpers, carers and volunteers; unclear worldviews and the eclectic approach and methodologies in social work maintain current myths and may also fuel more myths when social work continues to be understood from current viewpoints rather than being undefined, debunked and reconstructed; the current recognition and rewards being placed on high status professions by commercial companies and society will further erode fundamental principles and concepts of what constitutes a profession

2.6 Concluding Remarks

There are critics of CLA. There will be some participants who will not be able to appreciate other perspectives beyond their "identification with a particular discourse, worldview, myth or metaphor even with assistance" (Riedy, 2008, p. 154). These participants may not be developmentally equipped or have the capacity to reflect on deeper layer analyses (Riedy, 2008). This critique probably refers to participants in a futures workshop wherein participants brainstorm to map out probable futures of an issue in question. In a research investigation, this is less of a problem, as it would be left for

the researcher who is analyzing the textual responses to look for deeper meanings and alternative perspectives that could be hidden from participants of the study.

A corresponding critique to this stems from the argument that CLA places less attention on the individual and concentrates more on socially and culturally constructed views instead. Individuals do have their own perceptions and values and they have self-awareness and consciousness. The critique is about the lack of emphasis on the psychology of the individual. A defence to this critique would be to claim, "discourses, worldviews, metaphors and myths operate as collective correlates and aggregates of individual values and perceptions" (Riedy, 2008, p. 156). Contrary to the notion of a lack of emphasis on the psychology of the individual, CLA can be applied to any issues at any levels, be it at the personal level or collectively. Every individual has his or her own litany, system of beliefs, worldviews and deep narratives. I have stated in my 'Personal Prelude' that I believe in the 'evolution' and 'impermanence' of all things. As for SASW, I was 'detached', 'disinterested' and upheld the 'out of sight, out of mind' mentality in my beginning years as a social worker. The deeper narratives that described my entire experience with SASW were 'the lost sheep', 'the awakening' and 'the guardian' – in that order. These reflected the phases of my 'enlightenment' with SASW. The psychology of the individual influences the psychology of the community and vice versa.

An important critique that any researchers in CLA need to address is found in the trustworthiness of the CLA methodology. Qualitative research has been criticized for lacking in rigour in ensuring that its analysis is reliable and valid (de Wet & Erasmus,

2005). Lincoln & Guba (1985) coined the term 'trustworthiness' to replace reliability and validity but Morse, Barrett, Olsen & Spiers (2002) argued that "reliability and validity have been subtly replaced by criteria and standards for evaluation of the overall significance , relevance, impact and utility" (as quoted in de Wet & Erasmus, 2005, p. 28).

In CLA, the process of verification, which is checking, confirming and testing for accuracy, is in-built through the layers of analysis, deconstruction and reconstruction. Textual information is analyzed at each layer and cross-examined between layers. The individual meaning accrued to textual information is not lost at the Litany Level of analysis as this serves the basis for all higher layers of analysis. At the Litany Level, textual information of participants of the study was sorted according to the research variables as contained within the research framework and questionnaire. Coding is in accordance with the CLA methodology wherein the primary codes are found in the layers of analysis. Thus the CLA analysis is guided and contains clear procedures for analyzing the data. Thus mechanisms are in-place in a CLA-based investigation so that trustworthiness and the overall evaluation of the research is maintained.

From the account of the CLA methodology and approaches that has been provided in the chapter, it appears that CLA is an appropriate research method to study the future of SASW. The following chapter reports the results of the investigation.

CHAPTER THREE

Results

3.1 Introduction

In presenting the results of the study, responses made by respondents to key research questions were sorted into themes. This formed the basis of analysis using what may be loosely described as a grounded theory approach to guide the collation, categorization and analysis of the data at this stage of the study. It is not the intention here to enter into a prolonged discussion of grounded theory approaches, nor the lengthy debates that have characterized the evolution of such approaches. This has been well documented elsewhere (see, for example, the works of Charmaz, 2006). It is considered that to do so would deflect the research from its central purpose as an investigation conducted within the parameters of a Professional Doctorate in Transdisciplinary Studies founded upon Mode 2 knowledge (Graham and Smith 2002), as opposed to the more usual discussion of theoretical paradigms found within a Doctor of Philosophy dissertation. Suffice it to note that grounded theory is a commonly employed inductive analytical approach in studying qualitative data as knowledge is generated from those being studied and the empirical materials that they provide (Bryman, 2004). Furthermore, a grounded theory approach is congruent with the interpretive foundation of the Causal Layered Analysis techniques that have been employed within this study.

The results of this chapter have been presented according to the questionnaire design (see Appendix A). The subsequent interpretation and critical analysis of these results will be undertaken in Chapter Four.

3.2 Profile Of Respondents

Due to limitations in sampling as explained in Chapter Two, only 27 respondents were surveyed. Of these 27 respondents, 11 were Registered Social Workers (RSWs), 7 were Non-Registered Social Workers (Non-RSWs) and 9 were Former Members (FM) of the Association. Of the 27 respondents, 15 were within the age range of 21-40 years: 8 RSWs and 7 Former Members. The 7 Non-RSWs seemed to be relatively older occupying the older age ranges of 41 years and above. Five of these 7 Non-RSWs were above the age of 60 years. Only 3 RSWs and 2 Former Members were above the age of 40. Twenty-three of the 27 respondents were females (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Age Range Of Respondents

Age	RSWs (n=11)		Non-RSWs (n=7)		Former Members (n=9)		Total (n=27)
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
21-30		3			1	3	7
31-40		5			1	2	8
41-50		1		2		1	4
51-60		2					2
61-70				2			2
>70			2	1		1	4
Total		11	2	5	2	7	27

Table 3.2 shows the marital status of the respondents. Sixteen of the 27 respondents were married with 10 of them having children. Three respondents were widowed and 8 others were single. There was a higher proportion of singles amongst the Non-RSWs (3) and Former Members (4) as compared with RSWs (1).

Table 3.2

Marital Status Of Respondents

Marital Status	RSWs (N=11)		Non-RSWs (n=7)		Former Members (n=9)		Total (n=27)
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Single		1		3	1	3	8
Married:							
With children		6	1	1	1	1	10
No Children		4				2	6
Widowed			1	1		1	3
Total		11	2	5	2	7	27

Twenty-two of the respondents professed having a religion (Table 3.3). Four others were freethinkers with 1 other who did not respond to the question. Nineteen of the 22 who professed having a religion were either Protestants or Roman Catholics.

Table 3.3

Religious Affiliations Of Respondents

Religion	RSWs (n=11)		Non-RSWs (n=7)		Former Members (n=9)		Total (n=27)
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Christian:							
Protestants		5	2	3	2	2	14
R. Catholic		1		2		2	5
Buddhist		1				2	3
Free-							
thinker		3				1	4
Not Stated		1					1
Total		11	2	5	2	7	27

Of the 27 respondents, 20 were Chinese, 5 were Eurasians and 2 were Indians (see Table 3.4). There were no Malay respondents in this study.

Table 3.4

Race Of Respondents

Race	RSWs (n=11)		Non-RSWs (n=7)		Former Members (n=9)		Total (n=27)
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Chinese		9		3	2	6	20
Malay							
Indian		1		1			2
Eurasian		1	2	1		1	5
Total		11	2	5	2	7	27

Nineteen of the 27 respondents were Ordinary Members, 6 were Life Members and 2 were Fellows of the Association. All 7 Non-RSWs were either Life Members (5) or Fellows (2) of the Association (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5

Membership-type Of Respondents

Membership-type	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Ordinary Member	10		9	19
Life Members	1	5		6
Fellows		2		2
Total	11	7	9	27

Table 3.6 shows the highest Social Work qualifications attained by the respondents. One respondent held a Diploma in Social Studies, 20 held a Bachelor Degree majoring in Social Work with or without honours, 4 had graduated with a Master Degree in Social Work while 2 others had completed a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work / Social Sciences.

Table 3.6

Highest Social Work Qualification Of Respondents

Highest Social Work Qualification	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Diploma in Social Studies*			1	1
B. Soc. Sc. (Social Work) / BSW	9	5	6	20
M.A. (Social Work) / MSW	2		2	4
Ph.D.(Social Science / Social Work)		2		2
Total	11	7	9	27

* A social work degree equivalent

Fourteen respondents also possessed professional qualifications in a related field (Table 3.7), particularly in a specific counselling approach and family therapy. Half of these 14 respondents were RSWs. In contrast, only 2 Former Members held a professional qualification in a related field.

Table 3.7

Other Related Professional Qualifications Of Respondents

Other Related Professional Qualifications	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Counselling: Psychotherapy; Brief Solution Focused; Transactional Analysis; Satir Model etc	3	1	1	5
Family Therapy*	3	2		5
Rehabilitation		1	1	2
Children Services		1		1
Case Management	1			1
Total	7	5	2	14

* Refers to a programme of study that states 'family therapy' on its certificate

About half of the respondents (13) had between 6 to 15 years of social work experience. Of these 13, 6 were RSWs, 6 were Former Members and 1 Non-RSW (see Table 3.8).

Nine of the 11 RSWs had more than five years of membership with SASW. Five of them had between 6-15 years of social work experience and another 3 had between 16-25 years of social work experience. All 7 Non-RSWs had more than ten years of membership with SASW and 4 of them have worked for at least 31 years in a social work field. In contrast, 6 of the 9 Former Members had less than five years of membership

with SASW. Of these 6, 2 had less than six years of social work experience and 4 had between 6-15 years of social work experience.

Table 3.8

Years Of Social Work Experience By Years Of Membership With SASW

Years Of Social Work Experience	Years Of Membership With SASW*									
	RSWs (n=11)			Non-RSWs (n=7)			Former Members (n=9)			Total (n=27)
	<5	5-10	>10	<5	5-10	>10	<5	5-10	>10	
< 3	1	1					1			3
3-5							1	1		2
6-10		2	1				2	1		6
11-15	1	1	1			1	2			6
16-20			1							1
21-25			2			1				3
26-30									1	1
31-35						2				2
36-40						1				1
>40						1				1
Not Stated						1				1
Total	2	4	5			7	6	2	1	27

* Some respondents joined SASW as student members prior to them working as social workers; there were respondents who joined as members but were not initially occupying social work positions

Of the 9 Former Members, 7 did not actively seek renewal of membership with SASW, one had retired and another felt that membership was not essential (Table 3.9).

Of the 3 RSWs who had membership lapses in the past, one felt that membership was not essential, another felt that the Association had not done enough and one other was on overseas employment. In contrast, none of the 7 Non-RSWs had membership lapses before they were accorded Life Membership and Fellow statuses.

Table 3.9

Reasons For Not Renewing Membership With SASW

Reasons	RSWs*	Non-RSWs	Former Members	Total
Overseas employment	1			1
Retired			1	1
SASW not doing enough	1			1
Membership not essential	1		1	2
Did not actively seek renewal			7	7
Total	3		9	12

* These are current members with previous membership lapses

Amongst the respondents surveyed, more Non-RSWs had taken on committee functions with the Association when compared with RSWs and Former Members (Table 3.10). Furthermore, 5 Non-RSWs who were involved in committees of the Association had been members of the Association for more than 21 years; in fact 4 of them have been members of the Association for more than 31 years. Of the 4 RSWs who were involved in committees of the Association one had more than 31 years of membership with the

Association. Three of the 4 Former Members who were involved in committees of the Association had less than six years of membership with the Association.

Table 3.10

Involvement As A Committee Member With SASW By Years Of SASW Membership And Membership-type

Years of SASW Membership	Involvement As A Committee Member With SASW					
	RSWs (n=11)		Non-RSWs (n=7)		Former Members (n=9)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
< 3		1			1	1
3-5		2			2	3
6-10	1	2				1
11-15	1					
16-20	1	2			1	
21-25			1			
26-30				1		
31-34*	1		4	1		
Total	4	7	5	2	4	5

* SASW was incorporated in 1971; some members continued their membership from its predecessors, the Malayan Association of Almoners (MAA), the Association of Professional Social Workers (APSW) and the Singapore Association of Medical Social Workers (SAMSW)

The key profile of the 27 respondents could be summarized as follows:

(1) the Non-RSWs surveyed were relatively older, aged above 40

(2) 23 respondents were females

(3) 16 respondents were married and only 8 were single; there were relatively more singles amongst the Non-RSWs and Former Members

(4) 22 respondents professed having a religion and 19 of these were Christians

(5) 20 respondents were Chinese; there was an over-representation of Eurasians (5) or 'Others' as officially classified when compared with the national average of 2.4%, and no representation of Malays

(6) only 4 respondents had post-graduate social work qualifications

(7) slightly more than half of the respondents had also attained other professional qualifications

(8) nearly half of the respondents had between 6 to 15 years of social work experience

(9) Non-RSWs have had longer affiliations as members of SASW compared to RSWs and Former Members; all of them were either Life Members or Fellows of the Association

(10) more Non-RSWs and Former Members have had some involvement with SASW when compared to RSWs

(11) 'Did not actively seek renewal' was the most commonly cited reason for not renewing membership with the Association

(12) in this study, more Non-RSWs were involved in Committees of the Association when compared with RSWs and Former Members

3.3 The Level Of Alliance With Professional Associations

Alliance, in this study, refers to the extent of one's identification and involvement with the professional association. Themes were generated from respondents' responses to the research questionnaire and these themes were further grouped into two categories: 'structural and systemic influences' and 'the Association's effectiveness'. These two categories help to differentiate between personal (respondents' issues), structural and global issues impacting on SASW as against inherent issues arising from SASW's weaknesses. As for the first category identified as 'structural and systemic influences', respondents' own views on alliances were highly influenced by personal, national and even global, structural and systemic issues. Some examples of this first category are time and cost considerations, professional developmental needs, and professional identity and image. The second category, 'the Association's effectiveness', specifically refers to inherent organizational issues faced by professional associations. Some of these organizational issues are internal organization's weaknesses and others are external structural and systemic influences impacting on the organization. Some examples of this second category are the professional associations' operational weaknesses and problems with advocacy, bonding and communication.

Respondents were asked about their own alliance with SASW as well as their perceptions of other social workers' alliance with SASW. Table 3.11 shows respondents' rating of social workers' alliance with their professional association (SASW) and their rating of other professionals' alliance (that they had come to know of) with their professional bodies (Others).

Table 3.11

Rating Of Professionals' Alliance With Their Professional Bodies

Rating By Social Workers*	RSWs (n=11)		Non-RSWs (n=7)		Former Members (n=9)	
	SASW	Others	SASW	Others	SASW	Others
Weak to Very Weak	5	1	3	1	6	3
Satisfactory	5	3	1	1	1	
Good to Very Good		3	2		2	3
Don't Know**		3	1	4		3
Sub-total	10	10	7	6	9	9
Undetermined ratings:						
Weak-Satisfactory	1					
Weak-Good		1				
Weak-Very Good				1		

* Social workers rated their perceptions of social workers' alliance with SASW and other professionals' (Others) alliances with their professional bodies; these responses 'weak-satisfactory', 'weak-good' and 'weak-very good' were not in the original responses provided. Their responses were not included in the analysis.

** One respondent from each of the three respondent categories elaborated that licensing plays an important part in other professionals' alliances with their professional bodies.

Fourteen social workers rated their alliance with their professional association as 'weak to very weak'. Of these 14, 6 were Former Members and they constituted about two-thirds of Former Members surveyed; 5 were RSWs and 3 were Non-RSWs and they constituted nearly half of those surveyed in their categories. One RSW rated their alliance with the professional association as 'weak to satisfactory'.

Seven respondents rated social workers' alliance with their professional association as 'satisfactory'. Of these 7, 5 were RSWs and they constituted close to half of the 11 RSWs surveyed.

Four respondents rated social workers' alliance with their professional association as 'good'. None of the RSWs had rated social workers' alliance with their professional association as 'good to very good'. In contrast, 2 Non-RSWs and 2 Former Members had rated social workers' alliance with their professional association as 'good'. Only 1 Non-RSW could not provide a rating.

Overall, slightly more respondents (14) rated social workers' alliance with their professional association as 'weak to very weak' as compared to those (11) who had rated such alliance as 'satisfactory to good'.

As for the rating of other professionals' alliance with their professional bodies, 6 respondents rated 'good to very good', 4 rated 'satisfactory', 5 rated 'weak to very weak', 2 rated 'weak to good' and 'weak to very good' and 10 could not provide a rating.

Respondents were asked to state reasons for their rating of social workers' alliance with their professional association. The following sections report the comments made by respondents.

3.3.1 Rating on Social Workers' Alliance with SASW: Don't Know

A Non-RSW could not rate the current level of alliance amongst social workers with their professional association but cited that:

> The smaller the organization, the slightly stronger would be the alliance. In the past, the Association was closed-knitted, everybody was interested and felt being part of the Association. In those days, there were only a couple of dozens of us [social workers] (Non-RSW-1; see Table 3.12)

Table 3.12

Reasons For Rating Social Workers' Alliance With SASW As 'Don't Know'

Reasons summarized by categories and themes	No. of Respondents			
	RSWs	Non-RSWs	Former Members	Total
On structural and systemic influences:				
Limitations in representation		1		1

3.3.2 Rating on Social Workers' Alliance with SASW: Weak to Very Weak

Those respondents who rated alliance with the professional association as 'weak to very weak' gave a combination of two main reasons for this. First, several stated that they did not have sufficient time available to be involved with the Association and indicated that they were too busy at work and home to be involved. The second reason given by these respondents indicated that they saw little value or benefit from their membership.

In fact, all the 5 RSWs who rated having weak alliance with the Association cited two reasons for this: insufficient time; and not seeing the value or benefit from joining. RSW-5 stated, "there are workplace issues and national issues that demand for time from social workers". Social workers were said to be too busy to contribute to the Association (RSW-4; RSW-7). Another stated "I did not feel compelled to join the Association" (RSW-2). Many social workers tapped into their workplace for professional support and in the resolution of work problems (RSW-5). Four of the 5 RSWs commented on the Association's lack of prominence and weaknesses in advocating for the profession. "The Association's voice is not loud enough" (RSW-3). Former Member-3 referred SASW to

that of a watchdog and having no voice of its own. "Many social workers do not have a clear understanding of what SASW offers" (RSW-7). She further elaborated that:

> SASW did not make use of current political clout such as the current movement in the work of CDCs [Community Development Councils] and debates in gambling addiction and how as a profession it can be of help to our community. It fails to be proactive in deciphering social issues and creating a lively info-hub - a network of social workers in brainstorming on social issues and social intervention strategies. SASW also fails to advocate for effective social work education in our local setting. It also lacks behind in providing sound professional training that takes into consideration changing social trends.

Similarly, all 3 Non-RSWs cited SASW's lack of prominence and limitations in representing social workers as reasons for weaknesses in social workers' alliance with the professional association. Non-RSW-4 stated, "many social workers specialize in a non-social work area. SASW has not been prominent enough". Some other Non-RSWs further commented, "SASW is not working in the frontline. It does not promote itself" (Non-RSW-5), and "SASW was not in the cutting-edge and was too preoccupied with traditional types of issues. There was this 'container-effect then' (Non-RSW-6). As for limitations in representation, Non-RSW-3 elaborated that "only a small percentage [of social workers] are members". There was also mention of fewer social work graduates today taking up social work as a career choice.

Former Members more commonly cited SASW's operational weaknesses and a lack of professional identity and image as reasons for the weakness in social workers' alliance with their professional association. Former Member-3 stated "I don't see the value of information transmitted to members or social workers – the information had not been suitable for me unlike information that I can find in journals printed by NASW [National Association of Social Workers] for example". Former Member-4 lamented, "it lacks the capability and capacity to do much professionally. It depends very much on the leadership and how agencies as employers of social workers can be bought into believing in its work". "An empty-shell syndrome" was coined by Former Member-5 in describing the lack of activities organized by SASW. A more critical view was held by Former Member-8 who had comfortably identified herself with the profession but not the Association. She stated that:

> It is important to have a sense of belonging. I don't sense this in SASW. It lacks the human touch. Even when I was invited to attend some of its activities, I felt out of place. I feel it wasn't necessary for me to go, I am not counted in. Even for those events that I have attended, it is not very focused. It is merely a get-together for feedback, nothing more than this. It lacks a clear direction, a vision.

Former Member-2 described how social work has been undermined by other related professions. He stated that:

> Social work is being played down when compared to counsellors, psychologists, family therapists – these professions offer a higher esteem in titles. Perceptions affect one's alliance and as long as social workers harbour such thoughts and

believe in such occurrences, they will not uphold social work in high esteem. Other Former Members commented on how social workers had not treated social work as their career. This weakness in social work image was further fuelled by the public's perception of social workers as volunteers (Former Member-8). "Many social workers do not treat their profession as a career; rather, they treat it as a job and they may not want to be committed to enhancing and building up the profession" (Former Member-3).

Table 3.13 shows the various themes generated from the reasons given by respondents' rating of their alliance with the professional association to be 'weak to very weak'.

Table 3.13

Reasons For Rating Social Workers' Alliance With SASW As 'Weak & Very Weak'

Reasons summarized by categories and themes	No. of Respondents			
	RSWs (n=5)	Non-RSWs (n=3)	Former Members (n=6)	Total (n=14)
On structural and systemic influences:				
Not seeing the value or benefits from joining	5	2	4	11
Having insufficient time to be involved	5	1	1	7
Lack of professional identity and image	3		3	6
Limitations in representation		3	1	4
Professional needs being adequately met by employers	2		1	3
Social workers' inertia		2	1	3
Members not interested in the Association's activities	2		1	3
Inadequate support from employers	1		1	2
Cost being a factor	1			1
Being self-sufficient	1			1
Social workers not in unison			1	1
On the Association's effectiveness:				
SASW's lack of prominence	4	3	2	9
SASW's weaknesses in advocacy	4	1	2	7
Issue of bonding with members	3	2		5
Operational weaknesses of the Association	1		4	5
Weaknesses in communication	2		1	3
Lack of mentorship	1			1

For those other respondents who indicated weak alliance with the professional association, some felt that they have received adequate support from their employers and thus there was no need to be reliant on the Association for professional support. Employers have also been relying less on external agencies for their employees' professional development needs. Agencies providing specialized social services were seen to be more adept in providing the specialized training than SASW. Moreover,

"many social workers solved their own professional issues without the help of the Association" (RSW-5).

Social workers do expect help from the Association but no help was rendered (Non-RSW-4). Former Member-8 remarked, "I don't feel that I need SASW. Others might need the Association more than me but SASW failed to attract them. I have very mixed feelings – I have a strong sense of attachment with the profession but not with the Association". Non-RSW-4 cited that "there is definitely apathy on their part. They are not used to asking for help. SASW does not have the teeth – the mandate – over many areas". There appears to be a sense of social workers' inertia – "they do not have a sense of belonging" (RSW-11). RSW-5 commented, "In Singapore, it seems like how one is being professionalized is dependent on one's own personal contacts and networks".

Not seeing the value and benefits from joining the Association is a critical issue for SASW to resolve. Former Member-5 noted "SASW is not strong enough because there are not too many social workers in Singapore to create the critical mass". Some questioned, "why join when many people in the field are not even trained social workers?" (RSW-2). For some others, "there are other platforms available for professional representation, such as other specialized professional agencies directly relating to my field of work, not necessarily through SASW" (Former Member-4).

3.3.3 Rating on Social Workers' Alliance with SASW: Satisfactory

'Lack of professional identity and image' and 'limitations in representation' were most frequently cited by respondents who rated their alliance with their professional

association as satisfactory (see Table 3.14). Politicians and the mass media were indicated to have contributed to the negative image that social workers face today. RSW-10 commented, "politicians and the mass media sometimes portray volunteers to be social workers and volunteer work as social work". For Non-RSW-3, "Social workers still give others the connotation of one having a good heart, and anyone who has a good heart can do too". There is also a lack of self-identity – "SASW has yet to build a 'contagious' self-identity – a collective kind of identity. It is a 'chicken and egg' issue" (Former Member-9).

SASW has had limits in representing social workers. There are boundary issues between SASW and employers, and SASW and other closely related helping professions. To RSW-8:

> Social workers sometimes wonder whether the role of the Association has been blurred. For example, is the Association crossing boundary into employers in matters concerning standards and practice? Employers know service standards better than the Association.

A differentiation of focus between employers and professional associations was articulated by Non-RSW-2:

> Employers play a different role from professional bodies. Associations bond peers and fellow workers in a closed-knitted professional relationship. Employers train employees to be effective in their jobs in accordance with their company mission – this may not be specifically profession oriented.

Employers have a broader interest than professional associations. Even though employers recognize the professional association, "there is a power differentiation. Employers may want their way" (RSW-8).

Table 3.14

Reasons For Rating Social Workers' Alliance With SASW As 'Satisfactory'

Reasons summarized by categories and themes	No. of Respondents			
	RSWs (n=5)	Non-RSWs (n=1)	Former Members (n=1)	Total (n=7)
On structural and systemic influences:				
Lack of professional identity and image	1	1	1	3
Limitations in representation	1	1	1	3
Not seeing the value or benefits from joining	2			2
Having no good timing to be involved	1	1		2
Social workers' inertia	1		1	2
Cost being a factor	1		1	2
Inadequate support from employers	1			1
Lack of assimilation into the profession	1			1
On the Association's effectiveness:				
Weaknesses in communication		1		1

One RSW who rated social workers' alliance with their professional association as 'satisfactory' cited personal interest as an inhibiting factor in the profession's progress. She stated:

> … their passion is one of personal interest rather than for the betterment of the entire profession. Recognition is not seen as important as personal interest. They are unlikely to get involved with professional matters that do not directly relate with their current job. They thus work quietly behind the scene (RSW-6).

Other feedback from respondents who rated social workers' alliance with their professional association as 'satisfactory' also referred to weaknesses in communication. Non-RSW-1 noted, "SASW needs to focus on its members as not everyone knows the real issues and limitations that it faces". RSW-8 commented about a rise in membership for the Association after the commencement of voluntary registration in the country. The groundwork undertaken in preparing for the registration of social workers opened up communications between social workers and the Association.

3.3.4 Rating on Social Workers' Alliance with SASW: Good to Very Good

Table 3.15 shows the reasons for the rating of social workers' alliance with their professional association as 'good to very good'.

Table 3.15

Reasons For Rating Social Workers' Alliance With SASW As 'Good & Very Good'

Reasons summarized by categories and themes	No. of Respondents			
	RSWs (n=0)	Non-RSWs (n=2)	Former Members (n=2)	Total (n=4)
On structural and systemic influences:				
Lack of professional identity and image		1		1
Recognition of the profession		2		2
Registration of social workers			1	1
Having no good timing to be involved		1		1
Issue of commitment		1		1
Limitations in representation		1		1
On the Association's effectiveness:				
Issue of bonding with members		2	2	4

For respondents who rated social workers' alliance with their professional association as 'good to very good' the 'issue of bonding with members' stands out as an important influencing factor. They emphasized the hard work and progress made by SASW, for example connecting professionals and students, forming committees, initiating lots of activities such as the feedback sessions that bond members together. Former Member-6 strongly recommended that "SASW needs to run programmes that are inclusive of all types of membership" and to maintain a 'personal touch' with members. As a result of the Association's efforts, "members are more aware of current issues and are willing to be part of the Association" (Former Member-7). "Today, we are better regarded, gained some respect and recognition. We have social workers in parliament and people who believe in our work", said Non-RSW-7. The registration of social workers helped to foster a sense of belonging amongst social workers (Former Member-7).

3.3.5 Rating on Other Professionals' Alliance with Their Professional Associations

Interestingly, respondents adopted quite a variation of language use when they described other professionals' alliance with their respective professional associations. Generally, respondents appeared milder in their descriptions of other professionals' issues and problems than when they described their own experiences with SASW even though they were referring to similar issues. For example the theme on bonding issues had to be classified differently to reflect more accurately the meaning placed on it. For respondents' views on alliance with their own professional association, 'issue of bonding

with members' is an appropriate theme to represent the difficulties involved in bonding members. However this theme was rephrased as 'degree of alignment with the professional association' under respondents' views of other professionals to more aptly reflect the detachment of the respondents' personal experiences when they described what they thought might be critical issues. This is expected especially when one is not directly involved with other professionals' problems – they are their problems, not yours.

Appended below are the reasons for rating other professional's alliance with their professional associations:

Table 3.16

Reasons For Rating Other Professionals' Alliance With Their Professional Associations

Reasons summarized by categories and themes	No. of Respondents*			
	RSWs (n=10)	Non-RSWs (n=6)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=25)
On structural and systemic influences:				
Influence of legislation	8	4	5	17
Degree of alignment with the professional association	2	3	4	9
Perception of professional identity and image	1	1	2	4
Degree of recognition of the profession	2		1	3
Associations to represent and protect the professions	1	1		2
Influence of professional value and interest			2	2
Degree of unity amongst the professionals			1	1
Having no good timing to be involved			1	1
Professionals' inertia	1			1
On the Associations' effectiveness:				
Extent of operational support available		1		1
Effective communication and publicity	1			1

* 1 RSW and 1 Non-RSW did not provide reasons to this question as they could not provide a reason; these 2 missing values are not critical to the study as the focus of the study is on social workers' alliance with SASW.

Respondents had some difficulty rating other professionals' alliance with their respective professional associations. Ten of them could not provide any rating. This suggested that the respondents surveyed were generally not very well acquainted with professional matters outside of their field. Of the remaining 17, only 5 had rated other professionals' alliance with their professional associations as 'weak to very weak' as compared to 14 who rated 'weak to very weak' for social workers' alliance with their professional association.

As many as 17 respondents believed in the strong influence of legislation, especially some form of accreditation or even licensing in influencing a professional's alliance with a professional association. Generally, they believed in the advantage of having legal protection for members, better compliance with standards of practice, more accountability, a more reliable service delivery, and being more credible in the eyes of the public. However, most respondents surveyed could not differentiate the role of a professional association and that of an accreditation or licensing board. They thought that both were the same entity. They were not aware that licensing is separate from membership and thus it is not compulsory to be a member of a professional association. To some, "if there are licensing boards, associations can influence these boards and professionals will join these associations because of their influence" (Non-RSW-4).

The next most cited reason influencing the extent of one's alliances revolves around the issue of a professional's degree of alignment with the professional association. Some respondents like Former Member-1 described alignment as a professional's effort to take up opportunities for professional development and growth through the professional association. Others were of the view that those who lack self-advocacy would fall behind despite the presence of a system of accreditation (Former Member-9). RSW-7 looked at alignment from the angle of sanctions. She felt that professionals would be more aligned with their professional associations when the latter are sanctioned to discipline.

RSW-6 added the notion of recognition as an important influence on alliance:

Some of the more established professions like medicine and law, the profile of

these professions are rather high. It is this high level of recognition which was accorded to them that made them want to be active in their associations. There is a strong impetus to build and retain this high prestige that they have already gotten. Having a high professional prestige has less to do with mandatory registration; it has more to do with individual effort. Social work appears to be trapped in negative cycles – never get to be recognized; social workers being misunderstood to be volunteers, and they command low wages. Its status is unlikely to change for the next few years. The public is not aware of what we are doing. As a result, social workers remain frustrated – a self-fulfilling prophecy – running in negative cycles. Social workers themselves are not believing in the power of change.

3.3.6 Summary of Social Workers' Level of Alliance with SASW

Despite the fact that RSWs have registered themselves with SASW, they were also more critical about the Association. None of them rated their alliance with SASW as 'good to very good' and an equal number of RSWs rated their alliance as 'satisfactory' and 'weak to very weak'. It would be insightful for this study to examine their motivations for joining the Association. This examination on their motivation is presented in the next section.

It is not difficult to understand why 5 of the Non-RSWs did not choose to be registered social workers. These 5 Non-RSWs were above 60 years old and they were

either retired or in semi-retirement. All 7 Non-RSWs were members of the Association for more than 21 years and 5 of them had taken up committee work with SASW. None of them had any membership lapses of note prior to them attaining Life Membership and Fellow statuses. Thus for a major part of the 30 or more years of their social work experience, they were members of the Association. Again, it would be interesting to explore their motivations to be affiliated and / or to remain with SASW at this point in their lives. Five Non-RSWs were involved in committee work with SASW. Three of the 7 Non-RSWs rated their alliance with SASW as 'satisfactory to good' with another 3 who rated their alliance as 'weak to very weak'.

Six of 9 Former Members rated their alliance with SASW to be 'weak to very weak'. Compared to both the RSWs and Non-RSWs, Former Members were relatively younger as 7 of them clustered around the age range of 21 to 40 years old. Four of the 9 Former Members had been involved in committee work with SASW. Three of these 4 Former Members who were involved in committee work had between 3 to 5 years of membership with SASW. Seven of the 9 Former Members did not actively seek membership renewal.

RSWs generally reported more stress at their workplace and that they had little time to be involved with SASW compared with Non-RSWs and Former Members. They, together with Former Members, were also relatively younger than Non-RSWs. In contrast, Former Members did not indicate having little time to be involved with SASW as a critical issue for them. RSWs also tend to question the value and benefits for joining the Association. It appeared to them that there was little value-add for them to join the

Association. They critiqued that SASW lacked professional prominence and advocacy. This lack of professional prominence was echoed by the Non-RSWs as they felt that the Association has had limitations in representing them. Former Members were also critical of the operational effectiveness of the Association. They lamented the lack of involvement and effort from SASW to bond members. It appeared that Former Members looked towards SASW for professional identification and leadership but became disappointed. Thus they too questioned the value for joining the Association.

Seventeen of the 25 valid responses from RSWs, Non-RSWs and Former Members believed in the influence of legislation in determining professionals' alliance with their professional associations. The professionals' degree of alignment (bonding) with their professional associations formed the next most cited reason influencing alliance. However, as many as 10 respondents across all three groups of social workers surveyed could not comment on other professionals' alliance with their professional associations. Thus, social workers are not very informed about professional matters outside of their profession.

3.4 Social Workers' Motivation To Join Their Professional Association

Motivation to join the professional association stems from social workers' professional development needs and how these could be met through the Association. There "must be an effort to be involved" by social workers (RSW-1). There must be something that they want out of the Association, for example "a reference letter or proof of membership required by universities and overseas employers" (Non-RSW-3). Social

workers must want to stay current and keep in touch with other counterparts in the field – they need to "adopt a shareholder's view" (RSW-6). The need for a professional association was spelt out by Non-RSW-1 when she stated that:

> In the early days, there was a strong need to set up services for the community. Such service development binds people together. When people care about other people, you act on your concern. You do things together.

In those early years, social workers needed to get together to initiate many new services and programmes. Today, there is maturity of social services and programmes and though social service agencies work closely together, they also compete with one another for the betterment of their services and programmes.

Another important influence cited by social workers was peer pressure and their friends' and lecturers' persuasion to join the professional association (RSWs 1, 6). "The mentoring programme benefits social workers. Consultations and contributions from seniors are important too" (RSW-8).

RSW-9 felt that social workers must believe in the purpose of the professional association. She explained that:

> I maintain membership to keep the Association going – after all, it represents us, and I hope that one day it will be more ready, more professional in its management. I believe that one day, social workers will be proud of the Association.

She does not wish to see social workers purely holding ‘paper-loyalty’ but that they are able to act on their loyalty instead.

Finally, having dynamic leadership and strategic outreach programmes would be key strategies that would attract social workers to join as members (RSW-4; Former Member-6). Some recognized the role of training and professional development and more particularly the registration of social workers by SASW as strong motivation to join (RSW-8; Former Member-5). Bonding through organized professional activities was seen to be equally helpful in attracting membership (RSW-11; Former Member-5).

It is apparent that RSWs in this study felt that social workers would generally be attracted to join SASW because of the inherent value that they place on the bonding of social workers and the importance of strong professional representation through registration and professional development. This seems to be true despite the fact that they questioned the value and benefits for joining the Association and lamented on the lack of professional representation / prominence and advocacy. It is perhaps their holding on to this value and belief together with the influence of significant social workers whom they know that they joined or remained with SASW.

On the other hand, Non-RSWs and Former Members appeared to place a little more emphasis on pragmatic help offered by the Association, professional activities and the formation of specialist interest groups as social workers’ motivations for joining SASW.

3.5 The Purpose Of Having A Professional Association

'Advocacy and standard-setting' and 'unification and bonding' form the top two purposes for having a professional association as cited by respondents. Table 3.17 shows respondents' thoughts on what they saw as the purposes for having professional associations.

Table 3.17

The Purpose of Professional Associations

Reasons summarized by themes	No. of Respondents			
	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Advocacy and standard-setting for the profession	7	6	6	19
Unification and bonding of professionals	7	6	4	17
Augmenting the image and identity of the profession	4	3	2	9
Professional development	4	1	2	7
Protection of the public	1	1		2
Promotion of the profession's competitiveness	1	1		2
Filling in the gaps for employers	1			1

"It is for the protection of the public, to show a strong presence of the country in which they represent" (RSW-8). "It is set up to promote the profession and professionals from competitions outside the field" (RSW-1). There is a mixture of consumer protection (Non-RSW-6) and protection of the professionals. Professional associations are to create a professional identity and then protect this self-identity (RSWs 4, 8, 9; Non-RSWs 1, 6). It protects and maintains the knowledge base and the specialized skills of an occupation

(RSW-1) and regulates it (Non-RSW-2). It does all these through deliberating on ethical practice (RSW-5; Non-RSW-1), setting standards and guidelines (RSWs 3, 5, 8, 9; Non-RSWs 4, 5; Former Member-2), as well as direction (RSW-3) for the profession and professionals. Former Member-9 commented "it provides meaning for most people. It is also a reflection of what society values – what is valued has a higher professional status. It is a collective identity".

Historically, professional associations, like trade or craft unions, lobby for power. "The lobbying powers of associations have diminished over time. It is an uphill task today for associations to do well and to represent the profession" (Former Member-4). Former Member-9 elaborated that:

> I think there are people who do not believe in having an association. It is paradoxical. They become bystanders instead. I hold the view that we cannot meet everyone's interests nor can we get everyone to be interested in the same cause.

Perhaps what has changed over the years would be the maturity of professional associations today where there are diverse groups of stakeholders, stakeholders who are not the professionals themselves. This trend was debated by respondents in the next section. What has changed significantly would be the advancement of information technology where many professionals rely on the world-wide-web for any information that they need. One respondent argued that:

> IT advancement today cannot replace an association's core function – to check on

eligibility / acceptance of members and the quality of all professional services provided. It cannot replace alliance and connectedness of people (Non-RSW-3).

3.5.1 Who should have vested interest in the Affairs of the Professional Associations?

Table 3.18 shows respondents' answers to the question "Who are the stakeholders of professional associations?"

Table 3.18

Who Are The Stakeholders Of Professional Associations?

Stakeholders	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
The professionals	9	8	9	26
Government	5	6	4	15
Community / Public	4	2	5	11
Clients	3	2	4	9
Employers of professionals / VWOs	3	3	2	8
Academicians	2		1	3
Donors / Corporate Sponsors	2			2
Those in public profile / politicians	1		1	2
Individuals with vested interest	1	1		2
Executive Councils of Associations		1	1	2
Those who work closely with	1			1
The Registrar of Societies	1			1
Registration Boards		1		1

Almost all the respondents believed that the most important stakeholders of any professional associations should be the professionals themselves. Fifteen respondents named the government to be the second most important stakeholder of a professional association. This was followed by the larger community or public as the third most important stakeholder. Similarly, when respondents were asked, "Who should set up the

professional association?" 19 named the professionals again with another 7 respondents naming the professionals in consultation with other stakeholders as the next top choice (see Table 3.19). These 7 respondents implied that professionals did not have the full autonomy to set up a professional association and that some form of support from key personnel or resources would be needed.

Table 3.19

Who Should Set Up The Professional Association?

Stakeholders	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
The professionals	7	4	8	19
Professionals in consultation with stakeholders	3	3	1	7
Don't know	1			1

When asked "Who should regulate professional associations?", 17 respondents indicated a mixture of key personnel as compared to 10 respondents who felt that the professionals themselves should regulate (see Table 3.20). Though RSW-1 believed in only having the professionals themselves regulating their associations, she further commented that:

> In Singapore, SASW needs the strong support of MCYS [Ministry of Community Development, Youth & Sports] and NCSS [National Council of Social Service] in matters relating to the recognition of social workers even though SASW can self-regulate. SASW and the government need the support from each other but SASW cannot do without government support; it has more to lose. This is the same for

some other professional associations.

There were quite a few respondents who felt that professionals alone should regulate. RSW-2 stated, “the professionals themselves should regulate. There is no need for the government to regulate”. RSW-5 commented similarly and added further “they [professionals] need to come up with control measures such as licensing”.

Some respondents felt that even though professionals should be regulating their own professions, other viewpoints can be sought through consultation and dialogues (RSW-6). RSW-8 elaborated that “others such as employers and the government can recommend though they don’t need to regulate in any direct way on professional matters”. This view was supported by Former Member-1 whose stand was that, “the state, professional boards, other legal institutions, and lay people to offer a different perspective”. After all, “the government is indirectly involved too through the Registry of Societies” (RSW-9; Non-RSW-4) and more directly with the setting up of specific legislation (Non-RSW-5). The Registry of Societies would be ensuring compliance with legislation (Former Members -3, 4,5,7); The Registry of Societies regulates more on the legislation “involving the governance of professional bodies rather than on professional matters” (RSW-11).

Table 3.20

Who Should Regulate The Professional Association?

Regulatory Authority	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
The professionals	6	1	3	10
Relevant interest groups and authorities	5	6	6	17

As to "Who should finance the professional association?" most of the respondents (23) cited 'the professionals themselves'. The next most common response was 'government and tax-payers' to be followed by 'donations' (see Table 3.21).

Table 3.21

Who Should Finance The Professional Association?

Source of Financing	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
The Professionals (Members themselves)	10	6	7	23
The Government & Tax-payers	8	3	5	16
Donations (Charity Organizations & the Public / Community)	7	3	4	14
Anyone who believes in the mission of the Association		1	1	2
Voluntary Welfare Organizations			1	1
Benefactors		1		1
Commercial Enterprises		1		1
NUS	1			1

One respondent lamented the limited capacity of some professional associations to be self-financing. She said:

> This is a 'chicken and egg' issue. If members are strong enough, they should self-finance. If not, it is back to having the government support again. Social workers are not paid highly, it is not a money-making profession. The government should consider helping those in the helping professions (Non-RSW-4).

A couple of respondents did not see any issue with the government financing the helping professions through their professional associations. RSW-7 commented, "SASW is helping the government to eradicate social ills. It is doing what the government wants for the betterment of our society". RSW-8 was of a similar view when she said "why not the government – when SASW is helping the larger society. However, associations must be very clear about any conditions attached to funding". As for relying on charity for financing professional associations, RSW-4 made this stand: "Associations that are human service oriented can rely on charity but this does not apply to non-human service professions". Two respondents felt that tax-payers (RSW-3) and those in the business of making money (Non-RSW-3) should finance professional associations especially for those associations which help to protect "public interest by ensuring standards" (RSW 3).

3.6 The Need For A Professional Association Like SASW

3.6.1 Do Social Workers Need a Professional Association like SASW to help them to develop Professionalism in Social Work?

Eighteen respondents said 'yes' to social workers needing help from SASW to develop professionally. Only 6 said 'no' to this. Two respondents qualified their responses with a 'yes and no' response with 1 other who could not provide an answer to this question (see Table 3.22).

Table 3.22

Do Social Workers Need A Professional Association Like SASW To Help Them To Develop Professionalism In Social Work?

Responses	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Yes	7	6	5	18
No	2	1	3	6
Both 'yes' & 'no'	2			2
Don't know (not working as a social worker)			1	1

Table 3.23 shows a breakdown of the respondents' reasons for social workers needing help from SASW to develop professionally.

Table 3.23

Reasons For Respondents' Need To 'Have' Or 'Not To Have' A Professional Association To Help Develop Professionalism In Social Work

Reasons summarized by themes	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
For those who answered 'Yes':				
Professionalizing the social worker, standard setting and advocating for the profession	2	6	4	12
Individuals may need help from the Association even though it is not doing enough	4			4
Continuing education for members	1			1
For those who answered to both 'Yes & No':				
Professionalizing the social worker, standard setting and advocating for the profession	2			2
For those who answered 'No':				
Other avenues for professional development	2		2	4
Professionalizing the social worker, standard setting and advocating for the profession		1		1
Bonding and identity building			1	1

Former Member-9 was one of those who answered 'yes' to social workers needing the Association's help to develop professionally. He commented that:

> Associations are needed to guide and encourage a certain standard of competencies. There must be uniformity and conformity. Sometimes we should be asking the question 'what can I do to contribute to the Association to help transform social work to a higher status and image?' It is by doing that we all

> gain from our collective action. Both the social worker and the Association stand to gain.

Beginning social workers do need their professional association. RSW-6 had this to elaborate:

> Beginning social workers need an association like SASW to help them to develop professionalism. Employers can help to professionalize social workers too but not all employers employ only social workers nor do they only provide social work services. Employers with diverse interests and services will not serve social workers as well as SASW whose key interest is in professionalizing the social worker. SASW can thus help to raise public awareness in social work better than employers. The Association needs to change the mindsets of social workers and employers in matters concerning professional issues.

The notion that employees are not a homogenous group came up as one essential difficulty for employers representing the interests of social workers in the workplace (Non-RSW-1). RSW-10 had this interesting observation that employers contribute about 10% in the promotion and development of professional growth whereas SASW contributes probably another 20% with the rest of the 70% dependent on oneself.

Non-RSW-4 made these comments about the lack of synergy between SASW and its members:

> Many social workers are heavily involved at their workplace and in community work. SASW has been weak in promoting and sustaining networking possibilities. SASW has not informed its members on what it specifically needed from them, and social workers have also not given sufficient feedback to the Association about what they need. Social workers thus rely on their own experience - trial and error - and try to learn the ropes on their own if they have no organizational support. They get 'burn-out' at the end of two years but some do return after a short break.

Former Member-5 echoed this lack of synergy and was of the opinion that "young beginning social workers need a lot of help to do their job well but SASW has been too busy with their own affairs to be of any help to them".

For the 2 respondents who had answered 'yes and no' to needing the professional association to develop professionally, RSW-3 had the opinion that guidance and supervision can be seen as an individual's effort as well as an organizational effort in promoting professionalism. This view was supported by RSW-5 who commented that "social workers should set the standard and the Association should then develop it further". She further stressed that having prior exposure to the profession would help one to be committed professionally and "prior experience in working in welfare organizations or even exposure to volunteer work may help to mould excellent social workers to be".

Those who answered ‘no’ to needing the professional association to develop professionally cited the many resources available besides professional associations like SASW who helped to develop oneself professionally (RSWs 2, 4; Former Members 2, 3).

3.6.2 What have Social Workers Benefited from SASW?

Table 3.24 shows respondents’ answers as to whether they have benefited from SASW.

Table 3.24

Did Social Workers Benefit From SASW?

Responses	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
For those who said they have benefited from SASW	6	7	6	19
For those who answered ‘Yes & No’ to having benefited from SASW	0	0	1	1
For those who said they have not benefited from SASW	5	0	2	7

Their responses were further broken down according to the reasons they accorded for benefiting or not benefiting from SASW (see Table 3.25).

Table 3.25

What Social Workers Benefited From SASW?

Reasons summarized by themes	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)*	Total (n=27)
For those who answered 'Yes' to having benefited from SASW:	(n=6)	(n=7)	(n=6)	(n=19)
Professional development such as in training	3	5	3	11
Networking and information-sharing	2	5	2	9
Recognition of social workers	1		3	4
Professional activities organized by the Association	1		2	3
Perceived benefit of being part of a collective whole	1			1
Peer support		1		1
Research			1	1
Library services			1	**1**
For those who answered 'No' to having benefited from SASW:	(n=5)	(n=0)	(n=2)	(n=7)
Not personally benefited	2		1	3
No reason given	2			2
Lack of support by employers to participate in the Association's activities	1			1
What SASW provides for its members are also provided elsewhere			1	1

* 1 Former Member did not provide reasons for benefiting or not benefiting from SASW

Slightly more than two-thirds of respondents (19) claimed that they have benefited from the Association especially in the areas of professional development (11) and networking (9). To a smaller extent, some respondents cited professional recognition (4) and professional activities (3) among the benefits they had received from the Association. There was one respondent who answered 'yes and no' to having benefited

from the Association and cited losing touch with the Association as the primary reason for this. For the 7 respondents who claimed that they did not benefit from the Association, 2 did not indicate any reasons while the remainder cited having not personally benefited (3), lack of employer's support (1) and lack of uniqueness of activities organized by the Association (1).

3.6.3 What could the Reasons be for Social Workers' Level of Involvement with SASW?

For respondents who answered 'yes' to being involved with the Association, 'time constraints' (13) and 'employers' support for staff' (8) were the two most commonly cited influencing factors that determine a social worker's level of involvement with SASW (see Table 3.26). RSW-1 lamented, "we are all competing for time at work and in professional activities". RSW-3 added "it is a time-factor – hard to find time, having to juggle between work and family". The issue of having to juggle with work and family commitments was repeatedly supported by all 13 respondents who cited 'time-constraints' as an influencing factor. Non-RSW-5 believed that time management is a personal responsibility. He further elaborated that "if more people help out, less time is required of any individual and thus the less one needs to sacrifice his / her family time for professional work". Hence, adopting the right attitude is equally important. Former Member-6 shared this view when she recalled that there are social workers who managed to juggle well with both family and work demands and thus she attributes 'attitude' as an important factor.

As far as work is concerned, some were of the view that employers are rather self-sufficient these days. Employers have been "self-sufficient in providing the necessary training and professional guidance when they have senior social workers who mentor and supervise the juniors" (RSW-6). There is also a pool of employers who may not be very supportive of social workers if their core function is not social work oriented (Non-RSW-2). Social workers like RSW-10 felt that employers can do more if they are educated about what the Association does and the benefits that might be reaped from collaborating with it. Equally challenging and of some importance was the call for SASW to collaborate with employers or to go beyond what employers are already doing for their employees. "Agencies are doing their own things whereas the Association tries to facilitate and build up a comprehensive professional base. All have different objectives even if they are doing similar things" (Non-RSW-5). Thus, there is a call for SASW to offer professional growth outside of the workplace such as by looking "into the holistic professional development of the social worker" (Former Member-4).

Other influencing factors of moderate importance include intrinsic values held by the social worker such as 'a sense of belongingness' and 'the value placed on benefiting from one's involvement'. "My strong involvement is related to my Christian faith of doing good deeds. It is all about internal motivation – one's intrinsic value about serving others" (RSW-5). "Somehow, there must be some kind of interest in the activities organized by the Association before I can be committed to attending it" (RSW-6).

For those respondents who answered 'no' to being involved with the Association, a 'lack of a sense of interest and belongingness' and the kind of support by employers are

key influencing factors for one's level of involvement with the Association. 'Time-constraints' were cited but were not the most critical consideration for one's involvement with the Association. Former Member-5 had this to say, "social workers do not see the need to be involved. Social workers are not united in the way they view their profession. Many see it as a job rather than a profession."

Table 3.26

What Could Be The Factors Influencing Social Workers' Level Of Involvement With SASW?

Reasons summarized by themes	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
For those who have been somewhat involved:	(n=8)	(n=7)	(n=7)	(n=22)
Time constraints	6	3	4	13
Employers' support for staff	4	2	2	8
A sense of belongingness	1	1	2	4
SASW to go beyond what employers can offer to their employees	2	1	1	4
The value placed on benefiting from one's involvement	1	2	1	4
Better collaboration between employers and the Association	1	1	1	3
Professional power	1		1	2
Interest in the activities organized	1			1
Religious conviction that drives internal motivation and values	1			1
Association to offer supervision to agencies that cannot provide for their staff	1			1
Membership size influences how one perceives involvement		1		1
For those who have not been involved:	(n=3)	(n=0)	(n=2)	(n=5)
Lack of a sense of interest and belongingness	1		2	3
Professional needs adequately met by employers	2			2
Support from employers important			2	2
Time constraints	1		1	2
Targeted programmes run by the Association	1			1
Inactive memberships	1			1

3.6.4 What are Social Workers' Views on SASW's Current Membership Rate and the Issue of Free-riders?

Close to three-fifths of respondents were of the view that the Association's current membership rate was satisfactory (see Table 3.27). RSW-8 commented, "the current rate is considered to be pretty good". At least 5 respondents felt that the current rate can be further improved. Of the 10 respondents who rated the current membership rate to be unsatisfactory, only one was a Former Member. These respondents wanted SASW to attract social workers to join the Association by initiating professional activities. "This is quite low. I guess this figure will go up with registration. It will be quite satisfactory if the percentage goes up to 65%" (Non-RSW-2).

Table 3.27

What Are Social Workers' Views On SASW's Current Membership Rate?

Responses	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
More than satisfactory	2	1	5	8
Satisfactory	3	2	3	8
Less than satisfactory	6	3	1	10
Cannot answer		1		1

Two-thirds (18) of the respondents did not find the issue of free riders to be a serious one (see Table 3.28). RSW-7 felt that the issue of free riders is an inevitable phenomenon for any professional association. RSW-4 added that:

This is not serious because there are no benefits from joining. However, it is very

> serious if people do not receive professional training and do not see the need to uphold their professional growth. Many of these people may be getting their professional training and growth from other sources.

Conversely to this, RSW-6 commented that:

> It is to our advantage if they have benefited from - say - pay increase and the registration of social workers. This only shows that SASW is effective and efficient and will entice non-members to consider joining. For non-members, their watchdog would be their employers who have the authority to mete out punishment for any wrong-doing, example one's involvement in dual-relationships.

There were public events and campaigns in which SASW and other government agencies could not exclude free riders. Some examples of these are the Outstanding Social Workers' Award and the President's Tea Reception (RSW-11). There are also publicity campaigns and scholarships that are not confined to members of the Association. Former Member-5 went further to suggest that SASW should harness employers to only employ social workers who are members of the Association.

Table 3.28

What Are Social Workers' Views On Free Riders Who Have Benefited From SASW Indirectly?

Responses	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
A serious issue	1	1	2	4
Not a serious issue	10	3	5	18
No indication given	0	3	2	5

3.7 Preliminary Classification Of Social Workers' Attitudinal-types

Based on details presented in the "Profile of Respondents' (see Section 3.2) and individual reports on the reasons for the level of alliance between social workers and their professional association and social workers' level of identification with their profession as presented in Section 3.3 ('The Level of Alliance With Professional Associations') and Section 3.4 ('Social Workers' Motivation To Join Their Professional Association') of this chapter, four attitudinal-types of social workers were identified.

The first attitudinal-type has been identified as the 'die-hard' social workers who have had strong alliance with the Association. Some of these individuals had some degree of influence or exposure to social work or social workers during and prior to undertaking a social work education. These are the long-standing members of the Association who are Life Members, Ordinary Members (who are usually Non-RSWs in view of their advanced age) or RSWs (for those who are not as old and who are still working and probably at the prime of their career). The most active members are usually

the experienced social workers and the working veterans, found mainly amongst RSWs and Non-RSWs, who continue to be actively involved with SASW with substantive years as members of the Association. They can be found volunteering in committees and projects (see Table 3.8 and Table 3.10). 'Die-hard' social workers can also be non-veteran social workers such as experienced social workers who profess strong alliance with their profession. They can be found in middle-management positions or are senior social workers at their place of employment.

The second attitudinal-type includes the 'novice' social workers who are likely to be beginning social workers who depend largely on SASW and their workplaces to help sustain their professional interest and competencies. This category includes beginning social workers from all categories of memberships and probably a significant pool of them are RSWs and Former Members with a few years of membership. They are less likely to be actively involved with SASW as they have competing needs for time. They are more easily disappointed when there is a lack of support from either their employers or the Association, and they are more likely to be critical of the Association as they expect SASW to change for the positive.

The 'ambivalent' social workers who are least clear about what they can benefit from the Association, and some seemingly having problems identifying with their profession comprise the third attitudinal-type. They would thus adopt a 'wait and see' approach. They probably work in isolation as the only social worker in their agency without much support from a senior social worker within and outside of their agency. If they were already members of the Association, they would likely be 'passive' members.

'Ambivalent' social workers can be persuaded or dissuaded to stay in the profession or to join the Association. Probably, many of them are Former Members if they have not already renewed their membership with SASW.

The fourth attitudinal-type was identified as the 'hard-to-reach' social workers who had given up on either the profession or SASW, or both. It is either that they have not joined the Association or they have not rejoined the Association for a long time. They remain disgruntled with SASW, and they would be unlikely to apply or reapply for membership unless they witness huge improvements made by SASW. By and large, they may not even be found in the SASW's Membership Database as they have never joined it. If not, they could be Former Members who have not renewed their membership for a long time.

These four attitudinal- types need to be further researched, as it is not within the scope of this study to affirm their characteristics. Nevertheless, this preliminary classification helps SASW in strategizing its marketing strategies to ascertain its usefulness.

3.8 Level Of Identification Of Social Workers With Their Profession

3.8.1 What are Social Workers' Views on Social Work as a Profession?

Nearly all, 25 of the 27 respondents were of the view that social work is a profession with 2 of them qualifying it to be an 'emerging' profession (see Table 3.29).

Table 3.29

Is Social Work A Profession?

Responses	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
It is a profession	8	6	9	23
It is an emerging profession	1	1		2
It is not a profession	1			1
No indication given	1			1

As to the rationale for their answers, respondents who supported the notion that social work is a profession cited some characteristics of social work as a profession such as specialized knowledge and skills, a code of ethics, theoretical framework and established methodologies. Former Member-2 further elaborated:

> It has a body of knowledge, code of ethics and values. The tricky part is in the body of knowledge itself which is not just unique to social work but applicable to psychology and sociology. Social work's specialized knowledge is shared. What has been unique to social work is its strong emphasis on the person-in-environment fit. Social work as a profession is beginning. It is happening as the general public is more aware of its existence and is recognizing it.

Former Member-4 supported the notion of social work as a profession by adding that "social workers have recognized qualifications. Though non-social work trained personnel can perform some social work functions, their experience and performance can

be limited". It is a legally accountable profession (Former Member-8). Qualifying what constitutes a profession, Former Member-9 expounded that:

> Yes, I can say this at a personal level. We have social work education and its specializations. But when comparing social work with other disciplines, social work is less defined. Consumerism creates professions. Those who have spending power will indulge in fulfilling their needs. Professions are created to serve those in need at the highest competent level.

On the notion that social work is only an emerging profession, Non-RSW-5 affirms that the public must recognize it to be a profession. "Social work is not a full fledge profession yet. It does not have true autonomy. Its knowledge base is generic in which other untrained people can perform parts of the job, for example counsellors" (RSW-1). The 2 respondents who felt that social work is not a profession cited incompetence of beginning social workers as barriers for achieving professional status (RSWs 6, 8).

3.8.2 Do Social Workers Identify Themselves as Social Workers to their Clients?

Almost all, 26 of the 27 respondents identified themselves as social workers to their clients. Three of the 26 respondents made some acknowledgment as social workers to their clients whereas the rest of the respondents strongly identified themselves as social workers to their clients (see Table 3.30).

Table 3.30

Identification As Social Workers To Their Clients

Responses	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Made strong acknowledgement as social workers	10	5	8	23
Made some acknowledgement as social workers	1	2		3
Made no acknowledgment			1	1

Eight respondents who made strong identification as a social worker to their clients cited organization structure, job title and job role as reasons supporting their identification as social workers. Many of these respondents claimed that such identification provides them with a clear identity as to who they are and what they represent and they would have been proud to acknowledge it (RSWs 2, 7, 9; Non-RSWs 4, 5, 6; Former Members 3, 4). Those who have other qualifications and expertise such as in counselling and family therapy said they would also acknowledge these other roles only when it is appropriate for them to do so (RSWs 5, 11; Non-RSWs 2, 4). For example, as Non-RSW-2 explained, "I identify myself as a social worker and I will also identify myself as a family therapist if this is helpful in explaining the work I do, especially when I conduct family therapy as part of my work with my clients".

Identification as a social worker helps clients to understand what a social worker does. RSW-9 reiterated that "it is a value that I uphold and my agency believes in it too. It helps to identify ourselves clearly and in the work we do. We often explain to our clients what we actually do as social workers". Elaborating on this further, RSW-11

explained, “I wanted to identify myself as a social worker to let my clients know that social workers not only engage themselves in financial assessment, they also provide psycho-emotional support”. Those who do not identify themselves as social workers could have adopted a “doesn’t matter attitude” (Non-RSW-7) or they “could have lacked the confidence to do so. They ain’t [sic] even sure whether they have been practising social work” (Former Member-3). Former Member-9 felt that it has often been a struggle to identify himself as a social worker to his clients because they “don’t fully understand”.

3.8.3 What are the Reasons for a Drift of Social Workers into other Professions?

The three most frequently cited views by respondents for social workers not taking up social work positions were the unfavourable conditions of work, the generalist nature of social work education and the profession’s inability to attract and retain social workers (see Table 3.31). Conditions of work included high workload, long hours of work, low pay and the demands placed on the job. The generic nature of social work education put the social worker in demand in many other related human services occupations and created inter-profession competition for the social worker.

RSW-4 lamented that:

> Even very good social workers are leaving the profession. It is hard to let them go. Conditions at work could be push factors for those who left. Workload is high. Singapore has done away with the pension scheme and this allows people to leave even more freely.

Many who felt that it is a loss to the profession bemoaned the ‘waste’ in educating them as well as the social cost to society where social workers are very much needed. Losing beginning social workers is a less serious issue than losing the very experienced ones (RSW-6). Non-RSW-5 perceived the current social work situation to be a “double-edged sword – that social workers can find jobs in other fields and having to recognize that our education and training are so generic”. Non-RSW-6 added “social workers use this educational foundation to hop-off”.

Table 3.31

Views On Social Workers Not Taking Up Social Work Positions

Reasons summarized by themes	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Unfavourable conditions of work may be push factors	4	2	5	11
Social work education is a generalist education that befits many other occupations	3	2	1	6
It is a loss to the profession	3	2	1	6
It is good that social workers are in demand everywhere	1	1	1	3
Social work plays a major role in other occupations	2			2
Social workers are not recognized as specialists		1	1	2
Many opportunities available out of social work sector			2	2
No issue if a social worker leaves for another helping profession	1			1
Employers will find it hard to fill vacancies	1			1
Harder on the profession if a senior social worker leaves the profession	1			1
Our social work education did not motivate graduates to join the profession	1			1
Post graduate qualifications in other disciplines widen the drift			1	1
It is a personal choice			1	1
It is a natural progression for social workers to seek new pastures			1	1

3.8.4 Social Workers' Application of Social Work Knowledge and Skills in Social Work Practice

Respondents' answers were categorized into values, methods and perspectives / approaches in social work practice (see Table 3.32).

Table 3.32

Respondents' Views On The Application Of Social Work Knowledge & Skills

Reasons summarized by categories and themes	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Social Work Values:				
General principles in social work		1	2	3
Self-determination / Self responsibility	6	1	2	9
Unconditional positive regard / Respect / Individual uniqueness	3	2	3	8
Confidentiality	2	1	4	7
Empathy	2		1	3
Empowerment	1		1	2
Social justice / Redistribution of resources	3			3
Sub-total	17	5	13	35
Methods:				
Casework skills	4	4	3	11
Communication / Interviewing / Counselling skills	5	4	6	15
Specific Counselling / Therapy approaches	6	4	3	13
Groupwork skills	3	2		5
Community work / Networking skills	3	3	1	7
Advocacy skills	2		1	3
Risk & Resource management	1		1	2
Sub-total	24	17	15	56
Meta Perspectives / Approaches:				
Person-in-environment fit	2	1		3
Worldview perspective	1			1
Systemic approach	4	2	4	10
Strength-based approach	1			1
Ecological approach		1		1
Structural approach	1			1
Holistic approach		1		1
Sub-total	9	5	4	18

Generally, respondents were able to make comprehensive references to social work values, methods in intervention and the perspectives / approaches that they or other social workers tap into in their social work practice. Identification of social work knowledge and skills had not been easy for "the concepts, principles and values are so generic that they can be transferred or borrowed" (RSW-1). "We practise what we were being taught without consciously identifying the principles and techniques" (RSW-9). Some Non-RSWs generally found it harder to recall the methods and approaches they have used in their practice though they could recall the social work values well (Non-RSWs 1, 3). Some Former Members believed that a lack of social work supervision made it rather difficult for beginning social workers to apply social work principles and methods in their practice (Former Members 3, 4).

3.8.5 Do Non-Social Work Trained Personnel perform as well as Social Workers in Social Work Positions?

Only 6 respondents, all RSWs, were of the view that non-social work trained personnel could perform satisfactorily in social work positions. Three-fifths of respondents felt that non-social work trained personnel performed less than satisfactorily in social work positions (see Table 3.33). Another 5 respondents were unable to comment. For those who rated non-social work trained personnel to have performed more than satisfactorily, aptitude for the job and intensity of training were cited as supporting factors (RSWs 2, 7, 8). RSW-6 offered another reason for their satisfactory

performance. She said "some social work skills such as communication and interpersonal skills need no formal social work training and can be performed by non-trained workers".

Table 3.33

Respondents' Views On The Job Performance Of Non-Social Work Trained Personnel In Social Work Positions

Responses	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Commented that they have performed more than satisfactorily	5			5
Commented that they have performed satisfactorily	1			1
Commented that they have performed less than satisfactorily	3	5	8	16
Made no comment on their performance	2	2	1	5

For those who rated non-social work trained personnel work performance to be less than satisfactory, some were of the view that such personnel do not have a holistic or comprehensive view of systems and thus were less able to handle complex social problems (RSWs 10, 11; Non-RSWs 1, 4, 7; Former Members 6, 8). "They cannot see the bigger picture such as the family system in action" (RSW-10). RSW-11 had this comment:

> It is less likely that they can perform their job holistically as social workers who apply a systemic orientation in their work. However, they can make up for their lack of training with experience and continuing supervision by social workers. This is where SASW can come in to moderate, to gate-keep for the profession.

"They may grasp techniques but may not fully conceptualize a client's social issues … they can perform their job to a certain level but beyond which you need a trained social worker to do it" (Non-RSW-2). Their learning though transferable is limited to very closely related job functions (Non-RSW-4). Former Member-2 found it difficult to work with non-social work trained personnel. He commented:

> There are conflicts as to how they assess a case. There need to be more synergy. They may be good in certain aspects but they cannot perform like a social worker. What makes a good social worker lies in one having an enquiring mind in policy-making, not reactive to difficult circumstances and the ability to transfer knowledge and skills in different settings.

There are "specifics in our social work education that cannot be transmitted without a formal and proper social work education" (Former Member-4). Former Member-8 qualified that "the values that one holds are important. Social workers are grounded in values and ethics but an untrained person may not. Skills are also important in that only properly trained persons can help others more holistically".

3.8.6 The Need to Safeguard and Professionalize Social Work

Nearly all, 26 of the 27 respondents were of the view that the profession of social work needs to be safeguarded and be further professionalized. Their suggestions to protect and to further professionalize social work are depicted in Table 3.34:

Table 3.34

Respondents' Views On The Need To Safeguard And To Further Professionalize Social Work

Responses summarized by categories and themes	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Enhancement to the job:				
Create specialization	2	2	2	6
Initiate new methods in social work		2	1	3
Control of title	1		1	2
Control of job entry	2			2
Improve work conditions	2			2
Reclaim some job functions			1	1
Improvement of competencies:				
Institute registration / licensing / certification	3	2	5	10
Mentoring and Supervision	3	1	1	5
Institute continuing professional education	1	2		3
Re-evaluate curriculum			1	1
Advocacy:				
Educate stakeholders and public	1	2		3
Increase pay	2			2
Increase advocacy for social workers		1		1
Educate employers	1			1
Build a strong professional body	1			1

Three suggestions stood out above the rest: instituting some form of registration / licensing, creation of specialisation, and initiating mentoring / supervision programmes were mooted to safeguard and to further professionalize social work. RSW-1 looked

towards a strong professional association. She explained that "we need a strong association to safeguard our interest or else we will be victimized. We need a professional association to intervene in some organizational policy". RSW-10 further elaborated on the importance of advocacy:

> Yes, we need to educate the board of directors of VWOs [Voluntary Welfare Organizations] and the public about what social work is. Pay increment is one step to further attract prospective social workers to join the profession and with adequate staffing, professionalizing the social worker at a higher level would be a more achievable goal.

3.9 What Are The Current Challenges Facing SASW?

The four most cited challenges expressed by respondents were to instil interest and commitment of members; to build strong leadership and governance; to enhance the image and morale of social workers; and to increase membership (see Table 3.35). As for instilling interest and commitment of members, some respondents lamented that the Association has failed to attract members in the activities that it organized (RSW-2). To achieve this, respondents hoped that the Association could be more strategic in planning programmes of interest to members, instilling a sense of identity and belongingness and in the protection of social workers through legislature.

Succession of leadership has often been a pressing challenge for SASW. Some respondents commented that there is also a challenge getting practitioners to head the Association, not just academicians (RSWs 2, 4). Former Member-4 added, "it would be a

challenge for the Association to have good leaders who dare to stand up to tough issues and to own the profession". Enhancing the image of social workers and increasing membership rate have been resounding issues and perhaps are subject to the Association having acquired a strong position. Some respondents proposed that the Association should highlight what social workers do and to focus on publications (Non-RSW-2).

Table 3.35

Respondents' Views On The Current Challenges Facing SASW

Responses summarized by themes	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
A challenge to instil interest and commitment of members	6	6	2	14
A challenge of building a relevant and strong leadership and governance	7	1	3	11
A challenge to enhance the image and morale of social workers and the profession	5	3	3	11
A challenge for social workers to join the Association	4	1	3	8
A challenge of having a 'voice' when working with relevant partners and authorities	4	1		5
A challenge of getting social workers regulated	1		2	3
A challenge of being self-sufficient	1		1	2
A challenge in getting sufficient people to take up a career in social work	2			2
A challenge getting adequate staffing	1		1	2
A challenge in fulfilling expectations placed on the Association	1			1
A challenge of ensuring proper supervision			1	1
A challenge to retain social workers in the field	1			1

In a separate question where the researcher read from a list of possible challenges facing SASW, respondents were asked to rate what they deemed to be the challenges:

Table 3.36

Respondents' Responses From A List Of 'Challenges Facing SASW' Read Out To Them

List of challenges:	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs* (n=6)	Former Members (n-9)	Total (n=26)
Registration of social service personnel	10	5	9	24
Professional legitimacy & authority	9	4	8	21
Succession of leadership	7	5	8	20
Formulating a new direction for the Association	8	5	7	20
Finances (not having sufficient funds)	9	5	6	20
Training competitiveness	9	3	8	20
Deprofessionalization as a result of public policy	7	4	6	17
Consultancy & service ventures	5	3	7	15
Registration of social workers	5	2	5	12

* One Non-RSW did not answer this question despite that a list of challenges was read out to him / her; nevertheless, this Non-RSW has already answered a similar question in Table 3.35 by stating what he / she thinks might be the challenges. The list of challenges in Table 3.36 only serves to provide a more comprehensive list of challenges to guide participants of the study.

Many respondents found it a challenge for SASW to register social service personnel. This topped the list of challenges rated by the respondents. RSW-2 said "to register RSSP [Registered Social Service Personnel] is a challenge. They don't belong to SASW, thus they may not have the loyalty". It might be controversial to register them (RSW-3) as, "they may feel threatened" (RSW-4; Non-RSW-1). RSW-6 explained

"RSSPs may not see themselves not at par with social workers. Thus, registering them in a different category will be a challenge". Their registration might "confuse the public" (RSW-7) and may "dilute social work as a profession" (RSW-9). Some respondents counter-proposed 'grandfathering' them (non-RSW-7) or to "restrict them by imposing 'x' years of service and submission of letters of recommendations" (Non-RSW-3) if their registration is inevitable. This latter suggestion implies that not all social service personnel should be registered. Their registration would "cut across mental health professions. There will be problems sustaining it" (Former Member-9). Former Member-8 suggested that the registration of social workers should be grounded first before embarking on the social service personnel registration.

Some respondents were of the view that professional legitimacy and authority tie in with registration. "If SASW does well in registration, it should not have a big issue with professional legitimacy and authority" (RSW-3). The next few listings of challenges centred on the Association's leadership capabilities. Difficulties in succession planning increase with "decreasing membership size" (Non-RSW-2). There is also a need for "fresh blood in the leadership" (Non-RSW-6) and the need to "explore longer term commitments for ease of continuity" (RSW-6). The latter suggestion is quite controversial since there have been difficulties getting members to consider leadership positions with the Association.

Stiff competition from other training providers is expected. RSW-1 cautioned "SSTI [Social Service Training Institute] may take over the training role of SASW in time to come". It remains a challenge for FRTC [Family Resource & Training Centre of

SASW] "to be the key training centre for social workers" (RSW-5). Though respondents found the training programmes offered by FRTC to be relevant to social workers (RSWs 2, 3), some were of the view that FRTC should revise its courses to reflect current times (Former Member-9).

Deprofessionalization was cited as a challenge by some respondents but many have found this to be either a 'good' challenge or not a challenge at all. RSW-2 commented, "deprofessionalization is not an issue. It is a good thing so that social work boundaries become clearer and social workers get to do more of the professional work areas". RSW-8 added that it "helps to cut down on the multi-tasking aspect of social work". It helps social workers to focus on their professional role (Non-RSW-4). Social workers may end up doing higher level of work (Non-RSW-5).

3.9.1 Should the Title of 'Social Worker' be changed?

Close to three-fifths (16) of respondents opted **not** to have the title of 'social worker' changed. Only 8 respondents supported the change of title (see Table 3.37) but qualified that a more suitable title needs to be created.

Table 3.37

Respondents' Views On Changing The Title Of 'Social Worker'

Responses	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Title of 'social worker' can be changed	3	2	3	8
Title of 'social worker' should not be changed	6	5	5	16
It depends on what the new title would be	1			1
Not sure whether to change the title of 'social worker'	1		1	2

Many respondents have strong reasons for not wanting to change the title of 'social worker' (see Table 3.38). Those who did not support a change of title have found the title of 'social worker' to be reflective of their work and they hold sentimental value to it. There is also the fear of having to go through educating the public on the new title should it be changed. These respondents believed in working on changing mindsets rather than changing the title of 'social worker'. On the other hand, those respondents who did not mind having a change of title hoped that a new title would better reflect on their professional status and the work they do. They wanted the new title to bring out the social work components that have higher professional value and weighting.

Table 3.38

Respondents' Reasons For Their Views On Changing The Title Of 'Social Worker'

Reasons organized by themes	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Not supportive of a change of title of 'social worker':				
Changing the title does not take away the stigma, the lack of recognition and status of the social worker	1	1	2	4
This title has been with us for many years and it is fine	1	1	1	3
What is attached to the title is more crucial than the title itself	2		1	3
Educate the public instead	1	1	1	3
Many people have been able to identify with the title of 'social worker'	1		1	2
People need to adjust and understand the new title	2			2
The title of 'social worker' is a distinguished identity		1		1
Supportive of a change of title of 'social worker':				
Provided that we have another title that is congruent with our work in current times	4	3	4	11

Note: The qualitative comments by respondents do not necessarily tally with their responses in this Table.

3.10 What Would Be The Future Of SASW?

The majority of the respondents believed that SASW has a future in representing social workers and will help to further professionalize social work practice. They believed that SASW would stand up to the occasion to influence public and social policies and be involved in international social work. Only a handful of respondents (2) were of the opinion that SASW might decline as a professional body in the future (see Table 3.39).

Table 3.39

Respondents' Views On The Future Of SASW

Responses summarized by themes	RSWs (n=10)	Non-RSWs (n=5)	Former Members (n=9)	Total* (n=24)
The Association will be recognized for its representation and professionalism in social work	3	3	1	7
The Association will always be improving and have a future	4	1		5
Licensing will be the Association's future direction	2	2		4
More prominent in public and social policy matters		1	1	2
More able to adapt to meet the demands of social workers and the profession	1		1	2
Having a future in international social work	1		1	2
New blood needed for the Association			1	1
Social work being deprofessionalized			1	1
The Association might be declining	1		1	2

* 1 RSW & 2 Non-RSWs could not answer this question; however, they could answer a similar question when a list of probable futures was read to them (see Table 3.40).

In a separate question where the researcher read from a list of probable futures of SASW, respondents then rated what they deemed to be its future:

Table 3.40

Respondents' Responses From A List Of 'Probable Futures Of SASW' Read Out To Them

List of probable futures:	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (N=27)
Enlargement of trade union functions	10	2	5	17
A national registration board	8	4	3	15
A conglomerate of similar or related professions	6	3	5	14
Declining status as a social work association	5	2	3	10
A dissolved association	4	2	4	10
A premier professional association		1	3	4

Slightly more than three-fifths of the respondents felt that SASW would likely enlarge its role to include trade union functions though they did not expect this enlargement of function to be happening in the near future (RSW-3). For some others, they felt that there was a call for caution in balancing professional and trade union functions (Former Member-2). Some deemed the enlargement of trade union functions to be "reverting to a lower level of advocacy at 'bread and butter' level" (Former Member-5).

There was also mention of SASW being part of a conglomerate of similar or related professions in order for it (as well as other professions) to have a bigger voice. There are benefits to forming such a conglomerate as explained by Non-RSW-7 who

said, "it is possible to form a conglomerate – unity through diversification. We need a bigger voice. Professional insurance will be more affordable". This movement "promotes collaborations with other professionals" (Former Member-2).

The declining status and the likelihood of SASW being dissolved was indicated by some respondents. Close to two-fifths of respondents believed that SASW might decline in status and might even be dissolved though few believed that it would definitely dissolve. It is difficult to envisage that SASW might dissolve although some respondents saw this as a possibility if "no one bothers" (RSW-9), if "there are too few members" (Non-RSW-2), and if it "cannot fulfil its roles and functions" (non-RSW-7). Former Member-4 commented that "SASW being replaced – yes, but not dissolved". "As long as social workers are needed, so will [there] be for the professional body" (Former Member-1).

There were no comments made by respondents on the probability of SASW being turned into a national registration board despite more than half of the respondents indicating this as a likely possibility. Perhaps not many of them are familiar with the structure of such national boards.

3.10.1 Will Regulating Social Workers enhance the Recognition of SASW?

All of the respondents were of the view that some forms of regulation would enhance the recognition of SASW. Licensing would further enhance the professional status of social work (see Table 3.41).

Table 3.41

Respondents' Views On Regulating Social Workers To Further Enhance The Recognition Of SASW

Responses	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
Voluntary registration will enhance the recognition of the Association	11	7	9	27
Licensing is an option to further enhance the status of social work as a profession*	11	7	9	27

* provided that there will be sufficient social workers taking up social work positions

3.10.2 Will SASW become Obsolete?

Though respondents find it difficult to perceive the dissolution of SASW as a professional association, they are more realistic about it being obsolete (see Table 3.42).

Table 3.42

Respondents' Views On The Circumstances That Would Make SASW Obsolete

Responses	RSWs (n=11)	Non-RSWs (n=7)	Former Members (n=9)	Total (n=27)
If it does not stay relevant	3		2	5
If it fails to get new members and membership is weak	4	1		5
If its leadership is weak	1	1	1	3
If there is a take-over by another profession		1	1	2
If it relies on only a few founding members	1			1
If it does not meet the aspirations of the young aspiring social workers	1			1
If it becomes part of a bigger mental health body		1		1

The two most frequently cited reasons for SASW becoming obsolete were the Association's inability to stay relevant and its membership being weak. Those respondents who were of the view that SASW would continue to be the professional body for social workers cited the Association's stability (Non-RSW-6) and the registration of social workers (Non-RSW-7; Former Members 4, 7) as reasons for SASW's survival as a professional body.

3.11 Concluding Remarks

The results of this study provided valuable insights into understanding why the level of alliance between social workers and their professional association was weak. Social workers appeared to have closer identification with their profession rather than with SASW. Social workers, irrespective of their membership status with SASW, did not seem to know much about their professional association. They thus could not articulate much about the current challenges faced by SASW, and neither were they able to predict its probable future.

The next chapter further analyzes the results that have been presented in this chapter by utilizing the CLA framework.

CHAPTER FOUR

Causal Layered Analysis Application

4.1 Introduction

The results that were presented in the previous chapter are invaluable in understanding respondents' views about their alliances with the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW), their identification with their profession and their vision of the future of SASW. However, the results provided by respondents could possibly be symptomatic of deeper issues that social workers might be facing and the inherent problems within SASW. The results did not sufficiently aid the development of an understanding of probable deep issues impacting on both the respondents and SASW.

Drawing directly upon the analytical principles and approaches of the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) framework and founded on the results reported in the previous chapter, this chapter attempts to answer key research questions by re-examining in greater depth the three fundamental relationships that influence the future of a professional association, the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW), namely: the level of alliance between social workers and their professional association; their level of identification with the profession; and their level of awareness of the challenges and the future of SASW.

For each of these three fundamental relationships, themes that had surfaced from the respondents' responses were further deconstructed and reconstructed into larger categories and codes using the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) framework (see Appendix G for Code

Book, Face & Identifier Information which provides a detailed definition and description of the codes used and documents examples for each level of analysis).

For example, the theme of 'not seeing the value or benefits from joining' was added to the 'Litany' layer of analysis and was coded as 'no value in joining' in Table 4.1 of this chapter. A series of similar codes such as 'no time', 'lack of interest in the Association's activities' and 'social workers' inertia' were further categorized under 'no foreseeable benefits from joining' within the Litany layer of analysis. 'Having insufficient time to be involved' as a theme signifies respondents' textual comments for having other priorities (that might have more foreseeable benefits) and it was therefore interpreted and categorized under 'no foreseeable benefits from joining'. All themes arising from respondents' responses were coded in this manner.

At each level of analysis (that is, the Litany, Systemic, Worldview and Myth levels of analysis) of the CLA framework, the initially constructed categories were reconstructed by horizontal gazing (comparing across issues within the same level of analysis) of inter-related issues within each fundamental relationship concerning the future of SASW. For example, the 'no foreseeable benefits from joining' (alliance with SASW) category was compared with other categories in other Litany Level of analyses such as 'social workers must see the need' (purpose to have SASW) versus 'not all social workers need a professional association' (need for SASW). Horizontal gazing helps to bring out major differences in respondents' understanding of the issues at hand (see Table 4.4). Thus, alternative futures were explored using this CLA framework.

The researcher is part of the social world of the research focus by providing information on the developmental tasks of SASW as a past president and an ex-official of SASW for the past eight years. Even having said this, the researcher ensured that the results previously presented in Chapter Three were confined purely to textual information provided by the respondents. In this chapter, the researcher was able to utilize his own experience as a former leader of the professional association to bring further insights to the social realities the respondents had given through their interviews. This deserves mention and is important in the research as there are few studies undertaken to explore, in the same depth and breadth, on membership alliance and on the challenges and the future of professional associations. While the literature review undertaken in Chapter One served as background information to this study, the study could not substantially support or refute the literature. Nonetheless, the findings of the study can be regarded as having made a significant contribution because they add industry knowledge to social work associations from what was clearly an industry perspective which, together with an academic perspective injected by the researcher forms the very foundations of transdisciplinary Mode 2 knowledge (Graham and Smith, 2002). Furthermore, the study has succeeded in charting a pathway for possible future research.

4.2 Level Of Alliance Between Social Workers And SASW

In answering the key research questions of the study, three inter-related issues were deconstructed and reconstructed using the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) framework:

social workers' alliance with their professional body; their perception of the purpose of having a professional body; and their need for a professional body.

4.2.1 Social Workers' Alliance with SASW

The following analysis outlines the overall view of respondents regarding social workers' alliance with their professional association. At the Litany Level of analysis, respondents accrued common beliefs about alliances with their professional association by social workers (see Table 4.1). From the respondents' perspective, social workers were found to be not interested in joining the professional association as they do not see any benefits from joining that were additional to the benefits they could obtain from their employers. Joining requires the payment of dues and a commitment to participate in the Association's activities. When these were weighed against one's subjective foreseeable benefits from joining, they might constitute a disincentive to join. Some respondents held the view that one's bonding with the profession would suffice and thus saw no need to join, or be in alliance with, a professional association. It appears that they do not need an intermediary like SASW to represent them.

At the Systemic Level of analysis, many respondents felt that the Association has not done much for social workers and the profession. They described the Association as weak both administratively and also in its outreach to both members and social workers. Many respondents did not see themselves as essential actors and contributors to the Association but as outsiders and critics of the Association. It would also appear that there were several intra-organizational issues that hindered the Association from making much

progress throughout a large part of its entire history. Some of these intra-organizational issues concerned SASW having limitations in funding and in professional resources and weakness in political power. Despite this, respondents expect SASW to have the means to reach out, to be efficiently managed and to be able to attract and convince social workers to join and retain high membership rates. These opinions were reflected in the Myth Level of analysis.

At the Worldview Level of analysis, respondents' opinions relate well with mega issues in social work as faced by social workers and social work professional associations worldwide. This has to do with the degree of professional autonomy and recognition of social workers and the level of prominence of social work associations. It would appear that whilst the respondents' opinions at the Litany, Systemic and Myth Levels of analysis are confined to the subjective experiences of social workers in their own country, their views at the Worldview Level of analysis reflect universal issues and debates within the profession.

At the Myth Level of analysis, there appears to be a recurring theme of the 'bystander stance'. The likely deep narrative of this stance is that there are more capable and experienced social workers who can transform SASW. The 'it shouldn't be me' attitude of many social workers and members of the Association maintains a sense of helplessness in those who are managing the Association.

Table 4.1

Social Workers' Overall View On The Level Of Alliance With SASW

Litany	**no foreseeable benefits from joining** – no time, no value in joining, lack of interest in the Association's activities, social workers' inertia
Systemic causes	**Association has not achieved much; Association lacks opportunities to represent social workers** – employers providing adequately for social workers, lack of support from employers, self-sufficiency of social workers, social workers not in unison, cost being a consideration, lack of bonding of members, limitations in representation by Association, weakness in advocacy and mentorship, limitations in representation, operational weakness of the Association
Worldview	**a lack of professional identity and image; Association's lack of prominence** – this is also resounding throughout the world where the recognition and the professional status of social work, social workers and the professional body have been debated, governments intervened in the funding and development of social work services; the development of social work, social workers and the professional body become secondary to public and social policies
Myth	**key players will ensure and support the Association and not allow it to be dissolved; play down on professionalism by mass media** – that registration or even licensing will keep SASW going, expectations that SASW will deliver what social workers want, and that SASW will not be dissolved; volunteers were often depicted to be social workers by the mass media, and that these volunteers were doing social work rather than volunteer work

(Litany – unquestioned reality; Systemic Causes – rational analysis, interpretative data where meanings and actions are scrutinized; Worldview – mega-structures, historical origins etc. that legitimize system of social organizations; Myth / Metaphor – deep stories, perceptions of reality, questioning collective archetypes)

There were key differences amongst the respondents who rated social workers' alliance with the Association as 'weak', 'satisfactory' or 'good'. Those who rated alliance as 'weak' (14 respondents) cited 'no time', 'no value' and no foreseeable 'benefits' in joining whereas those who rated alliance as 'good' (4 respondents) cited 'the issue of bonding with members' to be important. Whereas the former group of respondents felt that there is a lack of professional identity and image and a lack of the Association's

prominence, the latter group of respondents felt that the Association has progressed through years of hard work and the profession of social work and social workers have attained some degree of recognition. The 7 respondents who rated social workers' alliance to be 'satisfactory' also cited a lack of professional identity and image but added 'limitation in representation' by the Association as an important factor.

From these analyses, there is thus a difference in the attitude of the respondents who rated social workers' alliance with SASW as 'good', 'satisfactory' or 'weak'. RSWs were generally more critical of the Association, faced more stress at their workplace and thus had little time to be involved with SASW. The fact that they have registered themselves with the Association shows that they want recognition and benefits from SASW even though they could ill afford the time to participate or assist the Association. Their registration with SASW first and foremost affirms their identification with the profession and they hope that more could be done to augment the profession's professional and public image. There is thus a dichotomy amongst these RSWs who appeared strong in exercising their rights or entitlements as opposed to their relative weaknesses in collective contributions and actions. This is akin to that of a citizen who asserts his or her rights to benefit from social and public policies implemented by the government regardless of one's effort and involvement in these policies.

The majority of the Non-RSWs were veterans in the field and they were divided in their opinion, probably because they have literally witnessed SASW's development throughout its existence. Five of them had been in committees of the Association at various phases of their career. Thus, they could be more discerning in their opinions and ratings

than RSWs – 7 of them had not been in committees of SASW. Former Members were relatively younger than RSWs and Non-RSWs and they, like their RSW counterparts, were generally more dissatisfied with SASW and had exercised their inertia towards the Association by not initiating prompt renewals of their membership with the Association.

In contrast to respondents' rating of the level of alliance between other professionals and their professional associations, 17 respondents cited the 'influence of legislation' to be an important influencing factor for having strong alliance. Apparently, all the respondents were of the view that some form of registration would further enhance the recognition of SASW. Even though this could be true to some extent, there is a difference between the registration and recognition of social workers and the level of alliance of social workers with their professional association. For example, not all doctors join or are active with their medical association (Personal communications with doctors of a Singapore hospital, 2007).

4.3 Social Workers' Perception Of The Purpose Of Having A Professional Body

Respondents were of the view that there is still a role for SASW in augmenting the image and status of social work and in providing for the professional development needs of social workers in areas where employers have difficulties in making such provisions (see Table 4.2). However, social workers must believe in and want to actively involve SASW in fulfilling their professional development needs and in their professional representation. They would have to take the initiative by their own choice and will to be involved with SASW.

The future of a professional association - SASW

Evidences from this study suggested that social workers expect SASW to fill gaps rather than to compete with employers and other significant providers for training who are already offering specialized and targeted training programmes. They opined that the purpose of SASW is to provide for standard-setting, advocacy, image building and professional protectionism. Many of them tend to take the existence of SASW for granted and seem to believe that it will always be there.

The status of SASW remains low if its members merely continue to hold 'paper-loyalty' and not take an active step forward to participate and be involved in running it. This 'paper-loyalty' phenomenon suggests that social workers and members of the Association are not putting their full-trust to support the Association – this is tantamount to a 'one foot in' metaphoric explanation of the level of their involvement. Given the relatively small size of the Association with only three hundred odd members it cannot afford to venture into big plans to build up professional capability if only a small group of members are active.

Table 4.2

Social Workers' Perception Of The Purpose Of Having A Professional Body Like SASW

Litany	**social workers must see the need** – social workers must make effort to be involved, they want something out of the Association such as a reference letter, to stay current in the field; peer pressure to join
Systemic causes	**the Association to represent social workers** – the Association faces stiff competition from self-sufficient employers in providing for the professional development needs of social workers; fill in the gaps for employers
Worldview	**protection of public and the professionals, bonding, image and identity, advocacy and standard-setting** – training and professional development, organized professional activities, bonding of social workers, protection of the public (consumer protection), protection of the professionals, garner and maintain a collective identity
Myth	**a natural given for any profession to have a professional body to represent them** – social workers only hold 'paper-loyalty' rather than to act on their loyalty by contributing to the Association

(Litany – unquestioned reality; Systemic Causes – rational analysis, interpretative data where meanings and actions are scrutinized; Worldview – mega-structures, historical origins etc. that legitimize system of social organizations; Myth / Metaphor – deep stories, perceptions of reality, questioning collective archetypes)

4.3.1 Social Workers' Need for SASW

Seventeen respondents answered 'yes' to the need for having a professional association to help develop their professionalism in social work. Many respondents claimed that they benefited, from time to time, from some of the initiatives rolled out by SASW such as training and networking opportunities. Many of them referred to beginning social workers who need guidance and mentoring (see Table 4.3). Again, employers' support for staff to be involved with SASW and having the time to be involved were cited as crucial factors influencing social workers' need for a professional association like SASW.

Thus, in contrast to their responses to the purpose of having a professional association, when they responded to the question why social workers need a professional association like SASW (Litany Level of analysis) respondents further defined that beginning social workers would need more support from SASW than those who were more experienced. However, it would not be inappropriate to assume that most beginning social workers would need to focus on their job and on-the-job training to acquire the relevant skills that would help them to perform reasonably well in their job. Simply, they may not have the time to develop other foundational and complementary professional developmental growth areas in the early stages of their professional lives. There is a role for SASW to conduct training where employers do not provide any training structure to develop the beginning social worker. However, most agencies are quite well equipped today to develop their own training and professional development programmes. These days, agencies are better funded especially in training grants and they definitely have more manpower resources to juggle in the employment of senior social workers and in investing in regular supervision programmes.

There is a lack of synergy between SASW and its members, and between SASW and social work agencies (Systemic Level of analysis). SASW does not have the capability to employ a pool of regular trainers locally or overseas. It taps into the expertise of experienced social workers in various social work sectors to run training and professional development programmes on a project assignment basis. The Association is at the mercy of these experienced social workers and the goodwill of their employers for them to run training programmes on its behalf. Evidence-based outcomes as measurements of success

in social work agencies make it difficult for them to focus on things other than their own agency priorities. SASW needs to look into partnerships where there would be mutual gains in any collaboration with these agencies.

The Worldview that professional associations help to professionalize, advocate and set practice standards for their professionals, remains unchanged. Today, we speak of professionalization as if employees of agencies are a homogeneous group of professionals (Myth Level of analysis). Not all employers are able to be specifically profession-focused as they employ a variety of professionals and they need to look after the well-being and needs of all their professionals. Professionalizing the social worker, advocacy and standard setting are made more difficult when employees in some agencies are not homogeneous and comprise professionals from other non-social work related fields. Moreover, with the establishment of boards of registration, professionalizing the social worker today is very much a joint-effort between these boards of registration and professional associations.

There is also a myth that as a result of the Association's close to forty years of existence, it would be a pity to let it go – the deep narrative here is 'holding-on' and 'not letting-go'. This myth perpetuates some helplessness in the people who run the Association and anxiety in those who expect it to survive or do better than surviving.

Table 4.3

Social Workers' Need For A Professional Body Like SASW

Litany	**not all social workers need a professional association** – beginning social workers need a professional association to guide them more than others
Systemic causes	**differences in emphasis and competing needs in representation** – lack of synergy between SASW and its members; agency-focused orientation and outcome rather than profession-focused orientation and outcome
Worldview	**professionalizing the social worker, advocacy and standard-setting** – training and continuing professional development and education, competencies setting, collective action
Myth	**not always a homogenous body; the need to maintain and sustain the Association** – employees may not be a homogeneous group with the same or similar professional background; big emphasis on organizational (employers') effort to promote professionalism ; there is an unspoken expectation to 'hold-on' and not 'letting-go' of the Association

(Litany – unquestioned reality; Systemic Causes – rational analysis, interpretative data where meanings and actions are scrutinized; Worldview – mega-structures, historical origins etc. that legitimize system of social organizations; Myth / Metaphor – deep stories, perceptions of reality, questioning collective archetypes)

4.3.2 Reconstructing Social Workers' Alliance with SASW & Possible Solutions

Whilst the worldviews held by respondents remain similar and unchanged in the CLA reconstruction (through horizontal gazing) pertaining to alliance and the purpose and need for a professional association, there are major differences in the respondents' understanding of the issues at hand at all the other three levels of analysis – that is, the Litany, Systemic and Myth levels of analysis (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Litany Level Of Analysis Of Social Workers' Alliance With SASW

Alliance with SASW	**no foreseeable benefits from joining** – no time, no value in joining, lack of interest in the Association's activities, social workers' inertia
Purpose to have SASW	**social workers must see the need** – social workers must make effort to be involved, they want something out of the Association such as a reference letter, to stay current in the field; peer pressure to join
Need for SASW	**not all social workers need a professional association** – beginning social workers need a professional association to guide them more than others

In their responses, respondents seemed to be driven by the recurring notion that not all social workers need a professional association. All current issues such as insufficient time, and the lack of interest cited by the respondents merely supported this premise. The deep narrative at the Litany Level on social workers' alliance with SASW appears to imply that SASW is 'in the doldrums' having nothing much to offer.

SASW's effort to outreach to social workers must thus be targeted and be timely. Increasing effort should be expended on sustaining the professional interests of experienced social workers such as in advanced professional practice and credentialing. SASW should continue to expect small turnouts for its activities until such time as it has rolled out its expansion plans.

Table 4.5

Systemic Level Of Analysis Of Social Workers' Alliance With SASW

Alliance with SASW	**Association has not achieved much; Association lacks opportunities to represent social workers** – employers' providing adequately for social workers, lack of support from employers, self-sufficiency of social workers, social workers not in unison, cost being a consideration, lack of bonding of members, limitations in representation by Association, weakness in advocacy and mentorship, limitations in representation, operational weakness of the Association
Purpose to have SASW	**the Association to represent social workers** – the Association faces stiff competition from self-sufficient employers in providing for the professional development needs of social workers; fill in the gaps for employers
Need for SASW	**differences in emphasis and competing needs in representation** – lack of synergy between SASW and its members; agency-focused orientation and outcome rather than profession-focused orientation and outcome

Many respondents failed to fully recognize the extreme difficulties that SASW faces in garnering itself to be the professional body for social workers. Some of these difficulties include stiff competition from social work and welfare agencies and a lack of a homogeneous professional identity in many agencies. One deep narrative would be that SASW is not seen to have the mandate and the power to effect change. There seems to be a suggestion of 'redundancy' in SASW's representation of social workers.

Improving communications with members and social workers at large would help in some way to rectify this problem. A more important task for SASW is for it to be recognized and accepted as an important partner by government and social work and welfare agencies in providing for the professional development of social workers.

Table 4.6

Worldview Level Of Analysis Of Social Workers' Alliance With SASW

Alliance with SASW	**a lack of professional identity and image; Association's lack of prominence** – this is also resounding throughout the world where the recognition and the professional status of social work, social workers and the professional body have been debated, governments intervened in the funding and development of social work services; the development of social work, social workers and the professional body become secondary to public and social policies
Purpose to have SASW	**protection of public and the professionals, bonding, image and identity, advocacy and standard-setting** – training and professional development, organized professional activities, bonding of social workers, protection of the public (consumer protection), protection of the professionals, garner and maintain a collective identity
Need for SASW	**professionalizing the social worker, advocacy and standard-setting** – training and continuing professional development and education, competencies setting, collective action

Respondents evaluated SASW against its core mission to provide for the professional development of social workers, its role in advocacy and in setting practice standards. SASW still has a role to play in protecting the image and status of social work and social workers – this implies a 'guardianship role' for the Association. This contrasts greatly to the 'redundancy' metaphor. Such a conflict between systemic and worldview narratives inform us that 'a child must not forsake his parents' no matter how uncaring they are. SASW needs to set its priority in strengthening weak social work sectors so as to close the gaps in social work practice across all sectors.

Table 4.7

Myth Level Of Analysis Of Social Workers' Alliance With SASW

Alliance with SASW	**key players will ensure and support the Association and not allow it to be dissolved; play down on professionalism by mass media** – that registration or even licensing will keep SASW going, expectations that SASW will deliver what social workers want, and that SASW will not be dissolved; volunteers were often depicted to be social workers by the mass media, and that these volunteers were doing social work rather than volunteer work
Purpose to have SASW	**a natural given for any profession to have a professional body to represent them; registration of social workers** – social workers only holding 'paper-loyalty' rather than to act on their loyalty by contributing to the Association; registration of social workers will enhance social workers' alliance with SASW
Need for SASW	**not always a homogenous body** – employees may not be a homogeneous group with the same or similar professional background; big emphasis on organizational (employers') effort to promote professionalism

Many respondents over-emphasized registration as the key factor that would enhance the image and recognition of SASW. However, the mandatory licensing of social workers in Hong Kong did not bring about much increase in membership rate for the Hong Kong Association of Social Workers (Personal communication with Hong Kong Association of Social Workers, 9 Oct 2008). This is particularly true if membership and registration are independent of each other, and when the registration board and the professional association have no strong inter-dependent functions.

Respondents also seem to understand that there is a core pool of key players in SASW and appear to hope that this would suffice in sustaining SASW. Though they see the value of enhancing the stability and image of SASW, some of them do not see themselves as active contributors in promoting this change. This is despite the fact that nearly all the respondents, 26 out of 27 respondents were of the view that the professionals themselves

are the most important stakeholders of any professional associations. This myth in their belief that SASW will sustain itself and not be dissolved fuelled social workers' inertia in getting actively involved with the Association. SASW needs to contend with having only a limited pool of key players to run the Association but it can set its sights far in spearheading small projects of mutual interests with social workers and their employers at a slower but constant pace.

Throughout the analysis of social workers' alliance with their professional association, it is now clear that social workers see the need to have a professional body to represent them but this need is a weak one. This weakness is stemmed from social workers not having full ownership of the Association. They may see themselves as 'guests' of the Association rather than playing 'host' to the world. A 'host' would probably promote and be involved in the Association's activities. Members of the Association may be 'socially' a body (a social metaphor) but they do not see themselves leading it.

4.4 Social Workers' Level Of Identification With Their Profession

For the level of identification of social workers with their profession, three inter-related issues were reconstructed using the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) framework: social workers' views on social work as a profession, their identification as social workers to their clients, and their identification with their professional title of 'social worker'.

4.4.1 Social Workers' Views on Social Work as a Profession

Twenty-five respondents were of the opinion that social work is a profession. At the Litany Level of analysis, respondents cited social work as having the theoretical framework, professional knowledge and skills for practice (see Table 4.8). This has been supported by the respondents' claims on recognized qualifications and a legally accountable environment for practice (Systemic Level of analysis). Respondents also affirmed that they constantly applied social work knowledge and skills in their practice. However, respondents were of the view that, in the eyes of the public, social work has not achieved full professional status (Worldview Level of analysis). At the Myth Level of analysis, respondents were of the view that the practice of social work is not confined only to those who hold social work qualifications.

Table 4.8

Social Workers' Views On Their Identification With Their Profession

Litany	**social work is a profession** – with specialized knowledge and skills, a code of ethics, theoretical framework, established methodologies
Systemic causes	**there are recognized qualifications in social work** – social workers possess recognized qualifications, a legally accountable profession
Worldview	**social work is not a full fledge profession** – it is an emerging profession; the public must recognize it to be a profession; it does not have true autonomy; not all beginning social workers can perform competently without supervision and continuing professional education
Myth	**social work's specialized knowledge and skills not unique to social work** – knowledge and skills applicable / borrowed from psychology and sociology; when given on-the-job training non-trained social work personnel can perform social work functions well, consumerism creates professions

(Litany – unquestioned reality; Systemic Causes – rational analysis, interpretative data where meanings and actions are scrutinized; Worldview – mega-structures, historical origins etc. that legitimize system of social organizations; Myth / Metaphor – deep stories, perceptions of reality, questioning collective archetypes)

Generally, respondents felt that social workers were able to identify with their profession and were of the opinion that social work is a profession. The difficulty of differentiating the work of a social worker from one who is not trained stems from the debate on the specialized nature of social work knowledge and skills (Myth Level of analysis). It is not an argument over what social work is but rather, it is an argument about who can perform the work competently.

What continues to fuel debates about social work practice is the under-developed nature of social work practice in developing countries, where there is either a lack of social work programmes or the quality of social work education is not of a reasonable standard. Nevertheless, social workers must believe that they are professionals in their own right.

Such motivations help to sustain professionalism and the zeal to move forward. They must actively inform the public that they are professionals and encourage them to become accustomed to this professional ideology.

4.4.2 Social Workers' Identification as Social Workers to their Clients

Twenty-six respondents identified themselves as social workers to their clients. Table 4.9 below outlines respondents' views on social workers' identification as social workers to their clients.

Table 4.9

Social Workers' Views On Their Identification As Social Workers To Their Clients

Litany	**it comes with the job, it is natural** – the organizational structure, job title and job role made it easy for social workers to identify themselves as social workers to their clients
Systemic causes	**identification as social workers creates clear identity in the helping relationship** – it manages clients' expectations; it provides a clear identity as to whom they are and what they represent
Worldview	**clients do not fully understand what a social worker is and what his / her roles are** – clarification and acknowledgement as social workers help to educate clients and the public
Myth	**low status attached to the title of social worker** – a lesser professional title; lower status than many other professions

(Litany – unquestioned reality; Systemic Causes – rational analysis, interpretative data where meanings and actions are scrutinized; Worldview – mega-structures, historical origins etc. that legitimize system of social organizations; Myth / Metaphor – deep stories, perceptions of reality, questioning collective archetypes)

Respondents were less concerned with identifying themselves as social workers than the low image of social work and social workers. Many of them have found it helpful to

identify themselves as social workers as the title of 'social worker' informs the public of their role.

4.4.3 Social Workers' Identification with the Professional Title of 'Social Worker'

Respondents' perception of their professional title as 'social worker' is an inter-related concept to social workers' identification of themselves as social workers to their clients. Close to three-fifths (16) of respondents indicated that they do not want the title of 'social worker' changed; thus only 8 respondents wished that the title of 'social worker' be changed. Those 16 respondents who wished to retain the title of 'social worker' have found the title to be reflective of the work they do and they hold sentimental value to it. They also do not believe that there would be a better occupational title that would accurately reflect the professional nature of their job. They fear having the need to re-educate the public on what any new title might be and having to re-establish their professional pride all over again.

Upon further deconstructing respondents' textual responses to related questions on the occupational title of 'social worker', familiarity and an accustomed identity with the title of social worker were the key underlying emotive states that were maintaining their point of view. When this issue is reinterpreted or reconstructed together with other related professional issues in social work, these same respondents were holding on to a view that it would be more pragmatic to work on changing and improving the standard of social work practice than to spend time changing an occupational title.

Despite having about sixty years to develop the profession of social work, social workers in Singapore are still struggling with public recognition. This brings forth a fundamental question as to whether an occupational title carries more weight in gaining public recognition than improving standards of practice, or both.

The worldview of social work is that it is a profession of 'many faces', denoting the social worker to be both a generalist as well as a specialist. Unlike medicine where general surgeons or nephrologists are unmistakably medical doctors, many could not identify youth workers and caseworkers at family service centres to be social workers. This problem is inherent in the fact that many personnel not trained in social work occupy these occupational titles as well. Such a phenomenon not only limits the occupational title of 'social workers' to that of an education criterion, it also does not support the notion that social workers are the only professionals in providing any particular type of services. Reconstructing and reordering knowledge entails uncovering hidden or deeply rooted problems that social work has yet to resolve such as having no real monopoly over the treatment of societal problems. Table 4.10 outlines the ideology of the 'social worker' title using the CLA framework.

Table 4.10

An Ideology Of The 'Social Worker' Title

Litany	**problem with occupational title** – an ordinary title that does not command and reflect professionalism; it has the status equivalent of an ordinary office worker, a general executive; the job functions and roles of the social worker are very diversified that impress upon society that the social worker is either a volunteer or a generalist; many basic social work tasks can be performed by non-trained social work personnel and social work assistants; social workers' pay are pegged at the executive pay scheme instead of the professional pay scheme
Systemic causes	**a historical given of title and role, a structural legacy maintained** – started humbly as volunteer work to help the poor and the oppressed / disadvantaged; functions have been task-based and resource-focused and have been largely dependent on external resources (societal scarce resources) and less on the internal resources of the social worker (in terms of knowledge and skills unlike counsellors and psychologists); cut-backs in welfare funding limits the resources available to help the poor and the needy, and in hiring more social workers to ease increasing workloads and affects the efficacy of social workers in resolving most social problems
Worldview	**the professional value discourse** – social workers do not have the monopoly of any social and welfare services that are confined to social workers only; in a multidisciplinary team and in many organizational hierarchical structures of a multidisciplinary team, social workers are often placed near the lowest level or be seen to undertake supportive functions such as fieldwork investigations to support a diagnosis or an overall treatment plan - since social workers are more able to provide ground information from where the problem lies; the perception that social workers support a multidisciplinary team; that social workers are also not indispensable should there be a cut-back in funding
Myth	**the societal value discourse** – the current recognition and rewards being placed on high status professions by commercial companies and society will further erode fundamental principles and concepts of what constitutes a profession; many professionals are over-priced and over-valued today resulting in the blurring of many occupations in terms of occupational boundaries as they all aspire to be recognized in the eyes of the public

(Litany – unquestioned reality; Systemic Causes – rational analysis, interpretative data where meanings and actions are scrutinized; Worldview – mega-structures, historical origins etc. that legitimize system of social organizations; Myth / Metaphor – deep stories, perceptions of reality, questioning collective archetypes)

The recognition of social workers as professionals will only come about when there is mandatory registration or licensing of social workers, upholding of best practice standards and expanding new frontiers in social work knowledge and skills. All these must be happening simultaneously. At this point in time, there is only voluntary registration of social workers in Singapore. Once the voluntary registration of social workers has garnered enough support from social workers and employers of social workers, the next step is to introduce licensing of the title of 'social worker'.

Licensing of title is to protect the usage of title by those who are deemed to be qualified to use it. It does not restrict personnel not trained in social work taking up social work positions so as long as they are not called social workers. This is an important interim measure to enhance the status of social work by attracting people to enrol in a social work course of study with the intent of embarking on a career in social work. At the same time, SASW needs to continue to accredit social work programmes and to ensure that social workers are competent to practice. Once there are sufficient social workers to fill all social work positions, licensing can then be extended to licensing social work positions as a long-term strategy to protect the public and to ensure only competent social workers can practice.

Therefore, simply changing the occupational title of 'social worker' may not be of much help. Surgeons have successfully differentiated themselves from medical doctors by re-designating the title of 'Dr' to 'Mr' within the medical profession. Many surgeons hold this title in high regard no matter how common this title appears to be outside the realms of medicine. Many businesses in various industries have upgraded the designations of their key corporate accounts holders by calling them 'managers', 'directors' and 'consultants' but

this enhancement of status or image is artificial. In fact, the title of 'manager' has been 'degraded' by our society in recent years in response to an infiltration of this title by many businesses today.

There need to be a clear differentiation and distinction of professions that fully require one to be properly trained to practise from those that are not. Unless governments, societies and the general public no longer uphold 'professions' to be one of high stature, as a measurement of wealth and success, of educational achievements and to be revered, the terminology of 'profession' merely differentiates one occupation from another by the different ways in which knowledge and skills are created and acquired. The fundamental problem with 'professions' today is that it has been overpriced and overvalued.

4.5 Social Workers' Level Of Awareness Of The Challenges And The Future Of SASW

Many respondents were not too familiar with the challenges faced by SASW. Thus they had a difficult time deciphering what the future would be for the Association. For these two questions, many respondents had to be probed and guided with a probable list of challenges and futures for them to think about.

Problems of having a low membership rate and a lack of participation in the Association's activities are two crucial issues yet to be resolved by SASW. Many respondents were concerned about the weakness in leadership in the Association but they felt that there was nothing much that they could do about it given that they have their own work and family commitments to juggle. Above all these, what could be fuelling this

weakness in alliance with SASW might stem from the social workers' resounding general perception of the low image and lack of professional legitimacy in social work (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11

Social Workers' Views On The Challenges Faced By SASW

Litany	**to instil interest and commitment of members; to increase membership; to register social service practitioners** – instil a sense of identity and belongingness; problems in sustaining social service practitioners' registration
Systemic causes	**failure to attract members in activities organized; failure to bond members; stiff competitions from other training providers** – difficult to get members to actively participate, to volunteer in committees; competitive loyalty of members with other training institutes
Worldview	**problem with leadership in professional associations; succession and continuity issues** – no good leaders who dare to stand up to tough issues and to own the profession; to explore longer term commitment in leadership for ease of continuity; to get 'fresh' blood into the leadership
Myth	**low status of social work; low in professional legitimacy** – SASW to highlight what social workers do and to focus on publications

(Litany – unquestioned reality; Systemic Causes – rational analysis, interpretative data where meanings and actions are scrutinized; Worldview – mega-structures, historical origins etc. that legitimize system of social organizations; Myth / Metaphor – deep stories, perceptions of reality, questioning collective archetypes)

Despite the fact that many respondents were not fully aware of the current challenges faced by SASW, the majority of them believed that it has a future in representing social work and in professionalizing social work practice. Only a handful of respondents believe that SASW might decline in status (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12

Social Workers' Views On The Future Of SASW

Litany	**to represent social work; to professionalize social workers; declining status of SASW** – to rise to the occasion to influence public and social policies and be involved in international social work
Systemic causes	**probable enlargement role to include trade union functions; registration of social workers** – to have a bigger voice; social workers' well-being is important; registration augments the importance of SASW in providing direction and advice
Worldview	**be a part of a conglomerate of similar or related professions** – having unity in diversification; professional insurance more affordable
Myth	**SASW will not be dissolved; as long as social workers are needed** – possibility of a decline in status but difficult to perceive that it will dissolve; unless no one bothers or when there are too few members to sustain the Association; SASW to stay as long as social workers are needed; may become obsolete rather than be dissolved

(Litany – unquestioned reality; Systemic Causes – rational analysis, interpretative data where meanings and actions are scrutinized; Worldview – mega-structures, historical origins etc. that legitimize system of social organizations; Myth / Metaphor – deep stories, perceptions of reality, questioning collective archetypes)

The majority of the respondents believed that SASW has a future. They believe that SASW would rise to the occasion when tested. The probable future for SASW lies in the extent of its involvement in the registration and possibly licensing processes. Slightly more than three-fifths of the respondents felt that SASW would engage in trade union functions but cautioned that this must be delicately balanced with the professional role of the Association. Few respondents believed that SASW would be dissolved even though this could still happen if social workers are not joining or showing no interest in the Association. At most, SASW might become obsolete. Respondents somehow believe that 'someone else' will come to the Association's rescue should this ever happen.

4.6 The Future Of SASW: Re-envisioning, Recasting The Issues &Possible Solutions

Generally, respondents seemed to view their alliances with SASW as less than satisfactory to weak, and they did not seem to know enough of SASW to comment about its organizational structure, its challenges and probable future. However, their identification with the profession of social work remained strong and their continuing interest in SASW could be fuelled by their desire to promote the profession. They saw in SASW the vehicle of change for them, be it the recognition of social work or the well-being of social workers but many were too 'busy' to take an active interest in the affairs of the Association. Their 'insufficient time' to participate in the Association's activities could be interpreted to mean that they have not regarded SASW as their priority.

Table 4.13 outlines the key issues faced by SASW and the underlying ideologies behind them:

Table 4.13

A Critical Analysis Of Key Issues Faced By SASW & Their Underlying Ideologies

Perspective	Problem Defined	Underlying Ideology (myth / image / story)
Litany	**Blind spots in expectations between social workers & SASW** - in needs and service provisions	SASW is treated as a back-up resource by social workers and employers
Systemic	**Competition rather than collaboration** - SASW has to compete to represent social workers; its resources are external to SASW	Dependent on goodwill & reciprocal benefits; accreditation driven, not membership driven
Worldview	**SASW is not fully autonomous** - strong governmental influence; play down by public figures & the mass media	A semi-controlled social institution highly influenced by socio-economic & political climate of the day; government's focus is on social service sector & not social workers *per se*
Myth	**SASW will not be dissolved** - there are key players (backers); it will always have a role to play	It has a long history and it has survived; there is a strong belief that someone else will come to its rescue

(Litany – unquestioned reality; Systemic Causes – rational analysis, interpretative data where meanings and actions are scrutinized; Worldview – mega-structures, historical origins etc. that legitimize system of social organizations; Myth / Metaphor – deep stories, perceptions of reality, questioning collective archetypes)

Table 4.13 reflects the various realities faced by SASW and the continuing underlying ideologies upheld by important stakeholders such as social workers, employers and the government. Recurring myths were found in the ideologies uncovered for each of the levels of analysis in the CLA framework that perpetuate all reasoning about SASW and that constrain current thinking about its future. Hence, SASW's weakness does not lie in its lack of strategies to promote change but rather in the continuous beliefs held by social workers that appear to make it unimportant or less important to them. The new accreditation system of social workers separates registration from membership, and this

impacted negatively on the Association in some ways. A decline in membership has been seen. Though not in a constant and stable manner, SASW has thrived in the past ten years and respondents noted its hard work and progress made. Nevertheless, SASW has been criticized for not doing enough despite that more had been done to bond members and to strengthen the operational readiness of the Association. Turnout for events and professional activities remained poor as social workers could not find the 'right' time to attend these activities. SASW could not have been their priority. Thus, the attitudes of social workers and other stakeholders need to change in order for SASW to be relevant and effective. What might be sustaining this 'attitude' of social workers and other stakeholders could be long-standing myths imbedded in their minds. SASW needs to create new ideologies or 'new stories' or 'new images' to turn things around.

Table 4.14 documents alternative ways of framing key selected issues:

Table 4.14

Reframing The Issues

	Originally Framed	Reframed
Litany	SASW not doing enough	Not all social workers need SASW (blind spots in expectations); Few social workers responded to the call by SASW
Systemic	Competitive markets; self-sufficiency of agencies	Fair-play; gaps in professional development; market for all
Worldview	Not fully autonomous; social control; low image	Limitations in advocacy & in representation; inadequate resources
Myth	Will not be dissolved	Dependent on a few key players; belief in a 'saviour' – probably higher authority

(Litany – unquestioned reality; Systemic Causes – rational analysis, interpretative data where meanings and actions are scrutinized; Worldview – mega-structures, historical origins etc. that legitimize system of social organizations; Myth / Metaphor – deep stories, perceptions of reality, questioning collective archetypes)

The notion that SASW has not been doing enough could be a flawed statement especially with the voluntary registration of social workers that commenced in April 2004, and the social work chapters, special interest groups as well as professional workgroups that have sprung up over the last eight years. Perhaps, respondents felt that there could be issues with sustainability of programmes and continuing improvements that bothered them. There is often the expectation that more could be done or that things could be done differently. For example, many SASW members who signed up as mentors were not successfully matched because there were not enough social work students who signed up for the mentoring programme (Fan, 2003). Mentors were not prepared for the fact that the programme was short-lived. The voluntary registration of social workers was a resounding success in its initial years of implementation but the government was pushing for the

registration of social workers to be separate from membership with the Association and advocated for the registration of social service personnel (Fan, 2003).

SASW could not compete with 'resource-rich' employers to run relevant work-related training programmes for social workers. Cutbacks in funding for social services, new funding models that are programme-based and new funding packages for training initiatives had created a lucrative trade for social service agencies to market and package training and professional development programmes for their sector. Today, training institutes no longer monopolize training initiatives. Social service agencies too can embark on training and it has become quite fashionable for these agencies to set up subsidiary training centres. Even public hospitals have set up post-graduate training institutes to further the training of its healthcare workers. Today, training is a market for all who have the resources to provide the training. SASW, which used to rely on social workers to help conduct training, now has to compete with many more 'competitors' for both trainers and trainees. Unlike many social service agencies whose staff can be trainers and trainees, SASW has none.

Professional associations today are no longer the sole advocates for professions. Registration and licensing boards, specialist bodies and the government, through certain statutory boards, are also advocating for the same professions. Whilst historically, professional associations dictated on professional matters, governments through statutory boards today have taken over this 'mandate' as they advise professional bodies on pertinent professional matters. Professional associations operate within structural constraints in the

country they serve. Professional associations cannot afford to be not aligned with overall governmental policies and objectives.

Given the current problems facing professional associations, it would be difficult to rationalize why they should not be dissolved or become obsolete. What purposes do they have? In response to these key issues, Table 4.15 shows the recasting of key issues and offers possible solutions that SASW could adopt to improve its image and acceptance by members, other social workers and other stakeholders.

Table 4.15

Recasting Key Issues & Possible Solutions

Level	Problem	Basis of Solution	Who might solve it?
Worldview	Not fully autonomous; social control	**Advocate & lay claims** where necessary - educate	Social workers, government, mass media
Systemic	Competition; agency-focused & not profession-focused	**Create niche markets; collaborate** - consultative, integrative & partner local & regional associations / institutions	SASW, employers & the government
Litany	Blind spots in expectations	**Proactive & targeted marketing**, mind-set change, be current, be proactive & respond promptly	SASW, social workers

(Litany – unquestioned reality; Systemic Causes – rational analysis, interpretative data where meanings and actions are scrutinized; Worldview – mega-structures, historical origins etc. that legitimize system of social organizations; Myth / Metaphor – deep stories, perceptions of reality, questioning collective archetypes)

The layers in Table 4.15 were reversed to show the importance of reconstructing from mega-structural change to social and organizational change. SASW and all key stakeholders including social workers, mass media and government need to jointly advocate for the profession. SASW needs to revisit its mission and vision as a professional body in view of the current professionalization movement by registration and licensing boards as well as other statutory boards. In Singapore, the voluntary registration of social workers is supported and funded by the government but SASW oversees the secretariat to the Social Work Accreditation Board (SWAB) and works closely with the Board to jointly chart professional development programmes for accredited social workers. Whilst registration or even licensing looks into the basic competencies of social workers for practice, SASW now focuses on credentialing for specialist practice. Thus whilst registration and licensing boards ensure basic professional practice competencies and standard setting, professional bodies look into sustaining practice, development of practice and specialty developments in Singapore.

SASW must continue to lay claims to representing social workers and the profession. The government can support the initiatives undertaken by SASW to professionalize social work and social workers by introducing incentives and expert resources. For its part, SASW needs to look beyond initiating basic and foundational programmes and to focus on changing the attitude of social workers towards their professional association, employers, the mass media and the government. SASW needs to re-establish a strong presence by proactively organizing dialogue sessions with its members, knowing the problems and finding the right solutions for furthering the professional

development and growth of social workers. The Association needs to study the socio-economic and political climate to be more 'useful' to the profession and other stakeholders such as the government and the Singapore society. Its outreach to social workers must therefore be very targeted.

SASW needs to invest in having the appropriate manpower to reach out to social workers, social service personnel and employers. SASW needs to disseminate information promptly, information that educates social workers and other stakeholders about its strategies and challenges. It needs to gather news, stories, agency's needs and other information so that it can respond swiftly to ground issues. 'Die-hard' social workers (usually retirees and very experienced social workers) can further help with this.

SASW needs to compete with its competitors in offering expert consultation, professional development programmes and in building the human capital. Where appropriate 'collaborative competition' (in the absence of a monopoly market) would usher in more opportunities for SASW to excel. This ensures fair play as in market sharing. SASW should also not be shy of national representation, especially in dialogue sessions and feedback on government policies. Finally, SASW must constantly look for 'new blood' and committed individuals to serve the Association. The best way to do this is through individual contacts and recommendations.

The CLA methodology applied to study the future of SASW informs us that there are serious structural issues that hinder social workers' alliance with SASW. Infrastructures such as a ready and efficient professional development system or network have been created by voluntary welfare organizations (VWOs) with governmental support. SASW must

participate in these structures and be a part of them. SASW cannot see itself outside this social service structure / system. SASW must work within these social service structures. For example, the Association must be easily identified and recognized by social workers and VWOs to be the leading advocator for social work. All the strategies discussed above allow SASW to be in the forefront rather than being regarded as a back-up resource for social workers and other stakeholders.

In summary, the strategies discussed so far focus on structural change and are targeted at the Litany and Systemic Levels. The strategies proposed within this chapter include:

(1) SASW should build up its capabilities, especially its professional resources;

(2) SASW should be targeted in its approach to secure membership as not all social workers need a professional association; it should focus its efforts on the professional development of social work students and beginning social workers;

(3) SASW needs to look into credentialing and create specialist social work tracks for those who are interested to advance themselves further;

(4) SASW should strengthen its position in creating niche markets for professional training and exchange programmes, locally and regionally; the focus is less on initiating professional activities for its members but to help create niche markets for its members to gain new professional experiences in the field;

(5) SASW should strengthen its communication with social workers and other stakeholders; communication must be proactive, current and responsive in commenting on social problems and in making sound recommendations;

(6) SASW should formulate professional guidelines and standards in practices; it should build itself up as the authority over professional matters concerning social work and to guide the current accreditation or any future licensing boards; and,

(7) SASW should set itself to be the leader in initiating continuing professional education programmes for social workers.

This study affirms that the future of SASW is reliant on how successful the Association is in changing the mind-sets of social workers and other important stakeholders. The next Chapter focuses on uncovering deeper narratives and metaphors that work against SASW in transforming itself to be a respectable professional association.

CHAPTER FIVE

Uncovering Deep Narratives And Locating Alternative And Preferred Futures

5.1 Introduction

This Chapter attempts to integrate Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) of the data arising from the study, the current positioning of the profession of social work and the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW). Through the use of metaphors and Inayatullah's 'Futures Triangle' technique (Inayatullah, 2008), a futures studies tool, deep narratives were deployed to articulate alternative and preferred futures for SASW.

5.2 Uncovering Deep Narratives On Social Workers' Alliance With SASW

The central focus of the study was to explore the level of alliance of social workers in Singapore with their professional association, SASW. Based upon the analysis of the results of the study numerous deep narratives and metaphors could be uncovered as expressed in or implied from the analysis of respondents' statements on social workers' alliance with SASW. Table 5.1 outlines the deep narratives and metaphors that were uncovered.

Table 5.1

Uncovering Deep Narratives &Metaphors On Social Workers' Alliance With SASW

	Key characteristics uncovered	Deep Narratives & Metaphors used or implied by respondents
Litany	no foreseeable benefits from joining	'empty-shell' syndrome 'container-effect' 'no critical mass' 'in the doldrums' (implied)
Systemic Causes	Association has not achieved much	no (political) power no mandate (rights) operational weakness
	Association lacks opportunities to represent social workers	redundancy (implied) as a back-up resource - 2nd class (implied)
Worldview	a lack of professional identity & image	not homogenous lack of collective identity weak professional boundary
	Association's lack of prominence	'in the dark' not in the 'cutting-edge' no 'clout' no 'voice' no 'teeth' registration as image building
Myth	key players will ensure support the Association and not allow it to dissolve	not in unison (having personal interest) 'guests versus host' mentality (implied) 'one foot in' (implied) parent-child relationship (implied) (mismatched) needs not met apathy amongst social workers professing only 'paper-loyalty' bystander stance (implied) self-fulfilling prophecy (amongst social workers, stakeholders & staff of SASW)
	play down on professionalism by mass media	altruistic nature of social work a misunderstood profession (implied)

Be it at the Litany, Systemic, Worldview or Myth Levels of analysis, it is evident from Table 5.1 that there are deep narratives and metaphors in every level of CLA. These deep narratives and metaphors work against SASW's attempt to transform itself to be the premier professional body for social workers in Singapore. The deep narratives and metaphors create barriers for change. Moreover, they tend to sustain and build on each other to create a 'strong defence' against the formulation of any positive narratives and metaphors. It is clear from these deep narratives and metaphors that whatever SASW does, it would still subject itself to criticism. The five deep narratives that critically inflict wounds upon the Association are identified as: a '2nd class' Association, social workers professing only 'paper-loyalty', their 'one foot in' mentality, the bystander stance adopted by many social workers, and self-fulfilling prophecy of not being actively involved with the Association. These deep narratives are less obvious to most social workers and stakeholders as they are hidden and embedded within the Myth Level of analysis and they continue to propel the myths more deeply. Registration of social workers was a deep narrative that supported the Association well but this was short-lived when the Social Work Accreditation Board (SWAB) took over this function from SASW in 2008.

5.3 The Futures Triangle

Inayatullah conceptualized the 'Futures Triangle' in 2005 and included this technique as part of the 'Six Pillars' for futures thinking (Inayatullah, 2008). This technique helps to "map, contextualize and historicize" the issues being studied (Pham, 2006, p. 36). The futures triangle explores the tensions between three dimensions: the pull of the future

(includes competing images which can be positive or negative), the push of the present (the drivers for change and can include economic, technological, political and demographic factors), and the weight of history (these being the barriers that include deep structures such as gender, class and ethnicity) (Pham, 2006). The futures triangle helps to develop a plausible future through the interaction and analysis of the three forces or dimensions (Inayatullah, 2008).

Researchers like Pham (2006) and Anthony (2007) used the futures triangle to map out the issues being studied before applying CLA to study any specific issues in-depth. The futures triangle has been used in the present study to remap and recontextualize reconstructed data and the deep narratives uncovered through CLA. Figure 5.1 depicts the current situation impacting on SASW as reconstructed and recast in Chapter Four.

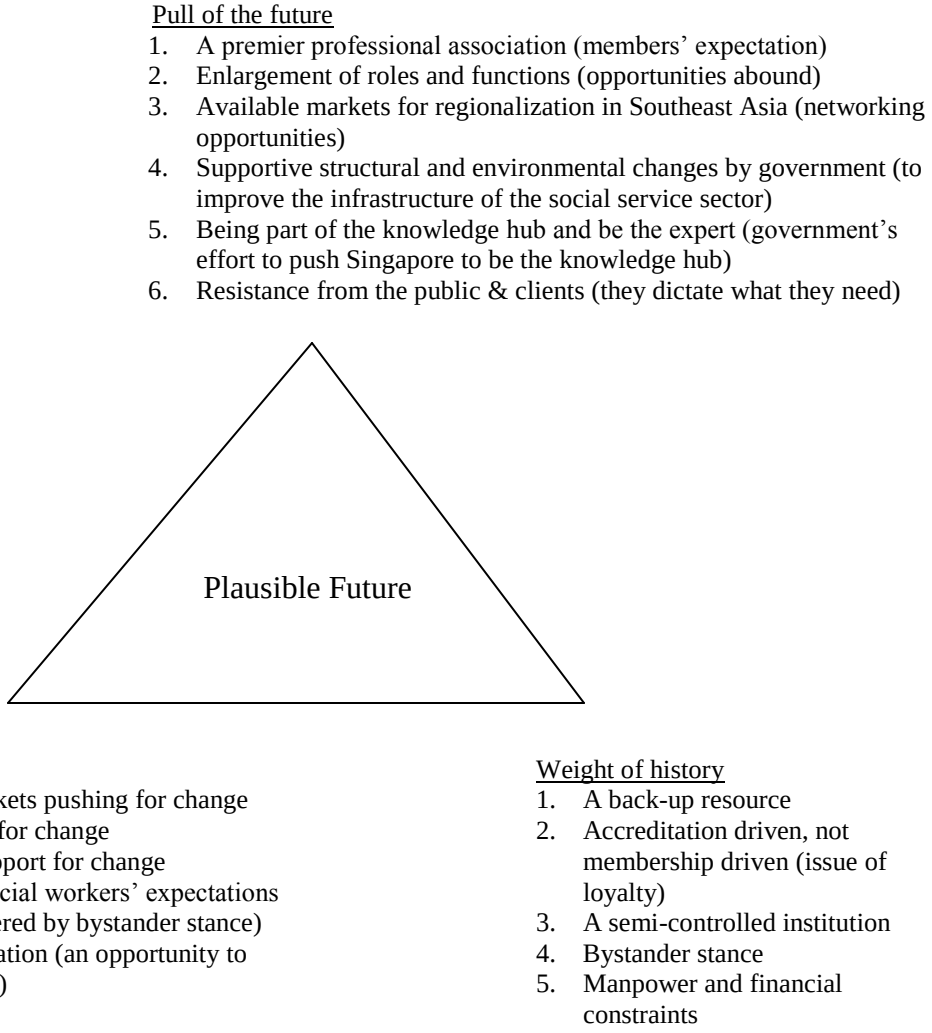

Figure 5.1 The Futures Triangle: Remapping The Issues Facing SASW

Figure 5.1 shows many favourable conditions for change for SASW but the Association is highly weighed down by many barriers which leave it partially-handicapped to effect any change. The weight of history is further fuelled by deep dominating and negative narratives and metaphors uncovered in Table 5.1. All of the deep narratives in

Table 5.1 would cluster up at the base of the futures triangle, making it extremely difficult for SASW to move upwards to reach its preferred future.

5.3.1 Pull of the future - the images

What then could possibly entice SASW to excel as a professional body? The 'pull of the future' would be the expectations of social workers to have SASW transformed into a reputable institution for knowledge and skills integration, to be the 'National Geographic' beacon (www.nationalgeographic.com) for social workers in Singapore which provides education, service, research and programmes to the world. The National Geographic studies the entire world from the animal kingdom to mankind, nature and landscape, and scarce resources depicting current and future problems and highlighting possible solutions. It is futuristic in its vision by creating opportunities to meet the average man's expectations through television, publications, research participation as in its recent Genome Project on population genetics (https://genographic.nationalgeographic.com/genographic/index.html), commercial outlets retailing popular iconic items of the world. The impression given is that National Geographic 'owns the world' by dealing with the world and 'selling' the 'world' to the world of human beings, reaching out to the very young and the very old. All these are done through partnerships with many reputable world bodies. Without National Geographic, these world bodies would likely to be less interwoven and integrated.

In drawing from this analogy, National Geographic is seen as something akin to the Singapore government's promotion of Singapore as a specialist hub in every aspect from the financial markets, cyber-technology, artificial intelligence, medical excellence, life

sciences and so would inevitably pull the profession of social work upwards in a spiral to support a fast growing nation in the many specialist industries that it encourages. There is a potential call for excellence in social work along with medical science and this inspires medical social workers to think 'outside of the box', innovate and assert their authority in their field of specialty. Similar potentials can be seen in geriatric social work, school social work and family work as there are increasingly mounting pressures in these aspects related to rapid socio-economic development in Singapore. As life becomes sophisticated, social workers need to go beyond where the problem lies. What products and services can social workers and SASW sell to Singaporeans? Social workers need to be doing more than the 'see and tell' strategy by helping people to own their problems and become motivated to resolving them or in showing support to resolving them. How would SASW be supporting social workers and the changing Singapore society in the nation's pursuit for excellence?

The 'pull of the future' is also a call by society. Clients may opt for practical help but not the social interventions that would help them to change. They may dictate what they need. Clients may be too caught up with their life stresses to put their energy into changing. Likewise, social workers may be too caught up with their stresses at work to put their energy into safeguarding, protecting and uplifting their profession's image and status.

5.3.2 Push of the present - the quantitative critical drivers

Strong governmental support in registering social workers and social service personnel makes it essential for the profession of social work and SASW to 'shape-up' and professionalize. In that sense, how SASW governs itself is not independent of the current

registration and licensing movement in Singapore. Even though SASW is called to advise the registration board in many professional matters, the Social Work Accreditation Board (SWAB) in turn exerts pressures on the Association to speed up changes in the way it professionalizes the social worker.

The other significant push is the movement to deprofessionalize, to free up tasks that can be better performed by some other workers. Due to a shortage of social workers, social service personnel are deployed to do similar work. There is also an expansion of the role and functions of social work assistants today to take over the mundane day-to-day administrative and management functions of social workers. Deprofessionalization is not an entirely negative force as it helps the professionals to focus and advance in their professional areas of expertise.

Managerial outcomes dictate that a social worker's time is spent performing his or her job function. More time has been spent on recording and producing statistical data and in ensuring positive outcomes. Processes can be short-changed and this may pose ethical concerns. Henceforth, the 'push of the present' for SASW is to safeguard the social worker from degrading into the guardian of outcomes.

5.3.3 Weight of the past - the barriers to change

One fundamental barrier towards change for social work is the altruistic nature and the humble beginning of social work as a friendly visiting service. The image that social workers serve only the poor and the needy recur in speeches by government officials, mass media and in the self-expectations and expressions of many social workers. This conceptual

framework makes social work unique but it also hinders it from evolving to be more clinical in its focus. The poor image and less favourable conditions of work weigh social work down from progressing as a profession. Inadequate funding constrains pay and the provision of services and programmes. All these create barriers for SASW to advocate meaningfully for the profession. Most critical of all barriers are the negative narratives held by social workers about their professional association.

5.4 Alternative Futures

A number of alternative scenarios and futures can be postulated from the discussion so far. One alternative future for SASW would be that of an 'empty-house'. While it is half-empty (the status quo) at this point in time, it can grow to be totally empty if SASW does not succeed in changing its current predicaments. The second alternative future would be 'the falling star'. Within this alternative future social workers will ensure that SASW is not to be dissolved. However, it will experience a fall from grace from its once held important role in educating and professionalizing social workers through the Family Resource & Training Centre (FRTC). It might eventually even lose its premises at FRTC. Going back to the past at a time before the birth of FRTC offers another alternative future – 'the homeless professionals'. The worst alternative future for SASW would be to watch it being replaced or dissolved. Nonetheless, this may not be all that bad if another more capable and effective professional body takes over.

5.5 Preferred Futures

Arising from the findings of this study, three preferred futures have been chosen for further discussion and possible action: (1) establishing a vibrant professional capability and membership base; (2) SASW to go regional; and (3) establishing an information hub. The brand new stories and deep narratives of these preferred futures would see the Association make the transition 'from rags to riches'. This is, a transformation from being unwanted and needy to one that has the 'clout'.

5.5.1 Establishing a vibrant professional capability and membership base

Given the current scenario where social workers are not getting involved with SASW, it would be difficult to think of building professional capabilities in terms of leaders, educators, trainers, mentors, and specialist volunteers for committees in social policy, ethics and social work practice. Building capabilities needs to be strategic and phased-in in order to be successful. Building capabilities requires a four-pronged approach having four sets of strategies to target the four attitudinal-types identified from the study (see Section 3.7 'Preliminary Classification of Social Workers' Attitudinal-types' in Chapter Four). It will be recalled that the four attitudinal-types included:

1. 'die-hard' social workers who have had strong alliance with the Association and many of whom had some degree of influence or exposure to social work or social workers during and prior to them undertaking a social work education;

2. ‘novice’ social workers who are likely to be beginning social workers who need to depend on either SASW or their workplace to help sustain their professional interest;
3. ‘ambivalent’ social workers who are least clear about what they want from the professional association, and who would thus adopt a ‘wait and see’ approach; and
4. ‘hard-to-reach’ social workers who have given up on either the profession or SASW, or both.

Whilst the ‘die-hard’ social workers are more likely to be engaged in some major roles in the Association, the ‘novice’ and the ‘ambivalent’ social workers might experience some form of a dichotomy of ‘zeal’ and ‘helplessness’ within themselves as to how they might want to be involved in the Association. Perhaps, SASW could gather enough ‘die-hard’ social workers first to stabilize its leadership succession problem and then to strategically involve them as trainers, supervisors (paid or voluntary), and mentors to beginning social workers (usually the ‘novice’) and social work students. The ‘hard-to-reach’ social workers might have had personal grievances against the profession and the Association despite the fact that some remained in the profession. It would be difficult to reach out to the ‘ambivalent’ and ‘hard-to-reach’ social workers. However, should SASW be able to gain popularity and achieve a higher status and recognition, it would then be easier to reach out to them.

The preliminary classification of social workers’ attitudinal-types that has been undertaken through this study is useful in providing an alternative means for SASW to be

more specific and targeted in its marketing strategies. Currently, SASW's recruitment strategies focus on types of memberships such as Ordinary Members, and Student Members rather than on social workers' attitudinal-types. Hence, its recruitment strategies are broad and generic in nature. Strategies of this kind would certainly not appeal to the 'ambivalent' and 'hard-to-reach' social workers.

5.5.2 SASW to go regional

SASW needs to go regional to collaborate with the social work associations of neighbouring countries. As there are too few social workers practising in Singapore, there is a limit to membership size. This is a critical issue for the Association and one that has direct impact on its financial capability to carry out its professional work. Revenues from training have dwindled over the last few years with stiff competition from many newly emerging training institutes in Singapore. Many of these new training initiatives are subsidiaries of local social service agencies with a few exceptions at the regional level.

SASW's reputation as a training institute dates back to the early 1990s with the establishment of the Family Resource and Training Centre (FRTC). FRTC had been one of the main training centres for social work and social service training. SASW should look at developing credentialing of specialty social work fields. FRTC should support credentialing efforts by offering appropriate certification courses. Though FRTC has suffered a decline in the last few years, it is currently thriving on a few core-training programmes, one of which is the social work supervision training. FRTC should partner reputable specialist social work centres to mount specialist certificate courses for social

workers and social service personnel on a profit-sharing basis. These courses should be redesigned to suit the needs of our social work counterparts in neighbouring countries. In this way, FRTC would be in a prominent position to serve both local and regional partners in social work. SASW, through FRTC should engage overseas social work associations as its training partners.

5.5.3 SASW as an information hub

SASW has tried a variety of ways to promote 'hubbing' where members can book its facilities for social interaction, professional meetings, dialogue sessions and so on. As far back as 2003, SASW was able to provide e-forums to encourage discussions on current social policies and social issues. Internet-chats were made available to small groups of six who could then meet online to discuss social work projects. However, the take-up rate for this innovation was not high. There was no study done to explore the reasons for the failure of these initiatives.

In order to go regional and to partner overseas social work associations, SASW needs to revive its information hub and this includes the regular publication of its newsletters, journal and publicity of its events. It is evident in this study that social workers want up-to-date information about their profession and that of their professional association. Therefore, SASW needs to ensure regular communication with its members, prospective members and the public. Establishing an information hub is the quickest and most visible way for SASW to promote and market itself.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

This Chapter has outlined the deep negative narratives underlying the myths about SASW. There are deep narratives and metaphors at every level of the CLA but the strongest deep and negative narratives come from the Myth level of analysis.

Utilizing the CLA approach, this study has brought up many underlying and hidden issues in a manner that conventional methods of research could not have achieved. The new stories or new deep narratives for SASW must be tactfully introduced and reinforced firstly to members of the Association and then to all social workers. The National Geographic beacon for SASW is an important goal for the people running the Association. They must think, act and anticipate from the angle of packaging a product or service in a similar vein to National Geographic – selling the 'world' to the 'world', an ingenious concept.

The next Chapter concludes the study by relooking at the literature reviewed, outlining the limitations of the study, and examining the significance and implications of the study.

CHAPTER SIX

Significance And Implications Of The Study

6.1 Introduction

The literature review included in Chapter One outlined the development of social work, its theory and practice, and explored social work through the lens of its stakeholders, namely the government, the public, social service agencies, employers of social workers, and social workers.

This study affirmed that an organization's auspices determines a professional's commitment to it (Blau & Scott, 1962). About half of the respondents in the study did not have very high regard for the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) and they saw no benefits from joining it. The study also supported the notion of agency-focused needs as against SASW's needs insofar as there were competing needs in the social worker's professional commitment towards his / her employment agency and that of the Association.

In line with literature on why people choose to become social workers (see, for example, Francozo & Cassorla, 2004), this study has shown that many individuals who become social workers do so because social work fits their ideals and altruistic persona. There is potential for drawing upon the same ideals and altruism to encourage these individuals to continue in their social work careers rather than opting out or seeking alternate employment. Those who can be retained in the profession should also be encouraged to support membership of SASW. In both ways this will help to enhance the

status of the profession and the future development of SASW from which position it then becomes possible to consider and develop appropriate strategies to improve working conditions so as to minimise burnout which many regard as the most significant reason for social workers seeking alternate employment.

The research also affirmed that many of the social workers in the study have not been adequately advocating for themselves. A related concern is in leadership succession. This is not only an issue with social workers not taking up leadership positions at their workplace but also an issue for SASW wherein social workers tend not to take up executive roles. Respondents have cited having competing professional and familial needs for their lack of involvement with SASW but the reasons for their lack of advocacy for themselves are unknown. Although the present study did not explore this, future research could be done to add insights to the reasons.

Lastly, the research showed that almost all of the social workers in the study strongly identified with their social work practice. They also took pride calling themselves social workers in their jobs. Though many of the respondents have had strong identification with their profession and a weaker identification with SASW, many of them felt that someone else will do the work at SASW without them having to be involved. The study showed that the social workers surveyed demonstrated considerable concerns for SASW but their concerns were not strong enough for them to translate these concerns into action. Given the current critical leadership succession issue in SASW, this strong bystander attitude may ultimately bring about the downfall of SASW.

6.2 Limitations Of The Study

This study is exploratory as there is a lack of studies that examine the level of alliance of social workers with their professional body. The sample size in the study was limited to the membership database managed by the Association. Thus, it is not possible to include social workers who have never joined the Association. In future, should licensing of social workers commence in Singapore, it would then be possible to use this database for the sample size.

Having the researcher as a former 'spokesperson' and a 'historian' of the Association is helpful in providing invaluable information about the Association. Without proper documentation on the current development of the Association, the researcher is probably the most available resource person for information pertaining to the Association. However, there could be a certain degree of bias and subjective judgement displayed without the full knowledge of the researcher. Alternatively, the researcher could have interviewed some social workers on SASW's Executive Committee. Nevertheless, the researcher would not be able to rule out the possibility of them aligning themselves with the researcher who has had a long-standing relationship with the Association. In other words, their responses may not be fully objective.

Since there is a lack of studies on the alliance of social workers with their professional association, there is little opportunity to explore the results of such studies utilizing different research methodologies as the basis for drawing comparisons. The closest studies on social work associations were by Goh K.S. (1971) and Sackville (1990).

Goh's study in 1971 is a historical study as it was in that year that SASW was formed. The study showed strong indications that only a small core number of members were willing to steer the life of SASW and its predecessors. Members' perceptions were sought on the professional status of social work, service conditions and the extent of members' involvement in professional activities. The detailed results of Goh's study was not compared and contrasted with this current study for two apparent reasons: the 1971 survey-questionnaire was largely built on pre-coded statements formulated by the researcher and this could have posed some limitations to a complete understanding of the respondents' own perceptions and expressions of the problems being studied, and the study focused on members' perceptions of the dissolved associations - SASW's predecessors. Goh's survey was conducted sometime in February 1971 and the first General Meeting of SASW was convened in March 1971 (Goh, K.S., 1971).

Sackville (1990) studied the role and influence of professional associations in the development of social work as an occupation from 1900-1990. He studied seven professional associations of social work that led to the eventual formation of the British Association of Social Workers. His study explored the historical development of professional associations in social work, the inter-relationship between the seven social work associations and the development of social work. However, though membership issues were raised, Sackville's study focused on defining the occupation of social work, identifying issues with recruitment and training, raising professional standards, improving work conditions and influencing social policy.

For the very first time, Causal Layered Analysis as a research tool has been applied to such a study. However, this futures methodology is not a familiar research approach for most social workers. Thus, it is expected that social workers will vary in their appreciation of it. Moving forward, it would be beneficial if focus group discussions could be planned as part of the research methodology where action learning could be enhanced.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

This study has provided valuable insights into how those social workers who participated in the study perceived the purpose of a professional association, the issues and challenges faced by it, and its relevance in today's modern and technologically-advanced society. The study answered the key research question on the level of alliance of social workers with their professional association, SASW. It also suggested probable futures of SASW and identified strategies that would help strengthen the current level of alliance between social workers and the Association.

The political power and significant influence of employers and government in the development of a profession were deeply felt in this study. These external forces appeared to over-ride the efforts of a professional association like the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) to professionalize the profession. There was a dichotomy in what SASW can do and what social workers and other significant stakeholders expect of the Association. Social workers in this study expected SASW to be autonomous and free from government control. Yet they acknowledged the prowess of these external forces in influencing the profession and the professional body.

Currently, there is a lack of synergy between SASW and other stakeholders in working towards a common platform in providing for the professional needs of social workers. Nevertheless, SASW must continue to help demonstrate the worth of social workers as competent professionals. It is envisaged that membership will remain small but significant enough for SASW to carry out its mission and those strategic solutions as outlined in this study. It will take time for SASW to improve its communication with its members and social workers at large. It will take an even longer time to witness a change of mindset on the part of social workers to be more profession-focused and to engage as active members of the Association. One of SASW's key challenges lies in the very multi-faceted profession of social work where some sectors, at least in Singapore, like medical social work, have gained enormous recognition in recent years whilst others suffer much disquiet.

Given the relatively small numbers of social workers in Singapore, collaborating with other closely-related helping professions as indicated in the findings of this research may not be an all that far-fetched strategy for both survival and advancement. This may happen especially with the planned registration of allied health professions by the Ministry of Health in Singapore (Personal communication with Senior Officials of the Ministry of Health, Singapore, 2007). Indeed, this study has shown that membership size plays a very significant role in a professional association's stability and growth.

Importantly, this study has affirmed that a social worker's alliance with a professional association is significantly influenced by broader personal, national, global and systemic issues as well as inherent organizational issues faced by the Association. Despite

social workers being critical of their own professional association, they remained hopeful that it could effect positive changes for the profession. However, many did not consider themselves as part of the change process. Instead, they adopted a bystander stance and would only come to the rescue of SASW should it face serious threats of being dissolved. Factors that motivate and attract social workers to join and remain with SASW are found in the extent to which the Association's services, events and projects were being targeted, personalized and carried through sufficiently to add value to their current workplace achievements and commitments. Thus, it is hoped that the strategies suggested through this study might bring about a stronger association that meets the needs of the professionals.

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APPENDIX A

The Research Questionnaire Framework

Issue	Question	Level of Analysis
I Social Workers & Their Professional Association		Analyses of purpose, need and level of alliance
1. Respondents' perceptions on the level of alliance:	1. How do you rate the current level of alliance between social workers and SASW? Rating of response: Very Weak Weak Satisfactory Good Very Good Don't Know	Level 1 Analysis
Social workers & SASW	1.1 What are the reasons for your response to the current level of alliance between social workers and SASW?	Level 2-4 Analyses Broadening analysis of the depth and breadth of alliance in Q 1 to elicit deeper issues
Professionals & Professional Associations	1.2 What do you perceive to be (Can you guess) the level of alliance amongst most professionals and their professional associations in Singapore? Rating of response: Very Weak Weak Satisfactory Good Very Good Don't Know	Level 1 Analysis Making it possible to compare & contrast respondents' perceptions of alliance amongst other professionals and their professional bodies
	1.3 What are the reasons for your response to the level of alliance between most professionals and their professional associations in Singapore?	Level 2-4 Analyses Broadening analysis of the depth and breadth of alliance in Q 1.2 to elicit

		deeper issues Making it possible to compare & contrast issues of alliances of social workers and other professionals
2. Respondents' perceptions on purpose of setting up professional associations:	2 In your opinion, why do professional associations exist in most modern societies today ? (Contrast past & present needs in view of technological changes)	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of purpose, from individual to world perspectives
	2.1 Who are the stakeholders of professional associations ?	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of purpose & interest groups
	2.2 Who should set up professional associations ?	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of purpose & commitment / responsibility (duty)
	2.3 Who should regulate professional associations ?	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of purpose & authority / legitimacy (power)
	2.4 Who should finance professional associations ?	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of purpose & commitment / responsibility (duty)

3. Respondents' perceptions of their need for a professional association:	3 Do you / social workers need a professional association, like SASW, to help you / them to develop professionalism in social work ? (ie. mission, role & structure & technological change; professional development by well established agencies) Response: □ Yes □ No □ Not Sure	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of need, from individual to world perspectives
	3.1 Provide reasons for your response on the need for a professional association like SASW.	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of need & personal commitment / responsibility (duty)
	4 Do you / social workers feel that you / they have benefited from any services provided by SASW?	Level 1 Analysis
	4.1 What have you / social workers benefited from SASW?	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of individual need & association's purpose
	4.2 What is the level of involvement for (How actively involved are) you / social workers in the activities of SASW? Why?	Level 1Analysis Exploring the depth and breadth of individual need & alliance, from individual to world perspectives

	4.3 What could be the reasons for your / / social workers' (active / inactive) level of involvement in the Association's activities?	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of individual need & alliance
	4.3.1 Social workers are competing for time at work and in professional activities. What are your views on this?	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of individual need & alliance
	5. SASW represents about 57% of social workers in Singapore (obtained from SASW Membership Database, Apr 2004). What is your view on the current membership rate?	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of alliance, from individual to world perspectives
	6. How serious is the problem with social workers who choose not to join SASW and who would have indirectly benefited from SASW's initiatives?	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of individual need & alliance, from individual to world perspectives
II Level of Identification of Social Workers with Their Profession		Analyses of identification and professionalism

1. Respondents' perceptions of what constitutes a profession:	7. In your opinion, is social work a profession? (ie. Body of specialized knowledge & skills, formal education, code of ethics & public recognition)	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of what a profession is, from individual to world perspectives
2. Respondents' identification with the profession:	8. How often do you / social workers identify yourself / themselves as social workers to your / their clients?	Level 1 Analysis Exploring the depth and breadth of professional identity, from individual to world perspectives
	8.1 State the reasons for the need to identify / lack of identification as a social worker.	Level 2-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of professional identity
	9. Is there a drift of social workers into other professions? What are your views on this?	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of professional identity, from individual to world perspectives
3. Respondents' perceptions of the degree of professiona-lism within the profession:	10. In your opinion, do social workers apply social work practice principles and techniques in their job?	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of professional identity & professionalism, from individual to world perspectives
	10.1 Which social work principles and techniques do you / social workers normally identify with in your / their social work practice?	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of professional identity & professionalism

	11. Many non-social work trained personnel are performing social work roles and functions satisfactorily. What are your views on this? (ie. Knowledge & skills, standards)	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of professional identity & professionalism, from individual to world perspectives
	11.1 Is there a need to safeguard / protect the profession of social work? (ie. regulatory measures; collaboration with employers; niche markets) Why?	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of professional identity & professionalism
	11.2 Is there a need to further professionalize social work? (ie. Claiming specializations, venturing into new frontiers – niche markets) Why?	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of professional identity & professionalism
	11.3 Do you think that social work will be subsumed under a related helping profession in the future? Why? Eg. under a broader category of helping professionals such as 'social service workers'.	Level 1-4 Analyses Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of professional identity & professionalism
III Social workers' awareness of the challenges & the future of their professional association		Analyses of perceived challenges and possible solutions, and perceived future and probable direction

	12. What are the current challenges facing SASW?	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of <u>perceived current challenges</u>, from individual to world perspectives
	12.1 Which, from the list below, that you would also consider as challenges facing SASW and why: (Researcher will read out items that have not been raised by interviewee) <u>Response</u>: □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know	Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of <u>perceived current challenges & possible solutions</u>
	12.1.1 succession of leadership 12.1.2 formulating a new direction for the Association 12.1.3 finances 12.1.4 registration of social workers 12.1.5 registration of social service personnel 12.1.6 training competitiveness 12.1.7 consultancy and service ventures 12.1.8 professional legitimacy and authority 12.1.9 deprofessionalization as a result of public policy 12.1.10 change of occupational title of 'social worker'	Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of <u>perceived current challenges & possible solutions</u>

	13. What would be the probable future of SASW?	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of <u>perceived probable future</u>, from individual to world perspectives
	13.1 Which, from the list below, that you would also consider as probable futures of SASW and why: (Researcher will read out items that have not been raised by interviewee) Response: □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know	Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of <u>perceived probable future & direction</u>
	13.1.1 declining status as a social work association 13.1.2 enlargement of trade union functions 13.1.3 a premier professional association 13.1.4 a conglomerate of similar or related professions 13.1.5 a national registration board 13.1.6 a dissolved association	Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of <u>perceived probable future & direction</u>
	14. Would the current move towards voluntary registration further enhance the recognition of SASW?	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of <u>perceived probable future</u>, from individual to world perspectives
	14.1 Is licensing your option to enhance the status and recognition of social work as a profession?	Broadening analyses of the depth and breadth of <u>perceived probable future & direction</u>

	15. If SASW were to reorganize, what would its new organizational structure be like?	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of perceived probable future, from individual to world perspectives
	16. Under what circumstances would SASW be obsolete? (ie. Not serving the needs of its members)	Level 1-4 Analyses Exploring the depth and breadth of perceived probable future, from individual to world perspectives

APPENDIX B

The Research Interview

The future of a professional association – a causal layered analysis
Interviewee's Personal Background Information

For official use:
Research ID: NRM _____ / RM _____ / FM _____

Instruction: Please check through and fill in any missing information or tick where appropriate.

1. SASW Membership Status: □ Ordinary / Full □ Life □ Fellow

2. Sex: □ Male □ Female

3. Age: _____

4(a) Marital Status: _____ 4(b) No. of children: _____

5. Ethnic Group: □ Chinese □ Malay
□ Indian □ Others: _____

6. Nationality: □ S'porean □ S'pore PR □ Others

7. Religion: _____

8. Social Work Education attained & Year attained:

Qualification attained	Year	University
□ Diploma in Social Studies	_____	U. of S'pore
□ Graduate Diploma in Social Work	_____	_____
□ B.A. / B.Soc. Sc. in Social Work	_____	_____
□ B.A. / B. Soc.Sc. Hon. in Social Work	_____	_____
□ B.S.W.	_____	_____
□ M.A. in Social Work	_____	_____
□ M.S.W.	_____	_____
□ D.S.W.	_____	_____
□ Ph.D. in Social Work	_____	_____
□ Others: _____	_____	_____

9. Other Academic & Professional Qualifications attained:

Qualification(s)	**Major / Specialisation**	**Year attained**

10. Employment History: (for Social Work Positions only)

Job Title	**Social Work Setting**	**Years in Service**
Current:		

11. SASW Membership History:

Membership Category	**Period From**	**To**	**Reason(s) for lapse (if any)**

12. SASW Official Appointments held:

Appointments held	**Period From**	**To**

13. Professional Membership with other Professional Bodies:

Membership Category	**Professional Association**	**Period From**	**To**

The future of a professional association – a causal layered analysis

Interview Guide

For official use:			
Research ID:	NRM _____ /	RM _____ /	FM _____

Introduction

Thank you for your participation in this research. You have just checked through the Personal Background Information Form and have given your consent to take part in this research. You have given me consent to audio-tape this session. I will be recording brief notes as I conduct the interview with you.

I like to remind you of your rights to pass over any questions that you do not wish to answer and withdraw from the research at any time. No identifiable personal profile / data will be released to SASW or documented in any part of the research paper.

This research is to explore your views on the Singapore Association of Social Workers (also known as SASW) and the profession of social work.

Principal Guiding Questions

Social Workers & Their Professional Association

1. How do you rate the current level of alliance between social workers and SASW?

   Rating of response:

   Very Weak Weak Satisfactory Good Very Good Don't Know

   1.1 What are the reasons for your response to the current level of alliance between social workers and SASW?

   1.2 What do you perceive to be (Can you guess) the level of alliance amongst most professionals and their professional associations in Singapore?

Rating of response:

Very Weak Weak Satisfactory Good Very Good Don't Know

1.3 What are the reasons for your response to the level of alliance between most professionals and their professional associations in Singapore?

2. In your opinion, why do professional associations exist in most modern societies today?

2.1 Who are the stakeholders of professional associations?

2.2 Who should set up professional associations?

2.3 Who should regulate professional associations?

2.4 Who should finance professional associations?

3. Do you / social workers need a professional association, like SASW, to help you / them to develop professionalism in social work?

Response: Yes No Not Sure

3.1 Provide reasons for your response on the need for a professional association like SASW.

4. Do you / social workers feel that you / they have benefited from any services provided by SASW?

4.1 What have you / social workers benefited from SASW?

4.2 What is the level of involvement for you / social workers in the activities of SASW? Why?

4.3 What could be the reasons for your / social workers' level of involvement in the Association's activities?

4.3.1 Social workers are competing for time at work and in professional activities. What are your views on this?

5. SASW represents about 57% of social workers in Singapore (obtained from SASW Membership Database, Apr 2004). What is your view on the current membership rate?

6. How serious is the problem with social workers who choose not to join SASW and who would have indirectly benefited from SASW's initiatives?

7. In your opinion, is social work a profession?

8. How often do you / social workers identify yourself / themselves as social workers to your / their clients?

    8.1 State the reasons for the need to identify / lack of identification as a social worker.

9. Is there a drift of social workers into other professions? What are your views on this?

10. In your opinion, do social workers apply social work practice principles and techniques in their job?

    10.1 Which social work principles and techniques do you / social workers normally identify with in your / their social work practice?

11. Many non-social work trained personnel are performing social work roles and functions satisfactorily. What are your views on this?

    11.1 Is there a need to safeguard / protect the profession of social work? Why?

    11.2 Is there a need to further professionalize social work? Why?

    11.3 Do you think that social work will be subsumed under a related helping profession in the future? Why? Eg. under a broader category of helping professionals such as 'social service workers'.

12. What are the current challenges facing SASW?

12.1 Which, from the list below, that you would also consider as challenges facing SASW and why: (Researcher will read out items that have not been raised by interviewee)

Response: □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know

12.1.1 succession of leadership
12.1.2 formulating a new direction for the Association
12.1.3 finances
12.1.4 registration of social workers
12.1.5 registration of social service personnel
12.1.6 training competitiveness
12.1.7 consultancy and service ventures
12.1.8 professional legitimacy and authority
12.1.9 deprofessionalization as a result of public policy
12.1.10 change of occupational title of 'social worker'

13. What would be the probable future of SASW?

13.1 Which, from the list below, that you would also consider as probable futures of SASW and why: (Researcher will read out items that have not been raised by interviewee)

Response: □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know

13.1.1 declining status as a social work association
13.1.2 enlargement of trade union functions
13.1.3 a premier professional association
13.1.4 a conglomerate of similar or related professions
13.1.5 a national registration board
13.1.6 a dissolved association

14. Would the current move towards voluntary registration further enhance the recognition of SASW?

14.1 Is licensing your option to enhance the status and recognition of social work as a profession?

15. If SASW were to reorganize, what would its new organizational structure be like?

16. Under what circumstances would SASW be obsolete?

APPENDIX C

MEMORANDUM
From the Office of Research

Central Queensland
UNIVERSITY

Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
Ph: 07 4923 2603
Fax: 07 4923 2600
Email: n.turner@cqu.edu.au

18 November 2004

Mr Kam Tong (Gilbert) Fan
C/Hartford Management Centre,
176 Orchard Road Centrepoint #06-06 Singapore

Dear Mr Fan,

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL FOR PROJECT H04/09-118, *THE FUTURE OF A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION – A CAUSAL LAYERED PERSPECTIVE.*

The Human Research Ethics Committee is an approved institutional ethics committee constituted in accord with guidelines formulated by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and governed by policies and procedures consistent with principles as contained in publications such as the joint Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee and NHMRC *Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice.*

On 17 November 2004 the Human Research Ethics Committee of Central Queensland University acknowledged your compliance to the conditions placed on your ethics approval for the research project *The future of a professional association – a causal layered perspective* (Project Number H04/09-118).

The period of ethics approval is 01 November 2004 to 30 April 2005. The approval number is H04/09-118, please quote this number in all dealings with the Committee.

The conditions of approval for this research project are that:

(a) you conduct the research project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments required to be made to the proposal by the Human Research Ethics Committee;

(b) you report immediately anything which may warrant review of ethics approval of the project, including:
  (i) serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants;
  (ii) proposed changes in the protocol;
  (iii) unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project;

(A written report of any adverse occurrence or unforeseen event that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the research project must be submitted to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee by no later than the next working day after recognition of an adverse occurrence/event.)

(c) you provide the Human Research Ethics Committee with a written "Final Report" by no later than 31 May 2005;

(A copy of the reporting pro formas (Final Report) may be obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee Secretary, Nicole Turner please contact at the telephone or email given on the first page.)

(d) if the research project is discontinued, advise the Committee in writing within five (5) working days of the discontinuation;

(e) you make submission to the Human Research Ethics Committee for approval of any proposed variations or modifications to the approved project before making any such changes;

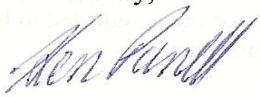
(f) you comply with each and all of the above conditions of approval and any additional conditions or any modification of conditions which may be made subsequently by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Please note that failure to comply with the conditions of approval and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* may result in withdrawal of approval for the project.

You are required to advise the Secretary in writing within five (5) working days if this project does not proceed for any reason. In the event that you require an extension of ethics approval for this project, please make written application in advance of the end-date of this approval. The research cannot continue beyond the end date of approval unless the Committee has granted an extension of ethics approval. Extensions of approval cannot be granted retrospectively. Should you need an extension but not apply for this before the end-date of the approval then a full new application for approval must be submitted to the Secretary for the Committee to consider.

If you have any queries in relation to this approval or if you need any further information please contact the Secretary, Nicole Turner or myself.

Yours sincerely,



Associate Professor Ken Purnell
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

Cc: Project File
Associate Professor Les Killion (Supervisor)

APPENDIX D

IN-PRINCIPLE APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH

THE FUTURE OF A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION - A CAUSAL LAYERED PERSPECTIVE

E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE FROM
THE PRESIDENT.1 SINGAPORE ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Subject: RE: Thesis
Date: Sun, 26 Sep 2004 21 :05:03 +0800
Thread- Topic: Thesis
Thread-Index: AcSjcCs9levKW3EBTMi6ilfsplswswA WBFtA From:
"Tan Ngoh Tiong" <swktannt@nus.edu.sg>
To: "Gilbert Fan" <fangil@singnet.com.sg> X-
OriginaIArrivaITime: 26 Sep 2004 13:05:03.0634 (UTe)
FILETIME=[7004E720:0 I C4A3C9]
X-NAS-Classification: 0
X-NAS-MessageID: 2035
X-NAS- Validation: b

Dear Gilbert:
Your proposed research: "The future of a professional association - a causal layered perspective" would be of direct interest to SASW. I do not anticipate any problem with exco approving SASW's participation in this project.
Concurrent with your seeking your university's ethics committee's approval, I suggest that you also submit the proposal to SASW's ethics board for the review your proposal.
Best wishes,
Ngoh Tiong

Dr Tan Ngoh Tiong
President, SASW

Associate Professor
Department of Social Work and Psychology
National University of Singapore
II Law Link
Singapore 117570

APPENDIX E

(Date)

Dear Member,

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Mr Gilbert Fan, a Registered Social Worker with SASW, is requesting for your voluntary participation in his research entitled **'The future of a professional association – a causal layered perspective'** as a partial fulfilment of the requirement of the Professional Doctorate (Transdisciplinary Studies), Central Queensland University.

Gilbert will, through his research, be examining the level of alliance between social workers and their professional association, SASW. The research will identify the factors that can further strengthen the alliance and critically examine how the professional association can best help to professionalize social workers in the country. The research and your participation will significantly help SASW to chart new directions, further develop the profession as well as justify its mission and purpose. It thus has the support of the Association's Executive Committee and the Professional Ethics Committee. You may refer to the 'Information Sheet on Research' enclosed, for more information on the study.

The non-proportional stratified sampling for the research will be administered by SASW where selected members will be mailed this letter together with all other relevant documents for their reference. Gilbert will only be given the names and contact information of members who have consented to participate in the research. Members who choose not to participate in the research will not be identified. However, he will be given the total number of members sampled and the total number of those in each stratified category who choose not to participate in the research.

Once you agree to participate and return the attached acknowledgement form within a week of receipt of this letter, the following information from the SASW Membership Database will be made available to Gilbert as prescribed in the Personal Background Information Sheet enclosed:

(1) your membership history and status
(2) your educational qualifications and year attained
(3) your personal profile such as your age, gender, ethnic group and nationality
(4) your contact information

In the event that SASW has not received an acknowledgement from you, we shall follow up with a call to confirm your interest in participating in the research before we randomly select the next prospective participant.

Please do not hesitate to return your acknowledgement form to Ms Hati at the Association through email at admin@sasw.org.sg or call / fax Tel: 6775 4776. For further clarifications or assistance, please contact the undersigned at the abovementioned contact number. Your participation in the research is voluntary and deeply appreciated.

Thank you and best regards,

James Lim
Project Manager
Singapore Association of Social Workers

The people professionals...
the career that makes a difference

"THE FUTURE OF A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION – A CAUSAL LAYERED PERSPECTIVE" RESEARCH

Acknowledgement Form

Name: _____

Member ID _____

Please tick one of the following:

☐ I **agree** to participate in the above-mentioned research study

How would you like to be contacted by Gilbert?

Contact Number: _____

What would be the **best time** to contact you?

☐ During Office Hours / ☐ After Office Hours

When would be the **best period** to conduct the interview?

☐ November ☐ December ☐ January ☐ February ☐ March

☐ I **do not agree** to participate in the above-mentioned research study

Kindly respond by **mailing / calling / faxing**:

Singapore Association of Social Workers
Blk 324 Clementi Ave 5 #01-209
Singapore 120324
Tel / Fax: 6775 4776
Email: admin@sasw.org.sg

INFORMATION SHEET ON RESEARCH:
THE FUTURE OF A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION – A CAUSAL LAYERED PERSPECTIVE

IMPORTANT NOTES TO RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Please contact Central Queensland University's Office of Research (Telephone 61 (07) 49 232 607) should there be any concerns about the nature and / or conduct of this research project.

You must be above the legal age of 18 to participate in this research, and not under the influence of alcohol, drugs or any form of coercion from any personnel related or not-related to this research.

This research will be carried out according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (2001) produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia (see website at http://www.health.gov.au/nhmrc/ethics/contents.htm).

INSTRUCTIONS TO RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The title of the research is **The future of a professional association – a causal layered perspective**. My interest to take up a doctoral study in transdisciplinary studies started at the beginning of my second term as President of the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) in 2002/2003. After taking up the post as President in 2001/2002, I was heavily involved in resolving many pressing issues that SASW was facing at that time. My interest in understanding and managing professional matters grew steadily. I was already aware then that SASW needs to adopt innovative strategies for its long-term survival. SASW has to be doing better than surviving as it has to map out probable futures and to turn challenges to opportunities.

The research that I am undertaking examines the level of alliance between social workers and their professional association, SASW. It will thus identify the factors that can strengthen the alliance and critically examine how the professional association best help to professionalize social workers in the country. The research will help SASW to chart new directions and justify its mission and purpose.

The research methodology adopted is a face-to-face interview (using a semi-structured questionnaire as a guide) to explore social workers' perceptions of their Association and the extent of their affiliations with it. The interview will be audio-taped and only selected parts of the interview will be transcribed. Estimated time of interview would be about one hour

and a half. The interview approach has been chosen to reflect the breadth and depth of the research.

The sampling methodology to be adopted will be a non-proportional stratified sampling of qualified social workers from the SASW Membership Database. Permission to conduct the research has already been obtained from SASW and Central Queensland University.

Participation in this research is voluntary and non-discriminating. Consent of prospective participants will be obtained for the research paper to be given to SASW for reference, and for researcher / SASW to publish and present at professional meetings / seminars and conferences. No identifiable personal profile / data will be released to SASW or documented in any part of the research paper.

Thank you for your kind attention and participation.

Gilbert Fan
Researcher
E-mail: fangil@singnet.com.sg
Hp: 96351122

APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM ON RESEARCH:

THE FUTURE OF A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION – A CAUSAL LAYERED PERSPECTIVE

Declaration by Rsearch Participant:

I have read the Plain Language Statement (Information Sheet on Research). I received explanation on the nature, purpose and duration of this study, as well as what I will be expected to do.

I understand and agree to take part. I also understand that I can withdraw from the study at any stage for whatever the reason without prejudice.

I understand that while information gained during the study may be published or presented in professional meetings, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.

I understand that regulatory authorities may wish to inspect raw data of this interview to verify information collected. I further understand that by signing this document, I give permission for this review of the records.

I understand that I will be audio-taped during the interview.

I wish to receive / do not wish to receive* a brief summary of the outcome of the study (*Please delete whichever is not applicable to you).

Your Name :

Signed & Date :

Contact Information (for receiving summary report of research):

E-mail :

Address :

RESEARCHER

I have explained the study to participant and consider that he/she understands what is involved. A copy of this signed document will be retained by the participant for future reference.

Researcher's Name, Signature & Date:

NOTICE OF WITHDRAWAL FROM THE RESEARCH

To: Mr Gilbert Fan
P.O. Box 137
Telok Blangah East Post Office
Singapore 910902

E-mail: fangil@singnet.com.sg
Tel / Fax: 65821426
Contact No: Hp 96351122

This is to notify you that I have decided to withdraw from the research. Please kindly notify me in writing that my notification to withdraw has been received.

Thank you.

Your Name :

Signed & Date :

Researcher

I have received the participant's notice to withdraw from the research and will delete his / her data from the research accordingly. I assure the participant that I hold no prejudice against his /her withdrawal from the research.

Researcher's Name, Signature & Date _____

APPENDIX G

CODE BOOK, FACE & IDENTIFIER INFORMATION

FUTURE: Code Book – Family Tree	
1	Code Families
2	LITANY
3	LO-1
4	LO-2
5	LO-3
6	LO-4
7	L1
8	L2
9	L3
10	L4
11	L5
12	MYTHS
13	M1
14	M2
15	M3
16	M4
17	M5
18	SYSTEMIC
19	S1
20	S2
21	S3
22	S4
23	S5
24	WORLDVIEW
25	W1
26	W2
27	W3
28	W4
29	W5

Code Book Summary Report

LO - 2	Alliance of Other Professionals
W1	Alliance with SASW
M1	Alliance with SASW
LO -1	Alliance with SASW
S1	Alliance with SASW
L1	Alliance with SASW
M5	Degree of professionalism
W5	Degree of professionalism
S5	Degree of professionalism
L5	Degree of professionalism
WRLDVWS	Discourse Analysis / Worldviews
W4	Identification with Social Work
S4	Identification with Social Work
M4	Identification with Social Work
L4	Identification with Social Work
METALYS	Myths & Metaphors
LO - 3	Analysis Perception of challenges
LO -4	Perception of probable future
L3	Perception of Social Work as a profession
S3	Perception of Social Work as a profession
W3	Perception of Social Work as a profession
M3	Perception of Social Work as a profession
S2	Purpose & need for a professional association
W2	Purpose & need for a professional association
M2	Purpose & need for a professional association
L2	Purpose & need for a professional association
SYSALY	Systemic Analysis
LITANY	The Litany

ALL CODE WORDS

LITANY None PAR 1 30/10/05

Litany
Full Description
This is the unquestioned views of reality which are examined at the first layer of analysis of CLA, the Litany Level.
Example
Examples of the unquestioned views of a social worker identity - low status, low emphasis on skills & high on compassion, can be performed by anyone who has a heart,lowly paid; need to enhance social worker identity.

L0-1 LITANY 2 30/10/05

L0-1 - Alliance with SASW
Full Description
This code measures respondents' perception of the level of alliance between social workers and their professional association,SASW.
Example
"Level of alliance:
Very good
Good
Satisfactory
Weak
Very weak
Don't Know"

L0-2 LITANY 2 30/10/05

L0-2 - Alliance of Other Professionals
Full Description
This code measures respondents' perception of the level of alliance between most professionals and their professional associations in Singapore.
Example
Level of alliance:
Very good
Good
Satisfactory
Weak
Very weak
Don't Know

```
L0-3 LITANY 2 30/10/05

L0-3 - Perceptions of challenges
Full Description
This code measures respondents' perception of the current
challenges faced by the professional association, SASW.
Example
Examples are 'gaining confidence from the membership',
'succession of leadership', 'finances' etc.
-----------------------------------------------------------------------

L0-4 LITANY 2 30/10/05

L0-4 - Perceptions of probable future
Full Description
This code measures respondents' perception of the probable
future of the professional association, SASW.
Example
Examples are 'declining status of SASW', 'enlargement of
trade union functions', 'a dissolved association' etc.
-----------------------------------------------------------------------

L1 LITANY 2 30/10/05
L1 - Alliance with SASW
Full Description
Unquestioned assumptions are analyzed.
Example
"Did not receive any reminders for membership renewals, so
did not renew" (basic unquestioned assumption held by the
respondent).
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

L2 LITANY 2 30/10/05

L2 - Purpose & need for a professional association
Full Description
Unquestioned assumptions are analyzed.
Example
"Every profession needs a professional association to
represent it" (basic unquestioned assumption held by the
respondent).
-----------------------------------------------------------------------
```

L3 LITANY 2 30/10/05

L3 - Perception of Social Work as a profession
Full Description
Unquestioned assumptions are analyzed.
Example
"It has a body of knowledge & skills" (basic unquestioned assumptions held by the respondent).

L4 LITANY 2 30/10/05

L4 - Identification with Social Work
Full Description
Unquestioned assumptions are analyzed.
Example
"I am proud to be a social worker" (basic unquestioned assumption held by the respondent).

L5 LITANY 2 30/10/05

L5 - Degree of professionalism
Full Description
Unquestioned assumptions are analyzed.
Example
"Many non-social work trained personnel are performing social work roles and functions satisfactorily" (basic unquestioned assumption held by the respondent).

SYSTEMIC None PAR 1 30/10/05

Systemic Analysis
Full Description
The Systemic Level is where historical factors and other evidences are uncovered as possible causal variables by examining the history of paradigms through the application of genealogical analysis.
Example
The humble beginning of social work is that it evolves from the work of volunteers of settlement houses & charitable agencies who offered their services to help the poor and the needy. The mass-media often refer back to this historical truth.

S1 SYSTEMIC 2 30/10/05

S1 - Alliance with SASW
Full Description
Interpretive, systemic analysis of data.
Example
"SASW did not actively reach out to me" inferring a one directional relationship (responsibility) rather than a mutual or dual relationship (dual responsibilities).

S2 SYSTEMIC 2 30/10/05

S2 - Purpose & need for a professional association
Full Description
Interpretive, systemic analysis of data.
Example
"Every country must have a professional association for social work which represents their VOICE" (inferring an inherent & essential role of professional associations in professional advocacy that cut across all political borders).

S3 SYSTEMIC 2 30/10/05

S3 - Perception of Social Work as a profession
Full Description
Unquestioned assumptions are analyzed.
Example
"It has a body of knowledge & skills" (basic unquestioned assumptions held by the respondent).

S4 SYSTEMIC 2 30/10/05

S4 - Identification with Social Work
Full Description
Interpretive, systemic analysis of data.
Example
"Social Work helps me to be down-to-earth and to be kind" (inferring also that any professions would fit in as long as kindness is inherently displayed in that profession. The 'down-to-earth' and 'kindness' connotation implies a value judgment by the respondent).

S5 SYSTEMIC 2 30/10/05

S5 - Degree of professionalism
Full Description
Interpretive, systemic analysis of data.
Example
"The job scope between a non-social work trained personnel is too similar to that of a social worker thus clients could not differentiate the specialized skills of a social worker from that of a non-social work trained personnel" (inferring the possibility of very little skills differentiation between the two groups of personnel and that clients are less concerned with titles of the workers.

WORLDVIEW None PAR 1 30/10/05

Worldviews / Discourse Analysis
Full Description
It is at this level where such ideological and subconscious assumptions are differentiated and distanced from individual and systemic realities, and critically reframed by reconstructing alternative pasts and alternative futures.
Example
An example would be an exploration of professional discourses such as:- volunteer work, generalist, specialist; unclear views of social work further hinders professional image.

W1 WORLDVIEW 2 30/10/05

W1 - Alliance with SASW
Full Description
Critically differentiated & distanced in the analysis of data.
Example
"SASW is not doing enough for social workers" (inferring to the Association's potential legitimacy over social workers barring all limitations. This also in turn creates a myth that the Association has absolute or 'true' power). Refer also to the example in M1 which suggests that the opposite might be true.

W2 WORLDVIEW 2 30/10/05

W2 - Purpose & need for a professional association
Full Description
Critically differentiated & distanced in the analysis of data.
Example
"A professional association networks with other similar professional bodies as an essential reference point" (inferring an inter-dependent powerful resource /relationship amongst them). Compare this example with those described in the Litany on 'power'.

W3 WORLDVIEW 2 30/10/05

W3 - Perception of Social Work as a profession
Full Description
Critically differentiated & distanced in the analysis of data.
Example
"Anyone can pick up the skills quickly. You do not need to go through a 3-year course in social work to be a social worker" (inferring that there are different ways to learn social work such as on-the-job training, thus bringing up two other important issues - is social work more knowledge-based or practice-based, and is social work a profession ?

W4 WORLDVIEW 2 30/10/05

W4 - Identification with Social Work
Full Description
Critically differentiated & distanced in the analysis of data.
Example
"I feel embarrassed each time I read in the newspaper how lay volunteers called themselves social workers. It is time that someone looks into this problem" (inferring power relations over recognition of occupational titles - who is leading who in such name calling ?).

W5 WORLDVIEW 2 30/10/05

W5 - Degree of professionalism
Full Description
Critically differentiated & distanced in the analysis of data.
Example
Referring back to this example that "the job scope between a non-social work ... is too similar to that of a social worker ...", the researcher has to further examine the realities behind this in terms of stakeholders, the ideologies supporting such an occurrence, and the limitations in resolving pertinent issues such as the 'popularity' of social work as a profession.

MYTHS None PAR 1 30/10/05

Myths & Metaphors
Full Description
At this level, myths & metaphors are critically challenged & redefined realistically by reordering knowledge for conscious transformation.
Example
Myths can be found in professional titles and roles:- social workers seen to be helpers, carers and volunteers; unclear worldviews and the electric approach and methodologies in social work maintain current myths and may also fuel more myths when social work is not undefined / debunked.

M1 MYTHS 2 30/10/05

M1 - Alliance with SASW
Full Description
Critically reorder / transform knowledge.
Example
"Professional legitimacy lies within each individual social worker & can be further empowered by the Association as a collective choice" (inferring a dichotomy as to where the 'real' power lies and highlight the problem of 'responsibility' / 'commitment', and open up a cause-effect issue about power relations. It is a myth that it has all the power when it does not represent all social workers.

M2 MYTHS 2 30/10/05

M2 - Purpose & need for a professional association
Full Description
Critically reorder / transform knowledge.
Example
"It has always been around historically. It survived for years despite having the same old issues year after year" (infers the infinite nature of professional associations).

M3 MYTHS 2 30/10/05

M3 - Perception of Social Work as a profession
Full Description
Critically reorder / transform knowledge.
Example
"Social Workers can be replaced by untrained personnel unlike doctors or lawyers who cannot be replaced. In this sense, it is not quite a profession yet" (inferring that a professional is one who is indispensable, and the profession, as a gatekeeper, needs to regulate this premise well).

M4 MYTHS 2 30/10/05

M4 - Identification with Social Work
Full Description
Critically reorder / transform knowledge.
Example
"I don't mind counselling people but not the financial assistance aspect of my job as a social worker" (there is an implication that counselling might be a core function to this respondent - which might not bring out the essence of social work itself. Counselling is skills-based whilst financial assistance is resource-based where social workers have no full control of).

M5 MYTHS 2 30/10/05

M5 - Degree of professionalism
Full Description
Critically reorder / transform knowledge.
Example
"The title 'social worker' is ordinary and does not suggest that he /she is a professional" (inferring a myth in job title, possibly also a myth in job functions & in the value that clients placed on any occupations. This further highlights the subjectiveness of what constitutes a profession, and what makes a worker professional).

PROJECT FACE SHEET TEMPLATE

	Var Name	Type
1.	ALLIANCE	T
2.	IDENTIFYSW	T
3.	SW-PROFES	T
4.	NEED-ASSOC	T
5.	PROF'LISM	T
6.	CHALLENGES	T
7.	FUTURE	T

PROJECT IDENTIFIER SHEET TEMPLATE

	Var Name	Type
1.	ID TYPE	T
2.	M'BR STA	T
3.	GENDER	T
4.	AGE	N
5.	MARITAL ST	T
6.	CHILDREN	T
7.	ETHNIC GRP	T
8.	N'TALITY	T
9.	RELIGION	T
10.	SW EDN	T
11.	OTHER EDN	T
12.	SW POSTS	T
13.	SW M'SHIP	T
14.	SW APPTS	T
15.	OTH M'SHIP	T
16.	ALI SW RAT	T
17.	ALI SW REA	T
18.	ALI OTH RA	T
19.	ALI OTH RE	T
20.	PURPOSE	T
21.	INT GRPS	T
22.	NEEDS	T
23.	BENEFITS	T
24.	INVOLVEMEN	T
25.	COMPE-NEED	T
26.	M'BR RATES	T
27.	FREE RIDER	T
28.	PRO-DEFINE	T
29.	IDENTIFY	T
30.	IDENT REAS	T
31.	DRIFT-SW	T
32.	APPLY SW	T
33.	WK-DIFF	T
34.	PROTECT-SW	T
35.	PROF'LIZE	T
36.	SUBSUME-SW	T
37.	CHALLENGES	T
38.	FUTURE	T
39.	RECOG'TION	T
40.	REORGANIZE	T

ATTACHMENTS:

Term Paper 1: Advocacy For Social Workers: SASW's Role

(Submitted on 10th February 2003)

This doctoral project hopes to resolve some pertinent professional crises within the profession of social work and its professional body, the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) through revisiting fundamental principles and problems in the industry. Unless these pertinent professional issues are addressed, SASW will not be able to retain its authority as the national association for social workers in Singapore. Its autonomy as a professional body will likely diminish with the growing enlargement of practice functions of other closely related professions and with new and emerging helping professions. The current outlook for social work is also rather uncertain with changing socio-economic and political climate and its future is at stake. My doctoral pursuit is to re-examine the trends in social work practice and how these changes might implicate on professional associations like SASW in representing the profession.

Social work is diverse in its practice as it is highly influenced by the political, economic and ideological environment where it is practiced (Ife, 1999). With the erosion of the welfare state there is a movement towards the establishment of a workfare state (Nowotny, 2001, as cited in Graham & Smith, 2002) and the globalization of knowledge production (Dominelli, 1997). Singapore is not free from new developments and the push forward to professionalize as a result of globalization. Singapore prides itself in not being a welfare state and thus did not suffer any drastic cut in welfare aid as is happening in many other western countries stemming from the erosion of the welfare state ideology. Does

social work still retain its inherent worth with the erosion of the welfare state and the rise of a global economy? All these question primarily the inter-relationship between funding and welfare service provision, and between producing a quality service and knowledge capitalism. When funding becomes scarce, one of its key direct outcomes is the increasing inequality in society where opportunities become limited. How then does social work, as defined by the Council of Social Work Education (1992), enhance human well-being and alleviate poverty and oppression? (Meinert, 1994).

Singapore is not spared from the increasing trend towards outcome oriented social programmes where 'best practices' and other outcome measurements dictate funding. Social work is thus highly dependent on the ideology of the society it serves and the availability of resources such as trained personnel and funding. Social work is also subject to how knowledge and social reality are constructed and thus evolves with time. In this sense, the profession is unlikely to be stable, predictable and consistent across time (Meinert, 1994). This is indeed a very interesting observation since the value of the profession lies in its propensity to be both versatile and responsive in solving societal problems and in meeting the ever-changing needs of society. This strong inherent force for the profession to evolve and to solve poses a fundamental question as to what the future of social work and its professional association would be.

Relevance of the Professional Doctorate

The ‘Professional Doctorate’ enables me to combine knowledge and practice from a real-time holistic framework (network) that is both industry-focused and knowledge driven.

The transdisciplinary nature of the doctoral programme heightens and sharpens my ability to critically analyze the multi-facets of social policies, programmes and orientations by working across disciplinary knowledge areas (Nicolescu, 2002, as cited in Graham & Smith, 2002). According to Nowotny (1999) it is the application of knowledge that is increasingly producing knowledge. She further states:

> … Yet, with the growing interdependence of science and its ties with the economic, political and cultural context deepening, the alleged context-free nature of knowledge production became contradicted by the actual diversity and variety of scientific practices and their interdependence with society (p. 3).

Two sets of skills are thus necessary for the success of my project: a reflective mindset of past and current theoretical viewpoints and practice orientation, and a creative and visionary mindset of the future society and social work practice. A taxonomy / visioning methodology in futuring will be befitting of this project.

Being the current President of the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) and as its Immediate-Past President after my term ends in June 2003, my primary task is to restructure and build up the professional capability of the Association. In Singapore, the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) has both the government and members' support to register social workers in the near future. The entire mission of the Association revolves around the need to enhance the image of social workers, raise the standard of social work practice and protect the public from malpractices. Though the Association has already defined its intention to register social workers, there is no certainty as to whether

registering social workers would ultimately solve all of the profession's problems. The root cause of the current professional issues in social work is far from being addressed. My counterparts and I see it within our role and capacity to take on this challenging task to solve old familiar problems with new ideas through a transdisciplinary approach to problem-solving. This is indeed a very useful approach in that the professional problems in social work had been studied by academicians for some time over the past decade but its problems remain unresolved. Hargreaves (1998) commented on how teachers should rethink their role in creating, applying and disseminating professional knowledge like that of researchers and engineers. In social work, the content and form of its practice should be reexamined by social work practitioners in the field. After all, Mode 2 is "knowledge creation through applied partnerships" (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 21).

Issues, Trends and Dilemmas in Social Work

In this paper, I will only examine very generally two key inter-related problems in social work practice and outline some pertinent future challenges for the profession with particular reference to the Singaporean context. As it will not be possible to provide concrete scenarios in this paper, a detailed study of the theoretical foundations of these issues and problems and the implications of the transdisciplinarity movement in social work will be covered more thoroughly in my other papers. The two inter-related problems are the ambiguities of the professional status of social work and the shortage of social workers in Singapore.

Pertinent issues in the profession of social work

Social work as a profession has been constantly challenged by the proliferation of other helping professions since the 1990s. The mission of social work is often obstructed by public policies, management practice principles and media presentations of it (Ife, 1999). Social work moves more slowly than other professions in adapting to prevailing ideology. Its hindrance in adaptation is found in its inherent value orientation that makes it difficult to accommodate to new ways of service delivery under new managerial paradigm and economic rationalism (Ife, 1999). Following closely to the 'medicalization of deviance' by the medical profession, nursing has been quick in forming specializations and sub-specializations within their discipline. Social work is slower in adapting to these prevailing norms of practice and in the expansion of professional expertise. This is particularly true for Singapore.

The current form of social work is also far from being adequate in resolving society's multi-faceted problems. As it relies heavily on external factors beyond the purview of the profession, there appears to be a certain element of powerlessness within the profession (Ife, 1999). There is a lack of a developed and integrative organizing framework for social work practice. In the words of Bardill & Hurn (1994):

> We continue to learn from other disciplines and relabel social theories. Without a commonly accepted paradigm to guide our theory and model development and our research efforts, we continue to be buffeted about by politically motivated special interest groups, methodically bound true believers and the ever-present micro-macro disagreement that leads social work in circles (p.

43).

Social work has not changed much in its effort to develop its own professional paradigm (Friedman, 1991, as cited in Bardill & Hurn, 1994). Friedman further expounded on how people tried to solve problems with old familiar methods and expect a different outcome; instead, what is needed would be a paradigm shift (Shulman, 1991, as cited in Bardill & Hurn, 1994).

Generally, social work is less efficient today in empowering clients and in eliminating injustices. Unlike other professions such as medicine and law, social work is highly dependent on external factors for its worth. The extent of assistance that a social worker can offer to his / her client is dependent on the type of assistance needed, the agency's mission, the degree of support from legislation and public policy, and the level of inter-agency collaboration. A social worker would have attained the appropriate command of his / her own personal and professional values, knowledge-base and skills. A social worker's skills are often unseen and unknown to others. This makes it difficult for the public to recognize the full contributions of the profession. Hence, the client would largely accrue any effectiveness in the helping outcome to the resources gained rather than to the social worker's knowledge and skills. To put it differently, the client often does not realize how public policy, for example, can hinder any help that can be accorded. This occurs less frequently in medicine and law where there is usually direct recognition of knowledge and skills of the profession.

The other closely related key professional issue of social work is the misconception of social work as volunteer work by the general public in Singapore. This is a very unique situation for Singapore and perhaps is also true for some countries where volunteerism mushroomed alongside the development of social work, and when the former had been highly preferred and publicized by the government and the media. Though the Singapore government has been highly successful in advocating for strong community partnership in helping the disadvantaged through individual and corporate volunteerism, it failed to safeguard the interest of social work - the profession. Inevitably, it was done at the expense of social work when volunteers were tasked to perform social work roles by agencies where they serve. Even up to today, corporate leaders and politicians in Singapore still associate volunteer work as social work. Thus, the two terminologies, social workers and volunteers are often used interchangeably in Singapore.

Reports in our newspapers have featured complaints of poor attitude and service in some social service agencies. Not all complaints are valid. Neither was all complaints directed at social workers. But all these reports point towards consumers' increasing demand for a quality service. The general public, as a result of both public and media presentations, is still not quite clear about the roles and functions of social workers. They thus tend to confuse social workers with volunteers. They also have little knowledge of a social worker's values, training and skills. This hinders the Association's efforts to promote social work as a profession.

Volunteers are invaluable human resources in any society but a clearer definition between volunteers and social workers would address the issue of role and identity confusion between the two by the general public. Volunteers are persons who wish to contribute to society by volunteering their time and expertise with a social service organization. Most volunteers receive relevant on-site orientation and training by the organizations that they serve. Not every volunteer is a social worker though there are social workers who volunteer professionally.

Most of the time, social workers and volunteers are 'appraised' by their commitment and devotion in helping others. Social workers and volunteers are often seen in the light of being 'helpers', their ability to form a meaningful 'helping relationship'. In that sense, most people do not see the specialized knowledge and skills of social workers since volunteers can efficiently perform more or less similar roles. Perhaps to know the difference, one has to understand the kinds of assessment and psychosocial interventions that a social worker does.

One major hindrance in differentiating social work from volunteerism or other helping professions is in the generalist nature of social work itself. Social workers play a variety of roles. Some of these roles when seen in isolation may not differ greatly from that of a volunteer or a social service worker, for example providing emotional support to the elderly and the sick. However, social workers think, assess and utilize a repertoire of intervention skills when relating with a client. The difference is that the social worker is more apt and able to adopt a holistic perspective and utilize a systemic approach in relating with a client. According to Mattaini, "the social work practitioner needs to see - and know -

everything at the same time" (Mattaini, 1995, as quoted in Meyer & Mattaini, 1995, p. 3). The generalist nature of social work is also explained by Jim Ife in his book 'Rethinking Social Work' where he states that social work involves a multiciplicity of interrelated factors and that social workers would have to deal with complex systems and be holistic in their perspective (Ife, 1999).

In SASW's (2002) submission to 'Remaking Singapore' Committee (a committee set up by the Singapore government to chart a new future for the country), it stated the need to develop a long-term plan to raise the profile of social service professionals, including social workers. The focus should be to explain the nature of social services and the contribution of the social service sector to the public. This will rectify the current notion held by the public that those who work in the social services are volunteers.

In summary, the professional issues of social work practice have to do with:

1. its high dependency on the socio-economic and political factors including a dependency on the ideology of the society it serves and the availability of resources such as trained personnel and funding;
2. erosion of the value-base of the profession as a result of its dependency on external factors;
3. the social worker's skills being often unseen and unknown to others;
4. growing enlargement of practice functions of other closely related professions, and with new and emerging helping professions; and
5. the misconception between social work and volunteer work.

The need to increase the number of social workers to fill up social work positions

The shortage of social workers stems mainly from having insufficient social work graduates entering the profession and social workers leaving their jobs after working for only a few years. There is also an expansion of programmes and the setting up of new social service agencies requiring more social workers than before.

There are far more social work graduates than practicing social workers in Singapore. Many young Singaporeans chose to study social work with the option of joining a human service-related occupation. For many young Singaporeans, they would want to keep their options open to doing social work when they are ready and yet have the flexibility of choice to be able to find jobs in other human service-related areas such as human resource & public relations. The paper-chase phenomenon in Singapore and the high emphasis on success by taking up 'elite' professions have driven social work to be an alternative career option by many young Singaporeans today. With the current high rate of unemployment in the country, there is now a greater emphasis by government and the unemployed to seek social work and social service occupations. Interest in social work and the social service sector will last as long as the Singapore recession remains.

The curriculum of the undergraduate social work programme is generic, covering a broad spectrum of foundation knowledge and skills in the practice of social work for the beginning social worker. It is also not expected that every one who is trained in social work practices in the profession. The basic undergraduate curriculum is broad enough for the transference of knowledge and skills to other closely related fields. It is also not the local university's choice to create a strong social work curriculum as the educational emphasis for

Singapore now is to instil a liberal arts education with a strong orientation towards creativity and entrepreneurship. The undergraduate social work curriculum will not be able to prepare graduates to be effective beginning social workers. Will Singapore follow the trend in most western countries where the professional social worker requires at least a master degree in the discipline?

There will always be stiff competition for scarce human resources, be it within or outside the social work profession. For those who remain in the profession, specialization of social work knowledge and skills are normally undertaken at graduate and post-graduate levels during one's working career as a social worker.

In some other countries, there has been stiff competition for enrolment in a social work programme. There have been mixtures of fresh high school leavers as well as mature students who apply for enrolment in social work. These mature students have some years of social service experiences and would normally enrol in an undergraduate social work programme as their second degree. Most of these mature students have already decided to practice social work upon their graduation. In an undergraduate programme where fresh high school leavers learn and interact with mature students, the latter would normally serve informally as 'mentors' who can provide the learning-gap between knowledge and practice. In fact, it is of no surprise that students would generally firm up their career aspirations by the end of their second year of study – some would have grown to like and commit themselves to practicing social work upon graduation.

In Singapore, undergraduates are largely young fresh high school leavers and there are very few mature students who take up an undergraduate degree majoring in social work.

However, today we see more mature students taking up the Post-Graduate Diploma in Social Work when the National University of Singapore (NUS) started this new programme a few years back. Social work education in Singapore is transforming as there are more opportunities for graduate studies and specialization, and when more social service organizations invest in the human potential of the profession.

At present, there is little opportunity for non-degree working personnel who wish to pursue a degree in social work without having to do it abroad. This option of furthering their education is not feasible for most working adults as it usually involves uprooting a long-time job and family. Since the majority of these working adults are not eligible to enter NUS to pursue a degree in social work, many of them would have to choose other related distance-learning programmes such as psychology and counselling.

As part of SASW's effort to attract prospective persons to take up a career in social work, it intends to partner a foreign university to offer a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Distance-learning Programme. The BSW Programme would enable:

1. current social service personnel employed in social service agencies the avenue to upgrade themselves academically to a professional degree level;
2. mid-career personnel who are seeking a career change the opportunity to pursue social work as their alternative career; and
3. graduands from the Nanyang Polytechnic Diploma of Management in Community Services and graduands of the newly initiated Specialist Diploma in Human Services the avenue to further their education to a degree level.

By offering more opportunities to pursue a social work degree programme in Singapore, it is hoped that this BSW Programme could ease the shortage of social workers in our country.

SASW envisages that running a BSW programme is viable in that we have a market for adult learners as well as graduands from the human services and community services programmes. SASW hopes to be a pioneer and leader in this aspect so as to ensure an educational programme of good standing. It is not certain whether commercially run programmes would be able to ensure adequate contact lecture and tutorial hours needed for a sound social work education.

On the notion of social workers leaving their profession after a few years of practice

Not all social workers who leave their jobs leave the profession totally. Many have shifted to a different field in social work or to a closely related field, some have left for graduate studies, some resigned to look after their children or follow their spouses for overseas postings. There are often personal needs that need to be met besides professional ones. If social work is their first job, one possible reason for leaving is the curiosity to try it out in the commercial / private sector.

Much attention has been placed on comparing salaries and promotional aspects between social workers and other professionals as possible reasons for job dissatisfaction in Singapore. A social worker's salary is somewhat comparable with any executive officers' salary, though at the senior level, it was said that the social worker's pay is about 10% lower than that of senior civil servants in the country. Even senior executive officers' salary

lags behind any high risk and highly stressful jobs such as brokers and bankers etc. Perhaps the real difference is in whether a profession is instrumental in bringing in the revenue for the organization. As there will be varying societal demands placed on any professions, salary differentiation is therefore inevitable.

Social work in Singapore is most often not revenue generating. There are only a handful of private social work practitioners in the country. Hence social work in Singapore will not be of a good comparison with revenue generating professions. This is not to say that social workers do not require higher salaries. Efforts to place senior social workers' salaries at par with senior executives would be a significant move. It is certainly a fallacy to hold the perception that salary is not a crucial issue for social workers. While social workers advocate for the unfortunate and the poor, they also strive to maintain fairness and equality in pay and status for themselves. Social work is a value-laden and humanitarian profession where intangible human growth, development and advancement of the human race / society are of primary importance (Ife, 1999). It is not a profession that reaps immediate results, for the processes of change and learning is personal to the individual and takes time. Even having said this, most clients would almost immediately feel a difference and are emotionally charged in wanting to do something for themselves though to achieve their outmost personal goal(s) would take time. This seems to be true regardless of whether the client acknowledges that the change has to do with the skills of the social worker.

Social workers may find it difficult to get adequate professional and peer support that they need. It is not that social workers do not render support to each other. Many social service agencies have organized discussion groups, mentoring schemes amongst

others to assist newer social workers. There is this informal network of friends and peers in social work where social workers meet up regularly for friendship and support. Even social workers who work in isolation in organizations that employ only one social worker can get access to such informal networks. However, more need to be done for social workers. High caseloads and additional assignment of duties such as covering duties and assisting with the agency's special events etc can make it quite difficult for one to have the time to render support to each other. Social workers have to learn to make time for each other, to support each other. Social workers also need to make time for continuing professional education and training. Hiring more social workers would help to ease some of these problems but the issue remains that many agencies could not find qualified social workers to fill the jobs.

The need to build up professional capability of the Association

This section of my paper links up some of the issues, trends and dilemmas in social work with the role of the professional body, the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW).

Background of the Association

The Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) is into its 33rd year of existence, having taken over from its predecessors, the Malayan Association of Almoners (MAA), the Association of Professional Social Workers (APSW) and the Singapore Association of Medical Social Workers (SAMSW). The Family Resource & Training

Centre (FRTC) was set up under the Association in 1992 to provide family life education and to support, nurture and strengthen families through leadership in research, training, public education, consultancy and advocacy. SASW has received its funding largely from public donations to run training programmes for the professional development of social workers. Only a small fraction of funding comes from membership dues. The FRTC is funded separately through public donations and corporate sponsorships to run specific training programmes and public education in the local community. The FRTC also has its own By-laws and has been operating quite independently from the Association except that its Chairman and Management Committee must be appointed and endorsed by the Association.

The Association's mission.

1. To advance social work as a profession and foster a high standard of social work in the country.
2. To participate in activities which promote social work and social welfare on a national or an international level.
3. To participate in and provide community and social services to the public.
4. To promote the welfare of social workers.

(SASW, 2004)

Development of the Association

SASW's early efforts were placed on membership recruitment, establishing basic practice ethics and responding to emerging social needs and new services. Since almost all of SASW's committee members and volunteers were also practitioners, its early tasks revolved around sharing of service expertise and steering training programmes to meet existing needs. Contributions from fellow social workers have been on an ad hoc basis with little provision for long-term planning.

Throughout the last decade, especially over the last five years, SASW has attempted to be more visionary. Perhaps this was the stage of service development where more social work graduates enter the profession and when service provisions were more stabilized and the focus shifted to setting standard and competency in service delivery.

Current scenario

Agency-focused needs versus the professional association's needs. Today, social work in Singapore is still very much agency-focused though efforts have been undertaken by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) to co-ordinate services, standards and training among its affiliates. Outstanding agencies were picked as role models for others providing similar services. Professional development of social workers is still very much an agency's responsibility and its importance varies from agency to agency. Many social workers do not find the time to support the activities of the Association. Social workers in Singapore are far too tied down with agency's work to be able to volunteer their time to the

Association. Perhaps, many would have deemed that they would receive professional growth through their involvement with their agency's professional programmes and events.

This trend arises because of the competing needs and demands between social service agencies and the profession, which is represented by the Association. This mindset has to change if the importance of a SASW-Social Workers partnership in furthering social work is deemed to be essential. Social work may have to change in content and form to better reflect today's rapidly changing and uncertain world. Social work is both universal and unique to the country where it is practiced (Ife, 1999). Professionalizing social work can only be achieved at the national level. Social workers and SASW are in fact interdependent. When SASW does well, it would have a national impact greater than when an agency does well. With the current emphasis on developing the social service sector and in strengthening the social fabric and defence of Singapore, SASW is now in a pivotal position to make significant contributions to both the profession and the social service sector.

What is deemed to be of priority for SASW is to ensure that social work students and beginning social workers get the necessary professional support for their professional growth and development. Social work students may need continuing support from professionals in the field to help them to better integrate theory with practice on top of their placement opportunities. Beginning social workers may need additional support from fellow professionals to better assimilate into their professional roles. Social workers working in isolation can tap into this community of professionals for mutual sharing and networking. The direct benefits would be to promote and enhance interest in social work

practice and training, and in bringing down the attrition rate in social work occupations - particularly those who leave because of a lack of support for professional growth and development.

Growth in representation of practicing social workers in Singapore. From 1969 to 2002, the National University of Singapore (NUS) has graduated 1,828 social work graduates. Of these 1,828 social work graduates, 196 of them went on to complete their honours in social work at NUS (Department of Social Work & Psychology, 2002). There have been some foreign trained social workers and others who went on to do higher degrees in social work. There are more master's graduates in social work and many more doctoral students in social work today than a few years back.

The estimated number of practicing social workers in Singapore today is about 600. Hence, one in three social work graduates actually join the profession. There is a large pool of social service personnel employed within the social service sector who are not trained in social work. In Singapore, the ratio between a social worker and the population is 1:5736. In Hong Kong, it is 1:1074 and in Australia it is 1:620 (Singhealth, 2002).

Today, SASW manages to capture about 65% membership out of the estimated 600 practicing social workers and a smaller number of those who have left the profession but maintained their affiliations with the Association. There was close to a 15% growth in membership over the last two years. In USA, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) manages to capture about 50% membership from the nation's pool of social workers in the 1990s (Meinert, 1994). SASW envisages an upward trend in membership as

it attempts to uphold standards of practice and actively seeks opportunities and advocates for members' professional development.

Scope of my project

In conclusion, my project is to determine the future of social work associations like SASW and study how the professional association can advocate for social workers. My particular concern is the ambiguous status of social work today and the weak alliance between social workers and the professional association, with particular reference to Singapore. This issue is fuelled by the proliferation of helping professions and the emerging trend of 'dual-professionals'. This has inevitably given rise to an identity crisis amongst social workers and the ambiguity of practice boundaries. Nevertheless, Mode 2 knowledge production, according to Nowotny, may lead to conflicts across networks in which it is applied (Nowotny, 1995). The ultimate challenge is to question whether social work still serves its original mission and intent that it sets to serve.

Social work in Singapore can play a pivotal role in improving the social service sector. This includes raising the standard of service provision and in improving the lives of clients. Currently, social work in Singapore is professionalizing at a faster pace than some ten years ago. There is also a push to improve the standard of practice of social service personnel by the government. SASW is expected to take the lead in this aspect.

In my study of the content and form of social work in the future, my key guiding questions and concerns will include the following:

1. How should social work reposition itself to be inclusive and be a significant

contributor in our society? How should social work sustain and improve its stake in the helping profession? (A challenge to the profession)

2. In an era where professional identity is blurred, what would a social worker's identity be in the future? How to market 'professional loyalty' amongst social workers? (A challenge to the professionals)
3. What are the strategic roles that the Singapore Association of Social Workers play in helping to augment social work as a profession in the new knowledge economy? (A challenge to the professional association)

In helping me to be transdisciplinary in focus, I will also draw from closely related disciplines such as socio-economic, cultural and political overtones. SASW has already witnessed the impact of globalization and knowledge capitalism with its recent experience in engaging itself with international and regional social work networking and in its collaborative effort in initiating distance-learning social work education with a foreign university.

I will be re-examining the trends in Singapore's social development, social cohesion and social dystopia. The latter aspects are crucial for Singapore in wake of the terrorists' attack on Bali in October last year. The one fundamental social condition that social work can seek to play a pivotal role is in maintaining the social cohesion of Singapore, especially at a time when unemployment is high. The Singapore government has been successful in its efforts to develop strong communities and maintain a pluralistic society that is generally harmonious. However, these efforts may still not be able to weather any potential racial and

religious disputes. Social work can look into helping to further strengthen and maintain the social order significantly. It is thus a matter of how we define or redefine the roles of the profession and the Association to achieve this.

I will probably organize my other 3 papers along these lines:

1. an analysis of social work and the socio-cultural, economic and political conditions in Singapore;
2. an examination into the positioning of social work through a professional association's lens; and
3. the future of social work, social workers and the professional association through a futuristic lens such as in scenario-planning.

My doctoral project will likely look into pertinent sets of taxonomies or visioning, and hopes to bring about new knowledge production in futuring social work.

ATTACHMENTS:

Term Paper 2: Social Change And Social Issues In Singapore: SASW's Response

(Submitted on 8th December 2003)

In the early 1900s, the provisions of social welfare were along racial and ethnic lines. The Blacks in North America had their own charities separate from the Whites' charity establishments (Dubios & Miley, 2002). During the colonial rule until Singapore's self-governance in 1959, the British had a similar system of handling ethnic affairs in Singapore by encouraging ethnic groups and their clans to be actively involved in promoting their own ethnic culture and welfare (Vasoo, 2002). Social work during this time adopted a remedial approach in resolving societal ills. One of the early tasks was to combat nutritional problems amongst children, public health and sanitation matters (Vasoo, 2002).

After the colonial rule, the early years in nation building was highly successful in transforming Singapore into one of the world's busiest ports. During the early years, the Singapore government focused on the development of the country's residential and industrial infrastructures. It was also highly successful in promoting community organizations such as residents' organizations, town councils and most recently, community development councils to promote community bonding and inter-racial harmony. These developments shape the decentralization of Singapore's neighbourhoods and spearheaded the creation of voluntary welfare organizations in these neighbourhood centres. To prevent nepotism and corruption, civil servants were appointed in key positions in community organizations that are affiliated to the government (Vasoo, 2002). As a result, two sets of messages were inevitably perceived by the public: that the government has been

paternalistic in its approach and that it exerts some form of social control in its community development efforts.

Though Singapore's direction has been towards community building and development, it has not lost its sight on the need to continually combat the ills of urbanization and modernization. The most pressing social issue in the 1960s was to eradicate social isolation from the lack of strong neighbourliness and mutual support, over-crowdedness for some families, a lack of familial support for older folks with children marrying and living apart, and the significant increase of latch-key children (Lee, T., 1988; Vasoo, 2002). Industrialization, urban renewal and new townships had also created much social tension (Chan, C.S., 1972), particularly on marriage and family relationships in Singapore. There has been a decline in understanding and appreciating Asian values and culture with the phasing out of vernacular schools. More importantly, excellence and individualism have been so often stressed in schools today that the values of tolerance and selflessness were overshadowed (Advisory Council on Family and Community Life,1988). There were problems with enhancing good family values and stable marriages making the Singaporean family very vulnerable. Services to enhance marital relationship, family life and parenting have to be stepped up by the setting up of family service centres all over Singapore. The government then steps up funding for family service centres to enhance family life education to help resolve family and social problems.

In Singapore, centralized funding support through the Community Chest for voluntary welfare organizations affiliated to the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) enabled welfare organizations to concentrate on providing comprehensive and quality

services (Vasoo, 2002). The Government Financial Assistance Scheme was introduced in 1990 and revised in 1996 to help voluntary welfare organizations with up to 90% capital expenditure and 50% recurrent expenditures to develop approved programmes and facilities (Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002). Funding was also supplemented by donations made by Singapore Pools, an equivalent to contributions made by state lotteries in other countries. The 'many helping hands' concept has been adopted in Singapore to fund various community building projects including social services and the arts. This is a direct contrast to having state welfarism for fear of eroding established work ethics and the promotion of self-help. Singapore's success is in its tripartite partnership between government, voluntary welfare organizations and private enterprise (Vasoo, 2002) in providing social welfare services and in its social development.

The development of social services in Singapore follows closely but lags behind that of the developed countries; the main difference is in the approach towards welfare. Social services in Singapore had been residual in approach in its early years of nation building. A residual approach with moderate government intervention was necessary to rectify the ills of an industrializing Singapore society in the 1960s. A social development approach is needed to develop people as a resource in post-industrial society (Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002). Social development is planned social change. According to Friedman, a social development approach benefits both economic and social development where economic benefits are translated into social well-being (Friedman, 1992, as cited in Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002). According to Tan, N.T. and Ang (2002):

There is a perceived vital link between the well-being of people and sustained

> economic growth. Social development focuses on both the participation of citizens as well as economic growth that results in the enhancement of wages and lifestyle. Social development, or a 'people centred approach', is thus an investment in people to become more productive citizens (p. 38).

Thus the availability and stability of jobs (eradication of poverty), economic prosperity (sustained employment) and relative peace (social integration) are important ingredients for the success of social welfare (Sen, 1999, as cited in Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002).

In its effort to involve its citizens in socio-economic development and community building, the government has set up numerous channels for public discussion on national issues and policies such as the setting up of a strong Feedback Unit, Vision 1999 – The Next Lap – consisting of six advisory councils (on the disabled, the aged, sports and recreation, youth, culture and the arts, and family and community life), the Singapore-21 Committee and most recently the Remaking Singapore Committee to channel people's ideas, concerns and dissatisfaction over Singapore's public policy. Despite all these efforts, Singapore's public policy have been widely criticized as top-down and paternalistic (Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002). Strong government views and fiery public opinions via official feedback channels and public forums form the basis of today's hot debates.

Major Social Changes and Current National and Social Concerns in Singapore

There are four major inter-related social changes with accompanying social issues that the Singapore government needs to monitor closely. These are: (1) the high rate of

unemployment as a result of the current economic recession and the increasing income disparity amongst Singaporeans, (2) racial and religious tension leading to racial and religious disharmony and terrorism, (3) globalization and brain drain amongst Singapore's most educated and successful citizens, and (4) an increasing aged population.

Economic downturn and income disparity

Two kinds of measures are needed to combat poverty and the economic downturn. In eradicating poverty, long-ranged measures such as investments in education and training and access to social opportunities must be undertaken to ensure upward social mobility. Shorter-term measures are residual in nature where adequate provisions must be made available to those who are in dire financial needs and incentive schemes to promote and maintain the work ethics (Tan, N.T.& Ang, 2002).

Retrenchment in Singapore had been episodic with a loss of 29,086 workers in 1998. This was negligible since there were 120,300 jobs created in 1997 (Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002). However, there are no statutory retrenchment benefits under the Singapore Employment Act. Retrenchment benefits are negotiated on a case by case basis. Many short-term financial schemes by Central Development Councils (CDCs) were made available to retrenched Singaporeans for up to six months. Community funds such as the temple Heart Fund and the Love Singapore Fund set up by 35 churches also offered financial aid to families in need. Provisions of subsidies for housing, healthcare and incentives like tax reductions, the Economic Restructuring Shares (ERS) are means to help Singaporeans to maintain an acceptable livelihood. Rules on the use of Central Provident Funds (CPF) were

relaxed to ease mortgage payments for housing instalments for those in need. Higher Medisave limits (a compulsory medical fees saving scheme for salaried Singaporeans under the CPF Scheme) was initiated to help Singaporeans pay less cash for their medical expenses. The Medisave Scheme was extended to cover more medical treatments. The Housing & Development Board (HDB) also eases instalment payments by allowing lower monthly repayments or a freeze of monthly repayments from six months to a year. The amount owing will either make up for a longer repayment period or higher monthly payments within the original payment period after the freeze payment period ends (Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002).

Perhaps the most notable social safety net and strategy advocated by the government is the 'new social compact' policy outlined by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in his National Day Rally Speech in 2001 . This strategy ensures that:

1. all Singaporeans will receive heavy subsidies in housing, education and healthcare,
2. budget surpluses will be redistributed to all Singaporeans, and
3. more aid will be given to help the very poor who fall behind the 'new economy'. (Goh, C.T., 2001, p. 17)

With rising retrenchments and high unemployment prevailing in Singapore, unionists are now being attacked by dissatisfied workers for being pro-management and pro-government as they did not save jobs nor were they able to strike better retrenchment packages for those affected. The most heated industrial dispute between unions and

management involved the Air Line Pilots Association of Singapore (Alpa-S) against Singapore International Airlines (SIA). Alpa-S was warned by Acting Manpower Minister, Dr Ng Eng Hen not to be confrontational and self-serving. With Apha-S out-voting their leaders, the Minister is fearful that the long-standing strong tripartite relationship between government, employers and unions is now undermined (Soh & Goh, C.L., 2003). He further criticized the union in its failure to consider the fact that it took the government years to build up the air hub.

One of the long-ranged measures undertaken was the launch of the Skills Redevelopment Programme (SRP) in 1998 by the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) to retrain 40,000 workers over a period of two years. Employers can claim up to a certain portion of the worker's absentee payroll. In addition, the government will provide interest free loans to help workers pay for their course fees in courses that are relevant to the new knowledge economy (Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002). Other long-ranged measures include wage reforms. Wage reforms today are drastic and urgent for Singapore to stay competitive. International markets are shifting to developing countries where labour cost is cheaper. Labour cost in Singapore has risen tremendously over the years and the government uses civil servants' pay as an illustration of how it now pays more than what the private sector pays. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, in his 2003 National Day Rally Speech, does not want a wage system that hires and fires which he finds to be ruthless but a system of wage restructuring so that less jobs are lost (Goh, C.T., 2003). Despite having said this, retrenchments are high because multinational and regional companies in Singapore follow the hire and fire policy of their overseas headquarters.

Despite all efforts to revive the Singapore economy, unemployment reached its highest point in September 2003 to 111,100 or 5.6% (Ministry of Manpower, 2003). Jobs continued to dip as a result of the SARS epidemic outbreak. The Singapore Prime Minister's National Day Rally Speech on 17 August 2003, urged Singaporeans to look ahead and not to feel threatened by the recession, the SARS epidemic and terrorism. He referred to a Chinese verse:

> Where the hills and streams end and there seems to be no road ahead, amidst shady willows and blooming flowers, another village appears." In other words, when all seems lost, there is hope. Tonight, I want to assure you that we are not lost. I will show you the way out of the gloomy valley, and up into the sunny highlands (Goh, C.T., 2003, p. 1).

By 2003, more job fairs were organized and many manpower conversion schemes were jointly initiated by the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS)[1] and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) to help the unemployed to find work in sectors where jobs are still available. The Economic Development Board (EDB) has been actively identifying areas of employment and growth. To maintain competitiveness for businesses to survive and grow, "The government, together with the community, responded to the situation through a host of measures, which provided relief for business costs, enhancing economic infrastructure and capabilities, and stabilized volatile sectors of the economy" (Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002, p. 44).

[1] Renamed as 'Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports' (MCYS) as of 1 Sep 2004.

The sector that has the highest number of jobs created is the social service sector. The social service market is both elastic and viable for many job seekers. Both training-on-the-job and formal training courses are available. Jobs in the social service sector can be increased readily since most social service agencies personnel have high caseloads. Schemes like VWO Capability Funds (VCF) for voluntary welfare organizations can be used to fund manpower, pilot projects, new services and consultancy services. In a short space of time, the social service sector became vibrant and gained national publicity. Job fairs for the social service sector held over the past two years attracted thousands of job seekers.

In his effort to encourage Singaporeans during this economic downturn, the Prime Minister's National Day Rally Speech (2003) reminded all Singaporeans of how Singapore survived with tough measures undertaken in the 1960s and early 1970s amidst poor economic conditions, the British withdrawal from Singapore, harsh labour union policies and poor political ties with Malaysia. He emphasized that Singapore's current political and social environment are more stable today than in the 1960s and any disputes with Malaysia had been handled by peaceful means rather than by warfare (Goh, C.T., 2003). Within this relatively comfortable social and political backdrop, Singaporeans need to face another reality today that harsh government measures might have to be undertaken again to survive the current crisis. The government will thus show the way.

Racial and religious tension, and terrorism

Singapore has close economic and social ties with its neighbouring countries, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia. Political and social unrests in these countries will have spill-over effects in Singapore, especially amongst the Malay and Muslim Singaporeans. Currently, the most pressing and long-standing issues that Singapore faces with Malaysia are the water agreements of 1961 and 1962, the location of the Malaysian's custom, immigration and quarantine facilities, the redevelopment of the Malaysian Railway Land in Singapore (Tan, T.H., 2002) and the Pulau Batu Puteh (Horsburgh Lighthouse) territorial claims.

In light of this delicate backdrop, Singapore has been actively promoting social integration of its ethnic groups through public education, social and housing policies. In helping to build an active citizenship and a civil society, professional associations, religious and cultural groups have launched many initiatives to help their communities. There are heightened interests in keeping neighbourhoods clean and safe and to help the less fortunate. Dr Kanwaljit Soin, a Nominated Member of Parliament, once said:

> For as long as people don't ask the question 'what is the kind of Singapore we want to leave our children' and do not act on the question, then attitudes will take a long time to change and the process of evolving civil society will be slower (Soin, 1995, as quoted in Koh, S., 2000, p. 2).

In the two years following the September 11 attack on the twin-tower in New York, great efforts have been placed to reinforce understanding and appreciation of the different

cultures and ethnic groups by initiating cultural exchange programmes such as cross-dressing in cultural costumes during ethnic festivals and attending cultural celebrations including religious events. Singapore Ministers of Parliament together with grassroots leaders often take the lead to model for all Singaporeans the importance of racial and religious harmony and tolerance. In fact, 'Inter-racial Confidence Circles' were formed in January 2002 comprising of various racial, religious, social educational and business organizations to promote social and religious cohesion (Chan, K.M., 2002). Annually, the religious leaders of the major religions in Singapore gather to observe the beginning of the New Year by setting up joint religious activities. Despite all these, the most recent threats towards racial and religious harmony have been the issue of banning the 'tudung' (head-scarf) in schools and terrorism by Muslim factional groups. Once again, the Malay Singaporean's loyalty has been questioned.

In a Straits Times article by Teo (2003) entitled 'A Malay general in the SAF? Why not, says DPM', Deputy Prime Minister, BG Lee Hsien Loong revisited a debate on the role of the Malays in the military. He commented that whilst in the past it would have been difficult for a Malay officer to uphold loyalty to the country when faced with enemies of the same religion and race, he feels that the situation now has changed. More Malays are better educated and they are found in diverse professions. There are more Malays who are ready to take on bigger responsibilities. He further commented that Singapore still needs to continually work together to strengthen both social cohesion and a sense of national identity. BG Lee cited the September 11 attack on the twin-tower in New York and how Malay leaders in Singapore had made a clear stand on the matter and set the tone to contain

the problem amongst the Muslim community in the country (Teo, 2003). Singaporeans need to continually work on social cohesion and not rest on its laurel of success in containing terrorism. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, in his National Day Rally Speech 2003, alerted Singaporeans that the fight against terrorism will take a long time as the fight is not against a major organization but an ideological movement with sympathizers all over the world.

Globalization and brain drain

The new generations of Singaporeans after the post-war baby boom years in the mid-1940s to mid-1960s are better educated today. In June 1998, 19.8% of Singaporeans have at least a post secondary education or a diploma qualification, an increase of 6.4% for a period of ten years. In the same period, those with university qualifications rose from 5.5% to 14%. Those with below primary education decreased from 19.6% in 1988 to 14.4% in June 1998 (Sen, 1999, as cited in Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002). With a better educated population and the current movement towards regionalization and globalization, it is inevitable for Singaporeans to want to emigrate to take advantage of worldwide opportunities for professional and personal growth. Many Singaporeans are worried about their children's education and their chances of success in life. The Singapore education system is deemed to be harsh and job markets look bleak.

An interesting development in Singapore is the establishment of overseas offices by the Economic Development Board (EDB) to talent scout Singaporeans who work overseas to return home to serve their country. The other dual objective is to harvest ample

opportunities for Singapore's firms to compete internationally. Mr Chua Taik Him, Assistant Managing Director of EDB reiterated the EDB's formula in creating 'honeycomb-like communities' for researchers, innovators, venture capitalists and end-users to meet, exchange ideas and concepts and set up new companies to commercialize them. Many Singaporean researchers have been poached by US companies (Chellam, 2003). The attractiveness of higher earning power overseas will continue to attract emigration and overseas employment. In its place, highly skilled foreign talents from developing countries will flood the local market in Singapore to fill in the employment gaps (Gibson, 2000). One of EDB's solutions is to set up regional networks such as the Singapore Centre of Photonics Excellence and the Photonics Association of Singapore where US companies come to Singapore to look for local possibilities. Mr Chua commented that Singapore needs to proactively bring about new market connections (Chellam, 2003).

The issue of attracting foreign talent to Singapore is a critical move by the government to make Singapore a global city. Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew was quoted in the Business Times on 19 February 2003:

> If we do not attract, welcome and make foreign talent feel comfortable in Singapore, we will not be a global city and if we are not a global city, it doesn't count for much. The days of being a regional city, that's over (Chong, V., 2003, para. 2).

It was estimated that there are one million foreigners in Singapore and they are contributing to the economy. Some are representing Singapore in competitive sports (Chong, V., 2003).

With low birth rates and an ageing population, foreign talents will be part of Singapore's 'talent capital' to provide the competitive edge in the new millennium (Mah, 1999).

In its alignment of public policy on building 'talent capital', one of the most recent controversial moves made by the Singapore government is the public acknowledgement that gays in Singapore must be accepted as a part of Singapore society. It appears that the Singapore government is beginning to recognize that many talented gay Singaporeans have emigrated because of a lack of tolerance by both government and society. Singapore needs all its talented human resources to remake Singapore as a vibrant new society. The liberalization of social rules of conduct is to allow Singaporeans greater freedom to make decisions themselves. Today, setting up a speaker's corner, incentive schemes to attract foreign talents, bar-top dancing, bungee jumping and allowing the employment of gays in highly sensitive government jobs are the government's risk-taking and experimentation efforts to inject new ideas and integrate diversity in the Singapore society (Goh, C.T., 2003). The government needs to focus on the needs and livelihood of minority groups in a pluralistic society like Singapore. The approach is to be inclusive rather than being exclusive.

A greying population

In 1989, the median age of Singaporeans was 28.3. In 2001, the median age has increased to 34.4 (Vasoo, 2002). One in five Singaporeans or 796,000 people will be aged 65 years and above by 2030. Singapore is thus one of the fastest growing greying Asian countries with an expected 37.2% growth from 2000-2030 (Lee, M. & Lim, A., 2002). In

1990, there were 7.5 adult working persons per one aged person. By 2030, this will be reduced to only two adult working persons per one aged person (Shantakumar, 1994). Singapore has placed high value on the family as the foundation block for nation building. Filial piety and other strong Confucian Ethics are still preserved in the Singapore society. In a National Survey of Senior Citizens in 1995, 84% of the elderly in Singapore still live with their families (Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002). Future implications of a greying population would be the increasing burden and stress in providing for the aged sick elderly in smaller families and a higher reliance on community support networks for elder care (Vasoo, 2002).

To encourage older Singaporeans to remain economically active, the Employment Act (Part-time Employees) Regulations in October 1996 was enacted to encourage retirees and economically inactive women to rejoin the workforce. The retirement age was also raised from 60 to 62 in January 1999. The government hopes to gradually increase the retirement age to 67 to combat a probable decline of economically active people in the 21st Century (Tan, N.T. & Ang, 2002).

In 1999, an Inter-Ministerial Committee Report on Ageing Population (IMC) had made 70 recommendations to prepare for an ageing population. Three branches within the Elderly Development Division (EDD) of the Ministry of Community Development & Sports (MCDS) were set up to ensure the implementation of its recommendations. The three branches cover policy development, public education and services for the elderly. The 'new old' was a term coined to denote a new generation of elderly who will be more educated, have better buying power, are in a better position to advocate and obtain more benefits, and will continue to be economically viable. Already, in a survey of 42 'new old'

respondents who are currently between the ages of 37-59 years old undertaken by the Gerontological Society Singapore, more than 71% of them prefer to work past their retirement age. Ninety-three percent want to continually upgrade themselves when they grow old. It is also envisaged that many of the 'new old' will take on the entrepreneurial challenge and start enterprising second careers after their retirement. However, the central concerns of the government will be to assist the 'new old' to stay healthy and live a healthy lifestyle so as not to over-burden the younger Singaporeans with having to juggle with employment, family, elder-care and high medical bills. The single elderly who lack familial support will be of great concern in the future (Lee, M.& Lim, A., 2002).

It is envisaged that some older Singaporeans will still lag behind despite efforts to promote their employability. Social work lecturer, Dr Kalyani Mehta, is concerned with ageing women in Singapore and would like the IMC address the need for more gender-based needs and services for the elderly. She is concerned for mothers who have not worked for a long time and thus have fewer resources for old age. These women will have little or no provident funds to fall back on. The other areas of concern will be ageism and changing public opinion about ageing (Lee, M. & Lim, A., 2002). MCDS together with agencies for the elderly will work together to tackle these problems.

In Summary

The Singapore government has handled the social issues that accompany social change very well with new innovative strategies. The government tries to involve its citizens through constant dialogues and debates over public policy issues and then promote its strategies for change through very strong public education campaigns. Nevertheless, there are still some strong areas in public policy that the government will not waver nor leave it to both public and professional opinions.

Did social work in Singapore adapt itself to prevailing social change?

Social work practice has been influenced by emergent social circumstances and practice methodologies since the 1900s. These social work practices range from psychoanalytical approaches in the 1920s to institutional approaches, group work and community organizing, social reforms, and systems and ecological perspectives of the 1980s (Dubios & Miley, 2002). Thus though the mission and purpose of social work rarely changes, the nature of social work activities do differ (Dubios & Miley, 2002).

Mr Chan Chee Seng, former Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs (1971) urged social workers to take the lead to effect social change by adopting a developmental-orientation in social action. Voluntary welfare organizations (VWOs) were also encouraged to spearhead social welfare planning and to tap into new services (Chan, C.S., 1972). In his speech at the Inaugural Dinner and Dance of the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) in 1971, he gave the following advice to social workers:

The process of social change is a complicated one, and it involves cross-sectoral

> planning with the participation of various Ministries and departments and community agencies associated with our social objectives and planning … A viable social programme based on the development-oriented approach must be the concerted effort of the entire community …for the last ten years because of the urgent tasks of national consolidation, we have placed national purposes above social purposes, even at the risk of unpopularity. It is, therefore, expected that in the years ahead, greater emphasis will be laid on social aspects of development and on the acceleration of the process of social transformation which has already become evident over the last few years (Chan, C.S., 1972, p. 1).

Prevention of social problems through group work and community work was SASW's emphasis in its early years of formation. Vasoo (1972) then as President of SASW outlined three challenges for social workers: resourcefulness, community networking and research oriented . Social work in Singapore has taken advantage of innovative practices of the West in social casework. The 1960s and 1970s were highly influenced by psychodynamic theories with Transactional Analysis (TA) as the focal point in the mid-1980s. The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), amongst other civil service institutions, was promoting TA to its administrative arm. Treatment focus was very much individual-oriented. Group work with children and youth caught up during this period and this approach was popular with addiction cases. Social service agencies in Singapore have not failed to explore and adapt appropriate treatment methodologies in serving their clients.

With the setting up of the Family Resource and Training Centre (FRTC) in 1992, a training arm of SASW, the Association has been focusing on the training of social workers in family-oriented work. FRTC initiated a diploma programme in family therapy. The only other diploma programme in family therapy was offered by Counselling & Care Centre (CCC). Whilst the family therapy programme offered by FRTC was short-lived, the one offered by CCC has been able to sustain its popularity till today. The Centre continues to provide specialist training in working with children and youth, parenting skills and family life education. Its clientele includes teachers, childcare workers, social workers and other helping professionals. FRTC launched the Family 1st Convention on 27 July 2002 and have also started to host a radio-talk show on family matters. Renowned professionals working with children, youth and family were invited to speak on the shows.

Before Year 2000, SASW was not as successful in advocating for social workers' involvement in regional and international social work. Being a relatively young profession in Singapore, social workers have not reached the stage of professional development to be knowledgeable in international and comparative social policy and social work. Social workers were still 'fire-fighting' over high caseloads, high turnover, and treatment modalities than to be equipped with advocacy at the national and international fronts. In the period before 1990s, there were few social workers who have travelled and studied overseas. There was a dire lack of exposure on political and economic implications on social work. The government, through the former Ministry of Social Affairs and the Singapore Council of Social Service, took the lead in setting the direction for social service planning in the 1970s-1980s.

Early papers presented by SASW addressed issues of child protection, youth on the fringe, erosion of family values and poverty. Unfortunately, such papers were original papers written by social workers for their agencies who have sent them for overseas-training, attachments and conferences. A quick review of the Association's journal, Social Dimension, also indicated that many of the articles posted from 1972 to mid-1980s were foreign materials. In recent years, there have been an increase of local articles but the publication of Social Dimension has not been regular.

The mid-1990s witnessed an influx of social workers pursuing overseas studies. More funding was available to provide for scholarships and government agencies such as restructured hospitals are also sponsoring medical social workers for specialist training at master's level. The National University of Singapore (NUS) has also commenced a master programme in social work via coursework. This marks the beginning of change in social work as more social workers are not only better educated, they are also well-connected with their overseas counterparts and many are more open to changing the image of social work in the country.

One significant contribution by SASW was in the mid-1980s when Singapore plunged into recession. SASW initiated a task force to look at the social implications of unemployment and retrenchment. It also came up with a guide for employers and workers to look into individual and family well-being in a time of crisis. More recently as a result of the SARS outbreak, medical social workers at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (the government designated SARS hospital) looked into the impact of SARS on healthcare workers and have

documented their experiences handling the epidemic. SASW has also been asked by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) to provide safe-practice guidelines at the workplace for social workers during the SARS outbreak. SASW has also made representations to the Remaking Singapore Committee on its vision on social planning and social welfare, particularly in the area of developing the human capital.

In the past two years, SASW has officially formed an international relations committee for the purpose of networking with social workers all over the world. In 2001, SASW together with the National University of Singapore (NUS), the International Federation of Social Workers (Asia Pacific) hosted the 16th Asia-Pacific Social Work Conference bringing many delegates from all over the world to Singapore. Playing co-host to foreign social workers, SASW thus planted the seeds for more opportunities for attachment, exchange programmes and study trips. Currently, NUS has a team of social workers who are involved in a project mission to a third world country. Most recently, Ms Antonina Dashkina, the current President of the Union of Social Workers and Social Pedagogues, visited Singapore in November 2003 and a sharing session for social workers was initiated by SASW.

SASW has taken steps to be inclusive in as many aspects of social work as far as possible. Through advocacies by social workers themselves, committees have been set up to look into standards of practice, voluntary registration of social workers, and interest groups have been formed for family work, school social work and working with the elderly. These committees and task forces look into the future of social work in these specializations.

Some areas for improvement …

One major concern about social workers in Singapore is the lack of social workers wanting to take on administrative functions. In 1980, there was only one social worker holding a chairman's position out of 101 non-government welfare and social agencies affiliated to the Singapore Council of Social Service. This one chairman was the President of the Singapore Association of Social Workers (Tan, B.W., 1981). Many social service agencies today still do not have social workers as heads of agencies. This has serious implications on both supervision and practice aspects. Whilst there are reasons why social workers are not picked to be Chairpersons of the Board of Directors of some social service agencies, most agencies will not mind to have a social worker as the head of a centre who performs mainly professional and executive functions.

There are also not enough social workers that volunteer their services for their professional association. This is however understandable because of the competing demand between fulfilling one's work obligations and still have the time to commit oneself to professional matters at the professional association. Unless social workers begin to see the value of integrating their professional work at agency level with SASW, the image of social work will not change much. The laurels of successful social workers will remain an agency's pride and will not be seen by the public as a collective pride of a profession.

Whilst unionists are losing their foothold in times of a recession and with the economy remaining bleak, social workers are slow in offering their professional services to corporations to help to promote workers' well-being such as Work Life Programmes.

Social workers should look beyond networking with schools to provide school-based services and explore attractive corporate packages in enhancing wellness programmes for workers. Social workers need to be skilled in performing organizational diagnosis and needs assessment, conduct in-house training on interpersonal relationships, consulting on personnel policies and identifying high-risk population at the workplace (Tan, B.W., 1983).

Futuring social work

Will social policy that worked in good times fail us in times of crisis? It might and it certainly needs fine-tuning. Social workers must be forthcoming and be enterprising to offer professional expertise in this aspect.

Tan, N.T. (2002) identified four social work practice strategies to build a new Singapore: (1) social development and community orientations, (2) collaborative and multidisciplinary approaches, (3) preventing and conflict management, and (4) research and innovation. He hopes that social workers will embrace a broader developmental context and work towards corporate citizenship. Of the four practice strategies outlined by Tan, N.T. (2002), social workers need to further improve on performing advocacy functions, be effective in conflict management and be innovative. More social workers in Singapore must be prepared to take on advocacy work in the many committees and task forces set up by the government. There must be more representations from all sectors of the profession. Currently, there are two social workers in Parliament – one other has retired from Parliament recently. There are too few social workers in national committees that look into

social issues such as the poor and the aged. More could be done if only there are wider interest and representations.

The one major challenge for SASW in the near future is to aggressively market its vision and to actively promote membership and registration. SASW needs a strong and collective voice to enhance the image of the profession.

ATTACHMENTS:

Term Paper 3: Repositioning Social Work And SASW

(Submitted on 29th February 2004)

I shall attempt to write this paper primarily as the Immediate Past President of the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) and being also one of the Association's key officials over the past two years as its President in driving the voluntary registration of social workers in the country. My current portfolio is to implement the voluntary registration system and to help chart the future direction of the Association. I have outlined the historical and developmental accounts of social work and social change in Singapore in my second term paper. I shall attempt to write this paper from my personal viewpoint of the positioning of social work in Singapore by modifying the brand positioning framework as a guide, as developed by the Strategic Marketing and Research Techniques (SMART) © 1992-2001. Through this modified framework, I shall also attempt to discuss the factors and methods that I am using to help fellow social workers appreciate the importance of repositioning the Association and the relevance of their contributions to the profession. The impetus to register social workers in Singapore will be discussed in my next paper. Henceforth, I will only focus on some key social work issues faced by SASW and leave international comparisons amongst professional associations for my doctoral project.

Current Position of Social Work in Singapore

Social work is both a profound and an ambiguous profession. It is profound in its core values and mission but ambiguous in its practice. Social work is able to own wholly its mission and values as these are distinctive to the profession, but not its methodologies and skills in helping. Even after having said this, it is of no surprise that the mission and values of social work also appeal to and are shared by many others who are philanthropists and volunteers. After all, social work values are also human values (Tan, N.T. & Envall, 2000).

To Mattaini (1995), many functions of social work practice could be effectively performed by paraprofessionals and bachelor's level staff. This ambiguity of what constitutes social work practice could be a probable reason why many younger social workers in Singapore do not identify themselves wholly with the profession as they could have found it difficult to attribute their competencies to be purely social work based. Many interventions by social workers have gone beyond the three classical social work functions of "restoration of impaired capacity, provision of individual and social resources, and prevention of social dysfunction" that have been long ingrained in social workers as far back as the 1950s (Boehm, 1958, p. 18).

Identification with Social Work Practice

Inadequate practicum resulting in under-identification with social work practice

Until recently, most social workers in Singapore are practising with only an undergraduate degree majoring in social work. The practicum requirement of the social work major under the National University of Singapore (NUS) has undergone critical

changes over the years. The practicum requirement has declined over the years from three student placements to two, and most recently as of the Academic Year 2001/2002, student placements have been reduced to only one compulsory placement. The decline in placements was the consequent of NUS' move away from a specialist / professional education within an arts and social sciences faculty, and by adopting a liberal arts education instead. The decline in the number of student placements was not compensated by any increase in the number of hours of placement. Not only was there a decline in the number of student placements, many social work students were not exposed to social casework during their student placements. Not all had the luxury of being supervised by qualified social workers grounded in sound supervisory skills.

Beginning social workers armed with a social work major from NUS have mainly their theoretical foundations in social work to fall back on. Being a qualified social worker via a social work education does not ensure practice competence (Tan, B.W., 1981). Despite having social work students grounded in basic communication skills, many of them had problems in interviewing their clients. Many needed close supervision on-the-job. Not all of them had trained social workers as supervisors. Some beginning social workers practise alone as their agencies could not afford to employ more social workers.

Beginning social workers without the proper guidance by qualified social workers could not comprehend meaningfully what social work practice is. They have to struggle with assessment and intervention. They are pressured to show competence not only by their employers but by their clients. Their on-the-job learning becomes skewed to what works for them and who imparted the necessary knowledge and skills to them. Social work

practice is thus often not understood nor acknowledged under such circumstances. This further leads to under-identification with social work practice and the profession.

The attractiveness of other modalities of helping

Social workers exist alongside many other helping professionals, namely psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors, family therapists and many other new and emerging mental health professions. A step-by-step approach towards rapport-building, assessment and intervention as in the Egan's Problem-solving Model no longer fits in practice today where there are pressures of time from agencies and clients alike.

Since counselling in social casework is only one aspect of the many roles and skills of a social worker, counselling skills are usually taught as an introductory module in most schools of social work. However, social workers are expected by society to deal with deviant behaviours and social disorganization where counselling, on top of mediation and advocacy skills to reintegrate individuals to their social environments, inevitably becomes an important function (Siporin, 1975). Yet, the training of social workers in counselling and group work skills in undergraduate social work programmes remains insufficient.

Beginning counsellors who have undergraduate or post-graduate degrees in counselling or counselling psychology tend to have deeper insights, knowledge and skills in counselling than beginning social workers. Many specific practices in social work are clinical practices derived from other professions (McDonald & Jones, 2000). It becomes a fashion in Singapore that many social service personnel, including social workers, would want to be known as counsellors or family therapists. Other than merely exploring and

helping clients with their practical problems, social workers want to look into counselling to transform their clients.

The general public could be holding the view that social casework encompasses mundane ordinary tasks that do not require very profound training. This is despite the fact that social workers sometimes struggle with their own value orientations and ethical dilemmas. This problem lies with the humble beginnings of social work as a noble profession to help eradicate societal ills. The attractiveness of having a higher social status and skills as in some other helping professions soon pulled many prominent social workers away from their profession. One other pull factor has been the availability of specialized courses in some of these helping professions in Singapore whereas there was little opportunity for educational advancement in social work before Year 2000. Specialist courses in social work were not that readily available then. For many years, social work education enhancement in Singapore was only a research degree at the master's level.

Social work as a magnanimous service to the disadvantaged

Social work as a profession and social workers being professionally trained are yet to gain public knowledge. After all, the education of social workers was at the vocational preparatory level and was not deemed to be an appropriate undergraduate programme about half a century ago (Dubios & Miley, 2002; Wee, A., 2002). In Singapore, social work education at an undergraduate degree level only started in 1968 (Wee, A., 2002). Even up to today, the social work curricula have been grounded with a broad knowledge of the

liberal arts (Mattaini, 1995). A social worker's education is thus deemed to be broad in its scope of studies.

Social workers are still depicted to be volunteers by both the public and the media. Social workers are generally perceived to be working or helping out at social service agencies and social work departments of public hospitals. Many are of the view that social work is mainly about providing financial relief to the poor and helping the needy with their social problems, a crucial role as depicted by social work pioneers (Siporin, 1975). Social work is thus perceived by many to be a generalist occupation with many committed and devoted helpers in many sectors of society, and that social work requires only minimal training. The general public values the intrinsic value of social work and social workers but know very little about the profession.

As far back as in the 1970s, Siporin depicted social work as not having clear-cut boundaries nor the monopoly of its knowledge and functions (Siporin, 1975). Various professional methods have been deployed by social workers to promote self-sufficiency, social integration and social change (National Association of Social Workers, 2000). According to Edward T. Devine (1922), the "unifying element in social work lies in common social problems with which it is concerned, rather than in a common method or motive" (p. 19). This again underplays the importance of a clearly articulated unifying method of social work practice. Social work remains a multifaceted profession (NASW, 2000) and this connotation has been well accepted within and outside the profession and thus does not significantly contribute towards social work to be of a lower status profession (Gibelman, 1999).

Leadership in Social Work

Despite being in existence for more than 30 years, the Association only managed to employ its first full-time administrative staff to help in the proper running of the Association in 2002. By January 2004, the Association employed its first full-time social worker as Project Manager. Its initial effort to employ a director did not materialize as it failed to attract highly dynamic and well qualified Singaporean social workers who could lead the Association well. Many local social workers prefer direct service than indirect work such as in policy and social administration. The Association's leadership thus rests on its Executive Committee, all of whom are volunteers.

The Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) being the national professional body for social workers is undoubtedly, by default, the key authority representing social work practice and standards. Whilst SASW had in the past made some significant contributions towards the professionalization of social workers, these were done on an ad hoc basis rather than in a regular and strategic manner. The post of 'president' changed every one to two years making it extremely difficult for the Association to have continuity and a clear direction. Whilst a two-year term was common, there were only two presidents who served more than two years in the history of the Association. Most of the other executive committee members did not serve more than two conservative one-year terms.

In the Association's history of presidents, eight of the seventeen presidents were academicians whilst the rest were senior social work practitioners. Two other presidents

had close ties with NUS as external lecturers. This enabled the Association to have strong ties with the Department of Social Work & Psychology (DSWAP) of the National University of Singapore (NUS). Past Presidents of SASW who were academicians were able to influence senior social work practitioners through the Association. This tie-up of academicians and senior social work practitioners should be crucial towards the recognition of the Association as a body of professional social workers. However, this recognition has not been widespread since very few social workers join the Association as members.

Prior to 2001, SASW was only able to attract two to three hundred odd social workers as members of the Association. Many did not join the Association because they felt that there were little benefits from joining. Membership events for each year were minimal and very few members participated in it. There were also competition between agencies and the Association over enlisting social workers' help in committee work and in organizing professional events. Many social workers had to struggle with high caseloads and were not able to do more for the Association. It was thus apparent that SASW's leadership as a professional body did not succeed in influencing social work nationally.

The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) have a more direct relationship with social service agencies than SASW. MCYS is primarily responsible for shaping social policies and in governing statutory cases whereas NCSS provides the infrastructure and funding for agencies to provide social services. There is a more obvious interdependent relationship between social service agencies and MCYS / NCSS than for SASW. Many governments in the world are privatizing. Government's activities are reduced to merely providing for the

very needy (Ife, 1999). MCYS and NCSS, through funding social services, have the legitimate means to obtain statistical profiles and reports of clients for services rendered, provide avenues to ensure that staff are adequately paid and professionally trained for the job, and to ensure the continuing providence of relevant social services for the country. In a sense, SASW can also play an influencing role in these matters but only under a tripartite arrangement. It must therefore gain the support and acceptance of MCYS and NCSS. It must legitimize its roles and functions as a professional body. SASW must therefore reposition itself in order to play a more pivotal role in professionalizing social work and be recognized as a national leader in social work.

Positioning Opportunities for the Association

There are strong undercurrents between funding, accountability and service orientation amongst social service agencies, and between them and the government. Funding controls the kind of services and programmes that the government wants to make available to its people. Not every social service agency wants to provide certain types of services or go into a particular specialty area. The government, through the efforts of MCYS and NCSS, needs to macro-plan a comprehensive range of services and programmes for all sectors of the country. It has to help to rectify any gaps, shortfalls and over-supply of certain services within a sector e.g. in elder care or as in services for children and youth. It is a delicate balance for the government and social service agencies to mutually agree on a common philosophy and vision, a common platform and a common yardstick. The

government influences agencies' decisions by providing the necessary capital and funding required for starting new services and programmes.

Whilst the government has solicited the support of the Head of the Department of Social Work & Psychology (DSWAP), who is also a NCSS's Board Member, to chair forums and workshops on service planning and delivery it has not actively sought the voice of SASW in such matters that have dire professional implications. For some years now, SASW has planted the Head of DSWAP to be its official representative to NCSS's Board of Governance. Despite this, it appears that his headship appointment at DSWAP overshadows his appointment as SASW's representative.

SASW also has representations with the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), Singapore Professional Centre (SPC), Singapore Council of Women Organizations (SCWO), the newly setup Social Service Training Institute (SSTI), and the Family Resource & Training Centre (FRTC) which is the training arm of the Association. Although SASW has representations in these key aspects, it lacks a concerted and a strategic approach in positioning both the Association and social work as the authority and the key profession amongst the helping professions. SASW representatives have been reporting issues and events to the Association's Executive Committee but there was no 'party' vision, agenda and strategies to strengthen the Association's influence and stand as a professional body. SASW must therefore strategize in order to tap into its opportunities well.

Repositioning and Expanding Frontiers

In this section, I will outline the positioning opportunities for the Association. According to the Marketing And Research Techniques guidelines (SMART):

> Positions are based upon consumer perceptions, which may or may not reflect reality. A position is effectively built by communicating a consistent message to consumers about the product and where it fits into the market – through advertising, brand name, and packaging (Strategic Marketing And Research Techniques, 2004, para. 2).

Henceforth, SASW needs:

1. to build up a strong leadership which can influence and negotiate for the Association;
2. to build professional legitimacy by representing all social workers in the country;
3. to build interest groups such as chapters within the Association;
4. to build strong national representation in social and community development; and
5. to develop best practice standards, professional development programmes and initiate the registration of social workers.

Strong leadership. In order to ensure continuity and succession of leadership, SASW must embark on a mission to find and convince the 'right' people to take up leadership positions. Being the President of the Association in 2001, I envisioned what the future of the Association might be and undertook a series of tasks to reorganize SASW and

its training arm, FRTC. Whilst I persuaded fellow social workers to be part of the Association, I had to also convince them that there will be a new future for the Association.

Efforts need to be made to convince social service agencies and social workers on the concept of mutuality. The social service agencies need to recognize the efforts that their social workers are putting in when they participate in the Association's activities. Likewise, SASW must recognize the professional development of social workers at the agency's level. There will also be opportunities for collaborative efforts between social service agencies and SASW in organizing professional events together. This is one aspect of how SASW could persuade the 'right' persons to hold leadership positions. SASW must make its future known to social workers and let them be a part of its new image.

Professional legitimacy. Social workers who did not join the Association could be holding the view that the Association has not done much for social workers and that they need no representation. In the past, non-members had little or no access to information about the Association. I felt that the only way to show cause for change is for both members and non-members to experience the change themselves.

Efforts were undertaken to build up an infrastructure where members could communicate with one another and to obtain information in the quickest way. Given the advancement of information technology and the internet, great efforts were placed on designing an interactive website with public forum, online chat and bulletin boards. The most useful aspect of the website has been the posting of events, training and employment opportunities. Compared to those days where snail mails were the only means to reach the

masses, electronic mass e-mailing and e-newsletters have proven to be very popular. Members began to show interest by updating the Association with their current e-mail addresses. Within two years, the website registered close to 10,000 hits (SASW, 2004). The Association is witnessing more requests to post employment advertisements. With this change in approach in reaching out to prospective members, the Association saw a huge growth in membership within the first year when the website was launched. Membership rose to over four hundred for qualified social workers and about a hundred social work students joined as student members.

Interest groups such as chapters. The Medical Social Workers (MSW) Chapter was the Association's first chapter formed in 2001. With the formation of the chapter, almost all medical social workers employed in the healthcare sector signed up as members. Before the chapter was officially formed, SASW was concerned whether the formation of such a chapter would signify that medical social workers wanted to break away from the Association. After all, the Singapore Association of Medical Social Workers (SAMSW) merged with other social work associations to form SASW in 1971. Contrary to this suspicion, medical social workers felt that their needs were better met through the chapter. It recognizes the importance of having only one voice for a small country like Singapore. Already, the chapter's existence has been made known to the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Chapter also managed to have an audience with the Minister for Health to discuss professional matters.

The social work profession in Singapore has not advanced itself as quickly as its counterparts in the developed countries, nurses and therapists who have successfully claimed new or expanded frontiers for their professions. Social workers in Singapore are still looking into formulating practice standards. Both SASW and the MSW Chapter recognize that social workers from different practice fields must come together to re-evaluate practice standards, roles and functions and work towards better public awareness of the profession.

Following closely in the footsteps of the MSW Chapter, school social workers and family-service social workers wish to foster closer bond with the Association as they also believe in having one significant voice for social workers. The school social workers have already presented the School Social Workers Chapter proposal to the Association's Executive Committee in November 2003 and in-principle approval for the chapter to be formed was given.

Though the family-service social workers have not come together to form a chapter, they have met as an interest group to plan and implement a certificate programme for family social work practice. The other interest group that has been meeting quite regularly is the Gerontology Social Work Group. These interest groups and chapters are of paramount importance in shaping social work in Singapore and in gaining recognition from MCYS, NCSS, MOH and the public.

Strong national representation in social and community development. Social workers in Singapore are still very much agency-focused rather than profession-focused.

Since social work is highly influenced by external forces such as socio-economic and political climate, social workers should play a more active role in studying these factors and evaluate how people and society-at-large will be affected.

The government has set up a strong Feedback Unit and has been consistently asking for professionals to participate in it. SASW has indeed capitalized on some of the major committees such as Remaking Singapore Committee and some social workers have been involved in some other relevant committees relating to social and community development. Again, what SASW could do is to field and coordinate representations in these national committees so that the profession would be advanced through such mediums. This intent is one step nearer to the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) perspective of advising on the implications and effects of policies to committees and in partnering other disciplines and international agencies to define policies related to social welfare, political action and international development issues (NASW, 2000).

Best practice standards, professional development programmes and registration of social workers. One of SASW's core duties is to ensure that social workers have the competencies to practise effectively. The other core duty is to ensure that the public is protected from negligence and malpractices. These been the expected functions of the Association, SASW could take the lead by initiating dialogue sessions with social service agencies and to partner them in developing best social work practice guidelines and professional development programmes. One fundamental development in the history of

social work in Singapore is the development of a voluntary registration system. I will discuss the relevance of having a registration system in my next paper.

Market Segmentation

In today's competitive world, niche markets are preferred over mass markets. Under the Strategic Marketing And Research Techniques guidelines, market segmentation is "the process of partitioning markets into groups of potential customers with similar needs or characteristics who are likely to exhibit similar purchase behaviour" (Strategic Marketing And Research Techniques, 2004, para. 1). A three-step process is used in market segmentation.

Segment identification

SASW's niche markets are:

1. the government,
2. sponsors / donors,
3. employers of social workers,
4. associations of social workers,
5. schools of social work / training institutes,
6. social workers,
7. trained social workers not in social work positions,
8. prospective social work students, and
9. the public (particularly clienteles and course trainees).

Market selection

All the above-stated markets are important to the Association. With registration underway, many of the above-named markets will be targeted as important strategic partners and clienteles to SASW. For the purpose of this paper, I will only focus on the government as the key strategic partner in promoting social work.

There are many advantages in partnering the government in advancing social work and in professionalizing social workers. The most obvious reasons are:

1. obtaining funding,
2. tapping on ready networks,
3. sharing authority and recognition, and
4. sharing new initiatives for services and programmes.

However, there are currently two fundamental issues with this partnership.

Issue of trust and credibility. With the formation of SASW in 1971, the government, chiefly represented by MCYS and NCSS, was looking forward to SASW to play a key role in effecting social change and social action. For the past 30 odd years, SASW was slow in influencing social workers and social service agencies. The primary reason for this was the over-reliance on volunteers to run the Association for very limited terms of office. Despite this, the government helped with the initial setup of the FRTC in 1972 to boost the training of family service workers. FRTC has its own centre management but it has no legal entity. It was put under the jurisdiction of SASW as the government felt

that this arrangement was most appropriate at that time. It was most unfortunate that FRTC lost out as the key training resource centre when other training centres mushroomed in the mid-1990s. Though FRTC made a turnaround in 2000, competition had been stiff and it could not regain its former market share.

Without any significant change in SASW's direction and focus, it lost its appeal to the government as a voice for social workers in recent years. SASW managed to turnaround in 2001 when it concentrated on its efforts to remake SASW as a vibrant body of professionals. The government again showed interest in its efforts and a stronger connection was re-established. However, this might be short-lived because of undercurrents between SASW and the government over the different conceptions of what the registration system should be.

The twin-engines of social development and social control. Whilst the government pushes for social development initiatives, it does so through adopting many hard measures to distribute social services strategically and to enforce agency compliance. The government thus acts as an agent of social control on behalf of society. MCYS was often sought for its advice over the granting of highly subsidized rent for new social service agencies. NCSS has a say over funding and which social service agency to accord the 'Institute of Public Character' status for the purpose of tax-exemption for donors. The government recognizes that social service agencies have many 'wants' and if this is not well coordinated, there will be unnecessary wastage of welfare resources.

As for SASW, MCYS looks upon the Association to take the lead to register social workers and non-social work trained personnel who occupy social work positions. It also wishes that SASW would initiate the registration of social workers and counsellors together with the Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC). It was prepared to fund a secretariat for registration for both associations. In return, the government made the following requests:

1. that non-social work trained personnel who occupy social work positions are to be registered. The purpose is to accord recognition and status to these personnel and to legitimize their accountability for practice standards, and
2. that SASW could lead in the registration process as it has already completed its proposal for registration with a basic infrastructure in place.

SASW has deliberated on these requests and is particularly concerned about registering non-social work trained personnel as social workers. It also finds it difficult to work together with SAC on registration, given the different nature of the two professions and their different phases at registration at this point in time. These issues have yet to be resolved.

Marketing Positioning

It is hoped that when SASW succeeds in repositioning itself, it is more ready to market itself as the authority for social work and social workers.

Marketing positioning is about carving a market niche by searching out unique marketing advantages, seeking new segments or developing new approaches to solving old problems (Strategic Marketing And Research Techniques, 2004).

It is envisaged that SASW needs to adopt brand equity such as a catchy slogan that best reflects its profession. I am thinking of the following slogan to depict social workers as people-oriented:

The people professionals *…*
The career that makes a difference

Our mission is people, be it the individual, family or society. We are in the mission to help people cope in their environment and to advocate for their well-being.

I think these sums it all, that "people" represents the person holistically – that is spiritually, physically, emotionally, behaviourally and their well-being. No other helping professionals are as comprehensive as social workers in assessing, treating and advocating for any individual, be it as an individual person, a person in his / her family unit and in the larger society (person-in-environment fit). The word advocacy also reflects the policy aspects of social work where social workers influence structures and institutions alike to

make that difference for our clients. Social work is empowering, the career that makes a difference in people's lives. In a sense, the generalist nature of social work, though a setback in some way, is also a gain. We have the bird's eye view of the person and a meta-physical mindset in exploring social problems.

Conclusion

My primary role as the Immediate Past President of SASW is to try to redefine and brand social work so that the Singapore population is made aware of its existence, know what services it offers and know who it serves. Social work is constantly redefining itself (Tan, N.T., 2002). This might make my research and branding work more tedious but exciting and challenging. No other professions are "as self-examining and critically self-conscious as social work" (Kong, 1981, p. 40). However, it has yet to find "a boundary within which its activities are not only acceptable for a profession but also respected" (Kong, 1981, p. 41).

It has been said that internal factors within a profession either weaken or strengthen its claims of jurisdiction (Olson, 2001). As outlined in this paper, the current internal factors within SASW are less than satisfactory. It needs to critically examine outcome measures in its practice, an important requirement for funding. It does not have the full support of social service agencies or the mandate of the majority of social workers to meaningfully represent them. Similar to the general attitude of social workers in other countries such as Australia, social workers in Singapore are equally ambivalent about professionalizing social work (Jones, 2000, as cited in McDonald & Jones, 2000).

Henceforth, SASW needs to constantly build good relationship with both the government and social service agencies, and work in harmony with them to attain mutually beneficial goals.

The issue of 'product differentiation' between social work and other helping professions will be deliberated in my project as this demands deeper analysis of the professions in question. Nevertheless, social work needs to develop and sustain its share of the human service labour market (MacDonald, 2002). Lastly, whilst privatization allows the state to assert control over the private sector through fiscal measures (Dominelli, 1997). SASW must similarly legitimatize itself through the registration of social workers. Legislation might serve the dual purpose of public protection and in ensuring an acceptable professional standard.

ATTACHMENTS:

Term Paper 4: Scenario Planning: The Future Of Social Work And SASW

(Submitted on 26th March 2004)

In concluding my papers, I shall attempt to envisage the future of social work and the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) by utilizing strategic scenario planning to examine possible eventualities (Federgruen & Ryzin, 2003). I shall be using the 'strategy content' component of the strategic analysis model of scenario planning as outlined by Fahey and Randall in their chapter on "Integrating strategies and scenarios" from their book entitled "Learning from the future: Competitive foresight scenarios" (Fahey & Randall, 1999).

Strategy Content

Strategic Scope

I have outlined three key guiding questions in my first term paper. I will use the first of these three guiding questions to explore the strategic scope of the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW).

Question One: How should social work reposition itself to be inclusive and be a significant contributor in our society? How should social work sustain and improve its stake in the helping profession?

Much discussion on repositioning social work was documented in my third paper. I will only postulate three possible scenarios arising from that discussion:

1. Social work will be the key career choice for many aspiring to be in the helping profession in probably five years' time; or
2. Social work may revert to its traditional status of offering relief to the poor and needy (almoners); or
3. Social work will remain status quo in its current position as an ambiguous profession if it lacks continuing effective leadership in its current movement to enhance its image and status.

Scenario One: Social work, the key career choice probably in five years' time.

With the forthcoming implementation of voluntary registration on 1st April 2004, social work is well ahead of other helping professions in Singapore in formalizing self-regulation. Though counsellors have also embarked on voluntary registration, the Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC) does not have a regulatory system as comprehensive and detailed as that of social workers. SASW has spent a significant amount of time in finalizing registration and continuing education requirements and planned a forum for members to understand the registration system. Based on strong members' support for registration SASW is confident that the majority of its current members would register.

The current numbers of qualified counsellors, those holding a degree or post-graduate qualifications in counselling or counselling psychology are rather small. Due to a shortage of qualified social workers, many family service centres have recruited non-social work graduates to work in social work positions. With the government's initiatives to

attract mid-career persons to join the social service sector, many have either undergone or are completing professional training to be social workers through its manpower conversion programme. SASW has received many queries about membership requirements from the public. Due to the lack of a local basic degree programme in counselling, counsellors have yet to receive a similar backing from government. This setback has placed social work as the main course of study should one decide to be a helping professional.

There is however three glaring issues that SASW needs to resolve fast. Firstly, should SASW follow the footsteps of some professional associations in allowing current non-social work trained personnel employed in social work positions to register? Whilst exceptions or grand-father clauses apply to licensing or mandatory registration, will there be situations that would pose some difficulties for some non-social work trained personnel to fulfil registration criteria? Lastly, should SASW be inclusive rather than being exclusive in its approach towards self-regulation?

The key purpose of registration is to protect the public from unethical and malpractices amongst social workers. Bearing in mind that counsellors are unlikely to register non-counselling and non-social work trained personnel, how can the public be protected from malpractices by them? In the United Kingdom (U.K.), all social care personnel are regulated. The British system is based on certification within regulations for the entire social service sector (Ministry of Social Policy, New Zealand, 2000). England, Wales and Scotland regulate only the training of social workers (Ministry of Social Policy, New Zealand, 2000). In Singapore, the government has no strong intention to initiate social service personnel registration merely for non-social work trained personnel. There are

currently no professional associations who own this group of practitioners. Should the manpower conversion programme be highly successful in attracting prospective social workers, the registration of non-social work trained personnel would become redundant.

Scenario Two: Social work will revert to its traditional status of offering relief to the poor and the needy. With the proliferation of new and emerging helping professions today and the high level of specializations in social work, social work is already losing its foothold in some of its roles and functions. This was deliberated in some depth in my third term paper.

In Singapore, the government, particularly in healthcare, and the mass media still portray social workers as 'almoners'. Social workers find it difficult to break away from this role and identity. Given the generalist nature of social work and that most social workers in Singapore have only a basic degree with social work as a major, not many social workers practise at the specialist level. If social workers remain complacent in practising at a basic level, social workers in Singapore will lose their potential to develop themselves into highly skilled professionals like their counterparts in the United States of America (U.S.A.), United Kingdom (U.K.) and Australia. In U.S.A., 90% of the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) members hold a master degree in social work. Nearly half of its members hold advanced credentials from NASW. Ninety-three percent of its members maintain some type of certification or registration in their state of practice (NASW, 2004).

Scenario Three: Social work will remain status quo in its current position. This will likely to happen if it lacks continuing effective leadership in its current movement to enhance its image and status. A significant point to note is that whilst much has been done by the Association to change the 'fate' of social workers, social workers need strong leadership at both the workplace and in the Association. The Association's current status of depending on a large pool of volunteer social workers in its management committee will not suffice in the long-run in effecting change. Its failure to recruit a dynamic social worker with the vision and creativity to lead the Association is in itself a great setback for the profession. Likewise, social work lacks a strong voice if heads of social service agencies are not filled by qualified social workers. The current trend of experienced social workers preferring to stay in clinical practice will not help to rectify this concern. More must be done to encourage experienced social workers to take up leadership positions. Social workers need to see the bigger picture of profession-empowerment.

Strategies

Of the three scenarios painted above, only the first is a positive outcome and the other two are challenges or even threats to the profession. The question now is what strategies should the Association adopt in order to achieve success in promoting and advancing the profession?

Strategy One: Develop a long-term plan to raise the profile of social service personnel including social workers. With a high degree of uncertainty in today's

economy, increased social stress would be expected. The social service sector must be adequately equipped to handle these social stresses and their dire consequences. In SASW's recommendations to the Remaking Singapore Committee, it proposes that a long-term plan to raise the profile of social service personnel, including social workers, would be essential and timely (SASW's Submission to the Remaking Singapore Committee, 2002). This is strategic in that the government's concern is bigger than social work; it is the entire social service sector that concerns them and not social work *per se*. In a sense, there is an interdependent relationship between social work and the social service sector. Most social workers work in this sector. The more developed the social service sector is, the better the working conditions for social workers. Social workers must therefore work closely with the government to build a vibrant social service sector. The Singapore government recognizes social workers as only one of the major players within the social service sector. The other major player is the non-social work trained personnel or social service personnel who are occupying social work positions. SASW must thus resolve its differences with the government over policy matters relating to the registration of non-social work trained personnel and public protection amicably.

Though registering non-social work trained personnel would protect the public from malpractices by these personnel, the Association needs to be careful in its decision to include them. SASW is currently encouraging social workers to voluntarily register with the Association in order to augment standards of practice and to ensure public protection. Registering non-social work trained personnel then poses two problems:

1. that it would be difficult to subject these personnel to comply with the Association's Code of Ethics when they are not full-fledged social workers; and
2. their registration as social workers might discourage qualified social workers from registering.

SASW had worked out a proposal some years ago to register these non-social work trained personnel as 'enrolled social workers' but it was in the context of statutory registration rather than voluntary registration. While it makes sense to register them under statutory registration there is little basis to do so with voluntary registration. It is envisaged that these personnel would prefer to be an independent group of practitioners than to be seen as 'enrolled social workers', a less qualified status than a 'registered social worker'. The alternative to this is for this group of personnel to sit for an entrance examination in order to be registered as social workers. There is however a major setback should they be allowed to register by merely passing an examination.

With the manpower conversion programme in place for non-social work graduates to take up the Post-Graduate Diploma in Social Work at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and with the new Bachelor of Social Work Degree (BSW) offered by Monash University, there are ample routes for non-social work trained personnel to become qualified social workers through taking a formal course of study. Any attempts to implement an entrance examination by the Association would discourage non-social work trained personnel from obtaining a proper social work education. The exception to this would be older persons who did not have the opportunity to upgrade themselves to be

qualified social workers but have attained other qualifications instead. It would not be reasonable to expect them to pursue another qualification in social work unless they wish to do so. Perhaps, the Association should consider setting an entrance examination for non-social work trained personnel who have remained in the social work field for the past 10 years, have attained tertiary qualifications in a social science field, and have less than 10 years of practice before the current official retirement age set by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM). This issue requires membership endorsement and needs to be addressed at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) to be held in July 2004.

Statutory registration of social workers is implemented in U.S.A., in some Canadian provinces, Japan, U.K., Hong Kong, South Africa, Germany, Israel, France and Netherlands. Australia has a self-regulating system between the professional association, educators and employers (Ministry of Social Policy, New Zealand, 2000). The Manitoba Institute of Registered Social Workers Incorporation Act (1966) provides for voluntary registration and the control of the designation 'RSW'. Its governing body is the Board of the Manitoba Institute of Registered Social Workers (MIRSW) and the Manitoba Association of Social Workers (MASW) (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2003).

Strategy Two: Develop a master plan for manpower needs. There were 269 social workers in 1972 and 160 of them were employed in social work positions. Half of the 269 social workers were Malaysians or other nationalities (Ngiam, 1972). Only about 60% of social work graduates enter the social work field upon graduation (Brain Flow Committee,

SASW, 1992). From 1978 to 1987, only about 47% of social work graduates stayed on in social work. SASW reported that most social work graduates did not want to stay more than five years in a conventional social work position (Lee, A. & Ghoh, 2002). In a study conducted by Ghoh in 1996, two-thirds of the 145 social workers surveyed would consider changing jobs with one-quarter of them claiming that they would consider leaving the profession (Lee, A. & Ghoh, 2002).

The second strategy proposed by SASW in its submission to the Remaking Singapore Committee was to develop a master plan for manpower needs. This would be deemed to be an important step towards addressing acute manpower shortages in the social service sector. It was recommended that the master plan should include continuing training opportunities and career advancement for social service personnel and social workers (SASW's Submission to the Remaking Singapore Committee, 2002). SASW has already established dialogue sessions with the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) to look into manpower needs and career advancement for social workers. There is a need for further collaboration to map out national statistics on recruitment and resignation of social workers in the country and to effectively co-ordinate and monitor policy outcomes.

Easing the manpower shortage will benefit both social service personnel and social workers. Caseload per worker may reduce substantially and working conditions might also improve. There will be more opportunities for supervision and mentoring amongst agency staffs.

Competitive Differentiation or Posture

The second guiding question in my first term paper was:

Question Two: In an era where professional identity is blurred, what would a social worker's identity be in the future? How to market 'professional loyalty' amongst social workers?

The critical question to ask is how SASW wants to differentiate its services from the other helping professions and how it wants to publicize its services to service users. With this, I will postulate a fourth scenario:

Scenario Four: Social workers as 'the people professionals'. This would be a catchy slogan that would explain the uniqueness, scope of the profession and professionalism of the worker in a nutshell. Service users will not understand nor appreciate what professional identity is but they will have an interest to know what services are offered by social workers. Hence, the strategy that SASW should adopt is to be informed about innovative services and programmes in other countries and to help to promote the services and programmes of social service agencies by collaborating with them on a common platform, for example working on standards of practice. In order to do this, SASW must have a strong international network and representation. It already has an international committee and is a member of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew made a comment that the very 'Asian Chinese-Confucianist' culture of most Singaporeans has given way to a more cosmopolitan outlook today ("SM: Next 20 years", 2004). He further stressed:

> So, the interaction, the exposure, the external influences, external lifestyles, dress, social morass, has almost imperceptibly, but day by day, transformed the behaviour of our own people … We're still Singaporean, but quite different from their parents of 20 years ago ("SM: Next 20 years", 2004, p. H2).

Opportunities for international and regional exchange and sharing of new concepts and ideas will greatly enhance SASW's role in professionalizing social work in social service agencies. SASW cannot afford to turn a deaf ear to the social problems and the management of such problems of its neighbouring countries.

Strategies

Strategy Three: Branding social work and the professional association. I have attempted to brand social work in my third paper. SASW is looking into the branding of social workers as 'the people professionals'. The slogan 'people professionals' hopes to take away the public's perception that social workers are volunteers and non-professionals. It creates a unique identity for the social worker.

The identity of social workers would be clearer when registration is in place. SASW envisages that social service agencies whose heads are social workers would want to employ only registered social workers as far as possible. SASW must ensure the

marketability of registered social workers and keep a keen interest in their professional development.

Strategy Four: Professionalize social workers with comprehensive but relevant developmental programmes. MCYS has helped to publish a social work booklet to introduce what social work is and what social workers do. The booklet is refreshing and is interesting to read. It captures the essence of social work in a fun and light-hearted fashion.

With registration, an Advisory Panel on Registration will be formed to look into accreditation of social work education programmes, continuing professional education needs and professional publications.

In a dialogue session on registration of social workers held with members on 18th January 2003, participants' feedbacks to the Association were:

Adapted from 1st Dialogue Session on Registration (18th January 2003):

Issues raised on the need for professional development:
1. The basic degree in social work is inadequate for practice. Social problems are becoming more complex yet undergraduate training becomes more diluted, thus a basic degree in social work is inadequate; specialized skills are needed.
2. **Social workers lack supervision and nurturance.** Social workers lack supervision and nurturance because supervisors lack the time to mentor or train new social workers. Time spent on supervision might not be included in an agency's statistics. Participants suggested that social workers together with the Association should advocate to agency management that supervision of younger workers must be listed under the senior workers' job scope. Agencies must implement structured supervision for all social workers. Participants feel that supervisors must attend supervision courses to ensure high quality supervision.
3. How to decide when a social worker is qualified to supervise? What are SASW's requirements? SASW needs to formulate a policy on supervision.
4. Social workers also need to take personal responsibility in looking for personal development and supervision opportunities. Social workers need skills, knowledge, and also the right attitude. Singaporeans are good in skills and knowledge but they also need to be positive in their attitude.
5. Social workers need continuing education. Some social workers are weaker in their motivation to learn. Some need to read more and be critical in their thinking. Social workers should not equate attending courses to gaining knowledge. They need to get skills outside the discipline, e.g. marketing etc. They need to be self-sustaining.
6. Social workers need better supportive facilities e.g. library at the Family Resource & Training Centre (FRTC). SASW must be able to transform FRTC to be a well-equipped resource centre for social workers, not just for family studies.
7. MCDS[2] has formed a manpower committee on core competencies. SASW needs to partner with key stakeholders in mapping out these core competencies. There must be constant dialogues and feedback between SASW and its stakeholders on professional matters.

[2] Renamed as Ministry of Community Development, Youth & Sports (MCYS) as of 1 Sep 2004.

SASW needs to instil a sense of loyalty amongst social workers by professionalizing social workers with social work values and ethics in practice. This can be done through developing comprehensive and sound professional development programmes.

SASW will strategize by helping to professionalize social work students at the earliest possible stage of their studies. With the new curriculum in place, students from any faculties can take up social work modules without majoring in social work. If SASW works closely with the Social Work & Psychology Society (SWAPS) in exposing students taking social work modules to the profession, it is hoped that more of them will consider taking social work as a career option. Even if they do not choose social work as a career, they would have had a better understanding of the profession. Similarly, SASW has implemented a mentoring programme that will help to professionalize the beginning social worker.

Goals

The third and last guiding question in my first term paper was:

Question Three: What are the strategic roles that the Singapore Association of Social Workers play in helping to augment social work as a profession in the new knowledge economy?

Goals are translated into action-plans and are the greatest link between scenario-planning and strategies. Action-plans take into account an agency's existing resources (More, 2003). Goals may change as agencies obtain new information or when they gain new perspectives of their future (Fahey & Randall, 1999).

What would be the Association's likely future? I will paint three possible scenarios here and then discuss their impact on the Association's goals:

Scenario Five: SASW becomes a vibrant association by Year 2010. This scenario is achievable if the Association is successful in carrying out its dual mission to enhance the status and recognition of social workers and to protect the public from malpractices. With a presumably high rate of social workers being registered, it would have the mandate to negotiate and speak on behalf of social workers. However, there might be some pertinent problems that need to be resolved before this can happen.

Strategy Five: Restructure FRTC-SASW for long-term survival. SASW depends heavily on funding from charitable organizations and government subventions for new initiatives / project. Revenues from membership dues are negligible and will not support the employment of a full-time staff. The registration project, being a pilot project, is funded by the VWO Capability Fund (VCF) and Singapore Pools for up to three years.

The Singapore government does not believe in continuously funding professional associations, especially for recurrent costs such as manpower. They firmly believe that professional associations should be self-reliant. However, there are many reasons why some associations cannot be self-funding readily. Such examples will be social workers, therapists, counsellors in Singapore where revenues and membership sizes are small. In

some bigger countries where memberships may only be about half of the total number of practising social workers, membership figures are still considered to be enormous.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in U.S.A. has a total of 150,000 members as of 2nd March 2004. It has staff strength of 135 staff at its national office and manages a budget of 18 million (NASW, 2004). The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has a membership of about 11,000 in 1973 and again in 1992/1993. Between 1973 to 1992, its membership dipped tremendously to 7,845 members in 1982. General confidence and leadership were said to be crucial factors (Payne, 2002). Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZASW) has 1,314 members. Of these, about 763 are full members (Ministry of Social Policy, New Zealand, 2000).

In Singapore, most social service sector associations will not have the means to be self-sufficient without government aid. Numbers limit the growth of professional associations in Singapore especially in the social service sector. Associations whose clienteles are not used to paying market prices for services cannot survive without additional aid. Associations that do well are professionals who earn high incomes and have major corporate clients. Exception to this would be Singapore Council of Women Organizations (SCWO) where it is an association for women - women coming from all walks of life especially from influential and wealthy families who donate readily.

The registration project is a pilot project and SASW has to evaluate how effective it is for the Association to continue hiring full time staff when funding ceases in future. Eventually, SASW might have to merge the staffs from FRTC and SASW. Since SASW has legal responsibility over FRTC, it makes sense to merge or restructure the two entities.

Currently, FRTC is providing training to the community in family-life education and SASW is providing training to social workers. Due to historical reasons, FRTC cannot be seen to be deploying its staffs to perform administrative duties for the Association when funding was specifically given to it to run family-oriented training courses.

Generally, social workers feel that FRTC has an important role to play when accreditation and registration take place. FRTC was started in 1992 in response to the need for further training for family service centre social workers. Over the years, the needs of the social work scene have changed. Therefore, with accreditation and registration, FRTC could also develop a comprehensive range of professional training programmes for social workers. With the change in the needs and the functions of FRTC, there is a need to rename FRTC to better reflect its expanded mission.

Restructuring to maximize resources and to cut expenditures allow SASW and FRTC to compete meaningfully in the social service sector. Already, there are many training providers offering a wide range of training programmes to equip social service personnel and social workers with the necessary skills to specialize in diverse fields. FRTC needs to compete aggressively in order to survive the competition.

Scenario Six: SASW as a professional trade union and advocate for the welfare of social workers. It is quite apparent that many social service agencies in Singapore are able to provide quite adequately for the professional development of their staff. Some may perceive the Association's mission to professionalize social workers as unnecessary. However, these agencies, on their own, may not have a strong voice in advocating for better

working conditions for their staff. The Association would thus have the potential to advocate for better working conditions and higher salaries for social workers. This seems to be the expectations of Singaporean social workers. SASW might end up like the Singapore Teachers Union, a professional trade union for teachers. Associations of Social Work in Scandinavian countries and Finland have self-regulating systems linked with industrial unions (Ministry of Social Policy, New Zealand, 2000). In Britain, the British Union of Social Workers (NUSW) was formed in 1978 as a separate organization from BASW (Payne, 2002). SASW must study these alternative models carefully.

With the government's recommendation that the panel or board of registration be administered separately from the Association, SASW will lose its control over the registration and autonomy over the professional development of social workers. In countries like Hong Kong, where registration is separate from professional membership of the professional association, the status of the professional association declines. In Singapore, the SASW's model is to allow its ordinary (professional) members to register. Thus registration is an additional option for members of the Association. In that sense, SASW's model is very similar to the Manitoba Institute of Registered Social Workers (MIRSW) and the Manitoba Association of Social Workers (MASW) model of having membership and registration co-exists. MIRSW and MASW have a joint fees system that helps to reduce dues tremendously should a social worker wishes to join both bodies (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2003).

Scenario Seven: SASW might be dissolved or merged with the Board of Social Work Registration. The worst scenario is when social workers do not find the purpose to stay on with the Association. With the low rate of membership in social work associations all over the world, social work associations may become redundant in the future. It no longer needs to serve the professional needs of social workers as registration boards adequately serve them. If SASW is not dissolved or merged with a registration board, for example a social service board of registration or social workers board of registration, it might have to change its purpose and mission to that of a professional trade union as discussed in Scenario Six.

Registration boards can be a governing body or entity independent of government. For example, the New Zealand Psychological Society and the New Zealand Law Society are owned and administered by members (Ministry of Social Policy, New Zealand, 2000). Registration Boards should be independent from government so that they would lobby on social issues and not subject to the political ideology of a particular government. It can be government owned but be legally separated from government (Ministry of Social Policy, New Zealand, 2001).

Strategy Six: Strengthen SASW's advocacy and consultancy roles. Participants of the 1st Dialogue Session held on 18th January 2003 listed the following expectations of SASW:

1. To ground social workers on social work values and ethics;
2. To set up a Mediation Board to include handling inter-agency conflicts;

3. To initiate internship to make up for current shortfall in practicum;
4. To draw up standards and guidelines for specialized fields of social work, e.g. Medical Social Work, School Social Work, Family Work etc.; and
5. To initiate consultancy services to agencies.

Some major themes and the support needed from SASW as discussed in the dialogue session were:

1. support from the Association is needed in some areas, but there is also the element of personal responsibility to be inculcated;
2. need standardisation in terms of core competencies, with clearly drawn up career paths, promotion guidelines and competency development;
3. accredit postgraduate training; and
4. improve on library facilities.

Social workers and social service agencies look towards SASW for standard setting, mediation and advocacy. SASW has not been performing this role sufficiently to make any strong impact. More can be done if only more experienced social workers serve in committees and task forces.

Conclusion

In summary, SASW needs to:

1. work closely and win the confidence and trust of its niche markets, that is chiefly the government, employers of social workers, social work educators and

social workers;

2. be proactive in studying social problems and trends and adopting new strategies to eradicate such problems;
3. be experimental in developing new programmes and services and be a true leader in the field;
4. influence national policies by actively participating in national committees relating to political, socio-economical and cultural policies;
5. include professional trade union advocacy role in ensuring that safe and minimum standards of working conditions are met; and
6. find ways to self-finance its operations including being innovative in marketing and structuring its training programmes.

What is the future of SASW? There are more challenges and threats that SASW has to deal with in order to do better than just surviving. SASW is dependent on social workers and social service agencies and yet it needs to change their mindsets altogether. My project thus hopes to influence fellow social workers through a transdisciplinary lens.