

4TH INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMES CONFERENCE 2010



Pan Pacific Hotel, Singapore
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Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 The Council for Third Age (C3A), International Consortium for Intergenerational Programmes (ICIP), and National University of Singapore (NUS) worked together to organise the 4th International Consortium for Intergenerational Programmes Conference 2010 from 26-29 April 2010 in Singapore. The objectives of the conference were to:

- advance a shared understanding of how intergenerational policies, research and programmes act as agents of change to impact the sustainability of ageing societies;
- share best practices in engaging different generations in the realms of family, work and community, for the building of an inclusive and healthy society that values all ages; and
- promote discussions, knowledge sharing, and creativity in fostering insights to strengthen intergenerational solidarity

2 Being the first of its kind in Asia, the 4th ICIP Conference 2010 attracted 240 practitioners, policy makers, scholars and non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives from 12 countries to give keynote speeches and present ideas in panel sessions. It drew out and discussed issues related to the objectives listed above. The conference also included experiential learning lunches where delegates were challenged to identify specific issues and develop sustainable solutions pertaining to intergenerational relationships.

3 Gracing the occasion, Mr. Gan Kim Yong, the Minister for Manpower in Singapore, reminded delegates in his opening address that demographic changes in Singapore would see one in six of its residents turning 65 years or older in ten years' time, as compared to about one in 11 today. Hence, "[w]ith an ageing population, a multi-generational workforce and community will become the norm. We can turn this into an advantage and a crucial resource that we can tap on." Key discussions and recommendations from conference presentations in response to this suggestion fell mainly within the themes of the family, workforce, and community. Major topics examined under each of the theme are summarised as follows.

Intergenerational Relations in the Family

4 With rapid industrialisation and globalisation, family structure and the role of family in society have undergone changes in some communities. The traditional extended family where three generations reside under one roof or even the nuclear family in urban living may no longer be the norm in many countries. For example, there is the emergence of "one-three family" in Korea where grandparents assume a second role as parents for the grandchildren who live with them. Comparing the Singapore situation with other communities, Dr. Thang Leng Leng (Member of Steering Committee, Health Research Cluster, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore; and Vice-Chair of ICIP) commented that the role of family in Singapore has always been promoted as the society's foundational building block, and intergenerational initiatives in the realm of the family are often designed to *strengthen* family ties, instead of devising intergenerational programmes to replace or complement new family types, as may be happening in other communities. The differences in cultural values and approaches to programme design stimulated interesting discussions throughout the conference.

5 Rapid globalisation and societal changes have caused family members to have very different growing up experiences and value systems. Research findings presented at several panels show ideological differences and accommodation issues surrounding language and

religious preferences among family members. Intergenerational conflicts arising from these differences may affect knowledge transfer across age groups, particularly in a family business setting. Several panellists showed in their research that family members were able to work together to produce creative strategies or make behavioural adjustments to reconcile these differences. As for knowledge transmission, it was important that family members recognised its value for effective transmission, which would also form a solid foundation for future proliferation. Legislation could also help in this area to protect heritage knowledge and preserve it across generations.

6 In terms of intergenerational relationships, survey findings showed that younger family members are interested in taking up responsibilities of caring for their elder family members, and that the younger generation is willing to seek advice from their parents or grandparents regarding important life decisions. However, the same group also confessed in surveys that they do not share a close relationship with their elder family members as they would with their peers. These findings suggested that one way to strengthen grandparent-grandchildren relationship is to highlight the importance of cross-generational bonding through both family and community based intergenerational programmes.

7 In reviewing care giving responsibilities within three generational families, research also warned against the imbalance in power relationship that often exists between parents and grandparents, in particular, where the community culture values obligatory help given by older retired family members to younger working parents. Hence, there is a need to review this relationship to foster a healthy intergenerational relationship in terms of family care responsibilities.

Managing A Multi-Generational Workforce

8 Changes in demographic characteristics have brought about a working environment that features employees of five generations working together. A focus of the conference was to suggest ways and share experiences for both leaders and employees to strive towards a win-win situation in such a workforce. Consensus among delegates was to empower all workers and to design people-oriented instead of age-specific programmes.

9 With regard to empowerment, more research needs to be conducted to understand the attitudes and behaviours of each generation of workers and to design programmes to acknowledge employees' personal skill sets and experiences. Intergenerational programmes designed to tap on the strengths of each generation, like a mentoring system and intergenerational bonding workshops, would also encourage workers to strive and attain personal development, as well as achieve corporate goals.

10 The aim of people-oriented programmes is to achieve intergenerational fairness in employment policies and practices. Such measures could include matching support efforts to employees of all age groups and not only targeted at the older employees, such that all employees enjoy equal treatment and equal access to training and support. Retirement should be considered in terms of capability and competence and not on age alone. In addition, life cycles should not be treated as static stages with a fixed trajectory of education, career development and then retirement. Instead, one should try to stagger life stages throughout one's life cycle. Suggestions from the delegates included taking sabbatical leave during career building stage, and taking up re-employment at the age of retirement. Organisations must also be creative and flexible in designing a reward framework so as to attract, retain and engage staff of all levels and ages. Effective leaders must be able to understand the needs and

expectations of their employees from all age groups. The tasks for the leaders are to provide vision, design workable strategies, and enhance relationship-building, as well as manage diversity fairly within the organisation.

11 Delegates also shared their experiences in implementing workable solutions for intergenerational integrations in the workforce. For example, the Regional Development Agency in the East of England gives out awards to promote age diversity in employment, particularly for people over 50 years old. The flexible working options helped to reduce one's carbon footprint, reduce costs and increase productivity. Some Taiwanese enterprises tackle workplace ageing with intergenerational programmes that promote internal learning through encouraging interactions and communications among the novices and the expert employees.

12 The issue of the digital divide was brought up during the panel sessions. In order to bridge the gap and perception that younger employees have more digital capital, older workers must be enabled to cross this divide, to embrace digital life, and to engage in the global workplace.

13 Many delegates acknowledged the fact that the transfer of knowledge from the old to the young is vital for business success and sustainability. Providing re-employment opportunities for older age workers is a way to retain skill sets and professional knowledge within the organisation. This is best achieved through having legislation, policies and guidelines specifically designed for this purpose. In addition, there must also be appropriate attitude management within the organisation to enhance awareness of an ageing workforce and its related issues in work distribution, as well as to acknowledge work capabilities and expectations of both younger and older workers.

Building Intergenerational Solidarity in the Community

14 Community efforts in strengthening intergenerational bonding and solidarity include promoting intergenerational activities beyond family relations. Civic engagement should include: 1) bringing generations together; 2) promoting new perspectives in rural areas; 3) creating new forms of living together; 4) producing infrastructures accessible for people with disabilities and all ages; and 5) initiating ecological, economic and social sustainability.

15 Intergenerational interactions, either through learning experiences or doing activities together, can help to reduce ageism and change perceptions of how one generation looks at the other. It will also heighten the awareness of individuals regarding the ageing process and promote mutual understanding across generations.

16 Delegates shared invaluable information on detailing practical steps required for successful implementations of intergenerational practices and activities, identifying key success factors and challenges faced, as well as suggesting ways these challenges could be overcome. Practices included engaging the young and the old through innovative theatre initiatives, inviting elders to teach traditional arts and crafts, having students visit the elders in the community to accomplish a common task, connecting students and community elders in the classroom to promote active learning, implementing service learning in colleges with a focus on intergenerational programming, and involving recent retirees and active seniors in facilitating early environmental learning experiences for young children. Among the many benefits of having people across age groups to do things together are the opportunities to improve the self-worth of elder people, as well as break stereotypes of ageism that may be held by the younger generations. Through cross-generational engagements with elders in the extra-familial context,

younger people could also learn to reflect inwardly and discover an interest in communicating with and learning more about their own grandparents.

17 Experiences on the development of standard of practice for intergenerational initiatives were also shared at the conference. This standard was developed to capture environmental features, as well as to assess facilitating members' behaviours and participants' social behaviours commonly observed in intergenerational activities. Training materials were made available at the conference for interested delegates to review or adopt the scale in their respective practices.

18 In many of the community activities suggested, intergenerational learning was highlighted as an important element. This is not only crucial for developing and/or changing perceptions of the role of individual in society, it also empowers disadvantaged seniors by providing education for them and allowing them to participate in social activities. Contents of learning could include extending initial education training, advancing knowledge on community safety, and detailing information on health issues and volunteering efforts.

19 Suggestions were also made to align environmental design processes and plans with underlying values, programmes, and prevailing policies at any shared site facility, for better intergenerational integration, engagement and practice.

Conclusion

20 Cultural diversity not only exists across physical borders, but also across age groups. Differences arising from unfamiliarity, stereotypes, and perceived competition often create gaps between social groups. However, the seemingly irreconcilable differences can be bridged by well-thought-out and well-executed intergenerational programmes.

21 In his Closing Plenary address, Mr Lim Boon Heng, Minister in Prime Minister's Office, urged the delegates to continue the dialogue and exchange of ideas beyond the conference. He also encouraged organisations to do more to foster intergenerational bonding by tapping on resources and platforms such as C3A's Intergenerational Bonding (IGB) Awards, which recognises organisations for their efforts to promote intergenerational bonding through innovative programmes and activities.

22 As Mr Henry Quake, Chief Executive Officer of C3A, nicely summed up in his closing remarks, "we heard how employers are taking into account age-related factors when designing benefits and rewards, and when managing, designing and organising work tasks and the work environment. We were also told how service learning, shared sites and experiences, and intergenerational learning programmes in schools and the community can enhance solidarity between generations, social inclusion and cohesion."

23 The four-day conference stimulated delegates interested in intergenerational work to continue to translate values into actions, to encourage experience sharing and knowledge transfer, and to engage policy makers to support these efforts.

Acknowledgement

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