

**EDI in Singapore:
Emerging Issues with Sexual and Gender Minorities and People Living with HIV**

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Abstract

Diversity management had always been at the forefront of Singapore's social and economic policies. Over the last half a century, a slew of legislation, social and economic policies aimed at maintaining harmony and ensuring economic progress have successfully put Singapore on the world map as a global trading hub. Owing to Singapore's heritage as a migrant nation, much of the diversity management efforts in the past had focused on bases of diversity such as age, race, gender, religion. However, in recent years, there was much public discourse on the inclusion of gender and sexual minorities and people living with HIV, pushing for a greater need to address issues that have long been considered sensitive. This chapter spotlights the two issues against a backdrop of how diversity is managed in the Singapore context, and discusses two frameworks that may help shed more light on Singapore's approach to diversity management.

Keywords: diversity, inclusion, Singapore, LGBTQ, HIV

Introduction

Diversity management had always been at the forefront of Singapore's social and economic policies. Since her independence in 1965, the national narrative on diversity had been one of equality and harmony, as the racial riots of pre-independence days haunt the memories of policymakers (see Chia & Lim, 2010 for an elaboration). Over the last half a century, a slew of legislation, social and economic policies aimed at maintaining harmony and ensuring economic progress have successfully put Singapore on the world map as a global trading hub. Today, the country has a high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, surpassing some of the world's top economies such as the United States, Japan, Australia and the United Kingdom (World Bank, 2018), and ranks sixth in the world in terms of household wealth per adult (Credit Suisse, 2019).

The last decade saw several shifts in the way diversity is managed at both the national and organizational levels, marking progress on several fronts. Firstly, the national narrative on diversity shifted from one of "equality and harmony" to one of "diversity and social inclusion". This shift emerged largely due to the increasing diversity in Singapore as a result of increasing immigration, an influx of migrant workers, and a more global workforce (Mathews, 2016). Secondly, compared to the nation-building years where the onus was on the government to manage diversity, we see a rise in the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social enterprises, businesses, and individuals stepping up to champion diversity and inclusion. Thirdly, national, organizational, and individual efforts have targeted a broader array of diversity types, with government interventions focused on highly "legitimate" diversity types (e.g., race, age, disability) and NGOs, multinational companies, and individuals leading the charge in championing for the rights of what is possibly less "legitimate" diversity types (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity, persons living with HIV/AIDS).

This book chapter spotlights two diversity issues that have emerged in recent years that illustrate these shifts – (1) the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities at workplaces, and (2) discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV). To orient readers who are unfamiliar with Singapore, we begin with a brief overview of Singapore's population and approach to diversity management. We then delve deeper into the two issues that have taken centre stage in recent years. We present two useful theoretical frameworks for understanding diversity management in Singapore before concluding the chapter and identifying opportunities for future research.

The Context of Singapore

Singapore is a small island-nation located to the south of the Malay Peninsula, with a population of approximately 5.7 million as at 2019 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2019a). Singapore residents comprise 70.5% of the total population; among these, 87% are Singapore citizens and the remaining are Singapore permanent residents (PRs). The ethnic composition of the resident population follows the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others) ethnic model that forms the foundation of Singapore's multi-ethnic society over the years, with 74.4% Chinese, 13.4% Malays, 9.0% Indians, and 3.2% Other ethnic groups (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2019a). The ethnic composition of the total population does not follow the CMIO

model, however, as more than a quarter of Singapore's total population are non-residents from different countries around the world. This increased ethnic diversity is a key reason for the shift in rhetoric beyond racial harmony (which was the focus of diversity management efforts in the past) to that of social inclusion (Mathews, 2016).

Singapore has an aging resident population with a median age of 41.1 years and a 6.2% year-on-year increase in the number of people aged 65 years and above. As of 2019, the elderly population constitutes about 14.4% of the total population. Low birth rates have also contributed to a 0.5% year-on-year decrease in the number of people below 20 years old, resulting in a lower old age support ratio of 4.5 (as compared to the previous period of 4.8; Singapore Department of Statistics, 2019a). By 2030, Singapore is expected to become a super-aged society, with more than a quarter of the population being constituted by elderly residents.

Women comprise 51.1% of the resident population. Since the 1950s, women have been encouraged to obtain an education, and are catching up with men in areas such as literacy rate (males 98.9%, females 96.1%), post-secondary qualifications (males 61.3%, females 53.6%), and mean years of schooling (males 11.6 years, females 10.8 years; Singapore Department of Statistics, 2019b). Women in Singapore have many rights similar to that of men, such as the right to be educated, the right to choose whom to marry, the right to initiate divorce, the right to own property and other financial assets in their own names, and the right to sue. The Women's Charter, enacted in 1961, also protects women in areas such as monogamy in marriages, spousal maintenance upon divorce, and the rights of women after marriage (Singapore Statutes Online, 2020).

Over the last decade, Singapore has pursued a policy of population growth as the government attributes an increase in GDP growth not only to increased productivity but to a larger workforce (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2012). Such a policy is deemed necessary owing to Singapore's lack of natural resources resulting in a heavy reliance on its human capital. However, plans to increase Singapore's population to between 6.5 million and 6.9 million by 2030 (Prime Minister's Office, 2013) was met with strong negative response from the public as there were concerns about possible job losses and overcrowding that accompanied increased population density (Nakano, 2017). To address this issue, there was a re-focusing of efforts to expand the local workforce and tighten controls over the hiring of foreign manpower.

The issue areas covered in this section – namely, nationality, race, age, and gender – reflect the priorities of the state. Hitherto, the scope of the diversity and inclusion initiatives carried out by the government as well as quasi-governmental agencies narrowly relate to these critical points. In other words, they form the bases of diversity and inclusion in Singapore society. This will be illustrated in the next section, where we present the Singapore state's approach to diversity management.

Approach to Diversity Management and Inclusion

According to Hofstede Insights (n.d.), Singapore's culture is characterized by that of high power distance, high collectivism, moderate masculinity, low uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation, and moderate indulgence. Such cultural values are quite typical of Confucian Asian societies, and is not surprising given the dominance of the Chinese ethnic group in Singapore.

Research on cultural tightness-looseness also identified Singapore as a “tight” culture with strong norms and low tolerance of deviant behaviour (Gelfand et al., 2011). These cultural values are evident in Singapore’s approach to diversity management and inclusion, showing a preference for carefully balancing social and economic policies to manage diversity and inclusion rather than employing purely legalistic means. Legislation is only enacted in cases where there is strong socio-political legitimacy in the protection of certain culturally accepted social groups; specifically, for groups that fall within the one of the aforementioned recognized bases of inclusion in Singapore. Table 1 lists some of the key legislation pertaining to diversity and inclusion in Singapore.

Table 1. List of Key Diversity and Inclusion Legislation

Legislation	Type of Diversity Covered	Extent of Protection
Article 12 of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (enacted: 1965)	Singapore citizens Religion Race Descent or place of birth	“In the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment.”
Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (enacted: 1990; last revised: 2001)	Religion	“An Act to provide for the maintenance of religious harmony and for establishing a Presidential Council for Religious Harmony and for matters connected therewith.”
Retirement and Re-employment Act (enacted: 1993; revised 2012)	Age	“An Act to provide for a minimum retirement age for employees, for the re-employment of employees and for matters connected therewith.”
Women’s Charter (enacted: 1961; last revised: 2009)	Women	“An Act to provide for monogamous marriages and for the solemnization and registration of such marriages; to amend and consolidate the law relating to divorce, the rights and duties of married persons, the protection of family, the maintenance of wives, incapacitated husbands and children and the punishment of offences against women and girls; and to provide for matters incidental thereto.”
Vulnerable Adults Act (2018)	Individuals who are: (a) 18 years of age or older; and (b) by reason of mental or physical infirmity, disability or incapacity, incapable of protecting himself or herself from abuse, neglect or self-neglect	“An Act to make provision for the safeguarding of vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect or self-neglect, to provide for matters connected with that, and to make related amendments to certain other Acts.”

Source: Singapore Statutes Online (2020)

As evident in Table 1, existing diversity legislation extends protection to a limited number of social groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, vulnerable adults, and women) and mainly in social domains (e.g. family, community). There is no legislation protecting people from discrimination at the workplace, nor affirmative action policies imposed on organizations. It is thus unsurprising that Singapore was ranked the 2nd worst country in terms of workplace diversity and inclusion (Kantar, 2019). 24% of Singapore workers surveyed in the index reported being bullied, undermined or harassed in the workplace in the past year (one of the highest among the countries surveyed), and 32% reported being made to feel uncomfortable by their employers. The results of the 2019 Diversity and Inclusion Index released by financial markets data provider Refinitive also reflects how badly Singapore fared in terms of workplace diversity and inclusion. Only one Singapore company made it to their list of top 100 most diverse and inclusive organizations, ranking at the 79th place (Lam, 2019).

In lieu of legislation, the government has chosen to use a tripartite model to encourage non-discrimination and fair employment practices. Specifically, a quasi-governmental agency, the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) was established in 2006 to spearhead this initiative. An elaboration of tripartism and the role of TAFEP in its early years can be found in Chia and Lim (2010). The next section briefly introduces TAFEP and its more current initiatives.

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP)

TAFEP, the main quasi-governmental agency promoting diversity and inclusion at the workplace, is one arm of the Tripartite Alliance Limited, jointly established by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), and the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF). Originally established in 2006 as a non-legislative committee, the agency seeks to ‘promote non-discriminatory employment practices and to shift mindsets among employers, employees and the general public toward fair employment practices for all workers’ in place of anti-discrimination legislation (Chia & Lim, 2010, p. 200). Since then, the role of TAFEP has evolved from one focused on awareness-raising to one with greater emphasis on guiding implementation.

TAFEP continues to maintain a largely non-legislative approach in furthering its agenda, and plays a more advisory and supportive role in organizational efforts. This is largely done by advising companies to adopt tripartite standards, giving recognition through awards and pledges, and providing corporate training and partnership programmes, paid advisory services and free resources to support organizations in their efforts. Most recently, TAFEP co-developed the Fair & Progressive Employment Index that enables organizations to track how they fare against five established “fair and progressive values” (see Table 2), and benchmark themselves against other organizations in the industry. As the index is positioned as a learning tool, organizations receive recommendations on how they can improve on the five values once they complete the online index. For a detailed description of the development and implementation of the index, see Lim and Pang (in press).

Table 2. Fair and Progressive Values

Value	Description
Fairness	Build a fair organisation in which discrimination is not tolerated, and employees are treated fairly based on their ability, performance, contribution and experience. It is also where policies and practices comply with the relevant employment legislation and abide by the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices.
Inclusion	Create an inclusive workplace that values the strengths and contributions of each individual and leverages their abilities, skills, knowledge and experiences.
Agility	Embrace change and ensure that HR policies and practices stay relevant and effective in engaging the workforce.
Productivity	Cultivate a work environment that encourages learning, innovation and a spirit of continuous improvement, to achieve optimal business results in a manpower lean economy.
Sustainability	Develop sustainable employment opportunities anchored in a strong Singaporean Core and a globally competitive, diverse workforce.

Source: Lim and Pang (in press)

TAFEP’s road map to diversity and inclusion implementation

To guide diversity and inclusion implementation at workplaces, TAFEP (2019a) mapped out a tiered approach for employers in increasing order of advancement on the diversity and inclusion journey: ‘Starting Out’, ‘Being Fair’, ‘Being Progressive’ and ‘Being Exemplary’. In each of these stages, the agency provides various support initiatives for employers to complete their diversity and inclusion management journey. This tiered approach is necessary as many multinational companies based in Singapore tend to be more progressive in their diversity and inclusion efforts due to a cascading of initiatives from corporate headquarters (especially those with headquarters in countries with non-discrimination and/or affirmative action legislation), while small and medium-sized enterprises (comprising 99% of companies in Singapore) are more focused on bread and butter issues, with less resources available to allocate to diversity and inclusion efforts (Khoo & Chan, 2016).

Stage 1: Starting Out

As a baseline, all employers must adhere to Singapore’s labour laws governed under the Employment Act. To promote compliance, TAFEP’s Employment Advisory Service (a paid service) offers guidance and advice to employers and Human Resource departments on interpreting and applying the various labour laws in the Employment Act. Besides its paid services, TAFEP also encourages employers to complete the free-to-use Fair & Progressive Employment Index to establish a baseline measure for their organization on the five fair and progressive values. This would enable them to consistently track their progress on these five values (TAFEP, 2019e).

Stage 2: Being Fair

Next, in the realm of diversity management, employers are encouraged to adopt TAFEP’s Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices. The guidelines lay out various fair and merit-based employment practices in ways that protect diverse groups in the Singapore

workforce. Specifically, they are meant to prevent discrimination on the basis of ‘age, race, gender, religion, marital status and family responsibilities, or disability’ (TAFEP, 2017, p. 2). The specificities of the guidelines cover a wide range of practices from recruitment, remuneration and performance management to grievance management and dismissals. Apart from the guidelines, both individuals and companies can also pledge their commitment towards a fair and progressive workplace. Hitherto, more than 17,000 individuals have made their ‘Fair@Work Promises’ and close to 9,000 companies have signed the Employers’ pledge of Fair Employment practices, signalling their intention to be fair and to abide by the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP, 2019b).

Stage 3: Being Progressive

According to TAFEP (2019c), progressive companies are fair, inclusive, agile, productive and sustainable (see Table 2). To that end, TAFEP has developed and launched the Tripartite Standards – a set of employment practices that all employers are to implement at their workplaces. These standards cover various areas of employment such as recruitment, flexible work arrangements, grievance handling, age management, etc. For instance, the ‘Tripartite Standard on Age-Friendly Workplace Practices specifies a set of good age management practices’ for employers, including age-blind recruitment, employee resource groups and programmes for senior workers, senior-friendly physical work spaces, and re-employment opportunities for retiring employees (TAFEP, 2019c). Organizations who have adopted the various standards will be eligible to display the respective Tripartite Standard logo on their recruitment and marketing collaterals. To date, more than 4,000 organizations have claimed to have adopted at least one of the eight standards (TAFEP, 2019c).

Stage 4: Being Exemplary

Organizations who adhere to TAFEP’s guidelines and standards are then recognized as exemplary employers in Singapore. Recognition is awarded via two main initiatives: the Human Capital Partnership (HCP) Programme and the Tripartite Alliance Award (TAFEP, 2019d). The HCP initiative confers partnership to nominees who have instituted progressive employment practices as assessed by TAFEP. Successful organizations will be granted the HCP Mark, which provides additional benefits such as enhanced access to governmental support, human development resources and grants (TAFEP, 2019d). Employers who have adopted the guidelines and standards are also eligible for the Tripartite Alliance Award, comprising four categories, namely, Age Inclusive Practices, Fair and Progressive Employment Practices, Work-Life Excellence and Responsible Best Sourcing (TAFEP, 2019d). Such recognition helps position companies as top workplaces in Singapore, thus incentivizing further engagement in diversity and inclusion management.

In the last decade, TAFEP has indeed made headway in supporting the implementation of fair and progressive employment practices in Singapore. Previously, Chia and Lim (2010) questioned the efficacy of the agency given the lack of meaningful indicators, apart from the pledges of companies, to measure compliance. By extension, they cast doubt on the monitoring process and actual implementation of organizational diversity and inclusion policies. Currently, TAFEP still maintains the signatory model for driving its implementation, with little information on follow-through with compliance. Nevertheless, with the introduction of its recognition initiatives, there at least seems to be a monitoring process in place. At best, we know that at least 550 organizations (HCP Partners) have productively implemented the recommended guidelines and standards put forth by TAFEP (TAFEP, 2019d).

Moreover, while TAFEP is still largely non-legislative, it has recently been conferred some legislative backing. As of January 2020, through the Fair Consideration Framework, the Ministry of Manpower (2020, para. 2) has declared that ‘all employers in Singapore are expected to adhere to the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices’. Penalties have been imposed on non-adherence; errant companies with discriminatory practices would be placed on a watchlist and have their work pass privileges revoked. The Ministry may also prosecute employers for false declarations on fair recruitment: ‘Employers convicted of false declaration under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act will face imprisonment of up to 2 years, or fine up to \$20,000, or both’ (Ministry of Manpower, 2020, para. 11). However, a careful reading of the penalties seem to suggest that the Ministry is more concerned with discriminatory practices in relation to hiring preference for foreigners over Singaporeans – a hot button issue that has been under public scrutiny in recent years. Penalties for other forms of discrimination such as ageism or sexism seem to be largely absent. Regardless, reporting of breaches in employment practices is often an arduous task (Kaplan & Kleiner, 2000; Marshburn, Harrington, & Ruggs, 2017). It requires accessible and tangible evidence on the part of the whistle-blower who may then face retaliation from their employers — far harder when discrimination happens covertly via everyday interpersonal interactions (Kaplan & Kleiner, 2000; Marshburn, Harrington, & Ruggs, 2017).

Emerging Diversity Issues in Singapore

In this section, we discuss two key diversity issues that have captured the nation’s attention in the last decade. Firstly, we cast our attention on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) population in Singapore, as they grapple with a lack of legitimacy and government support. Secondly, we discuss the incidental progress on the inclusion of PLHIV in Singapore.

Inclusion of sexual and gender minorities at workplaces

In Singapore, in spite of the inclusive society rhetoric from the state, sexual orientation and gender identity (apart from sexed subjects; i.e. male and female) are not considered bases of inclusion in the general population nor the workplace. TAFEP (2017, p. 2), in its guidelines, only specifies the non-discrimination of employees on the basis of ‘age, race, gender, religion, marital status and family responsibilities, or disability’. Gender, here, specifically refers to the binary distinction between male/man and female/woman; it does not accommodate the gender identity of non-binary or transgender individuals. The non-inclusion of LGBTQ individuals can be attributed to two structural reasons. First, the maintenance of Section 377A of the Penal Code (hereafter, S377A), which criminalizes consensual sexual activity between men in private or otherwise. Second, the socially conservative society’s negative attitudes towards homosexuality. While cultural attitudes have been shifting over the last decade and the inclusion of LGBTQ-identifying employees at the workplace has improved in certain sectors of the economy, Singapore still substantially trails behind other developed economies for LGBTQ-specific diversity and inclusion initiatives and policies.

Homosexual Criminalization

There are estimated to be 210,000 men in Singapore who have sex with other men, making up about 3.74% of the general population (Teo et al., 2019). Yet, S377A – a remnant of the British

colonial public morality laws – continues to criminalise homosexual behaviours as acts of gross indecency. Titled ‘Outrages on decency’, the Penal Code (Cap 224, 2008 Rev Ed) S377A explicitly states that ‘any male person who, in public or private, commits, or abets the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 2 years’.

Today, Singapore is one of the 42 remaining former-British colonies with such a law in the books, but not without its contentions. On September 6, 2018, when the Indian Supreme Court decriminalized homosexuality, Singapore’s veteran diplomat, Tommy Koh, commented on a Facebook post celebrating the landmark decision: ‘I would encourage our gay community to bring a class action to challenge the constitutionality of Section 377A’ (Yahya, 2018, para. 2). His widely shared comment renewed a heated public debate on homosexuality, offering polarizing views and petitions from both pro- and anti-LGBTQ camps. Conspicuously, the Christian and Muslim religious leaders chimed in, warning against the normalization of homosexuality and its harms to society (Mokhtar, 2018). Amidst the divisive debate, the Singapore state was quick to reaffirm its stance made in 2007 (at the last major debate) that the statute will remain for the foreseeable future, but will not be proactively enforced in order to maintain the ‘uneasy compromise’ between the pro-LGBTQ minority and the conservative majority (Chen, 2013; Ng, 2019, para. 8). In other words, the state reiterated that S377A serves only to reflect societal morality against homosexuality in general (and all other non-heteronormative identities, by extension) and not to criminally prosecute gay and bisexual men.

Public Attitudes towards Homosexuality

Indeed, recent studies on public attitudes towards homosexuality – and acceptance of S377A in particular – suggest that the Singaporean society remains socially conservative. In 2018, a survey by Ipsos Singapore found that ‘55% of all Singaporeans supported Section 377A of the Singapore Penal Code, while 12% opposed’ (McPhedran, 2018, p. 1). A more nuanced national study on social attitudes towards S377A by Chua et al. (2017) found that 60% of the respondents agreed that the law should be retained. However, when respondents were informed of the non-enforcement policy of S377A, this number jumped to 75.6% – of which, only 20.6 per cent wanted the law to be enforced. This shows that although Singaporeans may not necessarily support punitive actions against LGBTQ individuals, they are generally unaccepting of their lifestyle. The general conservatism is further corroborated by the 2018 IPS Race, Religion and Language (RRL) Survey, where 63.6% of respondents indicated that it was ‘at least almost always wrong’ for same-sex sexual relations, and 60% for gay marriage (Mathews, Lim, & Selvarajan, 2019, p. 24). Both studies also found age and religiosity (especially monotheists) to be significant predictors of conservatism on the homosexual issue. Evidently, public attitudes towards homosexuality continue to be pre-dominantly negative, particularly amongst the older and more religious segments, corresponding to findings from earlier studies by Detenber et al. (2007) and Detenber et al. (2013).

Although around two-thirds of the population remain opposed to homosexuality, acceptance of LGBTQ individuals has been gradually rising. Compared to the results of the 2013 IPS RRL Survey, the latest statistics show that that moral opposition to homosexual sex has dropped by 16.4 percentage points (Mathews et al., 2019). Segmenting by age group, the authors also found the younger generation to be significantly more accepting of homosexuality – approximately one in two 18 to 25-year-olds and one in three 26 to 35-year-olds. Detenber et al. (2013) contend that positive shifts in public attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals could be attributed

to greater levels of globalization (read westernization) as well as increased exposure to homosexual content on both online and press media. In turn, this accounts for the positive shift particularly amongst the younger generation who are generally better educated and more connected.

A significant contributor to LGBTQ visibility in Singapore, over the last decade, is the annual Pink Dot event – a local variation of the worldwide Pride Parade celebrations. With the long-term goal of repealing S377A, LGBTQ activists framed the event as an apolitical, open-to-all celebration of ‘the idea that love transcends all limits’ (Tan, 2015, p. 983). Rather than lobbying the state directly, the movement was directed at the general public to favourably shift cultural attitudes. Initially only drawing a crowd of 2,500 in 2009, Pink Dot exploded to 26,000 attendees by 2014, maxing out the Speakers’ Corner (venue) capacity year-on-year (Tan, 2015). Given such numbers, the event annually draws attention from both local and international press media. In 2017, the government attempted to stymie the Pink Dot phenomenon by banning foreign funding and/or involvement for events held at the Speakers’ Corner, the only public site exempt from the Public Order Act. Multinational corporations from the likes of Facebook and Google are no longer allowed to sponsor the event, and only Singaporeans and Permanent Residents are permitted to participate. Nevertheless, the organizers continue to successfully bring in the figures each year since then and remain hopeful of gradually changing the hearts and minds of conservative Singaporeans.

LGBTQ in The Workplace

There are no estimates of the proportion of LGBTQ-identifying individuals who make up the Singaporean workforce. Nonetheless, Lim, Trau, and Foo’s (2018) study on workplace discrimination of sexual minorities had 11% of its respondents self-identifying as LGBTQ – consistent with United States’ estimates ranging from four to 17% (Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991). For these individuals, workplace discrimination is not uncommon. Studies have found that gay men and women are less likely to be hired for jobs (Foo, Lim, & Choi, 2005), and are more likely to be segregated into task-independent jobs for fear of upsetting heteronormative co-workers (Lim et al., 2018). Interviews with LGBTQ employees also suggest the existence of a pervasive ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ culture at the workplace (Kok, 2019; Wong, Kasman, & Lee, 2015, p. 15); a given considering the illegality of homosexuality and prevailing negative public attitudes. This has led to individuals compartmentalizing their personal lives from their work lives in order to protect themselves. Transgender employees, in particular, have found themselves resigning from their jobs in the face of overt discrimination during their transition (Wong et al., 2015).

Despite the above-painted bleak picture, workplace diversity and inclusion management for LGBTQ employees are not entirely absent. In certain sectors, provisions have been explicitly made to include LGBTQ employees – particularly amongst multinational companies. At the forefront of LGBTQ diversity and inclusion in Singapore, multinationals have been implementing their global policies and employee benefits locally in addition to sponsoring LGBTQ Employee Resource Groups at the workplace (Wong, 2014). As mentioned earlier, multinationals have also been proudly sponsoring the annual Pink Dot event prior to the ban on foreign involvement. Although 10 multinational companies appealed against the ban with the language of diversity and inclusion management at the workplace (Zhu, 2017), the authorities rejected the appeal and warned foreign companies to abide by local laws. According to Glasgow & Twaronite (2019, para. 18), multinationals in Singapore (since the ban) continue to promote inclusion through a hybrid ‘Embassy-Advocacy’ model, wherein they create an

affirmative workplace internally and make their ‘support for LGBT rights visible externally’ without actively partaking in lobbying activities. LGBTQ inclusion has also been gaining traction amongst local companies, particularly for industries embroiled in global competition for talent (Wong, 2014). In 2017, some 120 local companies supported the Red Dot for Pink Dot Campaign to fill the vacuum left by the ban on foreign sponsorship (Loi & Cheow, 2018). Since then, the movement receives sustained support from over 100 local companies each year.

However, LGBTQ-affirmative companies do not make up the majority. According to the 2017 LGBT Benefits Around the World survey by Mercer, only 42% of companies in Singapore offer protection for LGBTQ employees from workplace discrimination and harassment (Ang, 2017). More strikingly, a mere 15% of companies provide equal benefits for LGBTQ employees vis-à-vis their heterosexual counterparts – the lowest proportion in Asia. This is unsurprising given the retention of S377A, which legally justifies the exclusion of LGBTQ employees. Expectedly, 88% of the companies reported that they were ‘constrained by national laws’ and 41% cited ‘cultural, societal preconceptions’ as reasons for not offering equal benefits (Ang, 2017, para. 11). In a separate 2018 Workday Diversity & Inclusion survey, one in two companies rated ‘government and regulatory advisory’ as a key motivator for improving diversity and inclusion policies (Azahar, 2018, fig. 3). Such indicators, thus, suggest that the country’s poor track record for LGBTQ inclusion is expected to persist so long as companies are not intrinsically compelled to include LGBTQ employees.

In summation, LGBTQ individuals in Singapore continue to face discrimination in mainstream society as well as in the workplace – institutionalized by the existence of S377A that criminalizes homosexuality and the prevailing negative public activities towards them. While the Singapore state has pragmatically promised not to enforce S377A, allowing LGBTQ individuals to live their private lives without condoning their lifestyle, this has the effect of legitimizing homophobia and crystallising societal conservatism when it comes to LGBTQ acceptance. In turn, this inhibits LGBTQ diversity and inclusion practices from taking root in the country outside of the small fraction of progressive multinational and local companies – at least until the structural constraints are sufficiently addressed.

Discrimination against Persons Living with HIV (PLHIV)

Since the first reported case of HIV in 1985, a total of 8295 Singaporeans and Permanent Residents have been diagnosed with the virus as of 2018 (Ministry of Health, 2019). Based on mathematical modelling, this figure is expected to be underestimated by at least 28% (Chan, 2018). The gap in reported cases perhaps could be partially explained by the omission of those who have sought treatment overseas in order to avoid being recorded in the Ministry’s HIV Registry, as well as the stigma associated with HIV that prevents the uptake of voluntary testing – especially amongst heterosexual men (Lim et al., 2016; Tan & Hsu, 2019). Indeed, the issue of HIV is highly stigmatized in Singapore, particularly given its common association to taboo sexual practices such as casual or multiple sex-partners, homosexual sex, and commercial sex (Goh, 2008; Wong, Johnson, Koh, & Sen, 2016). In turn, this contributes to the problem of PLHIV discrimination and exclusion from mainstream society as well as the workplace.

Stigma and Discrimination

To date, there has been limited empirical research conducted in Singapore on PLHIV stigma and discrimination; extant literature mainly focuses on HIV prevention and education from a

public health perspective. The first and only quantitative study measuring perceived HIV-related stigma in Singapore, as experienced by 803 PLHIV, found high levels of perceived stigma (internalized and societal) across all demographic groups (Lin, Dhaliwal, Kong, Chan, & Tan, 2017). Another study conducted in-depth interviews with 16 PLHIV to ascertain their employment concerns (Tan et al., 2013). The authors reported that respondents were primarily concerned with maintaining the secrecy of their diagnosis in order to ensure their job security or entry. Respondents were also concerned about the inclusion of HIV testing in pre-employment health screenings. Their concerns largely stemmed from the anticipation of workplace stigma and discrimination, including discriminatory hiring and promotion practices. Their fears are not unfounded. Lim's (2003) study on the association between the fear of HIV/AIDS and organizational outcomes for PLHIV found positive and significant correlations between HR managers' fear and their perception that PLHIV employees would incur revenue and insurance costs as well as cause workplace disruptions. The study also found that managers who are more fearful are more likely to breach the confidentiality of the PLHIV employees' medical records. These findings thus suggest that the inclusion of PLHIV in the workforce and their protection from workplace discrimination remains a prevalent problem in Singapore.

Underpinning this predicament for PLHIV, is the stigma and fear surrounding the virus, which then manifests itself in discriminatory behaviours. In spite of biomedical advances in HIV management that has essentially eliminated the risk of transmission, the mainstream society has yet to dispel outdated myths about HIV transmission and management (Tan & Hsu, 2019). The corollary of which is the relegation of PLHIV to the fringes of society, driving them to live a life of secrecy regarding their status. However, the plight of this invisible group captured the attention of the public when the personal information of 14,200 individuals from the HIV Registry (5,400 Singaporeans/PR and 8,800 foreigners) was illegally leaked online on January 22, 2019 (Rei, 2019). A media frenzy surrounding the scandal ensued, particularly with interviews from PLHIV and activists from Action for AIDS (AfA) – the only community-based organization combatting HIV/AIDS in Singapore. AfA reported the general sense of distress and panic from the PLHIV community: 'A lot of people have been calling us crying, so worried that their children might find out, that their spouse would react. People are worried about employers finding out, insurers and their friends finding out. What's going to happen? Are they going to be blackmailed? Are they going to be threatened? I think there was a lot of fear' (Leyl, 2019, para. 14). The debacle, for the first time, noticeably and publicly shed light on the problem of PLHIV stigma and discrimination in Singapore.

Efforts to Alleviate Workplace Discrimination

Although there is no formal legislation in place to protect PLHIV, the state has devoted resources to alleviate discrimination at workplace settings. SNEF and the Health Promotion Board have jointly released the Guidelines on Managing HIV/AIDS at workplace, last updated in 2011. The guidelines provide critical information on HIV, emphasize that HIV cannot be transmitted through workplace contact, and strongly recommend the removal of impediments facing PLHIV employees (SNEF, 2011). Nevertheless, the guidelines recognize its own limitations by explicitly stating that employers retain their discretion in terminating PLHIV employees without justification so long as contractual notice is issued. Terminated employees, however, retain their right to dispute their dismissal within a month with the Ministry of Manpower under section 14 of the Employment Act, which would then involve mediation from TAFEP. On this basis, Ministry of Manpower issued a statement in 2019, after the HIV data leak, stating that PLHIV are protected from wrongful dismissals (Lim & Choo, 2019). The ministry also stated that it has yet to see any such cases hitherto. However, AfA has received

at least eight complaints from PLHIV, most of whom were afraid of making formal complaints to the authorities.

Short of formal legislation that explicitly protects PLHIV employees, their inclusion and protection in the workplace is then dependent on the individual company's voluntary adherence to the SNEF guidelines. To this end, SNEF promotes compliance through a three-tier implementation guide: (1) implementing education to mitigate HIV/AIDS-related fear and stigma; (2) creating a supportive environment at the workplace for PLHIV employees; and (3) instituting non-discriminatory policies (SNEF, n.d.). Concurrently, SNEF recruits companies to pledge their support toward implementing the first tier of the guidelines. To date, only 47 companies have signed the pledge. However, there has been little information on the monitoring and evaluation of the pledgers' compliance to the guidelines as well as their advancement to the other two tiers.

Recognizing the limitations of SNEF's efforts, AfA seized the opportunity presented by the HIV data leak to galvanize support from Singapore companies to address PLHIV discrimination at the workplace. The organization collaborated with Be Inclusive, a social enterprise advocating for diversity and inclusion management in Singapore, to launch the Employer's Pledge on HIV in the Workplace on January 31, 2019. The pledge called on employers to commit to the following:

1. HIV status alone is not grounds for a person's dismissal from employment;
2. Support will be provided to any employee who suffers harassment or discrimination on the basis of their HIV status;
3. Education initiatives that reduce HIV stigma and discrimination in Singapore will be undertaken, such as the Guidelines for Managing HIV/AIDS in the Workplace from the Singapore National Employers Federation (Be Inclusive, 2019, para. 4).

The community-based organizations have made some headway, garnering the signatures of 120 companies to date, including MOH Holdings Pte Ltd – the holding company for the Ministry of Health Singapore. This move has given the pledge a semblance of authority and added weight to the initiative. According to AfA, over 70% of the signatories are local small and medium enterprises (SME), who have variously cited that the lack of resources as a key challenge standing in the way of adopting PLHIV-related diversity and inclusion policies (correspondence). Presently, AfA and Be Inclusive are mobilizing resources for developing a toolkit targeted at SME business owners and HR managers in order to provide under-resourced companies the necessary support for implementing PLHIV-related diversity and inclusion policies. They also intend to engage in monitoring and evaluation of the signatories' commitment, and thus can be expected to be one of the key players in the realm of PLHIV inclusion in the workforce.

From the above discussion, it is evident that PLHIV stigma and discrimination has been a longstanding problem in Singapore. Previously rendered invisible, the recent data leak controversy has provided a unique opportunity for the state and community organizations to renew their efforts to alleviate the discrimination PLHIV face in the workplace. However, the lack of enforceable legislations for the protection of PLHIV and the high levels of stigma (both internalized and societal) conspire to impede substantive diversity and inclusion policies on this issue. In the interim, the only recourse for PLHIV employees appears to be the whims of individual organizational culture and the potential success of community organizations' advocacy and monitoring efforts.

Frameworks for Understanding Diversity Management in Singapore

Based on what we have discussed in this chapter, we now offer two theoretical frameworks that we believe are integral to understanding diversity and inclusion management in Singapore. First, we consider the role of the Many Helping Hands (MHH) approach or the multi-stakeholder approach that lays the foundation of Singapore's social policy framework. This approach appears to ring true for diversity and inclusion management as well, driving concerted action from several stakeholders as opposed to sweeping legislation. Second, we discuss the social construction of demographic groups, which demarcates the boundary of legitimate groups to be included as opposed to "illegitimate" groups. For advances in diversity and inclusion of illegitimate social groups, then, deeper socio-cultural norms and beliefs have to be disrupted.

Multi-stakeholder approach

In the realm of social policy, the Singapore government utilizes the MHH approach to devolve responsibility to the community, family, and individual for matters of social welfare. MHH is essentially a community-based, multi-stakeholder model for managing social inclusion, particularly for vulnerable groups (Sim, Ghoh, Loh & Chiu, 2015). Based on the communitarian belief that collective responsibility should be 'shared by various segments of society', stakeholders ranging from governmental bodies, enablers, grant-makers, donors, volunteers, and community-based NGOs are all brought into the folds of the social policy landscape (Sim et al., 2015, p. 10). Enablers, here, refer to quasi-governmental bodies such as the National Council of Social Service. According to Rozario and Rosetti (2012), the MHH approach is a manifestation of the Singapore state's capitalist rationality that emphasizes anti-welfarist self-reliance. It allows the state to absolve itself from enacting formal welfare provisions and legislation. Instead, the state coordinates, facilitates, and regulates social provisions under the aegis of quasi-governmental bodies (Rozario & Rosetti, 2012).

The multi-stakeholder approach described above bears striking resemblance to the way in which diversity and inclusion is managed in the economic sphere given its overlap with social dimensions. There are no formal legislation that protects employees from discrimination. In its place, the state has authorized TAFEP, a quasi-governmental body, to implement and enforce guidelines for diversity and inclusion. More importantly, NGOs continue to be key players in the diversity and inclusion arena, at times supported by governmental bodies. In the case of elderly inclusion, TAFEP and the Tripartite Committee on Employability of Older Workers take the lead in effecting age-friendly practices. The state plays a more supportive role through funding schemes and grants for employers as well as NGOs to promote further action. Even in the realm of PLHIV inclusion, governmental efforts are undertaken via SNEF and the Health Promotion Board. AFA, the key NGO stakeholder, is supported through grants and listed as a community partner of the Ministry of Health (Khor, 2018).

If our observations are accurate, then, we cannot expect the government to directly take the lead in diversity and inclusion management nor make any sweeping protective legislations in the future. Instead, it might be more productive for scholars and practitioners to be attuned to the supportive functions played by the government to empower the various stakeholders in each issue area. In this sense, quasi- and non-governmental organizations are expected to have a much more visible role in managing diversity and inclusion in Singapore.

Social construction of demographic groups

The ways in which certain demographic or social groups are constructed in society determine the level of institutional support they may receive from political structures. According to Ingram and Schneider (2005), only when a social group is positively constructed in culturally accepted ways and/or possesses political currency would that group be targeted for the distribution of policy benefits. Conversely, deviant groups with negative constructions and/or weak political currency are more likely to be distributed either ‘marginal benefits’ or ‘overt burdens’ (Ingram & Schneider, 2005, p. 262). This dynamic is very much evident in the management of diversity and inclusion in Singapore.

As discussed, the bases of inclusion are limited to certain highly legitimate diversity types, including race, age, disability, and to a certain extent gender. Positively constructed in society, national and TAFEP resources have been poured into improving the diversity and inclusion of these social groups. The same cannot be said of sexual and gender minorities. Majority of Singaporeans still do not accept LGBTQ individuals as the statistics have shown. Deemed illegitimate and undeserving of policy benefits, policymakers cannot be seen as catering to these group without bearing a political cost from the electorate. Hence, in the case of LGBTQ diversity and inclusion management, NGOs and individual organizations play an important role to fill the void in national policy. For practitioners, then, this means that continued efforts must be sustained to shift the minds of the electorate. As the social construction of the group changes in society for the better, we can expect more productive engagements from governmental actors in the future.

While cultural change is a long arduous process that may takes years to occur, unpredictable events or political opportunities may afford some leeway for policy action for illegitimate groups. For instance, PLHIV in Singapore have been facing longstanding stigma and discrimination. Yet, the ability to reframe the issue as a public health concern has given governmental agencies some room to introduce guidelines for inclusion of PLHIV in the workplace. Moreover, the HIV data leak gave PLHIV political currency and presented an opportunity for governmental agencies and community-based NGOs to act in ways to drive further inclusionary measures for the highly stigmatized group. The task of practitioners, then, is to seize any potential opportunities for culturally illegitimate groups to increase their political currency. Though the inclusion of these groups may not be as robust, since negative constructions persist, the little benefits they receive would still certainly be progress made.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have assessed the progress made in the country’s diversity and inclusion efforts, both at the national and organizational levels. Leading the national effort for building a fairer and more inclusive economy is the quasi-governmental agency, TAFEP. Though conceived as a non-legislative committee, TAFEP has been active in setting guidelines and standards for employers in Singapore to meet. More has also been done to enforce and guide implementation of diversity and inclusion strategies at the workplace. The Ministry of Manpower has recently stepped in to give these guidelines some authoritative force, which might contribute to greater compliance in the years to come.

We then examined two key issue areas of diversity and inclusion that have dominated discourse in the last decade; namely, inclusion of sexual and gender minorities, and discrimination

against persons living with HIV. LGBTQ individuals fare worse in regard to inclusion at all levels, constrained by a socially conservative and heteronormative Singapore society. National efforts, especially from TAFEP, remain conspicuously silent on this issue as sexual orientation and gender identity are not officially regarded as bases of diversity and inclusion. Instead, progress in this area is supplanted by community-based and organizational efforts. Lastly, the normally invisible PLHIV population came under public scrutiny with the data leak controversy. The stigma and discrimination they face in society and workplaces was publicly acknowledged. This renewed efforts for PLHIV inclusion, particularly from community-based advocacy.

Based on our assessment, we have laid out two theoretical frameworks that are useful for analyzing diversity and inclusion management in Singapore. First, we have shown that the multistakeholder approach, ‘Many Helping Hands’, favored by the government in the realm of social policy rings true for diversity and inclusion even in the economic sphere. The government relegates action to key stakeholders such as the quasi-governmental body, TAFEP, and other NGOs authorized as community partners. While these stakeholder take on a more visible role in diversity and inclusion management, the government plays a more auxiliary role and intervenes only when needed. Second, we have contended that the prevailing construction of social groups – as “legitimate” or “illegitimate” – determines that level of institutional support they receive. Unless the social construction of illegitimate groups changes for better, we cannot expect any meaningful governmental efforts for their inclusion. Instead, NGOs and individual organizations are expected to cater to these groups. Nevertheless, unpredictable events (like the HIV data leak) may increase the political currency of illegitimate groups and therefore warrant the involvement of the otherwise non-interventionist government.

Further research

Although we have only discussed two key diversity areas in this chapter, given its visibility in contemporary public discourse, there are further opportunities for research in other key diversity issues concerning disability, ex-offenders, and migrant workers. These social groups have also been getting significantly more protection and support in Singapore over the last decade. Particularly for low-wage migrant workers, the recent Covid-19 pandemic has increased the political currency of their current state of affairs. Migrant workers segregated into densely packed dormitories have borne the brunt of the pandemic in Singapore. As of June 1, 2020, there have been more than 35,000 infections, with migrant workers accounting for more than 90% of cases in Singapore. NGOs, such as the Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), have seized the opportunity to publicly call attention to the dismal living conditions of these low-wage migrant workers, and have been advocating for fairer treatment and inclusion in society (see Loong, 2020 for an elaboration). Following local and international outcry and scrutiny, an inter-agency task force that was set up to handle the migrant worker situation has reached out to collaborate with and coordinate efforts from NGOs. The Minister of Manpower has also promised to raise the living standards for migrant workers, unveiling plans for purpose-built dormitories with lower densities and better amenities. Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic has been the perfect storm that has raised the political currency for migrant worker inclusion in Singapore. In turn, this issue area appears to be a promising avenue for future research in diversity and inclusion management in the country.

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