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### Building gender-inclusive workplaces in Singapore: A practical guide for companies and human resource practitioners

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# Building Gender-Inclusive Workplaces in Singapore

A Practical Guide for Companies and Human Resource Practitioners

# Preface

We are a team of students from the Singapore Management University (“SMU”) Diversity Leadership Development Programme and SMU Women’s Connections. We believe that all employees are valuable members of many organisations that operate in Singapore. Companies can therefore harness the potential of stronger teams by ensuring that all employees feel safe, valued and included- regardless of one’s gender.

In 2014, Singapore saw more women than men enter tertiary educational institutions<sup>1</sup>. Despite this progress made, a study conducted in 2015 found that women were part of only 9.1 per cent of SGX- listed boards, with almost half of these boards being predominantly occupied by male members<sup>2</sup>. The figures reflect a situation of a “leaking pipeline” in Singapore, where there is a drastic drop in women’s participation moving from middle to senior level positions<sup>3</sup>. There is also a decrease in the number of women who remained employed after 30 years old<sup>4</sup>.

In response, there has been more focus in recent years on gender-inclusive initiatives, particularly in the aspect of family-friendly policies and women leadership. However, to make a difference in achieving a more gender inclusive environment, this guidebook puts forth the perspective that a comprehensive set of practical policies should be set up coherently to address various issues faced by individuals during their employment with a company.

The policies are categorised into five dimensions:

- **Employment and compensation**
- **Working environment, practices and cultures**
- **Family friendly policies**
- **International mobility**
- **Succession planning and women leadership**

Research has also revealed that a common problem that underpins the current state of gender inequality is unconscious bias<sup>6</sup>. Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form unconsciously<sup>7</sup>. As such, all five themes would call out stereotypes inhibiting gender inequality, following which we provide recommendations to address them.

The practical nature of the ideas in this guidebook make it relevant for most companies, regardless of their size, industry and resource availability. As these policies work towards building a common goal of inclusion for all employees, no demographic will be excluded in the process.

These practices have been compiled based on extensive literature review and in consultation with human resource practitioners, Diversity and Inclusion (“D&I”) practitioners, members of employee resource groups, career coaches, gender advocacy groups and C-suite executives from leading companies in various sectors. Anecdotes from selected interviews are included in this booklet so that readers can appreciate- in their own words- their experiences, challenges and hopes. In order to protect our participant’s privacy and the integrity of our contributors, pseudonyms have been used.

We sincerely hope that you find this publication useful.

# Acknowledgements

The months that we have spent researching, interviewing and authoring this publication has been a significant journey. We would like to express our gratitude to our interviewees who shared their personal and professional experiences and views with us generously.

The team would also like to acknowledge the following organisations.

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- *Mr. Hayden Majajas, Head of Diversity & Inclusion APAC, Bloomberg L.P.*
- *Infineon Technologies Asia Pacific Pte Ltd*
- *Ms. Karen Loon, Partner, Territory Diversity Leader, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP*
- *Dr. Michelle Goh, Entrepreneur*
- *Ms. Sher-Li Torrey, Founder, Mums @ Work*
- *Singapore Committee for UN Women*
- *Ms. Tan Kai Foong, Founder and Principal Consultant, Grain of Wheat Consulting*

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# Business Case For Inclusion

Gender equality, or the equality between women and men, is a notion that rights, responsibilities and opportunities should not depend on one's gender<sup>8</sup>. In the corporate context, this could be manifested as the right to equal pay for the same job, same career advancement opportunities and the right to a safe working environment. Thus, gender equality is not just a women's issue but an ideal everyone should strive for.

In a very competitive business environment, companies often face a myriad of challenges. Business leaders may feel that the return on investment from supporting inclusion initiatives are marginal, insignificant, and thus impractical. However, this is a very short-sighted argument and ignores the positive economic benefits in the long run. We have outlined four reasons why inclusion initiatives benefit an organisation in the long run.



## Access to a wider pool of talent

As this decade comes to a close in 2019, the number of locals entering the workforce each year will shrink by up to 80 per cent to around 20,000 - a decline that will significantly tighten the Singapore labour market<sup>9</sup>.

With Singapore's society made up of slightly more females than males at a ratio of 10:9<sup>10</sup>, companies should be more proactive in attracting more females to deal with this manpower crunch. Furthermore, only 59 per cent of women are in the workforce in 2015<sup>11</sup>. If this is raised to 77 per cent, which is today's rate for males, the labour force will increase by 16 per cent<sup>12</sup>.



## Increased retention

Employers who invest resources into inclusive policies create an environment which effectively capitalises on each individual's unique contribution and leads to more engaged employees. This would in turn help the company save money and retain talent in a tight labour market as employees with the highest level of engagement are 87 percent less likely to leave the organisation<sup>13</sup>.

Gender- inclusive policies can also help to retain talented female millennials. This is because the female millennial is more confident than any female generation before her and considers opportunities for career progression an important employer trait<sup>14</sup>.



## Improved employee performance

Gender- inclusive environments allow employees to “bring their whole selves to work.” This means that an employee need not fear harassment, is able to settle pressing personal or family matters before entering the office, and is motivated to give his/her all knowing that there is fair compensation.

The effect of such inclusive environments create lower absenteeism, reduced work errors with improved concentration amongst employees and stronger organisational commitment<sup>15</sup>. This improved employee performance would translate to increased organisational effectiveness in meeting its corporate objectives.





## Increased business performance

Business performance can be improved with cognitive diversity: differences in the way that we see the world, solve problems and make predictions.<sup>16</sup> Cognitive diversity within the team aids in superior problem solving and richer insights at the business unit level that would ultimately lead to superior performance<sup>17</sup>.

As identity diversity correlates to a certain degree with cognitive diversity and it is often the easiest approximation of cognitive diversity<sup>18</sup>, companies should actively work towards a more demographically diverse workforce. A more diverse employee profile that reflects the organisation's customer base also places the company in a better position to tap potential business opportunities.

It is also important to note that diversity alone does not achieve the aforementioned benefits. "Diversity" is by no means equivalent to "inclusion"<sup>19</sup>. Inclusion is a state of being valued, respected and supported. It's about focusing on the needs of every individual and ensuring the right conditions are in place for each person to achieve his or her full potential<sup>20</sup>.

As such, inclusion may be afforded to some instances but not others. Making a choice to be inclusive is therefore an intentional process that is facilitated by leadership, organisation culture, practices and policies. Inclusive workplace environments are therefore a complementary dimension needed for the organisation to harness the full benefits of a diverse workplace.

# Employment and Compensation

The Tripartite Guidelines On Fair Employment Practices (“TAFEP”) recommends that companies recruit and hire employees on the basis of merit (i.e. skills, experience or ability to perform the job) regardless of age, race, gender, religion, marital status and family responsibilities, or disability<sup>21</sup>. To ensure that the best people are hired, hiring managers should be aware of and minimise unconscious bias that may be prevalent during the hiring process:

## Job advertisements

Job advertisements should adopt gender-neutral terms and emphasise on attributes that are required of the job. Where the practical requirements of a job dictate the need for employees of a particular sex, the rationale for the requirement should be clearly stated.

### **Avoid words or phrases that suggest preference for job candidates of a particular gender:**

- ✗ “salesgirl”, “deliveryman”, “waitress”,
- ✓ “delivery staff”, “service crew”

### **Emphasis on attributes that are required of the job**

- ✓ “staff must be able to carry heavy loads”;
- “staff are expected to market cosmetic products”

### **Explain practical requirements for a particular sex**

- ✓ Female therapists needed to perform personal body massages and spa treatments for female customers.

Apart from advertisements placed in the job market, companies often approach recruitment agencies to fill in specialised or executive positions in a company. To encourage a more diverse mix within the organisation, the company could request the agency provide both male and female candidates for consideration before shortlisting applicants for interviews.

When I was sending out resumes for a job under my real name, I did not receive any replies. I then sent out resumes under a pseudonym using a Chinese name. Within three days, I received a few emails for interviews. This experience has demonstrated to me that unconscious bias may still take place in the hiring process.

Kharisma  
Director, Food and Beverage Industry

## Resume screening

Human resource (HR) managers and hiring managers typically screen a large volume of resumes before determining candidates for interview. Discrimination against candidates based on their personal identifiers on a resume is a systemic aspect of the labour market that affects women, visible minorities, and women from visible minorities<sup>22</sup>.

In science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines, research has proven that scientists may be significantly less likely to agree to mentor, offer jobs, or recommend equal salaries to a candidate if the name at the top of the resume is Jennifer, rather than John<sup>23</sup>. Hiring managers and applicants from the same alma mater also have a similar impact, particularly in financial services<sup>24</sup>, adding to the biases in the selection process.

As such, companies could have “blind resumes” to encourage those who are screening the resumes for shortlisting of interviews to focus on the areas specific to the role: experience and skills. These “blind” resumes are redacted so that they do not include the applicant’s personal details, such as his/her name, marital status, nationality, race, address and gender; but would

retain information pertinent to the role such as past working experiences, awards attained and relevant skill sets. Once candidates have been reviewed, screened and short-listed, HR can then return the redacted information (name, address, etc.) and carry out interviews.

# “Blind” Resume Sample

Resume#3541

Personal particulars removed to encourage hiring managers to focus on qualification

**Hiring Department:** Sales and Marketing

**Position:** Regional Lead

**Profile:** Confident, adaptable and highly qualified marketing professional with 8 years of experience in various industries. Leadership and creativity is evident from the proven track record of reaching new sales records despite a slowing business environment. Has also worked on several Diversity and Inclusion initiatives to enable stronger organisational commitment amongst employees.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

### The Nemo Company, Singapore

*Regional Sales Manager, House-brand Products*  
May 2011- Present

Relevant experience, awards, competencies should be kept

- Oversee south- east region for sales of company products, supervising 5 teams with combined staff strength of 50 sales representatives.
- Maintained and averaged a 20% annual gross increase in sales since joining the company from \$2million to over \$5million.
- Cultivated a strong repeat customer base that generated 60% of my annual sales.
- Set up a sales and marketing team in Yangon, Myanmar to support growing regional presence
- Executive Sponsor for the women’s network working with senior leadership to develop more women leaders

## **The Dory Company, Singapore**

*Country Sales Manager, Mar 2010- Apr 2011*

*Sales Associate, Aug 2008- Mar 2010*

- Managed daily sales of health supplements product line generating \$1.2 million annually.
- Provided floor sales leadership, handled corporate accounts and supervised 8 associates.
- Surpassed sales goals by 10% in 2009 and 8% in 2008 (despite economic recession)
- Recognised as Promising Employee of the Year, 2010

## **EDUCATION**

**Executive Masters of Business Administration** (July, 2014)

**Bachelor of Business Management with major in Marketing**

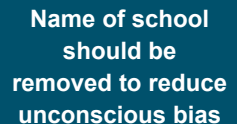
*Second Upper Class Honours* (July, 2008)

## **AWARDS & QUALIFICATIONS**

N3 Certificate Japanese Language Proficiency

HeforSheLeader Award Winner, UN Women

Dean's List, School of Business (AY 06/07)



Name of school  
should be  
removed to reduce  
unconscious bias

## Job interviews

Unconscious bias can contribute to unfair hiring at the interview stage. It is therefore important to minimise unconscious bias during face-to-face interviews.

Organisations can provide unconscious bias training for employees to “check” themselves and each other when making certain decisions. Through unconscious bias training, a hiring manager may realise that he may be biased towards a candidate who has graduated from the same university. In an interview situation, unconscious bias may result in the hiring manager asking fewer questions about the candidate’s education and instead delve deeper into the education of other candidates who graduated from different universities.

Implementing a system of interview panels rather than one-on-one interviews can further reduce unfair interview processes. The interview panel could comprise members from a different department, such as HR, or including at least a member from an identified minority demographic. The value of having an interview panel is the breadth of perspectives that different backgrounds will bring, while also lessening the impact of unconscious bias.

## Equal compensation

While women’s workforce participation and educational levels have risen<sup>25</sup>, Singapore women still earn less than men in all occupational categories except clerical and support. In most categories, this differential is more than 10 per cent<sup>26</sup>.

The gender pay gap has been well researched and studied. We have identified the common reasons cited for the wage disparity, and provide the following recommendations:

ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION
<p>In 2012, a global management-consulting firm, Hay Group, found that one in four Singapore employers pay male employees more for having completed full-time national service (NS). The additional pay - built into employees' salaries averaged \$185 a month<sup>27</sup>.</p>	<p>Evaluate job offers based on the relevance of an applicant's past experiences including past employment, NS and professional qualifications.</p> <p>It is not recommended to give all employees who has served NS, regardless of relevance to the job, a higher pay.</p>
<p>Women often face more career interruptions than men due to family commitments<sup>28</sup>.</p>	<p>To prevent women employees from resigning or requesting unpaid leave (beyond maternity leave entitlements), companies can offer various working arrangements (part-time, flexi work etc.) to help staff balance work and family commitments. <i>(See section on family-friendly policies)</i></p>



ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION
<p>Companies may be unaware that the gender pay gap exist within their companies.</p>	<p>In the company's annual pay review exercise, there should also be a breakdown between the earnings by males and females at each job level.</p> <p>This would help identify the gender pay gaps within the organisation and for management to decide on appropriate action(s)<sup>29</sup>.</p>
<p>As a product of unconscious bias, women and men are assessed very differently at the workplace<sup>30</sup>. This could lead to unfair compensation for females.</p>	<p>Pay increases or bonuses should be based on annually established goals for threshold, target and maximum.</p> <p>Discuss and defend the distribution of employees' raises or bonuses in a peer group setting (managers across business units with a HR partner present)<sup>31</sup>.</p>

**I consider the applicant's past working experience when making hiring decisions and the amount of remuneration to provide. For example, I would pay an applicant more if his/ her NS records demonstrate qualities, such as strong leadership qualities and tenacity, that are important to our business.**

**Jie Ying**  
**HR Manager, Consumer Business**

# Workplace Environment, Culture And Practices

It is the responsibility of every employee and all organisations to maintain a safe working environment. Harassment at the workplace should be promptly dealt with. Companies that have a bad track record of not taking workplace harassment seriously risk damaging their reputation and possible criminal prosecution by the authorities.

While harassment can take place in many forms, this guidebook focuses on sexual harassment. The principles highlighted in this guidebook to deter sexual harassment can be applied to prevent other forms of harassment.

Another distinguishing characteristic of gender-inclusive organisations is an environment where employees can bring their whole selves to the office. This is especially important because when individuals feel that they cannot be themselves at work, they will not be as participative within the team or as engaged in their assigned work.

## Dealing with sexual harassment

The issue of workplace sexual harassment in Singapore remains for the most part a 'hidden' problem<sup>33</sup>. While there are no official statistics on the incidence of sexual assault in Singapore, the Sexual Assault Care Centre under AWARE supported 267 people who faced sexual assault in 2015. Of which, 25% (about 68 cases) took place in a workplace context<sup>34</sup>.



Victims shared that the majority of these offences were committed by:

- Someone known to them
- Had longer experience with the company compared to them
- Individuals with higher position/ authority

Sexual harassment can take place in several ways. 'Less severe' forms of harassment - such as verbal abuse, physical touching, repeated lewd emails or text messages, or unwelcome comments on behaviour or dress<sup>35</sup>- are seldom called out by employers as many prefer not to wash "dirty linen" in front of their other employees<sup>36</sup>. At the same time companies may even not support staff in reporting more serious offences such as sexual assault to the police for the fear of reputational damage to the organisation.

There are several actions that employers can take to provide support and protection for their employees and ensure they enjoy a safe and conducive working environment. An important first step would be establishing an anti- harassment policy to set the tone within the organisation and to provide important guidance for parties handling harassment issues. The policy could include the following:

- A general guideline that employees have the right to feel safe in their working environment and not face discrimination in the workplace from reporting behaviour such as sexual harassment, unwanted advances, inappropriate physical touching etc.
- Highlight some common forms of sexual harassment to help employees call out instances when they feel unsafe. (See page 15 for common forms of sexual harassment)
- Clear procedures on how to report harassment - including identification of all parties to file the complaint to - with assurances of impartiality and confidentiality in investigations.

- When it comes to incidents of rape, the company should encourage the victim to make a police report and render assistance during police investigations.
- Possible disciplinary actions that may be taken against harassers, or against those who make false reports of harassment.

Key messages within the anti- harassment policy should be regularly communicated to employees and the policy document made readily available for reference by any staff within the organisation. For more information on harassment policies, readers can review the *Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment*.

There was a period when my male colleague would frequently put his hand over shoulder. I initially thought that he was being friendly, but soon became uncomfortable, I was afraid of raising the issue for the fear of overreacting.

Jessie  
Sales Manger, Banking and Finance

# Some Examples of Harassment

## VISUAL

- Staring at someone's body parts that makes him/her uncomfortable.
- Unwanted letters/calls/texts materials of a sexual nature.
- Lewd wallpapers or screen savers on computers, nude calendars.

## VERBAL

- Unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, remarks, or questions.
- Whistling at someone.
- Sexual comments about a person's clothing/anatomy/looks.
- Sexual innuendos or stories.
- Asking sexual fantasies/history.
- Spreading rumours about a person's personal sex life.



## PHYSICAL

- Unwanted pressure for sexual favours or dates.
- Unwanted leaning over or cornering.
- Touching an employee's clothing, hair or body in an inappropriate and non-consensual manner.
- Rubbing oneself sexually around another person.

Apart from having an anti- harassment policy, managers and supervisors can be taught certain simple tools to deal with sexual harassment complaints more effectively.

DO NOT	DO
Write-off “small” acts: What may seem like an insignificant act to you may be severely distressing to another.	Demonstrate care for the victim. Ask: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “How long has it be going on?”</li> <li>• “What can I do to make you feel safe?”</li> </ul>
Accuse the victim of making a false report.	<b>NOTE:</b> Convey empathy. Be mindful not to sound interrogative.
Make the victim feel as if it was their fault.	Actions taken should prioritise the victim’s health and well-being with prompt investigations into the complaint carried out.
Take action only after “investigations” are complete.	Take action at the team level to resolve the issue immediately if possible. If remedy actions are beyond the manager’s authority, he/she should escalate the matter.
Attempt to conduct an investigation into whether a rape has taken place.	When it comes to incidents of rape, the company should encourage the victim to make a police report and render assistance during police investigations.
	Manager should check on the staff periodically to provide necessary support. Referrals to social service organisations for professional help may be required.

## Gender-inclusive cultures

*Gender* refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviours that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. On the other hand, *gender identity* refers to "one's sense of oneself as male, female, or transgender". When one's gender identity and biological sex are not congruent, the individual may identify as transsexual or as another transgender category<sup>37</sup>. Thus, there may be employees within organisations who identify as transsexual.

In the effort to become more inclusive and understanding, companies can incorporate education about gender identity and gender expression in diversity training programs to build sensitivity towards colleagues who identify as transgender, transitioning or questioning. For example, most people take reasonable access to restroom facilities for granted as transgender people often face the burden of being confronted or questioned about which gender's restroom they should use. Such training would help *all* employees feel comfortable, and promote inclusion within the work environment.

Inclusive conversations should also use gender nouns/pronouns that are consistent with the gender identity of the individual. Enquire beforehand which gender pronoun an individual wishes to identify with and never assume where the trans-person is on in their journey of transition. Proper usage of gender nouns / pronouns, even in private conversations, can help tremendously in shaping inclusive environments.

When I began my gender transitioning, my colleagues would make many defamatory remarks at me. It was very hurtful. I only hoped that they saw me as a hardworking individual who wanted to contribute as much to my company as possible.

Nicole  
Consultant, Hospitality Industry

# Family Friendly Policies

With Singapore's rising standard of living, a dual-income family has become more of a necessity than a choice. While women become more educated and have higher career aspirations<sup>38</sup>, many are still expected to take on the larger role within the family, such as taking care of children<sup>39</sup>. At the same time, more men are increasingly expected to step up and be involved in caregiving roles within the family unit<sup>40</sup>. Family-friendly policies should therefore be made available to both men and women.

With Singapore's aging population and fewer members of the extended family, working adults will likely face increased pressure to look after the seniors<sup>41</sup>. This, coupled with cultural values such as filial piety<sup>42</sup>, often mean that employees are expected to take on family responsibilities beyond childcare.

Family-work conflict for single parents (divorced, separated, widowed etc.) also warrant attention as there is reduced family support compared to married parents. The increased financial burden and heavy parenting responsibilities of a single parents increases the importance for family friendly policies to help this demographic cope with the competing responsibilities.

Family-friendly policies that companies can adopt fall into three main categories:

- Flexible Work Arrangements
- Leave Entitlement
- Family Support Initiatives



## Flexible work arrangements

Flexible working arrangements are either temporary or permanent. Flexible Work Arrangements can manifest in having employees work reduced working hours (see table below for different policy choices); or having the same objectives but accompanied with the flexibility to ‘any time, any place, anywhere’ delivery.

POLICY <sup>43</sup>	FEATURES
Flexi-time/ flexi-hours	Employees choose their start and end time of work daily, as long as they complete the agreed-upon number of hours over an accounting period e.g. 40 hours in 1 week.
Part-time	Part-time employees work fewer hours compared to their full time counterparts over an accounting period. Unlike flexi-time, their hours are pre-determined.
Job sharing	Job is shared by at least 2 people, with hours usually split equally. Detailed arrangement and scheduling usually done by job-sharers, not supervisors.
Compressed work schedule	Employees work full-time hours in fewer than the usual number of days e.g. working 10 hours a day for 4 days.

There is a stigma for using flexible working arrangements amongst both women and men<sup>45</sup>. This is especially so when there is an economic downturn or higher unemployment rates<sup>46</sup>.

To ensure that flexible working arrangements are successful in meeting their objectives of helping employees balance work and family commitments, companies could engage in the following:

1. Regularly highlight the various policies through the company's intranet, company-wide events (family day, work plan seminars etc.) to create acceptance.
2. Encourage line managers to have conversations with their employees early about their family commitments to reiterate the company's support for employees. This could be at the point of employment or when there is a change in reporting structure.
3. Involve both senior male and female senior figures speaking about how they worked flexibly. This makes it clear that options were available – and culturally acceptable – for everyone across the company<sup>47</sup>.
4. Important to focus on performance and outcomes as opposed to traditional markers such as amount of face-time in the office

BEFORE EMPLOYEE GOES ON FLEXIBLE WORKING	DURING PERIOD OF FLEXIBLE WORKING
Line manager and employees agree on a set of deliverables or performance targets.	Regular meetings between line manager and employees to reaffirm expectations and offer organisational support.
Explain arrangements to the remaining team members and ensure that those who take on additional responsibilities are fairly compensated.	Reaffirm career progression plans and pre-requisites for staff going on flexi-working arrangements.

After my first child was born, I was allowed to work from home and would come into office as required. I eventually found out that my colleagues were unhappy as they felt I was contributing less to the team for the same rewards. The gossips were very unfair and I was very discouraged.

Johnson  
Senior Manager, Logistics

5. Conduct annual surveys amongst both male and women employees on awareness level, take-up rate and the proportion who would participate in the policies *again* when they required. Responses should be evaluated based on gender to pick up interesting insights and for meaningful follow-up actions.
6. Companies that are starting to implement flexible work arrangements can undertake pilot groups in order to trial and refine possible processes. Success stories from this low-risk experiments could also be shared to mould a more favourable organizational culture towards flexible working arrangements<sup>49</sup>.



**Note: Companies can get funding for implementing work-life strategies. The grant has 2 components: Developmental Grant (up to \$40,000) and the FWA Incentive (up to \$120,000). More information can be found on <http://www.mom.gov.sg/>**

## Leave entitlement

Apart from the statutory requirements of annual leave, childcare leave, maternity leave and sick leave<sup>50</sup>, many companies also offer paid- unrecorded leave to employees. This leave is typically used for only- approved reasons. To better support work-life balance, companies could expand the approved reasons for use of unrecorded leave to help employees cope with various family situations and needs.

Aside from paid leave, companies could also offer options for unpaid leave to support employees who need longer periods of work to take care of family matters.

PAID LEAVE	FEATURES
Childcare leave	Childcare leave for children till 12 years old (beyond Government-Paid childcare leave for children under 7 years old).
Family care leave	Offered to <i>all</i> employees, including single employees, for the care of any other member of the family.
Sick leave for family members	Allowing employees to use existing Sick Leave entitlement with submission of Medical Certificate from an older parents or children.

Most companies that we have researched on are also quick to point out that flexible working arrangements and no-pay leave provisions is a conversation between both employers and employees. Employees should provide early notice to their line managers with regards to making use of these choices so that the company has ample time to source for adequate manpower. At the same time, the company should be careful not to express pessimism or disdain when an employee enquires or requests such leave.

### Family- support initiatives

Beyond giving employees the time and flexibility to juggle their work and family commitments, companies can also have other initiatives to address employees' family needs and engage the employees' families.

FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMME	FEATURES
Eat With Your Family Days	Some companies commemorate Eat with Your Family Days more regularly than the annual event. To further encourage families to leave early, a meeting advise is sent by HR to all employees to block off the time after 5pm.
Family- oriented company events	Beyond the annual family day, companies could organise more regular events to include employees' families (Halloween/ Christmas/ New Year's party within the office etc.)
Parent networks	Encourage experienced parents to partner up with new parents for sharing of experience coping with both work and family. Companies can also provide a list of Parent Support Groups for employees who have children.

My company recently participated in a career fair for mothers wanting to return back to the workplace. It struck me that the mothers who participated were highly qualified and talented. I realised that if our company could make our environment more family- friendly, we could tap onto a very large talent pool.

**Richard**  
HR Director, Professional Services

## List of Parent Network Groups

### **Mums@Work (Singapore)**

Mums@Work supports women to find the perfect balance between being a mum and working. It provides information on:

- Mothers seeking Flexible Work Arrangements
- Mumpreneurs (Mothers starting a small business from home)
- Employers keen on Flexible Work Arrangement

<http://www.mumsatwork.net/home>

### **Crib Society**

CRIB Pte Ltd is a Singapore-based social enterprise which aims to empower women to become successful entrepreneurs through networking, matchmaking (finding complementary business partners) and business incubation (mentorship, access to funding etc.).

<http://www.crib.com.sg>

### **New Mother Support Group**

Set up nearly 20 years ago, we are the original support group for new mums and mums new to Singapore. We offer a chance to start friendships and build support through regular socials, walks, wellness groups, parties and seasonal events.

<http://www.nmsg-singapore.com>

### **Breastfeeding Mums Support Group (BMSG)**

BMSG's seeks to facilitate support for breastfeeding mothers, conduct workshops/ events for pregnant/ breastfeeding mothers & families, as well as work with businesses & workplaces to support breastfeeding.

<http://breastfeeding.org.sg>

# International Mobility

Many multinational companies have based their regional headquarters in Singapore. Moving forward, more Singapore-based companies have been encouraged to ride the winds of globalisation by tapping on a larger regional or global consumer base.

These business models means that more employees now would be expected to take on international assignments. Overseas working experience may even be an important consideration for further career progression within certain organisations.

In Singapore, women value an international experience more than their global counterparts and have indicated that overseas career opportunities are critical in attracting and keeping them with an employer. This proportion increases with the new generation of millennial women<sup>52</sup>. Despite these aspirations, overseas postings are disproportionately favouring men<sup>53</sup>.

Literature on this topic suggests and provides evidence that the following assumptions are pertinent to the Singapore workplace as they pose unfavourable bias against women in overseas assignments.

After I got married, I realised that I was not considered for several overseas assignments. When I asked my bosses, they explained that they had assumed I was going to start a family and would not accept the assignment anyways.

Nurul  
Executive, Banking and Finance

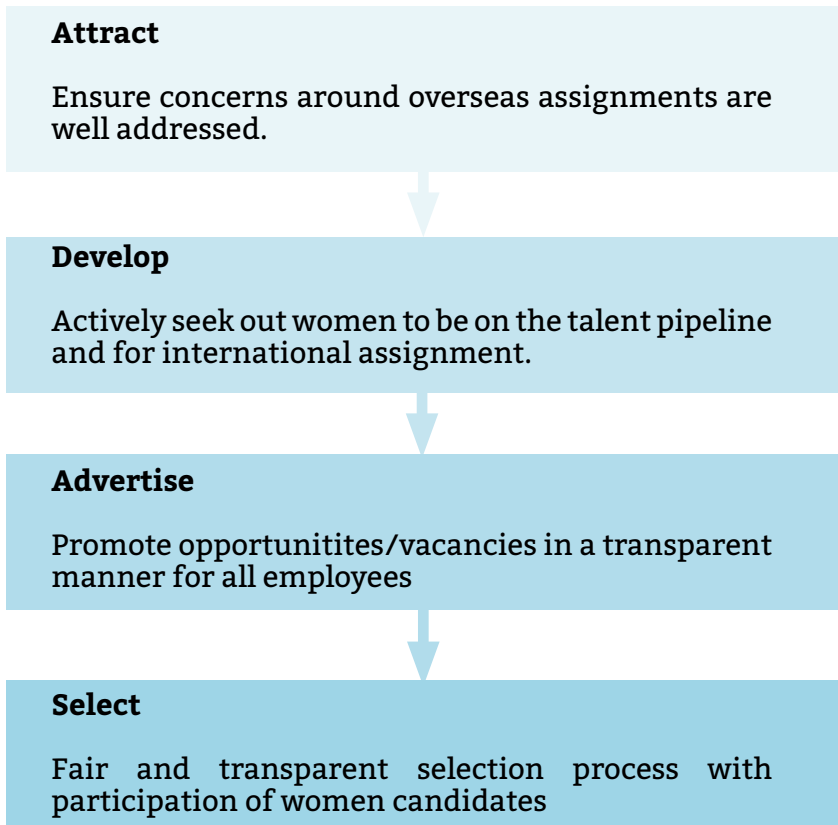
ASSUMPTION <sup>54</sup>	REALITY
Women are less ready than men to travel due to parental commitments.	Parental commitment was the top reason cited by for both men and women for not accepting international assignments.
Women are more concerned with putting their partner's income at risk.	Many families are dual- income households. Many men are afraid of risking their spouses' partners careers.
Men are more likely to accept international assignments in priority locations which are least favoured by employees.	Location challenges affect both genders. 59% of women in Singapore and 50% of men said they would never relocate to Africa, while 51% of women and 38% of men said that about the Middle East.
Women at a younger age are not ready for overseas postings.	Both men and women prefer to have international experiences early in their careers.

After I gave birth, I intentionally did not go for any overseas assignments. However, I gradually wanted to pick up the pace and indicated to management that I was willing to begin travelling again. The company began sending me for short assignments and the assignment durations increased over time.

**Kai Ying**  
Analyst, Banking and Finance



Here's how organisations can ensure that women have equal access to international work opportunities.



## Attraction

- Address specific location barriers to encourage all employees to take on international assignments in “less favourable” locations. This includes teaching women how to cope with cultural barriers at their host country.
- Participate in corporate networks that facilitate job searches for overseas trailing spouses/partners and providing member companies potential talent pool.

- Ensure that line managers and HR have a repatriation plan of at least 6 to 12 months prior to the end of employee's overseas assignment. **This would increase employees' confidence in going for overseas assignments.**



### International Dual Career Network

The International Dual Career Network is a **group of companies** including Philip Morris, Ernst & Young, L'Oreal and Cargill (depending on location) that provides a **platform for job searches to overseas trailing spouses/partners** and providing member companies potential talent pool.

### Development

- Actively seek out opportunities and develop mobility pathways to increase their number of mobile employees, particularly women.
- Senior male and female leaders with international experience should share their experiences and serve as role models to potential and current assignees.

### Advertisement

- Articulate overseas vacancies to *all* employees through intranet, email or meetings where all eligible employees are present.
- Do not offer a posting to a particular individual without prior broadcasting of the position to other staff within the company.

### Selection

- Use a formal or structured candidate selection process (i.e. do not assume that an individual is not interested based on observation).
- Ensure that there are both male and female candidates for the overseas posting before making a decision.

# Women Leadership

In 2014, companies in Singapore achieved gender parity at junior levels (58.5%). However, women representation fell as the positions became more senior. At middle levels, Singapore's average representation of women was 40.6%, and gradually dropped to 23.7% at senior levels<sup>55</sup>. Women made up 15% of Chief Executive Officers in Singapore and just over 8% of boards in Singapore<sup>56</sup>.

In this final section, we identify several initiatives to tackle some of the issues that may cause this “leaking pipeline” phenomenon. Approaches such as coaching and mentoring help equip women with the necessary skills for leadership position; while gender-inclusive succession planning policies ensures the company constantly pays attention to gender representation at *all* levels within the organisation.

## Succession planning

Though women and men say they want to be promoted in almost equal numbers (75% and 78% respectively), women are significantly less likely to make it to the next tier in their organisation<sup>57</sup>. While there are many factors affecting this research outcome, we have found that women are not fairly considered for promotions.

One good practice is to ensure that the position is not filled until there are both male and female candidates. An exception to this rule should be accompanied by steps taken by the company, HR or hiring department to ensure that there is a sufficient pool of both genders being groomed for future leadership positions.

The use of gender targets is another possible solution. Research has shown that gender targets work best in “tight”<sup>58</sup> cultures with pervasive norms and low tolerance of deviance<sup>59</sup>. Such cultures strongly favour traditional male leader roles and this makes it difficult for women to break into leadership positions<sup>60</sup>.

As teams and managers are constantly evaluated based on performance, it is likely that managers will hire only the best candidates for the job. It is unlikely that gender targets would result in a situation where the best candidates are not selected for positions.

A key component in succession planning is developing a sponsorship system when influential leaders (both male and female) within the organisation identify a protégé amongst the *high- performing female employee at the middle management level*. Sponsors go beyond giving feedback and advice; they advocate for their protégé and help them gain visibility in the company. This is done by talking about their protégé favourably during management meetings or informally with other senior leaders.

Sponsors should also keep a look out for career opportunities for their protégés and make recommendations that will help their protégé to the next level<sup>61</sup>. Where the necessary knowledge/ skills/ experience domains are lacking, the sponsors would highlight courses, relevant assignments or other executives who may be useful in providing the relevant exposure.

## Mentoring

When given a suitable job description, it’s been shown that women tend to underestimate their abilities. Men on the other hand tend to believe they have the ability to perform a role, even if they lack the necessary skills. This means that if women aren’t represented at the higher levels of an organisation, it becomes difficult for others to identify themselves as capable of a seat at that table<sup>63</sup>.

Mentoring involves female leaders sharing about their own personal life and work experiences with the junior staff to help them better cope with the challenges. These mentors not only

serve as role models but also advise on becoming effective leaders.

It is important to draw the distinction with the purpose of mentorship and sponsorship. Mentoring relationships help staff understand themselves, their preferred styles of operating, and ways they might need to change as they move up the leadership pipeline. By contrast, sponsors advocate for the sponsored party by helping them plan their moves, increase their profile within the organisation and endorse them at leadership levels.

When I was a junior staff, I was assigned a mentor. She was a mother, a women leader and a sports women. She shared her experiences and the trade-offs she made juggling the various aspects of her life. It was very helpful to learn from someone who has already walked the path.

Cheryl  
Manager, Technology Sector

## Coaching

Coaching for both male and female high- performing individuals within the organisation prepare them for more senior leadership roles. While the skills, knowledge and perceptions required for leadership positions are not gender- specific, it is also important to recognise that women and men go through very different socialisation processes. As a consequence, some societal expectations and challenges faced by females may differ from their male counterparts<sup>65</sup>.

Coaching catered specifically to the female demographic is therefore an important tool to help women overcome unconscious biases about themselves, navigate women- specific dilemmas and develop other skills necessary for senior leadership roles. This list is exhaustive and compiled based on interviews with executive coaches as well as our secondary research.



## Internalizing an identity

Psychological development takes place throughout our life and affects our identity or the way we see ourselves. One transition that adults face is moving from a socialised mind to a self-authored mind. The socialised mind places importance on how he/she is perceived by others, while the self-authoring mind is independent, seeks internal authority and establishes his/ her own set of beliefs and ideologies<sup>66</sup>.

As women are often expected to only display certain traits<sup>67</sup>, there may be backlash from others when they challenge this expectation. Hence women may experience uncertainty over how to form a leadership identity that works for them. This is especially so in Singapore's context where traditional gender roles are deeply rooted<sup>68</sup>.

Coaching helps women managers to work through any ambivalence they may feel during this transition, and anticipate their “new” identity of their careers going forward.



## Developing a sense of purpose

Studies show that women often performed worse on “envisioning”— the ability to recognise new opportunities and develop a new strategic direction for an enterprise- compared to their male counterparts<sup>69</sup>.

Therefore, coaching can be helpful for female leaders to develop a sense of purpose that is aligned with both their personal values and the organisation's corporate objectives.

Focusing on purpose also encourages women to look beyond the status quo to what is possible and gives them a compelling reason to take action despite personal insecurities<sup>70</sup>.



## Managing the leadership transition

Individuals may also face new work- life challenges through different stages of their professional careers. For example, when an individual in the mid 40's gets promoted, he/ she may need to deal with older kids becoming more demanding emotionally, aging parents requiring more attention, or other dynamics which may alter one's relationship with their partners<sup>71</sup>.

Better time management strategies can be helpful for leaders to handle the work- life dynamics by reducing certain informal roles or investing in new strategic areas.

As employees take on more senior roles within the organisation, it is important for them to invest more time in mentoring and focusing on the “big picture”. Unfortunately, some leaders do not have time to adequately deal with important managerial duties when they cannot properly delegate work.

**Sandra**  
Director, Medical Technology company



## Confidence

Women have more self- doubt around the things associated with masculinity such as negotiation, quantitative tasks, and leadership. When faced with these doubts, women have been socialised to withdraw a little bit, instead of confronting them<sup>72</sup>. This affects an individual's ability to project visibility and presence.

To overcome these challenges, individuals need to learn how to manage their own inner critic, communicate better and project confidence.



## Developing powerful networks

Networking at the workplace and outside the office help individuals to connect with others, become more effective in driving initiatives and to increase visibility<sup>73</sup>. These are important traits for career progression.

Some individuals may not engage in networking as they view the activity as “using people”<sup>74</sup> or are afraid of being labelled as pushy for promoting their own interests<sup>75</sup>. Research has also demonstrated that female employees, especially after child birth, have a higher tendency compared to their male counterparts to separate their work and social networks. This creates a missed opportunity for individuals to create camaraderie with their colleagues<sup>76</sup>.

Coaching therefore helps individuals deal with the misconceptions about networking and to devise strategies to for strategic networking.



## Confronting gender biases

Individuals face many gender biases that impede their career progression or make leadership roles especially challenging to achieve. For example: “The same behaviours that suggest self-confidence or assertiveness in men may appear arrogant or abrasive in women.”<sup>77</sup>.

Coaching helps an individual understand how they are perceived by society, how gender stereotypes affect those perceptions<sup>78</sup>, and how to take action or engage in negotiation to deal with these biases<sup>79</sup>. For example, how to put themselves forward for leadership roles when they are qualified but have been overlooked or negotiating for work arrangements that fit both their lives and work requirements.



# Concluding Remarks

This booklet has highlighted policies and best practices that are efficacious and have made a real impact since being implemented. At this point, we also note that D&I policies that are not properly communicated to employees are also limited in achieving its objective. This is because employees can hardly benefit from D&I policies if they do not know they exist.

D&I policies are ultimately designed to benefit employees and create more inclusive work environments. Companies should therefore design policies based on feedback; and to continuously monitor the success of the policies in achieving its said objectives. Taking into account feedback from employees and formulating policies based on that will go far in fostering a sense of ownership in employees, instilling a sense of belonging to the company, and building up a positive company culture.

We too recognise that companies can have the most stringent D&I policies put in place, but it will have no impact if the company culture behind it does not evolve along with it. Paying lip-service and using the terms diversity and inclusion will merely be self-congratulatory.

For example, a company with useful D&I policies that produce advertisements that are seen as stereotyping men and women in a derogatory manner would undo the good work that their policies have achieved in changing mind sets. To ensure that companies preserve the good of what that they are doing, this conflict between what they aim to accomplish and what they are actually doing is something that should be minimised or eliminated altogether.

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