Article

Interplay between Institutional Isomorphism and Institutional logics in shaping LGBTQIA+ Policies in Sri Lanka

Chathuranga, M.M.N[a]

Department of Business Administration, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

This interpretive study explores how institutional isomorphism and institutional logics legitimize the company's approach to fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Under the explorative single case study approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews with sixteen key informants. The case organization of this study is Country Holdings (CH), a local group of companies with a history of promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace. With over 150 years of operation and more than 20,000 employees across various industries, CH has consistently embraced an inclusive culture. The company has formalized anti-harassment and non-discrimination policies, emphasizing equal opportunity, a code of conduct, and zero tolerance for harassment or discrimination. The findings uncovered different actions the organization took in adopting the LGBTQIA+ inclusive policy and practice despite the strong anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments in the society and legal framework. Consequently, it was revealed how normative and mimetic pressures in the global market sphere create homogeneity. Moreover, this study uncovers how corporate, business, and labor market logics in the institutional fields create heterogeneity in the local market in terms of adopting the LGBTQIA+ inclusive policy and practice. These findings illustrate how several related perspectives of neo-institutionalism aggregately contribute to gaining legitimacy to adopt LGBTQIA+ inclusive policy and practice within the organization irrespective of heteronormative social and legal constraints. Overall, CH's approach to LGBTQIA+ inclusion offers a comprehensive model for other local organizations seeking to embrace diversity and inclusion. The intersection of supportive institutional logics and isomorphic pressures to adopt LGBTQIA+ friendly policy and practice facilitates a workplace that is competitive, innovative, socially responsible, and inclusive.

* Corresponding author. Tel: +94 714 214310; Email: nirmal@sjp.ac.lk; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9263-9239
  Institution: University of Sri Jayewardenepura

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Introduction

Globally, businesses are under increasing pressure to embrace diversity and inclusion in the workplace by implementing relevant policies and practices. To meet international business and human rights standards, many organizations have integrated diversity management (DM) into their human resources departments to enhance equity and equality at work. The growing emphasis on the "triple bottom line"—which balances social, environmental, and financial factors—underscores the importance of diversity and inclusion within organizations. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, such as 'gender equality' and 'decent work and economic growth,' further drive the adoption of these practices. While gender-related initiatives have gained considerable traction, with organizations implementing measures to ensure equity for women, issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity are often neglected (Aydin & Ozeren, 2019; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016). LGBTQIA+ inclusion is part of diversity and inclusion programs, yet many countries, especially in the global south, continue to struggle with it. There is a clear divide: in the West, LGBTQIA+ rights are generally advancing, while in many southern regions, anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments persist (Luiz & Spicer, 2021). Although homosexuality is becoming more accepted in North America, the European Union, and parts of Latin America, it remains widely rejected in the Middle East, Africa, and some Asian countries (Luiz & Spicer, 2021). This rejection is particularly challenging in places where being homosexual is virtually outlawed, like Algeria, Jamaica, and the United Arab Emirates, or where it can be punishable by death, as in Uganda and Saudi Arabia (Fullerton, 2013). The varying socio-political and legal contexts across countries influence how diversity and inclusion practices are accepted and implemented, especially regarding LGBTQIA+ individuals (Wijewardene & Jayewardene, 2020). As a result, businesses must tailor their diversity and inclusion efforts to align with the unique cultural and legal circumstances of each region.

As a South Asian country that combines Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic cultural influences, Sri Lanka also has a unique history of British colonialism, having been under European rule for over three centuries (from 1505 to 1948). This diverse background has resulted in a distinct socio-cultural and legal context in the country, where traditional beliefs and European values coexist and intersect. The Sri Lankan legal system comprises a blend of Roman-Dutch Law, indigenous Customary Law, and English Common Law. This unique mix influences various legal principles and regulations, including those concerning sexuality and gender identity. Under the Penal Code Sections 365 and 365A, homosexuality is deemed illegal in Sri Lanka, influenced by English Common Law's anti-sodomy provisions. These sections consider "carnal intercourse against the order of nature," encompassing any sexual acts deemed unnatural, and "any act of gross indecency with another person," respectively. They are broadly interpreted to cover all non-heterosexual acts and gender-variant identities (Ellawala, 2019, p.88). Additionally, other legal provisions, such as the Vagrancy Law and Section 399 of the Penal Code—which pertains to "cheating by personation" or impersonation—are often employed against the LGBTQIA+ community, with a specific focus on transgender individuals (Chowdhury, 2021). This combination of laws creates a challenging environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals in Sri Lanka, leading to discrimination and limited legal protections. The dominance of conservative masculinities, along with a lack of activism and civil rights movements, has contributed to increased criticism and hostility toward homosexuality in Sri Lanka, often manifesting in various forms of harassment (Adikaram & Liyanage, 2021). Despite this, Article 12(2) of the Sri Lankan Constitution protects individuals from discrimination based on sex and "other such reasons" (CPIN, 2018; Equal Grounds, 2021). Some progressive business organizations in Sri Lanka are aware of these protections and, with a nod to global human rights and sustainability issues, are attempting to implement inclusive policies for LGBTQIA+ individuals in their workplaces. This effort is particularly noteworthy given the broader societal context where hegemonic heterosexual masculine values are deeply rooted, and homosexual activity is illegal. Consequently, it is worthwhile to explore how these local businesses establish legitimacy for LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices in such a challenging environment. This study aims to explore the interplay between institutional isomorphism and institutional logics in shaping the legitimacy of LGBTQIA+ policies and practices within Sri Lankan businesses. Despite

growing global recognition of LGBTQIA+ rights, there is a paucity of research focusing on how institutional frameworks in Sri Lanka influence business practices in this domain. By investigating this relationship, the study seeks to fill a critical gap in understanding the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder the adoption of inclusive policies in a complex socio-cultural landscape. Accordingly, this study employs institutional theory to examine how a selected organization legitimizes LGBTQIA+ policies despite operating in a society dominated by conservative heterosexual norms and anti-homosexuality laws. While institutional theory is commonly used in human resource management (HRM) and diversity management (DM) research (Boxenbaum, 2006; Evans, 2014; Luiz & Spicer, 2019; Rainary, 2018; Yang, 2005), applying the institutional theory to explore the legitimization of LGBTQIA+ policies in Sri Lankan organizational contexts is a new contribution to existing knowledge. Within the vast institutional theory, this study adopts institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991) to comprehend how these broader institutional perspectives influence organizations to accept LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Thus, uncovering the co-existence of institutional isomorphism and institutional logics in legitimizing LGBTQIA+ policy and practice is another contribution of this study.

Litrature review

Weber (1978) highlighted the significance of social practices being governed by 'Maxims' or rules, suggesting that legitimacy arises from adherence to both general social norms and formal laws. According to Scott (1995, p. 574), legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that an entity's action is desirable, proper, or appropriate within a system of socially constructed norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. Meyer and Scott (1983) identified two primary sources of legitimacy: the first being official recognition from the State, and the second involving those who hold collective authority over what is considered acceptable, like lawyers, accountants, and intellectuals. Beyond these sources, legitimacy can also stem from the general public—large groups of people who endorse specific practices or opinions (Tolbart & Zucker, 1983). Additionally, the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and thereby impacting an organization's

legitimacy (Deephouse, 1996). Consequently, organizational practices often mirror what is perceived as legitimate behavior based on cultural values, industry traditions, a company's history, and popular management folklore (Eisenhardt, 1988). Understanding the complex sources of legitimacy and their impact on organizational behavior helps to clarify why certain practices gain widespread acceptance while others do not. Legitimacy assessments involve a social process where stakeholders evaluate whether an organization deserves support based on moral and rational grounds, rather than mere compliance or alignment of interests (Buchanan, 2018). To achieve legitimacy, organizations must secure the approval and acceptance of both internal and external stakeholders. This approval can be given voluntarily or coerced (Kostova et al., 2008). Given this context, businesses are under constant pressure to legitimize their practices, especially concerning diversity and inclusion. However, the complex interplay of social, political, and cultural drivers makes the process of achieving legitimacy challenging. Understanding the diverse sources of legitimacy helps businesses navigate these complexities and align their practices with broader societal expectations.

The external environment significantly influences a company's decision to adopt LGBTQIA+ friendly human resource practices (Everly & Schwarz, 2014). As companies continually adapt to market competition and changes in their surroundings, it is important to consider how external factors shape company policies (Kraatz, 1998). While external influences matter, internal characteristics unique to each organization also play a crucial role in business strategy (Everly & Schwarz, 2014). For example, a corporate culture that values equality can drive the adoption of LGBTQIA+ diversity and inclusion policies. However, achieving true inclusion requires more than just policies; it requires fostering a workplace culture that promotes supportive relationships among coworkers (Webster et al., 2017). Ellawala (2019) suggests that non-normative gender and sexual politics groups face legitimacy challenges from various sources, including states, local heterosexual politics, and international donors. These complications, along with cultural, societal, political, and legislative factors, create inconsistencies in LGBTQIA+ inclusion within organizations (Aydin & Ozeren, 2020). NGOs often respond to these challenges by adopting distinct queer identities that may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes, leading to

"collateral damage" for local queer communities (Ellawala, 2019). This underscores the impact of socio-political and legal systems on legitimizing LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the workplace.

Organizational stakeholders—both internal and external—play a critical role in legitimizing LGBTQIA+ diversity and inclusion policies. Research indicates that a supportive workplace climate for LGBTQIA+ inclusion relies on non-work-related interactions, relationships with immediate supervisors, and the influence of peers (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2008). Managers are crucial in addressing hostile or discriminatory environments, ensuring that policies are applied equitably, and considering LGBTQIA+ status even in the absence of explicit equality legislation (Ozeren, 2014). Unions also contribute to promoting LGBTQIA+ workplace diversity, often acting as institutional entrepreneurs. White-collar unions are generally more attuned to sexual diversity issues, while some labor unions excel at addressing LGBTQIA+ concerns in the workplace (Pulcher et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2006). Unions offer legitimacy from the perspective of LGBTQIA+ employees and possess specific expertise in dealing with LGBTQIA+ related challenges. Employers can foster an LGBTQIA+ friendly workplace culture by providing LGBTQIA+ inclusive diversity training and modeling inclusivity at the management level (Riley, 2008). However, policies alone may not eliminate stigma, and additional measures are needed to create a truly inclusive environment (Riley, 2008). Thus, achieving a positive organizational climate requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including employers, employees, unions, government, media, researchers, and activists.

However, the situation in Sri Lanka presents unique challenges due to deeply entrenched hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, and cisgender values (e.g., Adikaram & Liyanage, 2021; Kuru-utumpala, 2013). Furthermore, homosexuality is illegal under Sri Lankan law (e.g., CPIN, 2018; Equal Grounds, 2021; Kolbe & Solheim, 2021). This combination of cultural and legal barriers complicates the efforts to legitimize LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the workplace. Thus, what drivers lead businesses to legitimize LGBTQIA+ inclusion in a context where homosexuality is illegal and conservative social norms predominate remains largely unexplored.

Institutional isomorphism

A key question in organizational research is why some organizations are more alike than others (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008). Meyer and Rowan (1977) suggested that organizations adopt certain "rationalized myths" or widely accepted beliefs, which help shape their structures. In highly institutionalized contexts, organizations need to align their actions with these myths. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) expanded on this idea, proposing that organizations are pressured to conform, leading them to adopt similar structures. They identified three mechanisms through which this conformity, or isomorphic change, occurs: coercive, normative, and mimetic.

Coercive isomorphism is evidenced by labor laws, anti-discrimination protections, union participation, and other legal frameworks that organizations cannot easily avoid (Burgess & Jones, 2010; Ronconi, 2012). Examples include legislation like the Equal Employment Opportunity Act in the United States or Canada's Employment Equity Act, which create formal pressures for compliance (Yang, 2005). In gender diversity, government-mandated quotas and other regulations are other forms of coercive pressure (Khamis et al., 2019). Normative isomorphism is associated with professionalization, where the collective efforts of professionals shape the practices within organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Normative pressures arise from social expectations and professional associations, influencing decision-makers to follow accepted norms and practices (David et al., 2019). Employees bring professional norms from previous workplaces or educational backgrounds, impacting the culture and practices within an organization (Raineri, 2018). Community associations, such as women's and minority organizations, can also apply normative pressure (Yang, 2005). Mimetic isomorphism results from uncertainty and ambiguity within organizations. To reduce uncertainty, organizations tend to imitate successful examples in their field. This mimetic behavior occurs when goals are unclear, or the environment is uncertain (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Companies might mimic their competitors' diversity practices or other successful strategies to ensure success (David et al., 2019). For instance, mimetic isomorphism might include appointing female directors because other successful companies have done so (Khamis et al., 2019). This framework of isomorphism has been applied to

research on HR and diversity management practices, demonstrating how organizations might adopt similar practices in response to these varied pressures.

Institutional logics

The institutional context can limit the autonomy and reasoning abilities of decision-makers in companies, creating cognitive restraints and limiting their connection with the broader world (Jennings & Greenwood, 2003). Yet not all organizations strictly comply with institutional demands, neo-institutionalism explores why some organizations deviate from societal norms, provides a framework to understand such deviations and the mechanisms through which they occur (Lawrence, 1999). Institutional logics is a theory that examines how social culture influences the perceptions and behaviors of both individual and organizational actors (DiMaggio, 1998). Unlike neo-institutionalism, which focuses on structural isomorphism, institutional logics emphasizes individual autonomy, freedom, and cognition, allowing for diversity, innovation, and changes in the face of homogeneous structures and practices within institutional fields.

Jackall (1988) describes institutional logics as a complex, experience-based set of rules, rewards, and sanctions. Thornton and Ocasio (1999) define it as the socially constructed patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules through which individuals organize their lives, understand their social reality, and sustain their material existence. Despite varying emphases, these definitions share a core meta-theory that posits a social and institutional context where behavior is regularized while allowing for agency and change (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). According to Reay & Hinings (2009), institutional logics provide meaning to daily actions and governs how organizations operate. This perspective can help explain why some organizations deviate from normative behavior. Thus, the institutional logics viewpoint is a metatheoretical framework that analyzes the interrelationships among institutions, individuals, and organizations in social systems, considering their positions across various social institutions like family, religion, state, market, professions, and corporations (Thornton et al., 2013). This approach can also explore how institutional pressures and embeddedness within these contexts affect organizational structures and behaviors (Zietsma et al., 2017). Ultimately, institutional logics address how institutions influence and shape cognition and action within organizations and how these organizations, in turn, can shape and influence the broader institutional context.

Methodology

Research Context

Country Holdings (CH) is a local conglomerate with a history of promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace. This historically inclusive company has formalized anti-harassment and non-discrimination policies, with a strong emphasis on equal opportunity, a code of conduct, and zero tolerance for harassment or discrimination. Nevertheless, their non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies did not explicitly mention LGBTQIA+ employees. Their diversity framework primarily focused on gender, age, ethnicity, political affiliation, and different abilities. However, in 2015, after the Executive Director of a community organization advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights approached CH's leadership, the company took a significant step toward greater inclusion. Recognizing the need to expand its policies to encompass sexual orientation and gender identity, CH collaborated with two prominent LGBTQIA+ community organizations to update its policies. By incorporating LGBTQIA+ terminology, CH demonstrated its respect for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Following the policy changes, CH continued to build a truly inclusive culture, with a strong focus on creating a collective identity for its LGBTQIA+ employees. Despite these advances, CH faced several obstacles in its journey toward LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. Legal and cultural barriers, rooted in traditional values and existing laws, posed significant challenges. Nevertheless, CH's leadership remained committed to fostering a workplace environment where everyone felt valued and respected, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Methods

This interpretive study has adopted the exploratory case study strategy (Yin, 1993) to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon through detailed investigation, addressing its inherent complexity. Given the chosen case study design, it is crucial to gather a diverse range of insights from both organizational and non-organizational participants. As

indicated in Table 1, a total of sixteen participants took part in this study. When selecting the participants, I aimed for a representative mix from various levels and functions within the organization. Additionally, I interviewed a director of a community organization who played a significant role in CH's introduction of its Diversity and Inclusive policy.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect primary data for this research. I conducted fifteen interviews in English and one in Sinhala. To begin each interview, I introduced myself, explained the research's purpose, and why I selected that participant. I used simple questions to help the participants feel at ease. I found my research participants to be friendly, patient, and supportive. They preferred I use their first names rather than formal titles, which helped build rapport. This encouraged them to share their ideas, experiences, and narratives from different perspectives. Each interview lasted more than thirty minutes. Reflecting on the interview process, I experienced the inherent messiness and unpredictability of qualitative research. Although I had an interview guide, I

adjusted it as needed to accommodate the flow of the conversation. I could not interview some intended participants (LGBTQIA+ employees) due to company ethics, but I unexpectedly spoke to an LGBTQIA+ community leader. However, interviewing the participants from strategic, functional, and operational levels of CH was adequate to generate data to answer my research question. I often had to reschedule interviews due to participants' other obligations or issues like power cuts and connection failures. This caused my fieldwork to extend beyond the planned two weeks, taking over a month to complete.

With the participants' consent, I recorded the interviews and then transcribed them. I sent the transcriptions to participants for approval and to clarify any unclear words or phrases. After finalizing all transcriptions, I thoroughly reviewed the data to familiarize myself with it. I then proceeded with initial coding, assigning codes

Table 1: Participants' information

Positional Level	Name (pseudonyms)	Working experience at CH	Position
Strategic level	Kalani	13 Years	Assistant VP
	Meena	9 Years	Assistant VP
	Dilshan	21 Years	Head- Group HR
	Ruvini	8 Years	D&I in charge
Functional level	Vishwa	4 Years	HR Head- SBU 1
	Heshan	32 Years	HR Head- SBU 2
	Sudesh	9 Years	HR Head- SBU 3
	Diana	12 Years	HR Head- SBU 4
	Velma	14 Years	HR Manager- SBU 1
	Pubudu	1 Year	HR Manager- SBU 4
	Mahesh	3 Months	HR Manager- SBU 3
Operational level	Rashitha	18 Years	Employee- Finance
	Veronica	3 Years	Employee- HR
	Amali	11 Years	Employee- Accounting
	Pasindu	4 Years	Employee- HR
Director- Community organization	Daniel	An external party	

Source: Interview data

to sentences or groups of sentences that shared a common meaning. I refined these initial codes in an MS Excel sheet, highlighting similar codes with the same color to identify patterns. This allowed me to perform second-level coding, where I combined similar codes to identify broader themes

Data analysis and results

The thematic analysis method is used in analyzing qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews. In exploring how institutional isomorphism and institutional logics legitimize the company's approach to fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion, the analysis occupied six major themes: positive corporate culture, progressive leadership, inclusivity concerns by Gen Z, a business strategy, opinions by experts and professionals, and successful global businesses.

Positive corporate culture

CH is known for its unique and progressive culture that welcomes new trends and embraces change. A key aspect of this is CH's long-standing commitment to a non-discriminatory work environment. An analysis of CH's culture underscores how corporate values and logic contribute to the acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community and foster an inclusive atmosphere. By reinforcing a non-discriminatory ethos, CH creates a workplace where diversity is celebrated, and LGBTQIA+ inclusivity is recognized and legitimized.

> CH group has always been guided by its own vision and values, without succumbing to external pressures or trends. As a true leader in its industry, CH is committed to progressive and visionary approaches, consistently striving to create inclusive, respectful workplaces where everyone feels valued. The drive for inclusion at CH isn't about following others; it's about doing what's right. (Ruvini)
> I believe our motivation stems from genuine values, not from a desire to appear trendy or progressive. We believe everyone deserves decent work, regardless of sexual orientation or identity. (Dilshan)

The participants highlighted that the company's commitment to LGBTQIA+ inclusivity is driven by genuine values, reflecting its progressive outlook and the belief that everyone deserves equal opportunities at work.

> Our culture promotes respect for everyone, regardless of gender, race, or religion, ensuring we don't harass or discriminate against others. These guiding principles likely play a significant role in shaping our inclusive environment. (Meena)

Companies that prioritize diversity and equality are more likely to include the LGBTQIA+ community among their target audiences, even without legal obligations (Steiger & Henry, 2020). This kind of inclusive culture creates a more supportive environment for adopting LGBTQIA+ friendly policies and practices.

> CH's value system revolves around five core values: trust, excellence, innovation, integrity, and caring. These values shape our entire corporate culture, guiding our internal practices. Caring and integrity are particularly relevant to our focus on LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. Because our culture is rooted in these corporate values, we can easily uphold them within the organization and across all operations. (Pubudu)

CH's positive corporate culture, grounded in its distinctive value system (corporate philosophy), provides a rationale for adopting LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices, even when other companies in Sri Lanka do not. This approach sets CH apart within the Sri Lankan corporate sector, making it unique due to the guiding principles of its corporate culture.

Progressive leadership

Leaders who demonstrate genuine commitment to LGBTQIA+ inclusivity and actively support it send a strong message to their teams. This leadership involvement encourages others to follow suit and supports the adoption of LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices.

> I believe the top management is just as progressive. They're often educated abroad, youthful, open to new ideas, and highly supportive. They're deeply committed to inclusivity, with everyone, from the Chairman on down, working toward that goal. (Rashitha)
> The Chairman and other senior leaders spearhead this initiative, motivating others to get on board. They not only launched the program but are also consistently driving it forward. As a result, others are following their lead. (Heshan)
> I believe the leaders set a strong example, which is why every team follows their lead. (Diana)

Leaders who serve as role models or set examples for their followers can strongly influence their support for specific actions. When followers witness their leaders demonstrating best practices, they tend to adopt similar behaviors. This way, leaders' role modeling helps establish legitimacy for a particular course of action.

> Last year, for Pride Day, the Chairman spoke about LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in a newspaper article. (Meena)

Leaders' actions not only help legitimize LGBTQIA+ inclusivity within the organization but also establish external legitimacy by conveying the company's stance on the LGBTQIA+ community through the media. By publicly expressing the company's non-discriminatory position, the Chairman reinforces the inclusive mindset among the organization's members and sends a message to society that LGBTQIA+ inclusivity is recognized and valued. This visibility in the media contributes to broader social acceptance and emphasizes that LGBTQIA+ inclusivity should not be hidden or ignored.

Inclusivity concerns by Gen Z

The generational gap creates distinct discourses within the workplace, posing challenges for modern management. Differences in attitudes, technological literacy, and thinking patterns among Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z can complicate workplace dynamics. With Millennials and Gen Z increasingly entering the labor market, businesses must adapt to meet these evolving expectations. Today's younger generations are more open and expressive about their gender identity and sexual orientation, with Gen Z rejecting conventional norms, such as traditional gender roles or labels. By embracing these shifts and creating inclusive workplaces, companies can attract and retain top talent while staying relevant in a rapidly changing business environment.

> The modern companies reflect a workforce that is younger, more aware, better educated, more vocal, and more accepting of diversity.The younger generations— Millennials and Gen Z—bring fresh perspectives and are more likely to support inclusive practices. If organizations aim to attract and retain talent from these generations, it's crucial to align with the values and expectations of a more diverse

workforce. (Dilshan)

Given that Generation Z is more aware and accepting of the LGBTQIA+ community, CH believes that formalizing LGBTQIA+ inclusivity is the right thing to do. This commitment not only aligns with the progressive values of Gen Z but also demonstrates CH's dedication to creating a welcoming and inclusive workplace. By formalizing these policies, CH is fostering a culture that resonates with a generation that values diversity and equality.

> Given this generational shift, younger employees are generally more open to and aware of what it means to work in an inclusive environment.As a result, it's easier for them to embrace policies promoting diversity and inclusion. This cultural change driven by the younger generation aligns with the growing trend of Gen Z and Millennials entering the corporate sector. Statistics show that 33% of the younger workforce won't join a company that isn't inclusive, indicating that companies must adapt to attract top talent. (Ruvini)

Young people prefer to work for companies that embrace inclusivity and demonstrate a commitment to supporting LGBTQIA+ individuals. This shift in societal attitudes impacts the workplace, with businesses that prioritize diversity and inclusion becoming more attractive to the younger generation. Companies that recognize and adapt to these changing preferences are more likely to attract and retain top talent from this generation.

> In our sector (retail), the average age of employees is about 24, indicating a very young workforce. Given this youthful demographic, LGBTQIA+ inclusivity isn't a complex or unfamiliar concept for them. It's something they encounter daily—whether through societal trends, everyday conversations, or personal experiences. Many might even have friends who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community, contributing to their understanding and acceptance. (Vishwa)

Consequently, the labor market, with its increasing number of young workers, creates a strong market logic for adopting LGBTQIA+ policy and practice at CH. This shift reflects the expectations of the younger workforce, which prioritizes inclusive work environments. Companies that embrace diversity and offer LGBTQIA+ friendly policies are more likely to attract and retain young talent, thereby aligning with

the values and preferences of this new generation. By adopting these practices, CH meets the evolving demands of the labor market and fosters a workplace that is both inclusive and appealing to a broader talent pool.

A business strategy

CH, as a business entity, recognizes that LGBTQIA+ inclusivity creates mutual benefits for both the company and LGBTQIA+ individuals. By fostering an inclusive environment, CH can attract and retain diverse talent, enhance innovation, and strengthen its reputation, while LGBTQIA+ individuals gain a workplace that values and supports them. This approach underscores the reciprocal advantages of embracing diversity and inclusion within the organization.

> By embracing LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices, CH not only fosters acceptance within the company but also sets a benchmark for other organizations. This approach contributes to a positive image, signaling to stakeholders, clients, and the community that CH is committed to equality and inclusion. This strong public stance can lead to greater brand loyalty and serve as an example for other businesses to follow. (Meena)

LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices can significantly enhance a company's public image. By embracing diversity management and socially progressive corporate strategies, a company can increase its perceived value (Fatmy et al., 2021). The reputation as an inclusive organization not only fosters greater acceptance within the community but also sets a benchmark for other companies to follow. This approach contributes to a positive corporate reputation and encourages broader inclusion across the business landscape.

> Diversity is about embracing a range of ideas and perspectives. Ideas are the essence of business, as they drive innovation and reshape how we think and work. By valuing diverse ideas, businesses can transform their approach and unlock new opportunities, ultimately leading to the creation of new ventures and markets. (Mahesh)
>
> By including people from various backgrounds and experiences, you gain a broader range of input, decisions, and opinions. This diversity enriches discussions, allowing for a more

comprehensive exchange of ideas. (Dilshan)
Progressive employers recognize the significance of attracting individuals from all walks of life and fostering a workplace culture that embraces diversity and equality, reflecting the society in which they operate (Stonewall, 2010). This approach not only ensures a more representative workforce but also contributes to a more inclusive and equitable environment, which can drive innovation and success.

> Regardless of whether someone identifies as LGBTQIA+, companies can benefit from their qualifications and skills. Whether it's expertise in marketing or innovation, the focus should be on the person's abilities and suitability for the role, not their sexual orientation or gender. This approach allows companies to tap into a broader talent pool, leveraging individuals' unique capacities for their benefit. (Amali)

CH's recognition of the business value of LGBTQIA+ inclusion motivates the company to advance LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices. By embracing inclusivity, CH creates a safer and more welcoming environment for its employees, which in turn strengthens its reputation as a progressive and forward-thinking business. This commitment to diversity allows CH to access a wider talent pool, facilitating a richer exchange of ideas and leading to increased innovation and improved decision-making. Furthermore, this inclusive stance attracts top talent and serves as a positive model for other companies, reinforcing CH's position as a leader in diversity and equality. Ultimately, the business benefits of LGBTQIA+ inclusion are clear: a more engaged workforce, a stronger brand identity, and a more competitive market position. This approach not only demonstrates a commitment to social responsibility but also offers tangible business advantages in today's dynamic corporate environment.

Opinions by experts and professionals

Within CH, some influential and knowledgeable personalities advocate for the adoption of these best practices, emphasizing their importance in fostering a progressive and inclusive corporate environment.

> Later 2015, the executive director of EQUAL GROUND, an LGBTQIA+ advocacy group, reached out to our chairman and deputy chairman to discuss the significance of explicitly including LGBTQIA+ in our nondiscrimination policies. (Ruvini)

EQUAL GROUND, a prominent LGBTQIA+ advocacy organization, urged CH's senior management to include sexual orientation and gender identity in the company's nondiscrimination policies, emphasizing the importance of demonstrating a commitment to equality. This request, alongside other suggestions and opinions from influential voices within the LGBTQIA+ community, became a driving force in integrating LGBTQIA+ considerations into CH's diversity and inclusion policy. The involvement of top management, backed by their knowledge, influence, and experience, contributed to a greater focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) within the company.

> For instance, in our insurance sector, our CEO is an expatriate. When I initially discussed DE&I with him, our immediate focus was on increasing female workforce participation. However, my boss quickly raised the question, "What about LGBTQIA+? What are we doing about that? That's also part of diversity." This likely reflects his background and experience, having worked in diverse countries like Vietnam and Thailand. Although he is Indian, his exposure to different cultures has influenced his understanding and approach to diversity and inclusion. (Meena- SM)

Professional norms, both those brought in by new hires and those acquired through internal training, shape an organization's management and practices (Raineri, 2018). For example, Meena's boss, with his extensive international experience, underscores the need for LGBTQIA+ inclusion initiatives. His background, encompassing various cultural settings, leads him to prioritize diversity in a broader sense. Such opinions from various experts and professionals can be considered as a normative pressure that drives and enriches initiatives for LGBTQIA+ inclusivity within the organization.

Successful global businesses

Organizations often observe and study the best practices, actions, processes, and structures of leading global corporations. This approach helps them learn from successful models and implement effective strategies. However, it doesn't mean they blindly follow trends or adopt practices just because others do. Instead, they critically assess what works and then align these practices with their own goals and values.

> LGBTQIA+ inclusion has gained widespread

attention and become a topic of open discussion in many global organizations. Generational changes and greater awareness of global trends and practices influence this shift. As people observe the inclusive policies and progressive stances adopted in other countries, there's a growing recognition that LGBTQIA+ inclusivity is not just a progressive ideal—it's becoming a fundamental requirement for modern businesses. (Vishwa)

> We need to be aware of the broader context and adapt to evolving global best practices. It could be due to the influence of leading companies embracing these trends or the growing acknowledgment of inclusivity's importance in modern business. Whatever the reason, keeping pace with global developments is essential. (Kalani)

CH is attuned to the evolving business environment. Despite LGBTQIA+ inclusivity being relatively rare in the Sri Lankan business landscape, it is widely acknowledged as a sustainable practice globally. As a company with global partners, and clients, and a role as a supplier to the global market, CH keeps track of global best practices and seeks to align with them. This approach can be seen through the lens of mimetic pressures within institutional isomorphism, where companies often emulate the practices of successful global organizations to remain competitive and relevant.

> Diversity plays a crucial role in the success of leading global corporations. If you examine the strategies of these successful companies, you'll find that embracing a diverse workforce and fostering inclusive practices are key contributors to their achievements. This recognition drives many organizations to prioritize diversity as a core element of their business strategy. (Mahesh)

Diversity has emerged as a critical success factor for leading companies worldwide. Organizational actors often look to successful peers for guidance on what practices lead to success (Hambrick et al., 2004). Mimetic isomorphism refers to the tendency of organizations to imitate the successful behaviors of other organizations (Khamis et al., 2019). As a result, when global companies achieve success by adopting certain actions, processes, or structures, other
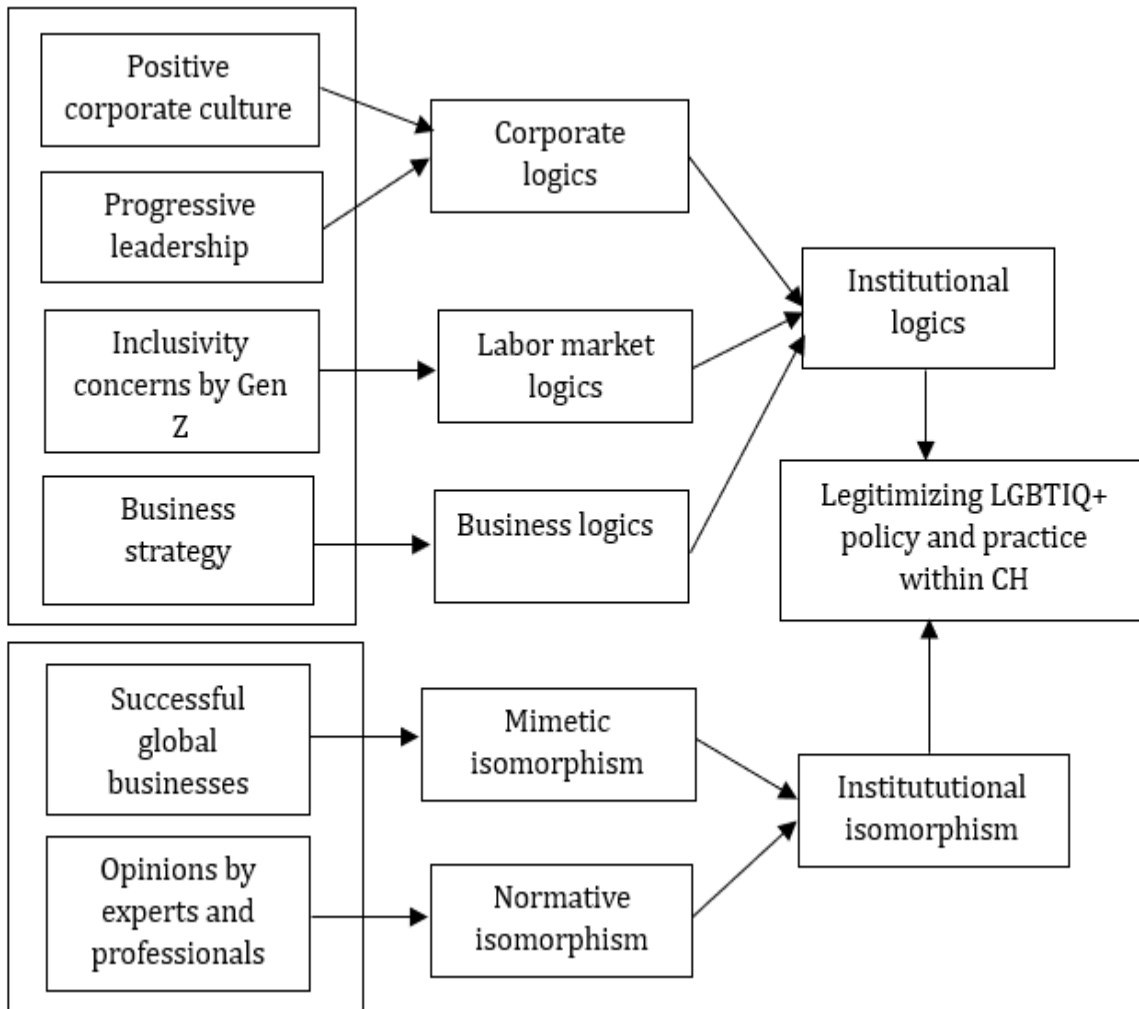
Figure 1: Legitimizing LGBTQIA+ inclusivity via institutional logics and isomorphic pressures

businesses are influenced to follow suit, incorporating similar approaches to replicate that success.

As illustrated in Figure 1, legitimizing LGBTQIA+ inclusive policy and practice has been driven by a coexistence of different isomorphic pressures and institutional logics.

Discussion and findings

The discussion consists of two main parts. First, I explore the underlying institutional logics that drive CH's commitment to implementing LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices. Next, I examine the isomorphic pressures that push CH to establish formal LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in their workplace. As shown in Figure 1, both institutional logics and isomorphic pressures together contribute to CH's approach toward adopting LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices.

Institutional logics

Organizational decision-makers can respond to shifts in legitimacy-related contexts by adopting isomorphic or non-isomorphic actions (George et al., 2006). The key question is: Why did CH become heterogeneous in the local industry by adopting radical practices, even though there was no pressure to do so in the local context? Organizations often face institutional pluralism because they operate in both local and global environments, experiencing changes in multiple institutional spheres simultaneously (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

The institutional logics perspective offers a framework for understanding how organizations navigate heterogeneity by embracing changes and innovations that go beyond the homogeneous structures and practices typical in their local institutional fields.

The implementation of LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices at CH is driven by the active involvement, support, and commitment of its leaders. Individuals in top positions are more likely to have access to crucial resources, enabling them to implement significant organizational changes due to their roles within the company (Battilana, 2006). Young leaders with international education tend to be more knowledgeable about various gender identities and sexual orientations. They treat LGBTQIA+ inclusivity with high importance and set an example for their organizations by fostering diversity and serving as role models for their followers. This approach helps create an ethical culture where leaders lead by example (Mayer et al., 2013). The chairman's public endorsements of the company's LGBTQIA+ non-discrimination policy further reinforce the firm's commitment to inclusivity. This public stance sends a message to both employees and society that LGBTQIA+ inclusion is part of the company's identity. Corporate leaders have a significant influence, not only by supporting organizational goals but also by quietly promoting broader societal changes (Weber & Waeger, 2017). Although institutions have the power to shape or regulate behavior, key players can also build, modify, or challenge these institutions based on their status and influence (Yeung et al., 2011). Consequently, the actions of senior management can establish new institutional logics or integrate existing ones.

CH sees formalizing LGBTQIA+ inclusivity as a strategic move to attract talented young workers, as Generation Z is more open to and welcoming of the LGBTQIA+ community. The growing reliance on young workers in the labor market provides additional rationale for CH's adoption of LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies, reflecting the younger workforce's preference for inclusive workplaces. As the labor market continues to evolve, establishing and solidifying LGBTQIA+ inclusive/supportive policies will become essential for companies seeking a competitive advantage (Ozeren, 2014). Furthermore, the changing workforce demographics, the decreasing pool of qualified candidates, and the rising number of LGBTQIA+ consumers and employees suggest that diversity is not only an ethical imperative but also a business necessity (Ozeren, 2014). By adopting these policies, CH can attract top talent and stay competitive in an increasingly diverse labor market. On social media platforms, LGBTQIA+ culture and behavior are more visible than ever. LGBTQIA+ advocacy and activities are increasingly prominent in the media, and social media have been instrumental in spreading information about LGBTQIA+ issues, shifting perceptions, and fostering the growth of LGBTQIA+ movements in Malaysia (Mokhtar et al., 2020). LGBTQIA+ celebrities and LGBTQIA+ specific representations in mainstream media are aimed not only at LGBTQIA+ audiences but also at the growing customer base that supports LGBTQIA+ equality (Nölke, 2017). Thus, social media plays a crucial role in raising awareness, especially among young people.

In a context where comparable companies in Sri Lanka have not embraced LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies, CH's positive corporate culture, rooted in its unique value system, provides a rationale for adopting such policies and practices. While some cultures adhere to traditional monocultural approaches, other organizations adopt a more diverse management philosophy (Samuel & Odor, 2018). CH's adoption of LGBTQIA+inclusive policies is supported by its corporate value system, which blends both masculine and feminine principles. Masculine ideals, such as excellence and innovation, drive the pursuit of power, status, and resourcefulness through diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I). At the same time, the company's feminine values, including integrity, care, and trust, justify the adoption of DE&I practices by focusing on the quality of employees' lives. This balance underscores the importance of providing personal freedom, shared responsibility, and mutual respect within the workplace. By combining these values, CH demonstrates that adopting LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies is not only about compliance or image but also about creating a corporate culture that values diversity, fosters innovation, and enhances employee well-being. Although "corporate" and "business" are terms that can overlap and are often used interchangeably, I used "business" to refer to the concept of costs and benefits in this context. The company's recognition of the economic benefits of LGBTQIA+ inclusion is a driving force behind CH's implementation of LGBTQIA+ inclusive practices and policies. Diversity management

and socially progressive corporate strategies can add value to a company (Fatmy et al., 2021). Conversely, if sexual minority exclusion is widespread within an organization, it can harm operational performance and overall morale (Cunningham, 2011). Employers benefit from creating inclusive workplaces, as this reduces "closet costs" and allows employees to focus their energy on their work rather than concealing their identities (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2008).

Corporate logic leads CH to formalize LGBTQIA+ inclusivity for reasons beyond improving image or gaining a competitive advantage—it is driven by genuine values. In contrast, business logic views LGBTQIA+ inclusion as a strategic tool, emphasizing the potential benefits to a company's bottom line. The inconsistency arises because corporate logic in CH focuses on moral imperatives, while business logic targets tangible business outcomes. Despite these differences, aligning both logics can provide a comprehensive approach to fostering a more inclusive and successful workplace.

Isomorphic pressures

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) suggest that institutional theory has shifted from analyzing local settings to focusing on corporate sectors or fields that are not tied to geographic boundaries. Scott (2001) notes that community studies fell out of favor after the 1980s as advances in transportation and communication rendered geographic boundaries increasingly irrelevant. This shift led me to evaluate CH's tendency toward "homogeneity" in a global business context.

CH adopts similar actions, processes, or structures that have proven successful for other global companies. Mimetic pressures occur when decision-makers look to the observed behavior of other organizations as a model for their own (David et al., 2019). Mimetic isomorphism describes how organizations imitate the behaviors of other successful organizations (Khamis et al., 2019). CH exemplifies this by adopting leading LGBTQIA+ practices from similar international companies and setting an example for the local industry, aligning itself with global market trends. However, there is no equivalent memetic pressure on CH at the local industry or market level.

Professionals' requests, recommendations, and judgments are often shaped by their knowledge and

experience, leading them to focus on implementing LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices. For example, one participant's boss, who had worked as a professional in various fields, emphasized the need for measures promoting LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Normative learning, which is closely linked to professionalization, encompasses efforts to "define conditions and methods of work" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Normative isomorphism occurs when professionalization leads decision-makers or executives to adopt the standards, language, and norms expected of their managerial class (Hambrick et al., 2004). In CH, many professionals have been exposed to foreign education and have worked in multinational companies. As a result, they tend to endorse best practices from a global perspective, such as adopting LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies. This exposure to international practices and ideas influences their approach, encouraging them to incorporate global standards into their workplace to promote diversity and inclusion.

Conclusion and implications of the study

In conclusion, to understand why CH adopts LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices, the findings can be categorized into two key areas. Firstly, normative, and mimetic pressures within the global market sphere influence CH's approach to diversity, creating homogeneity in its practices. Normative pressures manifest through professionals' requests, recommendations, and judgments, encouraging CH to implement LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies. As a result, CH adopts leading diversity practices observed in similar international companies, reflecting its response to mimetic pressures. Secondly, different institutional logics contribute to CH's adoption of LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and practices. The labor market, corporate, and business logics all play a significant role in rationalizing LGBTQIA+ inclusivity at CH. The labor market's increasing reliance on younger workers creates a market-driven rationale for LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in CH, highlighting the younger generation's preference for inclusive workplaces. Furthermore, CH's adoption of LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies is reinforced by a corporate value system that combines masculine and feminine principles. The masculine values, such as excellence and innovation, merge with feminine values like integrity, caring, and trust, forming a foundation that supports diversity and inclusion. Additionally, CH's understanding of the economic benefits of LGBTQIA+ inclusion provides

 further justification for implementing these policies. Overall, CH's approach to LGBTQIA+ inclusion is influenced by a combination of external pressures and internal values, creating a framework for a more inclusive workplace.

This study emphasizes the need for activism of government, schools, families, and other social institutions to extend the due recognition to LGBTQIA+ individuals. The study raises the need to repeal the prevailing laws which prohibit and undermine the behaviors of the LGBTQIA+ community. Local authorities, policymakers, schools, and families need more education on accepting gender-variant children, treating people of different sexualities and gender identities equally, and implementing policies and programs in a friendly manner rather than a hostile. Moreover, providing education and awareness of gender identity and sexual orientation to school and university students is a crucial step that the education authorities can initiate in making society and the workplace more inclusive. Moreover, the country's employment laws should be explicit about the remedies against LGBTQIA+ discrimination and harassment. A firm public policy is necessary to promote LGBTQIA+ rights while eliminating the legal and social barriers for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

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