Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigations Bureau: Guardian of Public Integrity

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FROM CROOKED COPS TO A VALUED INSTITUTION

We were sickened by the greed, corruption and decadence of many Asian leaders. We had a deep sense of mission to establish a clean and effective government. When we took the oath of office in June 1959, we all wore white shirts and white slacks to symbolize purity and honesty in our personal behaviour and our public life. We made sure from the day we took office in June 1959, that every dollar in revenue would be properly accounted for and would reach the beneficiaries at the grass roots as one dollar, without being siphoned off along the way. So, from the very beginning we gave special attention to the areas where discretionary powers had been exploited for personal gain and sharpened the instruments that could prevent, detect or deter such practices. (Lee 2000: 182–184)

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A. Boin et al. (eds.), *Guardians of Public Value*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51701-4_3

In 1951, a criminal gang including three police detectives stole 1800 pounds of opium with a value of \$400,000 from a police depot in Ponggol (a district in the north-east region of Singapore). To investigate the robbery, the British colonial administration that governed Singapore at the time appointed a special team led by a senior officer of the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB). The ACB had been established in 1937 to investigate corrupt activities within the Singapore Police. Investigations soon revealed that several senior police officers were involved in the racket in conjunction with the hijackers and the opium importers (Quah 2011: 209).

While police involvement in drug trafficking was hardly a revelation, this scandal revealed that the British government had made a serious mistake putting the ACB on the case: the branch was part of the police force and many corruption cases involved police officers. The British had essentially turned the investigation of rampant police corruption over to the police. The bungling of the opium case proved to be the last straw. Displeased with the outcome of the investigations resulting in the dismissal and forced retirement of two key senior officers (CPIB 2003: 0.6), the British formed another special investigation team to critically evaluate the previous investigation. When the special team completed its investigation in September 1952, the government decided to replace the rather dysfunctional ACB with the so-called ‘special team’. This team would become the now legendary Corrupt Practices Investigations Bureau (CPIB).

Many people might associate governments in Asia with corruption rather than good governance. Such perceptions are corroborated by various indices, rankings and studies (Transparency International 2019; World Bank 2018; Quah 2011). Two small ‘city states’ notably stand out: Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) and Singapore. Both have managed to curb, or at least drastically reduce and control corruption, in just a few decades. In recent years, Singapore in particular has managed to preserve political stability with large corruption scandals being absent. As a result, it can rightly be called a ‘unicorn’ in the region.

Since 1960, the CPIB has been a driving force in making Singapore one of the least corrupt nations on earth. Before that time, corruption across all parts of the Singaporean public sector was endemic, especially among the police. It had been since at least the 1850s. Corruption was widely seen by civil servants as a ‘low-risk, high-reward’ activity (Quah

2003: 184; 2011: 215). Salaries were often poor, particularly for non-British officials, and could be supplemented by bribes and favours. The threat of detection and punishment for such activities was a little deterrent. The commonality of corrupt conduct by public officials contributed to widespread distrust in public institutions, slow economic development and low morale among public servants; issues we can still observe today in many developing countries.

Indeed, over time the agency has developed the authority, mandate and legitimacy to investigate any potential corruption case. Singapore has been consistently ranked among the 10 least corrupt countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 25 years and is the least corrupt country in Asia. In 2010, Singapore was ranked joint first with Denmark and New Zealand among 178 countries on the CPI with a score of 9.3.

The institutionalization of the CPIB is closely intertwined with Singapore's success as a nation. It is hard to imagine Singapore's phenomenal economic growth would have been possible without the work of the CPIB. But how is it possible that this agency has won such extensive powers to fight corruption? This chapter shows that the agency is more than an organization. It has become an *institution* and as a result has been able to safeguard public values important to the Singaporean government. The agency has trumpeted and protected values like fairness, meritocracy and the rule of law, guarding them against forces of erosion for more than half a century.

This chapter first briefly explains how the CPIB meets Selznick's (1957) criteria for an institution: (1) a distinct identity and unique competence; (2) strong reputation and public legitimacy; and (3) enduring viability through adaptation. It presents in more detail the CPIB's tasks and functions. The chapter then seeks to explain how CPIB came to enjoy its institutional status, and how this status has supported its efforts to safeguard Singapore from corruption.

At the same time, the CPIB cannot afford to become complacent given the emerging challenges it faces: virtual and transboundary corruption, money laundering and an increasingly vocal and critical citizenry and political parties challenging Lee Kuan Yew's regime-founding People's Action Party's half-century of uninterrupted rule. In this vein, the chapter concludes with broader lessons that can be distilled from CPIB's institutional tale, while asking whether the CPIB's institutional model is only

possible given Singapore's unique political context which, itself, may already be starting to change.

In summary, the chapter addresses three key questions:

1. How did the CPIB become a successful public value creating institution? What were the driving factors?
2. How has the CPIB adjusted over time to maintain that status?
3. (How) can the CPIB maintain its status into the future?

THE CPIB AS AN INSTITUTION

Through a record of landmark cases against corrupt individuals, including ministers and senior public- and private-sector executives, and with continuous support from political leadership and an initially sceptical general public, the agency gradually developed substantial authority, mandate and legitimacy to investigate any potential corruption case.

In doing so, it successfully obtained and leveraged preventative, investigative and legal functionalities way beyond those of comparable agencies in both developing countries as well as other developed and relatively 'clean' countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, Denmark or the Netherlands. As such, the CPIB was and is a driving force in making Singapore one of the least corrupt and most successful nations on earth, in a region still largely characterized by corruption, nepotism and poor governance (Van der Wal 2019).¹

Over time, the CPIB managed to develop into something much more than just an organization. It has become an iconic institution, enjoying not just regional but global name recognition and widespread admiration, even from Western critics of the Singapore governance model. It is an institution because—in the words of the pioneer of institutional studies, Philip Selznick—the organization is 'infused with value beyond the requirements of the task at hand' (1957: 17). Institutions create, safeguard and embody values that are important to a society; they guard these values against erosion or overt attacks.

This 'extra dimension' is, of course, largely a matter of perception: people recognize something special without perhaps being able to immediately express *why* the institution is different than the organization. Goodsell (2011) refers to a certain 'mystique' that permeates the aura of such organizations. Indeed, it may be illustrative that while many other

countries have tried to mimic central features of the CPIB and the legislation underpinning the agency's mandate, such attempts have rarely been successful, let alone durable.

This may be due to the absence of key contextual drivers, inspirational leadership and perceived competence and 'belief' in the agency's distinct mission from external and internal stakeholders. Often, the crucial features that contribute to the institutionalization have to operate in tandem, in a 'perfect storm', to create and maintain mystique and legitimacy. In his seminal work, Selznick (1957) uses three criteria to identify an institution, which are applied here to the CPIB and the way in which the bureau is perceived by key stakeholders.

1. Distinct identity and unique competence—an institution has a strong alignment between the rationale for its existence it puts forward and the day-to-day strategies and practices it deploys to deliver on that promise. Over time, the CPIB has managed to continually 'earn and keep' its immense legal and investigative powers and mandates. Partly, this is the case because it lived up to its promise of cleaning up Singapore, which contributed to the stability that attracted international investment and regional headquarters of multinational companies, and partly because the CPIB never misused its powers and mandates for political vendettas (Quah 2011, 2017).
2. Strong reputation and public legitimacy—the institution is broadly trusted and well respected, with high internal support from employees and external support from key stakeholders including those who fund the organization, in some instances to such a degree that its existence is almost taken for granted. The CPIB enjoys high public—some would say 'performative'—authority (cf. Van der Wal 2017a) because it has fairly consistently 'delivered the goods': a high conviction rate for the cases examined while not exempting public- and private-sector executives at the highest echelons, including ministers. Legitimacy is also manifested in the ability to persuade the government to almost triple its staff in the past decade (from 90 FTE in 2010 to around 250 FTE today) and double the annual budget in that same period from almost S\$15 million to S\$30 million.²
3. Enduring viability through adaptation—to qualify as an institution, an organization must demonstrably have been able to 'deliver' on its

mission over time, creating valued outputs and outcomes that satisfy its key constituencies and stakeholders even as the manner in which it does so has changed quite considerably. Arguably, given Singapore's high degree of political stability and top-down governance, the CPIB has had to endure fewer adaptation challenges than its counterparts in more volatile, polarized and fragmented democracies (cf. Quah 2017). At the same time, the CPIB has had to upgrade technological capabilities and skills in response to emerging integrity risks just as any other anti-corruption agency.

Central to Selznick's definition is that institutionalization is a process, often lengthy and sometimes rocky, in which the institution and its leaders have considerable agency. At the same time, just as an organization can take on institutional characteristics, it can also lose them. Institutions can deinstitutionalize (Oliver 1992; Boin 2001), sometimes rapidly in times of crisis and scandal. They may have to reinvent themselves by adapting to changing circumstances and modernizing their mission and focus. In short: the actions, decisions and leadership of the institution actively contribute to the process of institutionalization, over and over again.

CPIB's institutionalization merits the question of how unique this phenomenon really is in light of the overall performance of other public agencies in Singapore, some of which are widely known and admired for being successful and iconic.³ The answer is that the institutionalization of CPIB and Singapore's extraordinary development are closely intertwined; in fact, they are mutually reinforcing developments that constitute a virtuous cycle. The CPIB could not have become an institution without the country's sustained efforts to address corruption and unethical behaviour. Singapore could not have become the economic success it is without its clean image. They are, in many ways, two sides of the same coin and are also communicated and 'branded' accordingly by the Singapore government (Ho 2010; Skilling 2012; Van der Wal 2019).

CPIB's substantial education and communication efforts have helped to turn public opinion against the use of cultural and anthropological excuses for corruption as a way of life, which was common in Singapore for many decades (Graycar and Jancsics 2017; Quah 2011). Indeed, the communication efforts of the CPIB fit seamlessly with the broader government discourse that has long propagated key public values such as fairness, integrity, service, excellence and meritocracy as being at the core

of the public service (Neo and Chen 2007). In this regard, subsequent PAP governments have implemented adjacent policies such as extremely competitive remuneration for public officials (Singapore's public sector elite is by far the highest paid in the world), competitive Ivy-league and 'Oxbridge' scholarships to attract the best and brightest into government (Quah 2011; Van der Wal 2019), and community service programs and outreach programs at schools and universities.

THE CPIB'S STRUCTURE, FUNCTIONS AND TASKS

CPIB's staff and budget have grown by around 45 times since 1952.⁴ Most Anti-Corruption Agencies (or ACA's) in Western countries that perform well on integrity, such as New Zealand, Switzerland, Denmark or the Netherlands could only dream of the budget, support and powers of the CPIB. In most cases, their anti-corruption institutions are also structured very differently. 'Western ACA's', which are usually named differently to begin with, usually fulfil advisory roles, conduct research, investigate reports of unethical conduct. However, they often also end up spending considerable time and energy fulfilling 'linking pin' or 'traffic police' roles. They refer cases to the police or prosecutor's office, or 'back' to confidentiality officers or integrity coordinators within the agency in question.

In comparison, the CPIB has an encompassing as well as strong mandate. The CPIB's tasks are 'the administration of the CPIB, the investigation of corruption and malpractices, and the review of administrative weaknesses in the public sector that provide avenues for corruption and the screening of officers for appointment in the public service' (Quah 2011: 223). The agency can investigate and adjudicate Singaporeans abroad for corrupt behaviour in other countries. They have a mandate and responsibility to pursue anti-corruption activities for *the public as well as private sector*; a key difference with most other ACA's.

The CPIB reviews procedures and practices in those government agencies where corruption is likely to occur, but it also conducts proactive risk assessment of new policies and practices to formulate recommendations to remove loopholes and vulnerabilities. The agency uses this review process to 'identify potential problem areas and loopholes' to minimize the opportunities for corruption (Soh 2008: 8). As part of its preventive function, the CPIB also ensures that candidates selected for positions in the civil service and statutory boards in Singapore are

screened, and it increasingly engaged in a wide range of communicative and promotional activities to sensitize both the general public. In addition to regularly training and communicating to public servants about the risks and dangers of corruption, CPIB officers attend school classes (starting as early as in primary schools) and use videos and cartoons to explain why corruption is harmful to personal and professional relationships.

Over time, CPIB has adopted a ‘total enforcement approach’ by addressing big as well as small corruption cases in both public- and the private-sector organizations, involving ‘both givers and receivers of bribes’ and ‘other crimes uncovered in the course of [the] corruption investigation’ (Soh 2008: 1–2). With just 358 on its books for 2019 (CPIB 2019b), the overall number of reports received by CPIB on an annual basis is low, especially taking into account that the Bureau’s mandate covers both the public and private sector of the city state. In fact, in the CPIB’s most recent annual report, 88% of the cases reported concern the private sector (CPIB 2019b).

An important lever of its authority and symbol of its centrality in Singapore’s administrative system is that the CPIB reports directly to the Prime Minister.⁵ Importantly, the agency is constitutionally enabled to immediately shift to a reporting structure under the President in case the Prime Minister himself becomes the subject of investigation, which has not happened in Singapore to date but which occurs with some regularity in other Southeast Asian countries.

There is little on the public record about individual leaders of the CPIB. Yet, a few have been celebrated in their steering of the agency. In its ‘pre-POCA stage’⁶ the CPIB director was a British bureaucrat reporting to the colonial government. After the opium scandal and the embarrassment it created among the colonial rulers, self-preservation and reputation management were key objectives. Subsequently, CPIB directors have usually been senior career public servants from the domains of civil defence, police, immigration and intelligence. Most recently, on 1 October 2018 Denis Tang Siew Taeng, who oversaw border security and anti-terrorism measures at Singapore’s Immigration and Checkpoints Authority, was appointed as the successor to Wong Hong Kuan, who led the Bureau from 2013 to 2018 and was most lauded for community outreach initiatives and promoting ethical conduct in the business sector (CPIB 2019c).

The fact that CPIB's leaders have rarely taken on a highly visible public profile, says something, we might speculate, about the nature of the organization and its mystique. The somewhat secretive nature of the agency's mission and the need to keep the identity of its employees undisclosed may be at play here. Also, the relative anonymity of leaders may simply reflect that information sharing and transparency about the inner workings of government are much less the norm in Singapore than in most Western countries.

CPIB'S INSTITUTIONALIZATION

In its early years, the CPIB was constrained by poor design and piecemeal resourcing. In the period between 1952—when the British colonial government established the CPIB—and 1959—when Singapore held its first independent elections—the Bureau was not particularly effective. The agency was tainted by its ongoing association with the Singapore Police Force. The CPIB fell under the purview of the Attorney-General, with Director Middleton-Smith reporting to the Colonial Secretary, the *de facto* governor of colonial Singapore. As Singapore's leading corruption expert Jon S. T. Quah (2011: 217–218) describes, the agency also suffered from a severe lack of funding and manpower:

Indeed, it is difficult to understand why the British colonial government did not provide the CPIB with more personnel and powers to enable it to perform its functions more effectively. In fact, the CPIB began its existence with only a small number of staff of 5 members, which was much smaller than the ACB's 17 personnel. The CPIB's small number of staff and lack of powers was a clear manifestation of the British colonial government's lack of political will in combating corruption.

Political tides, however, were about to turn. When Singapore held its first parliamentary elections in 1959, the leaders of the People's Action Party (PAP) built their campaign around combatting corruption. The PAP exposed the sitting government's corruption. The incumbent Minister for Education, Chew Swee Kee, was caught receiving more than S700,000 in unreported American donations. The PAP's anti-corruption stance resonated with the public. The party won 43 of the 51 seats in the house (Quah 2011: 218).

The 1960 Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA)

On 13 February 1960, the Minister for Home Affairs Ong Pang Boon stood to address the Legislative Assembly on the second reading of the Prevention of Corruption Bill. He said:

The Prevention of Corruption Bill is in keeping with the new Government's determination to stamp out bribery and corruption in the country, especially in the public services. Therefore, this Government is determined to take all possible steps to see that all necessary legislative and administrative measures are taken to reduce the opportunities of corruption, to make its detection easier and to deter and punish severely those who are susceptible to it and who engage in it shamelessly. (in Quah 1978: 10)

The 1960 Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) is foundational to the CPIB and its work. In many ways, the CPIB's institutional strengths only started to fall in place from then onwards. The Act contained features that eliminated previous legislative weaknesses, enhanced the CPIBs legal powers and increased its headcount from 5 FTE in 1952 to 33 FTE in 1963.⁷ Corruption was defined more explicitly. Corruption now encompassed much more than cash bribes, which was at the core of its definition in earlier colonial legislation. It could include favouritism or bribery by 'gifts', including:

[p]roperty or interest in property of any description, whether movable or immovable; any office, employment, or contract; any other service, favour, or advantage of any description whatsoever, including protection from any penalty or disability incurred or apprehended or from any action or proceedings of a disciplinary or penal nature, whether or not already instituted, and including the exercise or the forbearance from the exercise of any right or any official power or duty. (Quah 2011: 219)

By far the most important boost to the CPIB evoked by the POCA were its severe penalties for corrupt conduct and the sweeping investigative and adjudicate powers bestowed upon the CPIB. Officers could enter any place associated with suspected transactions and search, seize and retain incriminating documents under a warrant issued by a magistrate or CPIB's Director. Prosecutors could authorize CPIB's Director and senior officers to arrest suspects. Once arrested, the CPIB was empowered to investigate a suspect's 'bank account, shared account or purchase

account'. Other sections of the POCA enable the CPIB officers to inspect a civil servant's financial status and those of his or her partner, child or agent by obtaining information on their property, income tax statements and bank accounts from the relevant government departments and banks (Quah 2011: 220). The most famous, and infamous, of CPIB's legal powers under the POCA comes from Section 24 that states:

"The fact that an accused person is in possession, for which he cannot satisfactorily account, of pecuniary resources or property disproportionate to his known sources of income" is evidence that (s)he obtained them "corruptly as an inducement or reward."

Section 24 implies that the CPIB is not bound to operate under the presumption of innocence, which is pivotal to Western conceptions of criminal law; in fact, it allowed the agency and the public prosecutors to treat suspects as guilty until proven innocent. Individuals found guilty of corruption faced hefty fines or imprisonment for up to five years.

The POCA was supplemented by more detailed regulations for the conduct of civil servants. Civil servants and their families were forbidden from receiving gifts or entertainment from members of the public. These regulations were revised and strengthened over the years, and are currently among the strictest in the world.⁸

DRIVING FORCES OF SUSTAINED INSTITUTIONALIZATION

The combination of its far-fledged powers and staunch and stable political support aided by long-term policy stability are distinctive for the CPIB when compared to other anti-corruption agencies in neighbouring countries as well as Western countries that feature in the top rungs of global rankings alongside Singapore (Quah 2011, 2017).

Why has Singapore succeeded in fighting corruption when other Asian countries have failed to do so? In addition to the mandate, design and leadership of the CPIB described above, there are a number of important contextual factors which have driven the agency's institutionalization and success. 'Little red dot' Singapore is a tiny, highly urbanized city state with a total land area of only 710.3 sq. km, lacking substantial agricultural areas and natural resources. Singapore's smallness, high degree of urbanization and centralized, top-down governance model have certainly contributed to CPIB's success. These features facilitate political control,

administrative coordination and the absence of competition and turf wars between national, provincial and local government bodies (Singapore has only one layer of government), responsiveness of public officials and the absence of problems arising from implementing reforms in rural areas or provinces (Quah 1984, 2011).

Since independence, Singapore's government has built on, and almost mythicized, the notion of meritocracy introduced by the British in 1951 to ensure the recruitment and promotion of civil servants was based on merit and to accelerate the pace of localization of the administrative apparatus (Quah 2010, 2011). This commitment to meritocracy is seen beyond the work of the CPIB. An important driver has been the Public Service Commission (PSC) which until this very day plays a key role in HR management and performance appraisal throughout the public service, and awards very competitive and highly sought-after scholarships to the best students in each cohort (Quah 2010: 74, 91; Van der Wal 2019). Tellingly, experts have labelled Singapore a 'macho meritocracy' (Quah 2010: 5; Van der Wal 2019: 56; Vogel 1989: 1053).⁹

Political stability and commitment have also been major factors. The PAP government has been re-elected 13 times after winning the 1959 general elections, with opposition parties usually occupying no more than 10–20% of the seats in Parliament. This remained the case even after the ruling party received 'only' 59% of the popular vote in the now legendary 2011 election. The continuity of the PAP government and its commitment to curbing corruption in a context of high policy stability and low political turbulence has enhanced the effectiveness of its anti-corruption strategy, as well as prevented the government from using the CPIB as an attack dog against political opponents (or vice versa).

In fact, Quah (2011, 2017) documents that the Singapore government spends significantly more money per capita in the fight against corruption than most other Asian nations. In addition, it has eliminated political interference with anti-corruption investigations to the largest extent possible. In many other Asian countries both Parliament and Senate control various aspects of the workings of anti-corruption agencies, while (deliberately) limiting its investigative powers and expertise. Singapore has legislatively enabled the CPIB to be effective domestically and abroad, in the public as well as the private sector.

In addition, the political and institutional edifice of anti-corruption policy is rooted in the rule-abiding nature of the Singapore society. Singapore takes great pride in being seen as a 'rule of law' nation, in which

law-breaking is frowned upon, with the high odds of getting caught and being severely punished acting as continuous deterrents. Lee Kuan Yew's synthesis of the factors behind Singapore's strong stance in these domains makes a similar case:

The effectiveness of our system to check and punish corruption rest, first, on the law against corruption contained in the Prevention of Corruption Act; second, on a vigilant public ready to give information on all suspected corruption; and third, on a CPIB which is scrupulous, thorough, and fearless in its investigations. For this to be so, the CPIB has to receive the full backing of the Prime Minister, under whose portfolio it comes. But the strongest deterrent is in a public opinion which censures and condemns corrupt persons; in other words, in attitudes which make corruption so unacceptable that the stigma of corruption cannot be washed away by serving a prison sentence. (Quah 2011: 233)

To ensure the POCA's continued effectiveness and buffet CPIB's license to operate, the PAP government has introduced, whenever necessary, amendments (in 1963, 1966 and 1981) or new legislation (in 1989) to deal with unanticipated problems or to plug legal loopholes. For example, in 1966, the POCA was amended so that a person could be found guilty of corruption without actually receiving the bribe as long as he had shown the intention of doing so. The POCA was also amended in 1966 so that Singaporeans working for their government in embassies and other government agencies abroad would be prosecuted for corrupt offences committed outside Singapore and would be dealt with as if such offences had occurred within Singapore. In doing so, Singapore was an early adaptor of practices now commonplace in the United States, United Kingdom and other OECD countries (Graycar and Prenzler 2013).

In 1981, the POCA was amended a third time to increase its deterrent effect by requiring those convicted of corruption to repay all the money received in addition to facing the usual court sentence. Offenders who could not make full restitution were given heavier court sentences. Eight years later, the fine for corrupt offences was further increased by 10 times from S\$10,000 to S\$100,000 (US\$78,5113) to enhance the POCA's deterrent effect. Sections 11 and 12 stipulate that MPs and members of public bodies found guilty of corrupt offences would be fined S\$100,000 and imprisoned for a term of seven years.

The high level of political and societal support can be deduced from the way the CPIB navigated deep crises. On 14 August 1986, the suicide

of the then long-serving Minister for National Development the Cheang Wan, less than two weeks after he had been interrogated for 16 hours by CPIB officers after a corruption complaint against him by a building contractor (Quah 2011: 199) shocked the nation and put the CPIB in the spotlight. Four months later, the building contractor was fined the maximum amount of S\$100,000 for offering a million-dollar bribe to another building contractor for keeping the Minister's name out of the investigation.

The Minister's suicide is indicative of the gravitas and legitimacy of CPIB's investigations and accusations, and the shame and reputation loss associated with being accused of being corrupt after 25 years of successful CPIB operations and campaigns. The whole affair, however, also led to questions from members of Parliament and a subsequent parliamentary inquiry into what had happened exactly, at the request of MP Chiam See Tong, the opposition MP for the district of Potong Pasir. Accordingly, on 26 March 1987, President Wee Kim Wee appointed a three-man Commission of Inquiry to investigate the matter. After complaints by Chiam about not being allowed to access necessary information, he requested to be excused from the proceedings (Quah 2011: 200).

The inquiry concluded five months later that 'the two acts of corruption of Teh Cheang Wan might never have been uncovered but for the CPIB's commitment to investigating all leads to acts of corruption in Singapore' (Quah 2011: 200–201). According to Quah (2011: 201) 'an important consequence of the Teh Cheang Wan scandal was the introduction of the Corruption (Confiscation of Benefits) Act 1989, which was enacted on 3 March 1989 to enable the court to issue a confiscation order against the estate of a defendant if he had derived his benefits from corruption'.

Singapore's government leaders have been unwavering in their calls for vigilance and awareness regarding corruption, and have warned ministers and agencies against complacency based on past performance and reputation. For instance, shortly after Lee Kuan Yew's son and Singapore's third Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong assumed office in 2005, the government introduced revisions to the codes of conduct for ministers and MPs. Lee explained the rationale for the revisions to these codes of conduct as follows:

The integrity and reputation of the PAP MPs and Government is our most precious asset, which has been built up over half a century. If we lose this,

we will lose the respect of voters and the confidence of investors, and Singapore will go down. (Quah 2011: 235)

More recently, the agency has been investing heavily in enhancing both its physical and human technological capabilities. In close collaboration with other public agencies, data analytics and algorithms are used extensively to detect (virtual) fraud and money laundering, and newly employed data scientists and programmers investigate and prevent new types of twenty-first-century corruption, to ensure the sustained relevance and performance of the institution (Poon 2020; Tan 2020).

LESSONS FOR AGENCY DESIGN AND LEADERSHIP

In the introduction to this book, the editors write that institutions are to be taken as special organizations in their time and in their context. They add that when removed from that time and context, certain institutions or certain epochs in their existences or certain practices in which they engaged can be recognized as deplorable. In other words, an institution tells us something about the society it emerges from and exists in.

An intriguing question is the extent to which the CPIB's sustained success and legitimacy in the eyes of the general public would have been similarly impressive and uniform if it would have had to endure the political turbulence and polarization, and the 24/7 scrutiny of competing media outlets that have characterized most Western societies for decades now. In a sense, the CPIB has not just been revered but also shielded from assaults and potential erosion by subsequent PAP cabinets exclusively governing 'guided democracy' Singapore.

Political scientists and journalists—critics and admirers alike—have tried to classify Singapore's rather unique governance system in variety of ways, with 'benevolent dictatorship', 'authoritarian democracy', 'illiberal democracy', 'guided democracy', 'nanny-state' and 'Singapore Inc' being oft-used labels (e.g. Aoki 2015; Friedman 2011; Haque and Lee 2008; Sagar 2016; Tan 2012). At the same, the rather tight grip on the media landscape through the Media Development Authority (MDA) and Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) may have left more grey area unethical conduct by elites such as cronyism, nepotism, patronage and misuse of information off the public radar.

The argument that the many registered opposition political parties are weak and ineffective and do not provide a credible alternative, with the

exception of the Worker's Party who has become increasingly popular in recent years, or whether a degree of 'state capture' as a result of decades-long PAP rule has inadvertently created legal and institutional barriers for effective political competition, is fiercely debated among local scholars (e.g. Aoki 2015; Low 2014; Mahbubani 2015; Quah 2011; Tan 2008, 2012, 2018).

Anti-corruption enforcement in Western countries is often a much less centralized affair, as individual agencies and sectors tend to have their own integrity bureaus, coordinators and reporting structures, partly because multiple layers of government exist. These layers—municipal, regional and provincial—each have their own electoral dynamics, governance traditions and types of integrity issues and policies. At the same time, the fact that these countries do well *without* such a powerful institution implies their more fragmented and softer approach may suit their contexts better (Graycar and Monaghan 2015). Their more pluralist and liberal traditions, with separation and decentralization of powers being pivotal, may not sit well with a CPIB-like approach.

For these reasons, distilling one silver bullet or key instrument from 'the Singapore approach' is hard, if not impossible. Certain features of the Singapore 'success story' are not easily transferable to much larger countries with different political systems and histories. Still, four meaningful and intriguing factors can be distilled from CPIB's virtuous cycle of institutionalization that bear lessons and inspiration for other anti-corruption agencies and systems, and public institutions more generally, in both developing and developed country contexts.

Political Will and Continued Support

The continued political support for CPIB's approach to curbing corruption, reinforced by Singapore's political stability as a de facto one-party state has massively contributed to the success of the CPIB. Subsequent prime ministers have frequently explicated the importance of Singapore's clean image for its overall success and prosperity. Senior civil servants constantly stress the importance of integrity and the Civil Service College (CSC), which sees 40,000 civil servants attending its courses annually, organizes a variety of courses and conferences on the topic of integrity. These efforts are supplemented by a multitude of courses and talks offered by individual agencies, as part of onboarding programs and personal development.

Adequate Legislative Backing and Mandate

A second lesson regarding institutional success is the importance of up to date and clear legislative underpinning and mandates. The fact that the political leadership in Singapore did never exempt themselves (and legislation stipulating the President can take over investigations if they involve the Prime Minister meant he himself could also be investigated) have ensured that the CPIB has managed to continue to operate with sufficient operational and strategic autonomy. Concomitantly, it has maintained political support and attention by reporting directly to the PMO.

Clearly Defined and Demarcated Roles and Responsibilities

Many anti-corruption agencies, and in fact many public agencies in general, suffer from contested boundaries and goal ambiguity (Chun and Rainey 2005), degrading them to ‘traffic cops’ who spend most of their time and energy deciding whether a complaint or report falls under their purview or not, and if not, to which agency it should be redirected. CPIB’s legal mandate and subsequent responsibilities are clearly defined, updated when needed and backed up by operational strength and capacity. Due to Singapore’s top-down, one-layered governance system, the CPIB doesn’t suffer from administrative traffic jams and bureaucratic competition to the extent many of its international counterparts do. In short: the agency’s public value proposition aligns with the authorizing environment and its operational capacity, to paraphrase Mark Moore’s (1995) famous vocabulary regarding public sector strategy.

Competitive Compensation and a Performance Culture

Although the CPIB is responsible to a large extent for Singapore’s effective anti-corruption strategy, it should also be acknowledged that the CPIB’s efforts in curbing corruption have been assisted by other core principles and policies of the PAP government. For decades, the government has emphasized and enforced meritocracy in hiring and promoting, with scholarships and extensive training being provided to top talent (scouted as early as at the age of 16). In addition, it rigorously applies extensive, private-sector inspired performance appraisal systems. The approach has inspired scholars to label the Singapore government a ‘macho meritocracy’ (Quah 2010; Van der Wal 2019).

One much debated and increasingly controversial feature of this approach is the remuneration of ministers and senior civil servants, which is pegged to top salaries in the private sector through an intricate system of annual benchmarking against the average salaries of top earners in six industries (law and banking, among others). This policy of paying competitive salaries deviates from most other developed countries in which senior government officials are paid considerably less than their private-sector counterparts. As a result, (Deputy) Permanent Secretaries and (junior) Ministers can earn as much as 2 million USD annually in fixed and variable pay, which makes them by far the world's best paid politicians and public managers, leaps ahead of their counterparts in countries with relatively high public sector pay, such as Australia, Switzerland, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the United Kingdom (Van der Wal 2017a, 2019: 58).

Arguably, this policy has curbed the brain drain of ministers and permanent secretaries to the private sector and reduced the temptation for senior civil servants and ministers to be corrupt (Gong and Wu 2012; Quah 2010: 103–116, 119–120). Indeed, the government has consistently used two types of arguments to justify the high salaries: a HR-based argument of wanting to recruit and maintain the 'best and brightest' in the government, and an integrity-based argument of wanting to prevent senior officials get tempted to seek additional monetary gain. In this vein, it is somewhat ironic that the salaries are increasingly contested by critics, sometimes referring to the remuneration policy as 'legalized corruption' (Van der Wal 2019).

It remains to be seen whether as a fairly traditional law enforcement agency it is up to task to address partly unknown corruption risks related to 'borderless' digital revolutions such as cryptocurrency, block chain and their implications for transboundary money laundering and bribery. Like other government agencies, more frequent reviewing and updating of procedures and tools will be required, alongside investment in new capabilities and human competencies such as big data analytics (cf. Van der Wal 2017b).

Perhaps the biggest challenge to the continued authority and legitimacy of the CPIB is the changing nature of Singaporean society, in which more assertive stakeholders and a less docile citizenry scrutinize government performance more intensely than they used to, with social media playing an important role (Low 2014; Tan 2017). Therefore, the chances of the PAP's monopolistic hold on government power continuing

indefinitely have decreased with observers jesting that the nation is almost 'becoming a normal country' (Mahbubani 2015). If the political atmosphere becomes more polarized and divisive as a result, the chances of the CPIB's function and operations being politicized also increase. In fact, more combative electoral political dynamics present in many other countries—developed and developing—may well explain why they have chosen not to establish such a powerful institution or have failed to mimic the success of the CPIB if they did try.

The most important question is whether the CPIB and the Singapore government can maintain the 'virtuous cycle' described in this chapter (cf. Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Can the CPIB discover new effective practices, which become the norm internally? Can it keep delivering on its mission, which, in turn, will help to preserve its institutional status both internally and externally. Time will tell whether the agency will continue to display high performance and public legitimacy in an increasingly complex, so-called VUCA world (Van der Wal 2017b).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What would have happened if the CPIB has remained within the police organization where it started?
2. If you were to compare the CPIB to the main anti-corruption agency in your country, what are the main differences and similarities? How would these affect agency effectiveness and institutional potential?
3. Can anti-corruption agencies develop into equally effective and lauded institutions in more liberal, Western-style democratic regimes?
4. If you had to identify one transferable lesson for public agencies in your country that address complex policy issues, what would it be?
5. Can you think of a scenario in which the CPIB would suffer an institutional crisis? What can be done to prevent such a crisis?

NOTES

1. According to Quah (2011: 199), however, 'this does not mean that corruption does not exist in Singapore'. Indeed, in recent years various major incidences of bribery featured prominently in the media, ranging from local contractors soliciting contracts from government agencies to subsidiaries

- of famous companies and businesses operating at Changi Airport being involved in large-scale corruption cases, also abroad.
2. A tangible example of the organization's effectiveness is the extremely high conviction rate of 98% on average over 2014–2018 for the cases it has helped bring to trial, with 2016 denoting a staggering 100% conviction rate. Other key indicators of effectiveness are the speed with which cases are moved forward (80% within a year's time). See CPIB (2019a).
 3. Among such agencies are The Housing Development Board, responsible for Singapore's high quality and accessible public housing and the overall local home ownership rate of over 80%, The Economic Development Board, often credited with engineering the nation's persistent economic growth and interplay between educational and industrial strategy, and the Public Utilities Board, responsible for Singapore's water governance and secure and continuous access to clean drinking water (Everest-Philips 2018).
 4. The CPIB's relocation within the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and its legal powers that have enabled the CPIB to obtain the necessary cooperation from both public and private organizations may not require a headcount similar to Hong Kong's ICAC (around 1300 FTE) in order to be effective, according to Quah (1995: 337).
 5. The Bureau was first moved to the Ministry of Home Affairs before it got its own building in 1961. Moving back and forth between the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the Attorney-General's (AG) Office, it has remained under the purview of the PMO since 1969.
 6. As explained later in this chapter, the CPIB only started to operate fully and effectively when Parliament adopted the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) in 1960.
 7. The headcount has expanded gradually towards 93; this number has been fairly stable since 2009.
 8. As an example, civil servants are required to register with their supervisor and senior manager any personal loan (including mortgages) exceeding S\$100,000, as part of continuous risk assessment of the liability of civil servants and to minimize opportunities for blackmail and financial extortion.
 9. Meritocracy, however, is not perfect. Modern-day Singapore is being criticized for having bred an elite class of senior officials who are often accused of being out of touch with regular citizens (see Low 2014; Tan 2008, 2017). More broadly, the fact that the PAP has been in power since Singapore attained self-government, many senior Ministers have been part of subsequent cabinets for over 20 years, and the country has had only three Prime Ministers in 60 years, have contributed to its somewhat authoritarian image.

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