

Embracing LGBT Issues in Workplace Diversity-The Way Forward

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Abstract: If an individual was considered “gay” in the past, he/she would be subject to criticism, more in the form of mockery. This was broadly viewed as “uncatholic” in societies where people were expected to follow the common norms and mores like growing up, getting married and having children according to society’s established ways of living. Anything viewed outside this context would be highly criticised hence discarded by most of the members. This unconventional behaviour could be associated with people liking and living with those of the same sex-whether they could be both men and women. This later included people who are transgender like a male-looking individual having female genital organs or vice-versa. There are also people who could love both men and women known as bisexuals. Coming back to the discussion dealing with diversity, it can be generally claimed that organisations ignore the issue thinking that all workers are at least “morally correct”. Any behaviour that would go against conventional ones would be immediately looked down upon. But how is this possible at the workplace when people might be overly hesitant to state that their sexual behaviour is totally different from the rest? It can be broadly known male employees who have a more feminine attitude than others could be considered as “sissy” and be the centre of mockery or fun with the other colleagues. Being gay, lesbian or transsexual are terms that are usually less spoken at work although progress has been made on this issue regarding the need to overcome discrimination and see things in a positive manner. This review of LGBT workers analyses discrimination of such workers based from stigma against homosexuality but opens up to the wider picture that covers both ongoing discrimination and the way forward where governments are trying their best to include LGBT within diversity. The impending problems awaits firm solutions and resolutions and this is the purpose of the study that debates such a “hot” issue claiming that it has not yet received the expected response within workplace diversity.

Keywords: LGBT, diversity, integration, discrimination, inclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The key problem is that most societies-advanced or developing-show hindrance towards the lesbian, gay, homosexuals, etc. with the belief that their sexual behaviour is antisocial hence reprehensible for society. In this way, discrimination is omnipresent and the pressure of being stigmatised by those who claim to be “normal” might be overwhelming. Else, nation have also incensed the debate by stating clearly and openly that it is morally wrong to be engaged in other behaviour apart from heterosexual one. Countries like France and the United Kingdom might still show hindrance and have laws to criminalise non-heterosexual behaviour while developing nations like Uganda or Sudan have stated that there is lapidating or even stoning if people are caught behaving differently from what is normally permitted by law and religion.

There are efforts undertaken by organisations that show responsibility and accountability in this aspect. Some companies clearly mention that they will fight back discrimination and stigmatisation against those likely to offend and criticise homosexuals and people classified in the related context. It is however right to say that sexual differences are already discriminated but are not likely to impact at work. People of any gender or behaviour might act privately according to their will but have no effect on affecting the other workers. Rather, they feel highly discriminated and even prevented

from opportunities to progress at work. This is where the importance of respecting diversity arises and how we should welcome such employees within diversity.

This research work along with the next one covers contemporary issues in diversity by welcoming new types of diversity that are broadly spoken but not considered with enough importance. In this contemporary context of workplace diversity, new types of diversity do impact globally and need to be effectively addressed else they might remain issues without a proper outcome.

1.1 DEFINITION OF LGBT:

International Spectrum (2015) defines the acronym refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. Although all of the different identities within “LGBT” are often lumped together (and share sexism as a common root of oppression), there are specific needs and concerns related to each individual identity.

Bua (2014) explains that for anyone under 30, it may be difficult to imagine a time when the gay-rights movement was not operating at a milestone-a-minute pace. Just 45 years ago gays had little choice but quietly rise above the separate-but-inherently-unequal pre-Stonewall era. People who lived during these times were warriors on the front lines of history, but today the pace of change threatens to wash away the past in the eyes of a new generation.

1.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF LGBT:

Morris (2015) provided an account of the history of LGBT. Some of his key findings and arguments are discussed. The author states that most historians agree that there is evidence of homosexual activity and same-sex love, whether such relationships were accepted or persecuted, in every documented culture.

1.2.1 Europe and homosexuality:

There was little formal study of homosexuality before the 19th century, however. Early efforts to understand the range of human sexual behaviour came from European doctors and scientists, including Sigmund Freud and Magnus Hirschfield. Their writings were sympathetic to the concept of a homosexual or bisexual orientation occurring naturally in an identifiable segment of humankind, and Freud himself did not consider homosexuality an illness or a crime (Morris, 2015).

1.2.2 United States and homosexuality:

Morris (2015) comments that in the United States, few attempts were made to create advocacy groups supporting gay and lesbian relationships until after World War II, although pre-war gay life flourished in urban centres such as Greenwich Village and Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Greater awareness, coupled with Senator Joseph McCarthy’s investigation of homosexuals holding government jobs during the early 1950s, led to the first American-based political demands for fair treatment in mental health, public policy, and employment.

1.2.3 Advances in the 1950s and 1960s:

The primary organisation acknowledging gay men as an oppressed cultural minority was the Mattachine Society, founded in 1950 by Harry Hay and Chuck Rowland. Other important homophile organisations on the West Coast included One, Inc., founded in 1952, and the first lesbian support network, Daughters of Bilitis, founded in 1955 by Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin. Through meetings and publications, these groups offered information and outreach to thousands. These first organisations soon found support from prominent sociologists and psychologists. In 1951, Donald Webster Cory published *The Homosexual in America* (Cory, 1951), asserting that gay men and lesbians were a legitimate minority group, and in 1953, But it would not be until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality as an “illness” classification in its diagnostic manuals. Bederman (2010) coins that in 1952, the Immigration and Naturalisation Act of 1952 explicitly forbade to those with “psychopathic personality”— which the PHS assured Congress included “homosexuality or sexual perversion” — from entering the country, or becoming citizens. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, gay men and lesbians continued to be at risk for psychiatric lockup and jail and for losing jobs or child custody when courts and clinics defined gay love as sick, criminal, or immoral. Bederman (2010) further points out that between 1946 and 1967, hundreds of LGBT persons were arrested each year for sodomy or attempted sodomy, and thousands for lesser offences like “cruising,” propositioning an undercover policeman or woman, wearing sex-inappropriate clothing

and being present in a gay or lesbian bar during a raid. Newspapers routinely printed the names of those arrested, who frequently lost their jobs as a result.

1.2.4 The gay liberation movement:

Morris (2015) comments that the gay liberation movement of the 1970s saw myriad political organisations spring up, often at odds with one another. Frustrated with the male leadership of most gay liberation groups, lesbians formed their own collectives, record labels, music festivals, newspapers, bookstores, and publishing houses and called for lesbian rights in mainstream feminist groups like the National Organisation for Women (NOW). Expanding religious acceptance for gay men and women of faith, the first out gay minister was ordained by the United Church of Christ in 1972. Other gay and lesbian church and synagogue congregations soon followed.

1.2.5 1980s through today:

Through the 1980s, as the gay male community was decimated by the AIDS epidemic, demands for compassion and medical funding led to renewed coalitions between men and women as well as angry street theatre by groups like AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Queer Nation. Morris (2015) comments that enormous marches on Washington drew as many as 1 million gay rights supporters in 1987 and again in 1993. Celebrity performers, both gay and heterosexual, have been among the most vocal activists, calling for tolerance and equal rights.

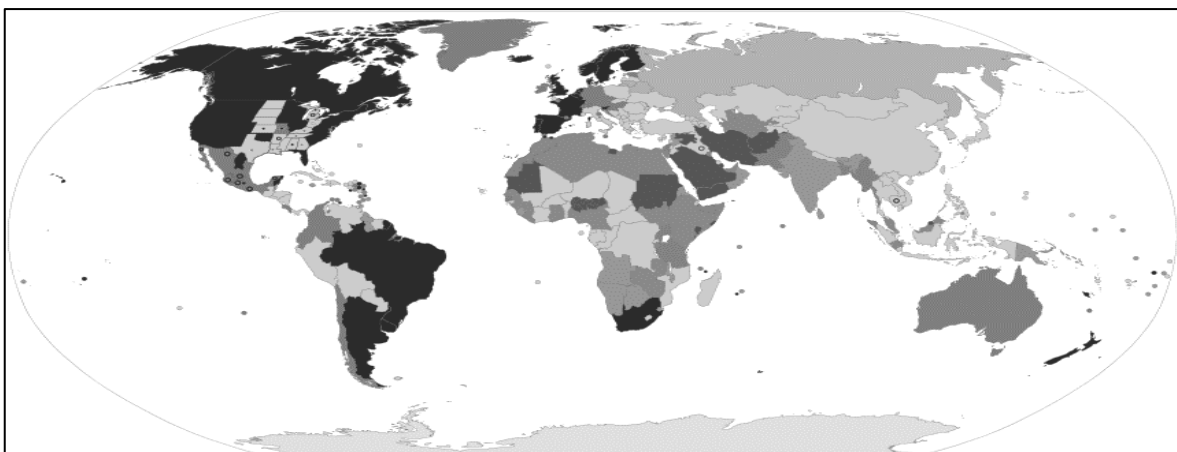
As a result of hard work by countless organisations and individuals, helped by Internet and direct-mail campaign networking, the 21st century heralded new legal gains for gay and lesbian couples. Same-sex civil unions were recognised under Vermont law in 2000, and Massachusetts became the first state to perform same-sex marriages in 2003. With the end of state sodomy laws (*Lawrence v. Texas*, 2003), gay Americans were finally free from criminal classification. Gay marriage is now legal in the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, and Canada, although the recognition of gay marriage by church and state continues to divide opinion worldwide.

1.3 GAY RIGHTS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES — VIEWS OF AFRICAN LEADERS:

The Economist (2010) states that Some 80 countries criminalise consensual homosexual sex. Over half rely on “sodomy” laws left over from British colonialism. But many are trying to make their laws even more repressive. A draconian bill proposed in Uganda would dole out jail sentences for failing to report gay people to the police and could impose the death penalty for gay sex if one of the participants is HIV-positive. In March 2010, Zimbabwe’s president, Robert Mugabe, who once described gay people as worse than dogs or pigs, ruled out constitutional changes outlawing discrimination based on sexual orientation.

In many former colonies, denouncing homosexuality as an “unAfrican” Western import has become an easy way for politicians to boost both their popularity and their nationalist credentials. But Peter Tatchell, a veteran gay-rights campaigner, says the real import into Africa is not homosexuality but politicised homophobia. George Kunda, Zambia's vice-president, lambasted gay people, saying they undermined the country's Christian values and that sadism and Satanism could be the result.

An illustration of the world’s view on LGBT:



Darkest shading represent nations that are more tolerant to LGBT issues and grey shadings represent countries where there is law enforcement and imprisonment. Countries like Uganda, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Mauritania, among others may enforce death penalty.

Source: GNU Free Documentation

South Africa was the first country anywhere to ban homophobic discrimination in its constitution. It is the only country in Africa to allow gay marriage. In April 2008 Eudy Simelane, a South African football player who was a lesbian, was gang-raped and stabbed to death. Two men were convicted of her murder but, in his sentencing, the judge denied that Ms Simelane's sexuality played a part in the crime (The Economist, 2010).

The Economist (2010) concludes that hopes rose a little in June 2009 when India overturned its 149-year-old sodomy law but since then the global trend seems to have been in the opposite direction. Campaigners argue the proposed laws have implications beyond gay rights. How countries treat one particularly vulnerable group is a good measure of how they will act towards the rest of their citizens.

1.3.1 A selection of developing nations and their attitude to homosexuality:

Table 1: Country, status and penalty imposed on homosexuals in selected nations

Country	Status	Penalty or sanction
Iran	Illegal	Death for men, slashes for women
Malaysia	Illegal	Fine, imprisonment up to 20 years
Morocco	Illegal	Fine, up to 5 years prison
Nigeria	Illegal under sharia	Death for men, 50 lashes for women, elsewhere 14 years of prison
South Africa	Legal since 1994	Beatings, rape or murder outside penal sanctions
Uganda	Illegal	Life imprisonment
Zimbabwe	Male illegal	Up to one year prison

Source: International LGBT and Intersex Association (2010)

1.4 LGBT AND WORKPLACE DIVERSITY:

For companies seeking to incorporate LGBT equality into their workplace inclusion and diversity strategies, there are two critical areas where small changes can have a significant impact: Recruitment and Retention.

1.4.1 Recruitment:

LGBT employees who work just as hard as their non-LGBT counterparts face multiple barriers to fair and equal treatment — barriers that make it harder for LGBT workers to find and keep good jobs; and barriers that prevent LGBT workers from accessing the same job-related benefits as their non-LGBT co-workers, putting LGBT workers and their families at risk (Map, 2015). Freedom to Work (2013) supports the idea that LGBT workers face discrimination that makes it harder for them to find and keep good jobs, earn a living, and provide for themselves and their families. This discrimination includes:

Bias and Discrimination in Recruitment and Hiring:

LGBT workers can put their job prospects at risk if they disclose that they are LGBT while looking for work.

On-the-Job Inequality and Unfair Firing:

An LGBT employee may be in a workplace that is blatantly hostile, one that condones anti-gay or anti-transgender jokes and slurs, and/or one where employers look the other way and allow a discriminatory climate to flourish. A 2011 survey found that 58% of LGB workers and 78% of transgender workers had heard offensive remarks or jokes at work. A

different survey found 26% of transgender workers were unfairly fired because they were transgender and 47% said they had experienced an adverse job outcome, such as being fired, not hired, or denied a promotion (Freedom to work, 2013).

Wage Gaps and Penalties

In addition to job and workplace discrimination, LGBT employees face wage disparities that make it harder for them to provide for themselves and their families. Polls show that individuals who self-identify as LGBT are more likely to report incomes of less than \$24,000 per year, and are less likely to report incomes of more than \$90,000 per year, compared to their non-LGBT peers (Freedom to work, 2013).

Regarding recruitment, Combs (2012) suggests that a company's approach to talent acquisition must include an eye toward diversity, including taking into consideration the state of LGBT issues in the U.S. and abroad. Some methods to demonstrate a commitment to inclusion and diversity, especially when looking to attract talented candidates who are LGBT include:

- Highlighting the policies and benefits relevant to LGBT employees on their websites (especially in the career section), including global programmes and how they may differ from those in the U.S.
- Implementing campus recruiting programs and highlighting inclusion and diversity information in outreach and education efforts.
- Partnering with LGBT student-focused, on-campus organisations that connect employers with LGBT undergraduate and graduate students.
- Communicating LGBT-friendliness through outreach programs and awards or by sponsoring LGBT non-profit community organisations.
- Participating in events such as the Out & Equal Workplace Summit, an annual conference where more than 2,500 individuals, human resources professionals, diversity managers, employee resource group leaders, and allies share best practices and formulate strategies based on their commitment to LGBT equality in the workplace.

1.4.2 Retention:

Combs (2012) states that once diverse job candidates have been recruited, it is vital to have a workplace environment in which all employees are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can fully contribute to the organisation's success. Organisations recognised for exceptional inclusion and diversity practices often have programmes that include:

- Establishing LGBT employee resource groups to provide leadership and growth opportunities for LGBT employees and serve as a vehicle to educate leaders about issues important to LGBTs in the workplace. Such groups also serve as ambassadors to the LGBT community.
- Mentoring and leadership development programs for diverse employees, including LGBT, as well as programmes to educate senior leaders and employees in general about diversity issues.
- Including LGBT content in inclusion and diversity training.
- Creating partnerships with LGBT non-profit organisations to demonstrate commitment to LGBT issues and offering volunteer opportunities relevant to these communities.

Organisations leading the pack with their inclusion and diversity efforts are realising the tremendous benefits and opportunities afforded by tapping into pools of skilled workers, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or background. Actively taking steps to embrace diversity will help organisations establish themselves as not only welcoming LGBT workers, but also realising the positive impacts of diverse workforces: higher degrees of employee engagement.

1.5 CASE EXAMPLE: LGBT INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE:

In today's fast-changing environment, the companies best positioned to outperform their competitors are those that consistently recruit and retain top talent. With an estimated 7 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)

employees in America's private sector, employers that are slow to create LGBT-friendly workplaces risk missing out on a substantial pool of skilled talent. Moreover, the consequences of alienating workers are significant. Losing and replacing the more than 2 million American workers who leave jobs due to unfair treatment and discrimination costs employers an estimated \$64 billion each year.

In 2012, it is legal to fire someone for being gay or lesbian in 29 US states. Not surprisingly, LGBT job seekers pay particular attention to which employers are known for having a diverse workplace, including treating LGBTs equally and fairly. One tool at a company's disposal is the annual *Corporate Equality Index* (CEI), published by the Human Rights Campaign, which evaluates companies on factors ranging from their non-discrimination policies to the strength of their benefits programs for LGBT employees. In 2012, 190 businesses were recognised as being a "Best Place to Work for LGBT Equality" by scoring 100%.

Research shows these factors make a difference to where LGBTs choose to work. When it comes to making career decisions, 83% of LGBTs surveyed indicate it is important that their employer offer equal health-insurance benefits to all employees. This is especially true for transgender employees, since many of the medical costs associated with transitioning procedures are not covered by the majority of employer-provided insurance plans.

Factors outside of the workplace also impact where LGBTs choose to work. While there are no U.S. federal mechanisms to prevent workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, there have been advances regarding marriage equality and relationship recognition in various states. Six states and the District of Columbia allow same-sex couples to marry, and nine more recognise broad domestic partnerships and civil unions. In a recent survey, 68% of LGBTs said they would prefer a job with an employer in a state where same-sex marriages are recognised over an employer in a state that doesn't recognise them.

Source: Combs, W. (2012) LGBT Inclusion and Diversity in the workplace, Diversity MBA Magazine.

1.6 LGBT INCLUSION: SAFETY, ACCEPTANCE AND EQUALITY:

Woods (2011) states that as diversity change practitioners, it becomes a reality to put inclusion into practice. Mickens (1994) outlined three areas of concern for LGBT inclusion: safety, acceptance and equality. These concerns continue today to provide a useful framework for thinking through inclusive policy, awareness and skill-building, and workplace culture change.

LGBT inclusion can be explored by asking what needs to be in place to promote:

- **Safety** from ridicule, harassment, bullying and violence
- **Acceptance** to foster understanding, goodwill and relationship building
- **Equality** to ensure non-discrimination, recognition of full lives and respect for the integrity of relationships and families

As with other aspects of inclusive policy, it is important to think through how policy becomes practice, how inclusion will be communicated, implemented and supported.

Diversity and inclusion often pushes us beyond our comfort zones. Managers are asked to dismantle backlash, to recognise stereotypes, and to keep an open-mind for learning from the experience of diverse others. They are challenged to re-examine their own identities, to surface deeply rooted assumptions, and to learn new ways to understand the complexity of human reality, including their own (Woods, 2011). When working with employee and management, the same skills and approaches that are useful with other dimensions of diversity are useful here. A workplace environment guided by expectations for work relatedness, fairness and respect is well suited for advancing recognition and inclusion of LGBT people.

1.7 CONCLUSION:

The LGBT issue is contemporary in approach compared to the traditional school of diversity that comprised age, gender, ethnic differences, etc. There is a little more consideration today where certain companies are duly considering this aspect and empowering employees in this category to better express themselves at work. There has been significant development over the years to transform the generalised homosexuality issue into the wider LGBT issue that is broader

and more inclusive in context. Discrimination is still quite high in this field, particularly in developing nations with a high representation of ethnic and cultural differences and people being conservative about this issue. Despite the fact that employers are attempting to include LGBT employees at work, there is still ongoing hypocrisy about the issue and latent or direct discrimination like homophobia wherever applicable. It is this stereotype that companies and employees develop and which might be the key reason to discriminate LGBT workers. Globally there are more demonstrations of LGBT groups to explain that they also form part of diversity, that their rights must be respected and that any form of stigmatisation should be overcome. Lastly, an inclusion strategy like safety, acceptance and equality greatly encourages companies to better embrace diversity regarding LGBT.

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