

TALENT TO CHANGE FOR

LGBT EMPLOYEE RESEARCH
LEADING THE WAY IN DIVERSITY



Workplace
Pride

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to dedicate this study to the employees and employers throughout the Netherlands that have been working so tirelessly to assure the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) employees in the workplace. The authors and publisher of this research have many persons to thank for their contributions which extended over a year of extensive planning, execution of the empirical research, preparation of the final report, and dissemination of the research results.

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As the international platform for the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people at work, Workplace Pride strives to improve the situation for LGBT people in the workplace. In order to help employers and their LGBT employees turn this goal into concrete actions, Workplace Pride introduced the Declaration of Amsterdam in 2011. Many points of the Declaration, a ten point action plan which includes steps to be taken by employers and LGBT employees, are currently being addressed; LGBT networks are being created and the general topic is now on the agenda of employers.

However, in order to create substantive, sustainable and positive change for LGBT people in the workplace, many questions still need to be addressed: What is the 'business case' behind LGBT policies and practices? How can employers respond to the specific needs of LGBT employees and truly bring out the best of their talent?

Workplace Pride commissioned Pro Firmus, in cooperation with the University of Groningen, to conduct this study entitled 'TALENT TO CHANGE FOR: LGBT Employee Research Leading the Way in Diversity'. This research explores the questions above and makes concrete recommendations that aim to improve LGBT diversity and inclusion in the workplace in the Netherlands and beyond. Research and data collection was carried out between November 2011 and April 2012 and aimed to find the answers to the key question: what changes are needed to attract and keep LGBT talent in the workplace?

The study findings highlighted that employers in the Netherlands have made progress on achieving LGBT equality in the workplace and on underpinning the business case for their inclusion. However, most private and public sector organisations have committed to addressing LGBT issues at a baseline level. Further action is, therefore, needed for diversity and LGBT inclusion to be fully embedded into the organisation's culture, business strategy and structures. Change agents among senior and middle management have a key role to play in engaging in diversity in words and deeds, in achieving measurable progress and in enhancing their understanding of the benefits of diversity.

This study is unique because it builds on and reflects the true experience of employers and employees, in both public and private sector organisations. It defines critical success factors and offers practical tools to every organisation that takes LGBT inclusion at work seriously. We welcome the publication of the study which we undertook with our strategic partner FNV, and we are thankful to the Dutch Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (OCW) for funding this project.

Workplace Pride Foundation

Board, Management Team and Exec. Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the international platform for the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people at work, Workplace Pride is committed to improving the situation for LGBT people in the workplace. In 2011, as part of its efforts to help employers and their LGBT employees turn this goal into concrete actions, Workplace Pride introduced the Declaration of Amsterdam. Many points of the Declaration, a ten point action plan which includes steps to be taken by employers and LGBT employees, are currently being addressed; LGBT networks are being set up and the general topic is now on the agenda of employers.

In the interest of identifying means to improve workplace environments for LGBT people, Workplace Pride, in cooperation with FNV, conducted the study 'TALENT TO CHANGE FOR: LGBT Employee Research Leading the Way in Diversity' in 2011 and 2012.

The study was carried out through in-depth desk research and the collection of qualitative data, by means of interviews and focus groups. Compared with previous research, this study is unique because it builds on and reflects the experience of employers and employees, in both public and private sector organisations. It defines critical success factors and offers practical recommendations to organisations that seek to create substantive, sustainable and positive change for LGBT employees, as well as benefit the organisation as a whole.

This research is intended to collate and analyse the existing evidence in support of the need to address LGBT inclusion. The main findings of the research can be summarised as follows:

LGBT-related workplace climate and culture are a work in progress

A considerable number of LGBT people continue to experience a negative workplace climate where a heterosexist and "fitting in" culture prevails, and is not systematically addressed. The exclusion of LGBT employees concerns the inability to come out, homophobia and transphobia, lack of visibility, exclusion from international mobility and harassment. Anxiety about coming out and a homophobic climate impact negatively on the performance and well-being of LGBT employees. Hostile attitudes and behaviour also concern clients and suppliers.

Many participants in the research stressed that a two-way process was essential

for employees to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace: employers' inclusion of LGBT employees creates favourable conditions for employees to feel safe and confident to be open about their LGBT identity and when LGBT people 'come out' about their identity, they contribute to rendering LGBT employees more visible and better accepted by their colleagues.

Coming out is more prevalent in an office environment than on the shop floor where LGBT employees face greater barriers to self-identifying as LGBT. The situation is more difficult in rural areas or provincial towns. Generally in male-dominated sectors or occupational activities and in the armed forces, LGBT are less likely to come out.

Low awareness of issues affecting LGBT employees at company and employee levels

Most employers do not collect any data related to the sexual orientation or gender identity of their employees. There is no monitoring at any stage of the employment cycle (recruitment, retention and exit) or through employee attitude surveys. The absence of quantitative or qualitative information sometimes leads to the conclusion that there are no problems to be addressed, and therefore, no need for action. Underreporting of hostility or discrimination of LGBT is often misunderstood or ignored by management

Diversity audits are only carried out on gender equality. The absence of LGBT diversity audits means that employers do not screen all new and existing policies to ensure that they are inclusive of LGBT, nor do they collect qualitative information that would allow them to identify issues. Conducting LGBT diversity audits would enable employers to develop policies and actions that are better informed and targeted, thus more efficient.

Some line-managers and staff who deal with complaints are not always adequately equipped or competent to deal with LGBT exclusion issues or to provide the necessary support and solutions. In many organisations, employees do not benefit from LGBT-awareness training. Such training is sometimes offered to managers, but more rarely to employees at shop floor level.

LGBT and straight allies as role models

There is evidence that there are role models among LGBT and straight managers, including HR. Among LGBT in middle management, only a minority actively contribute to improving workplace climate for LGBT employees. There are various levels of visibility of LGBT employees at senior level because they do not always choose or feel comfortable to act as role models. Decisions are sometimes based on personal choice, while in some cases, senior managers fear negative reactions and impacts on their career.

LGBT employee networks as key actors in advancing equality for LGBT at work

All participating organisations have an LGBT employee network. There is some evidence of cooperation between LGBT networks and HR teams, whereas, in other instances, they have not even met.

LGBT networks continue to fulfil an important role in supporting employees and in helping employers achieve their diversity targets. However, they cannot be expected to substitute their employers' primary role and they require further development, notably through capacity enhancing measures backed by adequate resources. Networks are increasingly aware of their own need to promote diversity by improving the membership, visibility and participation of lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees, and LGBT employees from the shop floor and rural areas. They too can become role models and change agents in the near future.

Employers are committed to the business case for LGBT inclusion, but they need to articulate it, implement it and measure it

A large number of representatives from organisations reported that their leaders were committed to and actually promoted the business case for diversity, as well as LGBT inclusion.

Attempts to ascertain these companies' more specific understanding of the business case were not always conclusive. Although in some companies the definition was clearer, we found that many companies could not articulate the essential elements that constitute and support the business case. The business case for diversity and LGBT inclusion had a different understanding and lent itself to wide interpretation, often being confused for having some (stand-alone) diversity initiatives in place, but it was not necessarily linked to what exactly the business case translated to in the different organisations. Companies and organisations tend to rely on how diversity managers have translated the business case for diversity and what it means at a business level. LGBT employees recognised the importance of business benefits and also insisted on the moral dimension of their inclusion in the workplace. The report highlights the quintessential role of CEOs and Board members as change agents who need to commit to diversity in words and deeds, whilst underpinning the business case.

Commitment to LGBT issues is mainly at a baseline level

The study found that many employers from the public and private sectors in the Netherlands have achieved some progress on LGBT inclusion in the workplace and that they are committed to LGBT inclusion at baseline level. There are examples of good practice in the form of policies and actions, and support from middle management and some senior executives.

The study findings demonstrate that LGBT inclusion is seldom fully embedded into the organisation's culture, business strategy and structures. There is little evidence to suggest that diversity and inclusion is mainstreamed into an organisation's core business activity and decision-making. Some companies are indeed building an understanding of the benefits of diversity for the organisation and for their employees. That learning process entails moving towards a more comprehensive understanding of the business case for diversity and LGBT inclusion, which would help shape the way business is performed and how employees interact at work. It could likewise lead to a more consistent approach

and implementation of strategy and policies. Not least, it could result in an inclusive culture that encourages creativity and innovation.

The importance of communicating LGBT-inclusion efforts throughout the organisation and externally

Some companies use different vehicles for educating employees about the benefits of diversity and LGBT inclusion, ranging from employee newsletters, intranet and web site announcements regarding the existence of an LGBT employee network, formal adoption of a diversity value statement to signing the Declaration of Amsterdam . A limited number of companies provide a welcome package to new employees, which includes how to access internal policies, as well as information on the company's LGBT network.

What prevails is an extensive use by companies of their intranet to communicate their diversity policy (and other policies, including the complaints procedure) and LGBT inclusiveness. However useful this tool may be, it is not available to all employees and information is, therefore, not effectively disseminated. For example, this concerns mainly employees who work on shop floor level and employees who work in different parts of the Netherlands in more rural areas.

Until recently, HR managers mainly focused on the use of gender-inclusive language in the organisation. Almost all respondents considered that language was becoming more LGBT-inclusive at company level (language used by management and in organisational documents). LGBT networks and individuals play a major role in developing their colleagues' awareness around the use of appropriate and LGBT-inclusive language.

Some corporate commitment to equality and diversity is explicitly stated on the companies' websites, with a specific mention of LGBT inclusion, of the existence of an LGBT employee network or its membership of Workplace Pride. Most representatives from public sector organisations perceived the private sector to be more advanced and expert at communicating, externally, on their diversity and LGBT inclusion values and achievements. The divergence between the private and public sectors' communication on this policy field can be illustrated by the little evidence on the websites of some public administrations of being inclusive, even though they have diversity-related actions in place. Diversity and inclusion is often absent in the company's mission statement and core values. In the case of some organisations, not only there is no section in their website where they present their diversity priorities and achievements, but the word is not even mentioned at all.

Employers' engagement with external stakeholders

The study found that individual participating companies have very few contacts with external organisations that work on LGBT equality or are advocates for LGBT human rights. Companies throughout the world that successfully implement diversity initiatives, recognise the value of building alliances with external organisations. For example, external organisations can provide valuable feedback on a company's diversity efforts,

thus contribute to their effectiveness, as well as information on what other companies are doing in this field.

Recommendations

The report concludes with a series of recommendations that may be useful as guidelines for debate and strategic planning on LGBT inclusion in the workplace by employers and LGBT employees' networks. Recommendations for employers concern actions around the role of leadership, data collection on LGBT employees, mainstreaming diversity and LGBT inclusion, effective communication and valuing the role of networks. Recommendations for LGBT networks concern actions on their governance, improving their membership and defining their role. ■

“I understand that it is not easy to be an openly lesbian manager in a macho environment, but in order to create change, you need to be openly gay”