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THE INTERNATIONAL
PLATFORM FOR LGBTIQ+
INCLUSION AT WORK



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Breakout #2

Bridge the Gap: Engaging Operational & Frontline Teams

11:15 - 12:30 | Mendes Da Costa

Breakout 2 Report



1. Executive Summary

The session explored how organisations can bridge the gap between corporate LGBTIQ+ inclusion commitments and the everyday experience of operational and frontline employees.

The core message was clear: **LGBTIQ+ inclusion becomes effective when middle managers translate policy into visible daily behaviour, practical routines and active support.**

Middle managers are the critical link between organisational policy and frontline reality. They shape team culture, influence psychological safety, respond to inappropriate behaviour, and determine whether employees experience inclusion as a genuine part of the workplace or simply as a corporate statement.

Participants emphasised that inclusion should not sit alongside operational management as a separate initiative. Instead, it should be integrated into existing routines such as shift handovers, toolbox meetings, team meetings, check-ins, recruitment, team formation and performance conversations.

Psychological safety emerged as an important operational enabler. Teams need to feel safe to ask questions, raise concerns and challenge inappropriate behaviour if organisations want to create respectful, productive and stable working environments.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of practical communication. Frontline teams may have different working environments, language needs and access to corporate communications than office-based employees. Simple wording, visual communication, multilingual materials and clear behavioural expectations can help make inclusion more accessible.

Given that approximately 70–80% of the global workforce consists of frontline employees, creating inclusive frontline environments is fundamental to organisational trust, safety, continuity, quality, engagement and future ways of working.



The session concluded with a focus on practical next steps, including the development of clear manager recommendations and support tools, and a proposed dedicated **"Bridge the Gap" learning module in 2027** with separate tracks for strategic management, middle management and operational teams.

2. Key Findings

Finding 1 — Middle managers are the bridge between strategy and frontline reality

Middle managers play a critical role in translating corporate LGBTIQ+ inclusion commitments into daily workplace behaviours. They shape team culture, influence psychological safety, respond to difficult situations and determine how employees experience organisational values in practice.

The Tata Steel example reinforced that effective leadership means actively valuing and leveraging differences rather than simply responding to diversity issues when they arise. Middle managers therefore need more than awareness of organisational policy. They need the practical skills, confidence and visible support required to apply inclusion principles in real workplace situations.

Finding 2 — Psychological safety is an operational enabler

Psychological safety should not be viewed only as a wellbeing or culture issue. It directly supports safe, respectful and productive teamwork. When employees feel able to ask questions, raise concerns or speak up about inappropriate behaviour, organisations are better positioned to identify problems early and maintain effective team performance.

For frontline teams, this is particularly important because operational environments often depend on clear communication, trust and the willingness to speak up when something is not working. LGBTIQ+ inclusion should therefore connect to broader operational priorities such as **safety, continuity, quality and engagement**.



Finding 3 — Inclusion needs to become part of everyday management

The strongest opportunity is to integrate inclusion into processes managers already use rather than creating additional, separate activities.

Practical examples include:

- Including LGBTIQ+ inclusion and workplace behaviour in daily or weekly team meetings.
- Agreeing on simple behavioural guidelines within each team.
- Reinforcing these expectations during standups and toolbox meetings.
- Including inclusion in shift handovers and team check-ins.
- Integrating inclusive practices into recruitment and team formation.
- Asking employees how they feel during performance conversations, rather than focusing only on activities and results.
- Checking that employees understand important information rather than assuming communication has been understood.

This approach makes inclusion part of normal operational management rather than a campaign that appears only at particular times of the year.

Finding 4 — Frontline communication needs to be simple, accessible and visible

Frontline employees may not have the same access to corporate communications, digital platforms or office-based inclusion initiatives as other employees. Communication therefore needs to reflect the realities of operational environments.

Effective approaches include:

- Simple and accessible language.
- Visual communication.
- Multilingual materials where appropriate.
- Pictograms and other visual guidance.
- Posters and information placed in high-traffic areas.



- Clear explanations of expected workplace behaviours.

The objective is not to simplify the importance of inclusion, but to make the message easier for everyone to access and understand.

Finding 5 — Managers need practical tools to address inappropriate behaviour

The case study involving Zoe and Caroline demonstrated that managers can face complex situations involving subtle jokes, exclusion, unconscious bias and potentially hostile behaviour.

Managers should be equipped to:

- Avoid making assumptions about an employee's experience.
- Seek direct feedback from the individual concerned.
- Address inappropriate jokes, comments or behaviour early.
- Explain how employees can raise concerns.
- Know how concerns will be handled confidentially.
- Access specialist support when needed.
- Understand the role of ERGs and confidential counsellors.
- Follow clear organisational processes for situations such as gender transition.
- Work effectively with unions and other employee representatives where appropriate.

This demonstrates that having an inclusion policy is not enough. Managers need the **confidence, knowledge and support infrastructure to apply it.**

Finding 6 — Speak-up mechanisms are essential to an inclusive frontline culture

Employees need to know not only that they can raise concerns, but also **how** to raise them and what will happen afterwards. Clear and confidential reporting and support pathways can help create trust.

Managers should actively communicate these mechanisms rather than assuming employees know where to go.



Creating a strong speak-up climate also means addressing inappropriate behaviour early. Jokes or comments that appear minor can become normalised and contribute to a wider culture of exclusion if leaders do not intervene.

Finding 7 — Frontline experience needs greater visibility

With an estimated 70–80% of the global workforce working in frontline roles, frontline culture is not a peripheral issue. It is central to organisational culture and employee trust. However, issues such as microaggressions, exclusion, language barriers and psychological safety can remain difficult to identify without deliberate mechanisms for listening and measurement.

Tools such as **DEI heatmaps, employee feedback, reverse mentoring and active executive sponsorship** can help leadership understand what is happening at team, shift and location level.

Finding 8 — Global consistency needs to be balanced with local ownership

LGBTIQ+ inclusion initiatives may face different levels of resistance across countries, regions, teams and organisational cultures. Leadership should maintain clear ethical principles and expectations while avoiding an overly rigid, top-down approach.

Building momentum through regions and teams that are already demonstrating success can create credible examples and help accelerate broader adoption. The objective should be consistency in organisational values while allowing appropriate local approaches to implementation.

3. Key Takeaways

- **Make inclusion operational:** LGBTIQ+ inclusion should become part of how managers run their teams every day.
- **Equip middle managers:** Managers need practical skills, tools, support and clear expectations—not just policies.
- **Build psychological safety:** Employees need to feel safe to ask questions, speak up and raise concerns.



- **Focus on the frontline:** An inclusive organisation cannot be achieved if the majority of its workforce does not experience inclusion in their daily environment.
- **Use existing routines:** Embed inclusion into handovers, toolbox meetings, check-ins and team discussions.
- **Make inclusion explicit:** Discuss LGBTIQ+ inclusion directly so employees understand that it is part of the organisation's expectations.
- **Communicate simply:** Use accessible language, visuals and multilingual or pictogram-based communication where appropriate.
- **Act early:** Managers should address inappropriate jokes, comments and behaviours before they become normalised.
- **Create practical support systems:** ERGs, confidential counsellors, transition processes, training and case-based learning can help managers respond appropriately.
- **Measure culture locally:** DEI heatmaps and other mechanisms can help identify patterns at shift, team or location level.
- **Connect inclusion to operations:** Inclusion should support broader priorities such as safety, continuity, quality and engagement.
- **Balance standards with context:** Maintain clear ethical expectations while allowing appropriate local approaches.

4. Practical Actions for Middle Managers

Area	Example action
Team culture	Agree on simple behavioural guidelines and repeat them in daily routines.
Shift handover	Check that everyone has understood important instructions, for example by asking one person to summarise.
Toolbox meetings	Discuss workplace behaviour as a routine topic, rather than as a separate campaign.
Communication	Use simple wording, visual guidance and multilingual or pictogram-based instructions where appropriate.



Speak-up climate	Explain how concerns can be raised and how they will be handled confidentially.
Leadership behaviour	Intervene early when jokes, comments or behaviour may make the workplace less safe or respectful.
Performance conversations	Ask employees how they are experiencing work, not only what they have achieved.
Team formation	Consider inclusion when forming teams and creating working arrangements.

5. Implications for the Organisation

The discussion suggests a shift from viewing LGBTIQ+ inclusion primarily as a **corporate policy or HR responsibility** towards treating it as a core element of operational leadership.

The organisation's middle managers represent a particularly important intervention point. They have significant day-to-day influence over whether employees experience the organisation's stated values as genuine.

Three areas therefore deserve particular attention:

1. Manager capability

Managers should receive practical guidance on inclusive leadership, psychological safety, microaggressions, difficult conversations and supporting employees through sensitive situations. Training should focus on realistic operational scenarios rather than policy awareness alone.



2. Frontline visibility

Leadership needs better insight into the actual experience of frontline employees. Measuring culture at team and shift level can reveal issues that are not visible through corporate-level metrics. Employee feedback, DEI heatmaps and reverse mentoring can help connect leadership with frontline experience.

3. Everyday integration

LGBTIQ+ inclusion should be incorporated into existing management systems and routines rather than treated as an additional programme. Handovers, toolbox meetings, check-ins, team discussions and performance conversations provide natural opportunities to reinforce inclusive behaviours.

4. Operational relevance

Inclusion should be connected to the issues frontline leaders already manage: safety, quality, continuity, engagement and team performance. This makes inclusion more relevant to operational leaders and reinforces that respectful workplaces are part of effective business operations.

6. Recommended Actions

Priority	Action	Owner / Level	Timing
High	Define clear inclusive leadership expectations for middle managers	Executive Leadership / HR	Immediate
High	Embed LGBTIQ+ inclusion and behavioural expectations into daily and weekly team routines	Operations / Managers	Immediate



High	Strengthen manager training on psychological safety, microaggressions and difficult conversations	HR / DEI	Short term
High	Establish clear and confidential support pathways for employees experiencing exclusion or discrimination	HR / Managers / ERGs	Short term
High	Develop practical manager guidance and tools based on frontline feedback	HR / DEI / Operations	Short term
Medium	Integrate inclusion into shift handovers, toolbox meetings and team check-ins	Operations / Managers	Immediate
Medium	Use simple, accessible, visual and multilingual communication where appropriate	Communications / Operations	Ongoing
Medium	Develop practical transition and inclusion support processes for employees who need them	HR / Employee Relations	Short term
Medium	Explore DEI heatmaps or similar tools to identify frontline culture issues	DEI / HR / Operations	Medium term
Medium	Expand reverse mentoring between senior leaders and frontline employees	Leadership / Operations	Medium term
Medium	Introduce regular ethical case discussions to help managers learn from real situations	HR / Leadership	Ongoing
Medium	Identify and share successful regional examples to build momentum elsewhere	Leadership / DEI	Ongoing



High	Develop the proposed 2027 "Bridge the Gap" learning module with separate tracks for strategic management, middle management and operational teams	Leadership / HR / DEI	2027
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7. Next Steps

The session identified two immediate priorities for continuing the work:

Consolidate practical guidance

Feedback from the breakout should be consolidated into clear recommendations and practical support tools for managers working with operational and frontline teams. The emphasis should be on **what managers can do differently in their next team meeting, handover or conversation**, rather than providing additional policy material alone.

Develop the 2027 "Bridge the Gap" learning module

A dedicated learning module is proposed for 2027 to strengthen LGBTIQ+ inclusion between operational and office-based staff.

The module should include three tailored tracks:

1. **Strategic Management** — setting direction, accountability, investment and organisational alignment.
2. **Middle Management** — translating strategy into team behaviour, psychological safety and practical routines.
3. **Operational Teams** — understanding inclusion, expected behaviours, speaking up and accessing support.

This three-level approach recognises that different groups have different responsibilities and learning needs.



8. Conclusion

The central message from the session was that **LGBTIQ+ inclusion becomes real through everyday leadership behaviour.**

Corporate policies establish the direction, but middle managers determine how employees experience that commitment in practice. For frontline teams in particular, inclusion needs to be visible, accessible and connected to the routines that shape daily working life.

The most effective approach combines clear organisational standards with practical manager capability, psychological safety, employee listening, accessible communication, local ownership and visible leadership support.

The proposed 2027 "Bridge the Gap" learning module provides an opportunity to turn these insights into practical learning for strategic leaders, middle managers and operational teams.

Bottom line: Bridging the gap between corporate LGBTIQ+ commitments and frontline reality requires organisations to make inclusive leadership part of everyday operational management—not a separate initiative.