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THE INTERNATIONAL
PLATFORM FOR LGBTIQ+
INCLUSION AT WORK



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Breakout #9

The Intersectionality of Communities: Driving Workplace Inclusion

14:15 - 15:15 | Mendes Da Costa

Breakout 9 Report



1. Executive Summary

The session explored the complexity of LGBTQIA+ inclusion through the lens of **intersectionality**, demonstrating that people's experiences of identity, inclusion and exclusion are shaped by multiple dimensions of who they are.

The session began by asking participants to identify the identities they associate with themselves. The resulting exercise demonstrated the breadth and complexity of identity, with participants identifying characteristics including gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, disability, nationality, profession, family roles and other aspects of personal identity. Among the most frequently identified terms were *woman, gay, queer, man, person of colour, mother, nonbinary and black*.

The discussion then examined how different identities can create distinct workplace experiences. Examples included the experiences of bi+ employees, neurodiverse LGBTIQ+ employees, transgender women of colour, intersex employees and LGBTQIA+ people from different cultural and geographic contexts.

A key theme was that **LGBTIQ+ inclusion cannot be treated as a single, universal experience**. Employees may encounter different barriers depending on the intersection of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, disability, neurodiversity, culture, nationality and other characteristics.

The session also highlighted broader structural and societal factors. These included the continuing criminalisation of same-sex relationships in 66 jurisdictions, the historical influence of colonial legislation, and the different levels of visibility and representation available to LGBTQIA+ communities around the world.

The workplace examples reinforced the importance of moving beyond visible diversity initiatives towards **inclusive systems, practices and cultures that recognise different lived experiences**.

The overall message was that intersectionality requires organisations to ask a more fundamental question: **Who might still be excluded by an inclusion strategy designed around a single identity or experience?**



2. Key Findings

Finding 1 — Identity is multidimensional

The opening identity exercise demonstrated that individuals rarely identify through a single characteristic. Participants identified a wide range of identities and descriptors, including gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, family roles, profession, nationality and personal characteristics.

The exercise provides a practical reminder that employees bring multiple identities into the workplace simultaneously. For organisations, this means that inclusion strategies designed around one characteristic in isolation may fail to recognise how different identities interact.

Finding 2 — Intersectionality changes the workplace experience

The session demonstrated that people within the LGBTQIA+ community can experience the workplace very differently. For example, the challenges experienced by a bi+ employee may differ from those experienced by a lesbian, gay or transgender employee. Similarly, race, disability, neurodiversity or cultural background can add additional barriers or shape how discrimination is experienced.

Intersectionality therefore requires organisations to move beyond asking whether LGBTQIA+ employees are included and instead consider **which LGBTQIA+ employees may still be experiencing barriers**.

Finding 3 — Bi+ employees can experience invisibility and misunderstanding

Research presented from Bi+ Nederland and Leiden University highlighted unique workplace challenges faced by bi+ people. One identified challenge is that colleagues may assume someone is either straight or gay, leaving bi+ employees feeling unseen or misunderstood.

This illustrates a broader issue: workplace inclusion can unintentionally become focused on more visible or familiar identities while other experiences remain less understood.



Organisations should therefore avoid assuming that initiatives designed for the broader LGBTQIA+ community automatically address the specific experiences of every group within it.

Finding 4 — Neurodiversity requires practical workplace adjustments

The session also explored the experience of neurodiverse LGBTIQ+ employees. Research referenced during the session identified practical workplace approaches including **quiet zones, flexible seating and reducing sensory triggers such as noise and bright lights**.

This reinforces the importance of moving beyond awareness campaigns towards practical changes in the working environment. An inclusive workplace may therefore require adjustments to physical spaces, communication approaches and working practices.

Finding 5 — Multiple forms of discrimination can overlap

The session highlighted how LGBTQIA+ identity can intersect with race and gender.

The Human Rights Campaign example focused on employees who may experience both racial and gender-based discrimination, highlighting the particular vulnerability of **Black transgender women**. This demonstrates why organisations should consider overlapping forms of discrimination rather than analysing each characteristic independently.

Policies addressing racism, sexism and LGBTQIA+ inclusion need to work together if they are to reflect employees' actual experiences.

Finding 6 — Historical and geographic context matters

The session placed LGBTQIA+ inclusion within a wider global and historical context. The presentation highlighted that **66 jurisdictions currently criminalise private, consensual same-sex sexual activity**, with many of these laws explicitly targeting sex between men. Almost half of these jurisdictions are Commonwealth countries.

The session also explored the continued influence of colonial legal structures. This matters for multinational organisations because employees may experience very different levels of legal protection, social acceptance and personal safety depending on where they live and work.



Finding 7 — Inclusion should account for intersex experiences

The session included a specific focus on workplace inclusion for intersex employees. Examples of recommended practices included inclusive language in policies, flexible approaches to dress codes and access to private, gender-neutral facilities. The session explicitly identified **requiring medical disclosure for accommodations** as an inappropriate practice.

This reinforces the principle that inclusion should protect privacy and avoid requiring unnecessary disclosure of sensitive personal information.

Finding 8 — AI can reproduce existing inequalities

The session also connected intersectionality with emerging technology. A key issue identified was that AI systems can reinforce stereotypes and suppress LGBTIQ+ voices because of bias within training data.

This creates a new dimension to inclusion work. Organisations increasingly need to consider whether technology, automated systems and AI tools reproduce existing assumptions about gender, sexuality, race or other identities.

Finding 9 — Workplace norms can pressure people to hide identity

The concept of **heteroprofessionalism** was introduced to describe the expectation that being "professional" can mean hiding queer identity or personal life in order to conform to heterosexual norms. This provides an important lens for understanding inclusion beyond formal policies.

An organisation may have inclusive policies while workplace culture still communicates that certain identities should remain invisible.

Finding 10 — Representation and visibility matter

The session explored the visibility of LGBTQIA+ people across different communities and contexts. The presentation highlighted the limited global representation of openly lesbian women in leadership and examined the experiences of queer people of colour and public figures



such as Munroe Bergdorf and Nisha Ayub.

Representation therefore needs to be considered not simply in terms of numbers, but also in terms of **who is visible, who has influence and whose experiences are represented**.

Finding 11 — History and community memory are part of inclusion

The session also highlighted the importance of LGBTQIA+ archives and community history. The presentation identified IHLIA LGBTI Heritage in Amsterdam as having been established in 1979, alongside other major LGBTQIA+ archives including ONE in Los Angeles and the Australian Queer Archives.

Understanding LGBTQIA+ history can help organisations connect contemporary inclusion efforts with the communities, movements and experiences that shaped them.

3. Key Takeaways

- **Think intersectionally:** LGBTQIA+ employees do not share a single experience of inclusion.
- **Look beyond the umbrella:** Different communities within LGBTIQ+ may face distinct barriers.
- **Recognise overlapping identities:** Sexual orientation and gender identity can intersect with race, disability, neurodiversity, culture, nationality and other characteristics.
- **Address invisibility:** Bi+ and other less visible identities can be overlooked by conventional inclusion approaches.
- **Design for different needs:** Practical adjustments can make workplaces more accessible for neurodiverse and disabled employees.
- **Protect privacy:** Inclusion should never require unnecessary disclosure of sensitive personal information.
- **Challenge workplace norms:** Inclusive policies are not enough if employees still feel pressure to hide aspects of their identity.
- **Consider technology:** AI and automated systems can reproduce existing stereotypes and exclusion.



- **Understand global context:** Legal protection and social acceptance vary dramatically across countries.
- **Value representation:** Consider not only who is represented but who has visibility, influence and voice.
- **Connect inclusion with history:** Community history and lived experience provide important context for today's inclusion work.

4. Implications for the Organisation

The session suggests that organisations should move from a **single-axis approach to inclusion towards a more intersectional model**. Rather than treating LGBTQIA+ inclusion, racial inclusion, disability inclusion and neurodiversity as completely separate agendas, organisations should consider where these experiences overlap.

Four areas deserve particular attention:

1. Review inclusion through an intersectional lens

Organisations should examine whether their policies, programmes and employee networks address the needs of different groups within the LGBTQIA+ community.

Questions to consider include:

- Are bi+ employees visible within our inclusion strategy?
- Are transgender employees of colour experiencing the same opportunities as others?
- Are neurodiverse LGBTIQ+ employees able to access appropriate workplace adjustments?
- Do our policies account for intersex employees?
- Are employees expected to hide aspects of their identity to fit workplace norms?



2. Build practical inclusion into workplace design

Inclusion should translate into practical changes to physical environments, communication and working practices. Examples include quiet spaces, flexible seating, accessible communication, inclusive policies and appropriate facilities.

3. Examine systems and technology

Organisations should consider how AI and other automated systems may reproduce stereotypes or exclusion.

This is particularly important as technology increasingly influences recruitment, communication, decision-making and employee experience.

4. Strengthen representation and visibility

Organisations should consider who is visible within leadership, employee networks, communications and inclusion initiatives.

Representation should reflect the diversity that exists within the LGBTQIA+ community rather than presenting a single version of LGBTQIA+ experience.

5. Recommended Actions

Priority	Action	Owner / Level	Timing
High	Review LGBTQIA+ inclusion strategy through an intersectional lens	Leadership / DEI / HR	Immediate
High	Identify groups whose experiences may be underrepresented in current inclusion initiatives	DEI / ERGs / HR	Short term



High	Include intersectional questions in employee listening and engagement surveys	HR / People Analytics	Short term
High	Review policies for bi+, transgender, intersex, disabled and neurodiverse employees	HR / DEI / Legal	Short term
Medium	Provide practical workplace adjustments supporting neurodiverse employees	HR / Facilities / Managers	Medium term
Medium	Review workplace language and expectations around "professionalism"	HR / Leadership / Communications	Medium term
Medium	Assess AI and automated systems for potential LGBTQIA+ and intersectional bias	Technology / Legal / DEI	Medium term
Medium	Strengthen representation of diverse LGBTQIA+ identities within ERGs and leadership programmes	ERGs / Leadership / HR	Ongoing
Medium	Build stronger connections between LGBTQIA+ inclusion and racial, disability and neurodiversity initiatives	DEI / ERGs	Ongoing
Medium	Incorporate LGBTQIA+ history and diverse lived experiences into education and awareness programmes	DEI / ERGs / Communications	Ongoing



6. Conclusion

The session demonstrated that **there is no single LGBTQIA+ workplace experience.**

People experience inclusion through multiple and overlapping identities, and these intersections can create additional barriers that may remain invisible when organisations approach inclusion through individual characteristics alone. The examples explored—from bi+ invisibility and neurodiversity to racial and gender discrimination, intersex inclusion, heteroprofessionalism and AI bias—show that effective inclusion requires organisations to look beyond broad statements of support.

An intersectional approach means asking who is missing, whose experience is different and where existing systems may unintentionally create barriers.

Bottom line: Meaningful LGBTQIA+ inclusion requires organisations to understand the full complexity of people's identities and design workplaces that recognise, support and value those differences.