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THE INTERNATIONAL
PLATFORM FOR LGBTIQ+
INCLUSION AT WORK



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Breakout # 8

Defining Success in a Challenging Landscape

14:15 - 15:15 | Toorop Hall

Breakout 8 Report



1. Executive Summary

The session explored how organisations and countries can better understand and measure progress on LGBTIQ+ inclusion by looking beyond legislation to consider **lived experience and perception**.

Susan Dicklitch-Nelson presented a global metric developed from 14 years of research, designed to evaluate how countries perform on LGBTIQ+ inclusion. The framework compares **legislative rights** with an **LGBTIQ+ Perception Index**, highlighting an important distinction between what the law says and how people actually experience society.

The discussion demonstrated that strong legal protections do not necessarily translate into positive lived experiences. Country-level data revealed significant differences between legislative and perception scores, while the Netherlands showed a relatively small gap between the two. However, the Netherlands still recorded weaker results around public gathering safety and violence.

A major challenge is the availability and reliability of data. Survey participation fell significantly between 2022 and 2024, partly because restrictive laws and fear of self-identification can prevent people from participating. This means that the absence of negative data should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of an inclusive environment.

The discussion then moved from national measurement to the workplace, exploring how organisations can distinguish between **diversity, equity and inclusion**, and how each requires different approaches to measurement. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) emerged as a particularly important factor: when ERGs are ineffective, they can have a significant negative impact on employees' overall experience of inclusion.

The overall message was that organisations need to become more sophisticated in how they define and measure success. **Legal compliance and representation are important foundations, but genuine inclusion ultimately needs to be understood through employee experience.**



2. Key Findings

Finding 1 — Legal rights do not tell the whole story

The session highlighted a fundamental distinction between **legislative protection** and **lived experience**. Governmental discrimination can be reflected in laws and policies, while societal discrimination may be experienced through attitudes, behaviours, safety concerns and exclusion.

The two do not always move together. A country can have relatively strong legal protections while people continue to experience significant social discrimination, or the reverse. The framework therefore provides a more complete picture by considering both what governments provide through legislation and what LGBTQIA+ people experience in everyday life.

Finding 2 — There is a significant global gap in LGBTIQ+ inclusion

The 2024 data presented during the session showed significant challenges globally.

- **69% of countries received an 'F' for legislation.**
- Iceland was the only country to achieve a **'B' perception score**.
- Workplace legal protections remain uneven across the world.
- **62 countries** provide legal protection covering both sexual orientation and gender identity.
- **31 countries** protect sexual orientation only.
- **2 countries** protect gender identity only.
- The remaining countries provide no comparable legal protection.

These figures demonstrate that legal and social progress remains highly uneven and that global organisations need to account for significant differences between operating environments.



Finding 3 — Country-level data can reveal important discrepancies

The comparison between legislation and perception produced several notable examples. Brazil scored relatively highly on legislation but considerably lower on perception, demonstrating that legal progress does not necessarily translate into positive lived experience.

Japan showed the opposite pattern, with relatively lower legislative protection but stronger perception results. The Netherlands showed a relatively small gap between legislation and perception, suggesting greater alignment between formal protections and lived experience than in some other countries.

However, the Netherlands scorecard also identified areas of concern:

- **B:** Legislation and police safety.
- **C:** Perception, general safety and discrimination.
- **F:** Safety at public gatherings and violence.

This illustrates why organisations should avoid relying on a single overall country ranking when assessing inclusion risks.

Finding 4 — Data collection itself presents an inclusion challenge

Reliable inclusion data is difficult to obtain. The number of survey respondents fell from approximately **137,000 in 2022 to 40,000 in 2024**.

This decline reflects some of the practical and political challenges involved in collecting LGBTQIA+ data. In restrictive environments, people may be unable or unwilling to identify themselves because of legal, social or personal safety concerns. This creates an important measurement issue: **low levels of reported discrimination do not necessarily mean low levels of discrimination.**

Organisations should therefore interpret gaps in data carefully and consider the context in which the data was collected.



Finding 5 — Diversity, equity and inclusion require different measures

The workplace discussion highlighted the need to distinguish between three related but different concepts:

Diversity concerns representation. Who is present within the organisation?

Equity concerns fairness and equal opportunity. Are people given comparable opportunities and treated fairly?

Inclusion concerns experience. Do people feel that they belong, can participate and can contribute fully?

Each requires a different measurement approach.

Possible approaches include:

- Measuring diversity through voluntary self-identification.
- Assessing equity through external benchmarking and comparative data.
- Measuring inclusion through direct employee surveys and experience-based feedback.

This distinction helps organisations avoid treating representation as a proxy for inclusion.

Finding 6 — Organisations need multiple sources of evidence

The discussion highlighted the value of combining internal and external data. Self-identification can help organisations understand representation, while external benchmarks can provide a point of comparison for equity and organisational performance.

Employee surveys are particularly important for understanding inclusion because they capture the experience of employees rather than simply counting demographic representation. The example of McKinsey demonstrated how organisations can combine self-identification with broader assessments of equality across employees, clients and society.

The wider lesson is that **no single metric can adequately measure inclusion**.



Finding 7 — ERGs can significantly influence employees' experience of inclusion

Employee Resource Groups emerged as an important organisational factor. Effective ERGs can provide community, visibility, advocacy, education and connection between employees and leadership.

However, the discussion also highlighted the reverse: **an ineffective ERG can have a significant negative impact on employees' overall perception of inclusion.** This means organisations should not assume that simply having an ERG demonstrates progress. The effectiveness, reach, credibility and relationship between the ERG and the wider organisation also need to be considered.

Finding 8 — Inclusion requires more than measurement

Data can identify gaps, but measurement alone does not create inclusion.

The discussion emphasised the importance of turning evidence into action. Organisations need to use data to identify where intervention is required and then develop approaches that fit their organisational and cultural context. The McKinsey example also highlighted the importance of a nuanced and human approach. Staff can be equipped to drive impact without relying solely on rigid or highly formal interventions.

3. Key Takeaways

- **Measure more than legislation:** Legal rights provide an important baseline but do not necessarily reflect lived experience.
- **Look at perception:** Employee and community experience provides insight that legal indicators cannot capture.
- **Understand the gap:** Differences between legislative rights and lived experience can reveal hidden inclusion challenges.
- **Interpret data carefully:** Low participation or limited self-identification may reflect fear or restrictions rather than an absence of discrimination.



- **Separate diversity, equity and inclusion:** Representation, fairness and lived experience require different measures.
- **Use multiple data sources:** Combine self-identification, external benchmarks and employee experience data.
- **Measure inclusion directly:** Ask employees about their actual experience rather than relying only on representation figures.
- **Strengthen ERGs:** An effective ERG can support inclusion, while an ineffective one can negatively affect employees' experience.
- **Turn data into action:** Measurement should inform practical interventions rather than become an end in itself.
- **Consider local context:** Global organisations need to understand differences between countries, regions and workplace environments.

4. Implications for the Organisation

The session suggests that organisations should reconsider how they define success in LGBTIQ+ inclusion.

A strong legal environment is important, but organisations should not assume that compliance automatically creates an inclusive workplace. Similarly, increasing LGBTIQ+ representation does not necessarily mean that employees experience belonging, fairness or psychological safety. Organisations should therefore develop a **measurement framework that distinguishes diversity, equity and inclusion** and uses appropriate indicators for each.

For example:

- **Diversity**
 - Measure representation through voluntary self-identification where legally and ethically appropriate.
- **Equity**
 - Compare access to opportunities, progression and other relevant outcomes using internal data and external benchmarks.



- **Inclusion**

- Directly measure employee experience through surveys, listening exercises and other feedback mechanisms.
- ERGs should also be considered part of this measurement framework. Their effectiveness, reach and relationship with employees and leadership can provide important indicators of organisational inclusion.
- Finally, organisations operating globally should interpret country-level data carefully. Legislative protection, social attitudes, safety and workplace experience may vary significantly between locations.

5. Recommended Actions

Priority	Action	Owner / Level	Timing
High	Develop a clear framework distinguishing diversity, equity and inclusion	HR / DEI / People Analytics	Immediate
High	Establish appropriate measures for LGBTQIA+ representation, equity and employee experience	HR / People Analytics	Short term
High	Use employee surveys to directly measure inclusion and lived experience	HR / DEI	Short term
High	Benchmark organisational performance against credible external inclusion frameworks	DEI / HR / Leadership	Short term
Medium	Review how ERG effectiveness is measured and understood	HR / ERG Leadership	Short term
Medium	Assess whether ERGs are reaching employees beyond their immediate membership	ERGs / HR	Medium term
Medium	Analyse country-level differences in legislation, perception and safety when developing global inclusion strategies	Global DEI / Leadership	Ongoing



Medium	Consider data availability and self-identification limitations when interpreting inclusion metrics	People Analytics / Legal / DEI	Ongoing
Medium	Use inclusion data to identify specific areas requiring intervention	Leadership / HR / DEI	Ongoing
Medium	Establish regular reporting that combines internal data, employee experience and external benchmarks	Leadership / People Analytics	Ongoing

6. Conclusion

The session demonstrated that **defining success in LGBTQIA+ inclusion requires more than counting laws or representation figures.**

Legal rights provide an essential foundation, but lived experience reveals whether those rights translate into meaningful safety, participation and belonging. Similarly, workplace diversity provides representation, but equity and inclusion require organisations to understand whether people have fair opportunities and genuinely positive experiences.

A sophisticated approach therefore combines legislative data, external benchmarks, demographic representation and direct employee feedback.

ERGs also play an important role in this ecosystem. Their effectiveness can significantly influence how employees experience inclusion and should therefore be treated as an important part of the organisational inclusion strategy.

Bottom line: You cannot manage inclusion effectively if you only measure who is present or what the law says. True progress requires understanding **how people experience the organisation—and using that evidence to drive action.**