LGBT Workplace Inclusion: Challenges, Policy Gaps and Path to Equitable Employments

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Abstract

LGBTQ+ employees continue to face significant workplace challenges, including discrimination, exclusion, and limited policy protections, despite increasing global efforts toward diversity and inclusion. This study examines the key barriers to workplace inclusion, identifies gaps in research on supportive policies, and evaluates the effectiveness of existing inclusion initiatives. A comprehensive literature review reveals persistent issues such as bias in hiring, workplace hostility, and inadequate legal protections, particularly in culturally diverse contexts. Findings highlight the urgent need for stronger organizational policies, leadership accountability, and inclusive workplace practices. This study advocates for targeted reforms to foster a truly equitable work environment for LGBTQ+ employees.

Keywords - LGBT employees, Diversity & Inclusion(D&I), Workplace Inclusion

Introduction

Corporate is usually aware of the need to embrace diversity in order to advance greater gender equality at work and ensure greater opportunities for under-represented and marginalised groups. Leading businesses are starting to recognise the business benefits as well, specifically the direct impact that diverse teams and inclusive work environments can have on productivity and performance. These businesses include both big local businesses and western multinationals operating in India. However, the population or diversity in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity is still overlooked.

Community Business report 2012, however, thinks that businesses can no longer ignore this problem given the tide of change happening in terms of legislation and their presence, not just in India but throughout Asia. Advocates for LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, transgender and Queer) workplace diversity and inclusion (D&I) discovered possibilities to publicize their work following the 2018 verdict. One of their main tactics was to present the adoption of D&I as something that made sense economically. LGBT professionals in India face significant obstacles that prevent many from being out in the workplace and limit their capacity to participate fully. More significantly, we think that businesses can take the lead in challenging attitudes and fostering a more welcoming environment for LGBT people in India.

Despite changes in the mindset of public as compared to a decade back and various laws being implemented in India, employees still face harassment, bullying or isolation at the workplace. They are willing to work for lesser pay due to lack of jobs and acceptance in the society. Repealing of Section 377 in 2018 lead to decriminalisation of homosexuals or NALSA judgement in 2014 was a game changer for trans community as they were identified as separate gender and reservation in jobs and educational institutions were also given to them. Yet, the research suggest that people do not feel comfortable in coming out as they face abuse, vandalism etc. To ensure LGBT inclusion in the workplace, organisations need to implement the strategies suggested through various research in writing as well as in spirit. There is vast literature available on workforce retention and diversity, yet limited studies focus on this community specifically. To suggest ways of improving this environment, this research has been conducted to provide solutions to corporates to create workplaces which are diverse and inclusive and leads to better job satisfaction and commitment.

Over the period of last 10 years, lot of reforms have been implemented throughout the world for LGBTQ which led to shift in the perception of the society towards this community. The progress has not been constant and not even similar across the world, some countries have done excellently in terms of reforms but than other countries are still lagging behind in its true implementation. Infact, in certain countries, they have taken a reverse stand rather than going forward. Across the globe, 73 countries still have no law in place for

protection of homosexuals, trans people identity still remains a debatable topic in most of the countries and further, few countries prevent intersex people rights. Even though, in legal terms, countries may be progressing but the organisation level hurdles are still seen in this hegemonic world where binary is considered as normal. People belonging to LGBT are being bullied, discriminated and basic facilities are denied (UN Human Rights Report, 2017). Companies need to create policies which can prevent such discrimination and provide necessary support to these employees in the workplace. Policies implementation is an ongoing process and requires constant intervention by decision makers within the organisation. Companies also need to ensure its public image is LGBT supportive as the population of these members are increasing which may build a marketplace and help companies in targeting new markets. These people tend to be too loyal if they feel their rights are being supported. Hence, companies with LGBT supportive motto can benefit in terms of employee retention and higher share of profits. It also improves its image at the world forum.

Based on these, the we feels LGBT inclusion needs to be taken up seriously by the organisation. Steps to ensure its D&I measures are creating a positive path going forward. We wish to shed more light on the same by doing the literature review and finding gaps in existing studies and suggesting future actions to implement these measures.

Research Objectives of the paper

1. To examine the key challenges LGBT employees face in workplace inclusion.

2. To identify gaps in research on workplace policies supporting LGBT employees.

3. To assess the effectiveness of existing inclusion initiatives for LGBT employees

Literature Review

Santos et al. (2024) The study focuses on how LGBT+ individuals encounter substantial challenges in the workplace, including widespread discrimination that negatively impacts their mental well-being and job satisfaction. Their decision to disclose their sexual or gender identity is influenced by workplace dynamics and the existence of anti-discrimination policies. While legislative and social advancements have been made, discrimination exists, reinforcing the need for

creating LGBT suppotive work environments and further promoting the need for inclusivity. Stringent Workplace policies are need of the hour and organising various awareness programmes to help spread knowledge among heterosexuals. Necessary training should be implemented at all levels by the organisation.

Sachdeva (2024) This paper highlights how LGBT individuals encounter substantial workplace challenges, including discrimination from colleagues and superiors, as well as restrictive company policies. Surveys reveal high rates of harassment and mistreatment, even where legal protections exist. These obstacles hinder career advancement and contribute to hostile work environments. This paper underscores the importance of open-minded leadership and innovative strategies to cultivate inclusive, discrimination-free workplaces, with a particular focus on India, where these disparities are especially evident.

Toorn et al. (2024) The paper explores various challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals in the workplace, including the risk of discrimination, privacy concerns, and the complexities of collecting sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data. These obstacles can undermine the effectiveness of diversity, equity,

and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. To address these issues, the data collection is to be done for preliminary analysis to gauge futher into the challenges faced by LGBT employees and overcoming them to ensure inclusive and equitable environment.

Villarino et al. (2024) Queer professionals in the business sector face significant challenges, from discrimination and unfair treatment to gender stereotyping. While the Philippines is generally seen as accepting of queer identities, many participants in the study shared experiences of bias that held them back in their careers. Even in workplaces they considered inclusive, these struggles remained, pushing them to develop coping mechanisms to manage their emotions and stay productive. The study underscores the need for workplaces to go beyond surface-level inclusion and actively create environments where queer employees feel truly supported and valued.

Ramalepe et al. (2024) The paper highlights the significant challenges LGBTQ+ employees encounter in African workplaces, primarily due to deep-rooted discrimination stemming from heteronormative norms. This discrimination adversely affects their well-being and job performance, often intersecting with issues of

gender inequality and sexism. While some individuals find fulfillment in their work, the overall workplace environment remains unwelcoming. The review underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to create inclusive, diverse, and equitable workplaces that effectively address the unique barriers faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Africa.

Mane (2023) study sheds light on the challenges faced by LGBT+ employees in Indian workplaces, highlighting issues such as discrimination, limited openness about sexual orientation, and a lack of supportive policies. With only 16.5% of respondents feeling comfortable being fully open at work, the findings underscore the persistent stigma surrounding alternative sexual orientations. While the study effectively addresses a critical gap in workplace inclusivity research, its small sample size limits the generalizability of the results. Additionally, it could have explored industry-specific experiences and proactive solutions in greater depth. Nonetheless, the study reinforces the urgent need for protective workplace policies and cultural shifts to foster a more inclusive professional environment for LGBT+ employees in India.

Maji et al. (2023) LGBTQ+ individuals encounter numerous workplace challenges, including hiring discrimination, unsafe environments, microaggressions, and harassment. Both direct and indirect forms of discrimination contribute to heightened work stress, often forcing individuals to regulate their sexual identity and appearance. These negative experiences impact job satisfaction, work-life balance, and career choices. The systematic review emphasizes the critical need for comprehensive diversity training and inclusive policies to create a more supportive and equitable workplace for LGBTQ+ employees.

Syed et al. (2022) analysed the concept of "employee voice" and explained the numerous vehicles or methods that facilitate it. After defining "missing voices" and "diversity," the article explores the potential causes of silence or disregard for the opinions of underrepresented workers. As a missing theoretical paradigm in the literature on employee voice, diversity management is highlighted in this study through the experiences of women, LGBT people, and members of underrepresented groups. Women, people of colour, and members of the LGBT community are all underrepresented in the

study. Finally, practical and theoretical consequences are discussed after a summary of practitioner insights is provided.

Tang et al. (2021) examined the LGBTQ-friendly workplace in China. This study seeks to identify the qualities of a workplace that is welcoming to LGBT employees. The qualitative analytical strategy of interpretivism is used in this study, which is founded on Queer theory and the theory of taste-based discrimination. Employees' familiarity with LGBTQ policies and identities was shown to be critical in fostering a welcoming workplace culture in this descriptive survey and interviews. Employing these principles, organisations can enhance employee welfare protection and create a more equal workplace.

Cauter et al. (2021) investigated the literature providing objective RTW(return to work) results and experiences among transgender people from an occupational viewpoint to (a) synthesise what is known about RTW (whether full-time, part-time, or self-employed) & (b) explain what knowledge gaps exist. It is commonly acknowledged that assisting individuals, particularly transgender individuals, in returning to work (RTW) or resuming prior job following a leave of absence owing to

psychiatric or mental concerns enhances their general well-being. RTW is a dynamic process that should be tailored through education, a transition plan, supportive legislation, and work changes with the help of outside experts.

Goryunova et al. (2021) examined transgender employees' access to career-enhancing opportunities and understanding of their work experiences in order to counsel organisational leaders on ways to foster an inclusive workplace. Semi-structured interviews with transgender and gender non-conforming Americans comprised this phenomenological study. Regarding their greatest level of formal education, employment sector at the time of interviews, and racial and ethnic identities, study participants (n = 12) differ slightly. The study shows that the dominant narrative is pervasive in American companies and negatively affects transgender and gender non-conforming people's employment experiences and access to opportunities for professional advancement.

Hadjisolomou (2021) examined at the case of Kathrine, a transgender woman working in a retail store, and discussed the customer's behaviour which has not been discussed much in research pertining to service sector. The

customers are usually abusive, discriminating, and transphobic behaviour Microaggressions, such as misgendering, mocking, and harassment, are commonplace in the study and are often ignored or encouraged by management, contributing to the stigmatisation of transgender employees. The fact that she has confronted and/or refused to service transphobic customers demonstrates her perseverance in the face of discrimination and violence. The essay calls for more study of the lives of transgender service workers, including the complexity and variety of coping techniques used by professionals who face discrimination because of their gender identity.

Dobusch (2021) described that mainstream and critical inclusion strategies rely on underlying ableist assumptions, resulting in autistic individuals being referred to as "the other Other" in organisational inclusion discourse. Organisational inclusion has emerged as a central idea when discussing diversity and inequality in organisations. Its central argument is that it is inclusive and "leaves no one behind." Reexamine two crucial concepts—belonging and recognition—of both systems via a feminist disability perspective, paying particular attention to the needs and

desires of autistic individuals. This study's objectives were twofold: Firstly, all-encompassing organisational inclusion methods were examined to see if they meet the needs of autistic people, who had been left out of previous thinking. To further, the analysis was guided by an onto-epistemological stance based on a feminist disability lens which recognised the disabled, supposedly defective body and mind, as an inherent part of human diversity.

Rice et al. (2021) studied Transgender Employees' Perception of Work-Related Skills. The goal of this research was to better understand the factors that may contribute to transgender people experiencing prejudice and discrimination on the workplace. Some participants were randomly assigned to the experimental setting that implied the employee was transsexual. Evaluation of work-related skills and prospects for success in the workplace are also considered. Transgender employees were evaluated less favourably than their cisgender counterparts on workplace-relevant skills and talents, but there was no difference in the evaluation of their prospects for professional success. The results are analysed in terms of the difficulties faced by

transgender workers in the workplace.

Fisher et al. (2021) examined young trans women's occupational health in the sex business. One common form of job for young trans women (YTW) is sex work. We used an occupational health framework to analyse relationships among demographics, sex work, and occupational outcomes in 18-month visit data (n = 263) from the SHINE study's (n = 263, San Francisco). In all, 41.8% of those surveyed said they had engaged in sex work at some point in their lives, mostly escorting or paid sex. Two of the motivations were "higher pay" and "cannot obtain employment due to gender discrimination." Among the occupational injuries were anxiety (53.6%) and depression (50%) with a significantly higher relative risk for young people who engage in various forms of sex work.

Daly et al. (2020) investigated changes in transgender people's employment engagement. The investigation employed a phenomenological methodology. Five individuals were interviewed in semi-structured fashion to collect data. The data were evaluated using a phenomenological interpretive methodology. There were discovered three themes: work, self-

presentation, and role transformation. Both positive accounts of transitioning and persisting obstacles to occupational involvement were noted. There were many documented implications on job and life roles. A gender change has the potential to instil transgender individuals with a revitalised sense of purpose and satisfaction in their daily lives.

Rudin et al. (2020) explored bigenderism, a Universalist theory that aims to explain why trans male employees report higher levels of economic success and organisational acceptance than trans female employees. After being presented with one of two case studies, respondents were asked to indicate if they would support a transgender employee's right to use the loo of their choice at work. The gender identity of the employee was the only distinction between the two case studies. In one case, the employee was transgender, and in another, she was transgender. Respondents' choices are unaffected by the gender of the transgender employee.

Findings

Despite increased efforts to implement diversity and inclusion measures, the data show that LGBTQ+ employees still face major obstacles to workplace inclusion.

Microaggressions, bigotry, and discrimination are still common and have an effect on one's general well-being as well as job advancement. Even while some organisations have implemented policies to promote inclusivity, there are still gaps in their efficacy, especially when it comes to addressing the intersectionality of workplace cultures and identities. Furthermore, little is known about the long-term effects of these policies, which emphasises the need for more research on fair and sustainable workplace practices.

1. Challenges Faced by LGBT Employees in Workplace Inclusion:

LGBT employees experience widespread discrimination, harassment, and bias, affecting their mental well-being, job satisfaction, and career growth (Santos et al., 2024; Sachdeva, 2024; Villarino et al., 2024). Many fear disclosing their identity due to privacy concerns, workplace culture, and potential professional repercussions (Mane, 2023; Toorn et al., 2024). Transgender employees, in particular, face additional barriers, including misgendering, exclusion, and discrimination in career advancement (Hadjisolomou, 2021; Rice et al., 2021). These challenges highlight the persistent struggles of LGBT employees, despite legal

protections in some regions.

2. Gaps in Research on Workplace Policies Supporting LGBT Employees:

While some research explores workplace inclusion for LGBT employees, significant gaps remain, particularly in culturally diverse settings such as India and Africa (Mane, 2023; Ramalepe et al., 2024). Studies often focus on general discrimination but lack in-depth analysis of industry-specific policies, leadership roles, and the long-term impact of inclusion measures (Maji et al., 2023). There is also limited research on how intersectionality—such as gender, race, and socioeconomic background—affects LGBT workplace experiences (Syed et al., 2022). Additionally, studies on return-to-work policies for transgender employees after transition-related medical leave are scarce (Cauter et al., 2021).

3. Effectiveness of Existing Inclusion Initiatives for LGBT Employees:

While some organizations have introduced diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, their impact varies widely. Many policies focus on surface-level representation rather than addressing deep-rooted biases (Villarino et al., 2024). Employee familiarity with LGBTQ-friendly policies plays a crucial role in shaping workplace culture (Tang et al., 2021). However,

initiatives often fail due to inadequate training, lack of enforcement, and resistance from management (Sachdeva, 2024). Additionally, studies highlight the need for active involvement of LGBT stakeholders in policymaking to ensure meaningful and sustainable inclusion efforts (Toorn et al., 2024).

These findings emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive workplace policies, inclusive leadership, and culturally tailored strategies to address the persistent challenges LGBT employees face in professional settings.

Conclusion

The study highlights the persistent challenges faced by LGBT employees in workplace inclusion, despite increasing global awareness and legal protections. Discrimination, harassment, and bias remain widespread, negatively impacting mental well-being, job satisfaction, and career growth. Many LGBT employees fear disclosing their identity due to workplace stigma, privacy concerns, and professional repercussions, with transgender individuals facing additional hurdles such as misgendering and career exclusion.

The research also reveals significant gaps in workplace policies supporting LGBT employees, particularly in culturally diverse regions like India and Africa. Existing studies primarily focus on broad discrimination patterns but lack insights into industry-specific challenges, leadership roles, and the long-term impact of diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives. Additionally, intersectional factors—such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status—remain underexplored in workplace inclusion research.

While some organizations have implemented D&I initiatives, their effectiveness varies widely. Many policies remain superficial and fail to address deep-seated biases within workplace culture. Employee awareness and engagement with LGBTQ-friendly policies are crucial, but a lack of enforcement, inadequate training, and leadership resistance often hinder meaningful progress. Successful inclusion efforts require active involvement from LGBT stakeholders and the development of culturally tailored strategies that go beyond tokenism.

To create truly inclusive workplaces, businesses must move beyond symbolic measures and implement concrete, enforceable policies. Strengthening anti-discrimination protections,

increasing leadership accountability, and fostering open dialogue about LGBT workplace experiences are essential steps toward meaningful change. By addressing these challenges and gaps, organizations can build equitable, diverse, and supportive work environments where all employees feel valued and respected.

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