

# Looking Beyond the Rainbow

*Is it time to broaden the conversation during Pride month and beyond to allow for meaningful action which acknowledges that people can identify with many marginalized groups and not just one?*

Pride month has become a universal invitation taken up by organizations across many parts of the world to use rainbows and other inclusive gestures in efforts to promote positive sentiment about their brand, and to suggest that they are inclusive employers.

Unfortunately, issuing rainbow lanyards to employees and littering social channels with celebratory posts require little – to no – substantive evidence that the business is in fact as inclusive as it makes out. The result, especially for those colleagues who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual and their allies (LGBTQIA+), is that the corporate image which is being built by the marketing machine conflicts with their real-life experience of the brand.

There is still much work to be done to attract, engage and retain talent – and to build a deeper trust with employees so that they have the confidence to bring their authentic self to work every day. And there is an ever growing need to do so. The number of people in the LGBTQIA+ communities is growing and yet these people still face challenges in expressing their whole selves in the workplace.

In the US, for example, there are nearly 14 million adults in the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) community and it is growing

rapidly.<sup>[1]</sup> This growth is attributed to the members of Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) being more than six times more likely than Gen X to identify as LGBTQ+.<sup>[2]</sup> For those leaders with an eye on the future, the importance of making real progress will not be lost: Gen Z is projected to account for 30% of the civilian workforce by 2030.<sup>[3]</sup>

Many members of the LGBTQIA+ communities who can pass as straight and/or cisgender, allowing them to make the choice as to whether or not they share their identity to co-workers and employers, are exercising this choice. In fact, according to research presented by Deloitte, less than half of the 5,474 LGBT+ people surveyed from workplaces in various sectors across 13 countries, said that they feel comfortable being out with all of their colleagues. Another one-third said that they are only comfortable being out with select colleagues.<sup>[4]</sup>

## The importance of bringing your whole self to work

While LGBTQ+ rights have advanced dramatically in the last 20 years, boosting diversity in the workplace, the focus has been on equitable policies and creating employee resource groups. But the significant proportion of workers who do not feel able to bring their full selves to work shows that despite years of work in this space, efforts are not always resulting in any real world change. Progress is also not happening quickly enough: organizational cultures are not keeping pace with the evolving makeup of the LGBTQIA+ workforce.

Employers need to take a broader view and do more to understand the complexity that lies within the LGBTQIA+ workforce to support and empower them.

Individuals are not just one characteristic – people can identify with many marginalized groups. It is critical, therefore, for DE&I strategies to acknowledge multiple personal attributes, including factors like race, age, religion, and immigration status if they are to create truly inclusive working environments.

Research undertaken for EY's US 2024 LGBTQ+ Workplace Barometer – which surveyed 500 LGBTQ+ full-time workers in the US who hold corporate roles at mid- and large-size organizations – uncovered that racially and ethnically diverse (R&ED) workers within the LGBTQ+ community are 1.7 times more likely to have experienced harassment at a previous employer, compared to White LGBTQ+ employees. Similarly, R&ED LGBTQ+ employees are 2.3 times more likely than their White LGBTQ+ peers to experience 'microaggressions' in the workplace.<sup>[5]</sup>

Creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment that accounts for intersectionality is important for engaging with and supporting LGBTQIA+ colleagues, but also for attracting and retaining talent. This is evidenced in the Deloitte study which revealed that one-third of all respondents are actively looking to change employer to one that is more directly inclusive, but this is even higher for ethnic minority respondents, where more than half are currently looking for a new role.<sup>[6]</sup>

Pride month and other such celebrations of diversity are important, but not as important as creating a culture of inclusivity that is permanent, and engenders a safer and more empowering workplace. When we take into consideration the changing make-up of future talent, and future customers and stakeholders, it makes good business sense to take an intersectional approach that engages with all LGBTQIA+ colleagues to create genuine trust and value for long-term success.

## We're here to support you on this important journey.

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