

Perceptions Of Employees Towards Colleagues Belonging to The LGTBQ Community

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Abstract - This study explores the perceptions of employees toward colleagues who belong to the LGBTQ+ community. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with employees from diverse backgrounds and industries. The findings reveal that while there has been progress in LGBTQ+ inclusion in the workplace, there is still a lack of understanding and acceptance among some employees. Negative attitudes and discrimination towards LGBTQ+ colleagues were found to be rooted in stereotypes, lack of education and exposure, and personal biases. The study highlights the need for continued efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace, including education and training programs, diversity policies, and support for LGBTQ+ employees. The results of this study can inform organizational practices and policies aimed at creating a more inclusive and accepting workplace environment for all employees.

Index Terms – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ (LGBTQ+)

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the issue of workplace diversity has gained significant attention, particularly concerning employees belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. Although organizations have made significant strides toward creating inclusive workplaces, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done to ensure that all employees are treated equally and given the same opportunities to succeed. One significant factor that can impact the success of an organization's diversity and inclusion efforts is the level of awareness and perceptions towards the LGBTQ+ community held by employees. This research paper seeks to explore the perceptions and depth of awareness towards the LGBTQ+ community and the possible impacts of the same on the workplace. By examining the attitudes and behaviors of employees towards their LGBTQ+ colleagues, we aim to identify the gaps in awareness and provide recommendations for creating a more inclusive work environment.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

RELEVANT DEFINITIONS

Braquet (2019) defines the term LGBTQ+ as a term that is used to describe a diverse group of individuals who identify as non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender. This includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and those who are questioning their sexuality or gender identity. The "Q" can be used to represent questioning. A person who is exploring and doubting their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination of these is said to be "questioning." It is frequently used by people who are still learning about themselves and are unclear of who they are. According to Holmes & Marra (2002), the term "workplace culture" describes the common ideals, assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors that influence how employees behave within a company. The unfair or unequal treatment of people based on their membership in a certain group, such as their sexual orientation or gender identity, is referred to as discrimination, says Krieger (2014). This paper attempts to shed light on the ways in which workplace culture, discrimination, inclusion, diversity, and equality might affect the experiences of LGBTQ+ employees by examining these criteria in connection to how employees perceive their LGBTQ+ coworkers in the workplace. This paper also aims to offer suggestions for organizations to establish a more inclusive and equitable workplace for all employees, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity through a thorough investigation of these ideas.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYEES

Employee motivation, job satisfaction, and general well-being can all be significantly impacted by how they are perceived in the workplace. Therefore, it is essential for businesses looking to foster a happy and productive work environment to understand the elements that affect employee perception.

Values And Organizational Culture

It is well acknowledged that organizational culture and principles play a significant role in how employees perceive their workplace. According to Schneider et al. (2013), workers are more likely to have a favorable opinion of their workplace if they believe that their organization's culture matches their personal beliefs. Additionally, businesses that place a high priority on moral conduct and social responsibility are more likely to draw in and keep workers who share these values, creating a more supportive work environment, says Greenberg (2017). Companies that have a good workplace culture have been reported to have higher employee satisfaction and retention rates (Sheridan, 1992). According to a study conducted by Deepalakshmi (2014), on the employees working in a Bengaluru-based software company, their findings indicated having a good workplace culture yields better profits in the long run, from an organizational point of view. The perceptions of employees when it comes to their colleagues are a critical aspect of workplace culture.

Management and leadership

Employee perception can also be significantly impacted by management and leadership strategies. For instance, Kumar & Sharma (2020) indicate that workers who have a good working relationship with their manager are more likely to have a positive opinion of their place of employment. Similar to this, managers are more likely to promote a happy work atmosphere if they give honest and regular feedback, acknowledge employee accomplishments, and provide opportunity for growth and development state Harms et al. (2018).

Diversity and inclusion in the workplace

Diversity and inclusion in the workplace have also been demonstrated to have a significant impact on employee perception. According to Dovidio et al. (2017), people who work in diverse and inclusive environments are more likely to be accepting of diversity in general and to have good attitudes toward their coworkers. Roberson (2019) says that businesses that place a high priority on diversity and inclusion are more likely to recruit and keep workers from a variety of backgrounds, creating a more positive and effective workplace.

Working Conditions

The burden, autonomy, and variety of tasks within a position can all affect how employees perceive their employment. According to Parker et al. (2001), employees are more likely to have a favorable opinion of their workplace if they feel that they have a lot of control over their work and are given opportunities to apply their skills and abilities. Hackman & Oldham (1976) add to this saying that giving demanding and engaging activities to employees increases their likelihood of feeling engaged and motivated, which fosters a more positive work environment.

POSSIBLE FACTORS INFLUENCING PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYEES TOWARDS LGBTQ+ COLLEAGUES

Attitudes and prejudices are a major aspect that affects how LGBTQ+ employees perceive diversity in the workplace. Meyer (2017) says that discrimination and prejudice against LGBTQ+ people can create a toxic work environment and damage an organization's reputation. For LGBTQ+ employees to be positively seen at work, diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace are essential. According to Roberson (2019), LGBTQ+ employees have a more favorable opinion of companies that prioritize diversity and inclusion (Roberson, 2019).

LGBTQ+ employees' perceptions may be influenced by their visibility and representation in the workplace. A sense of inclusion and belonging can be fostered in the workplace when LGBTQ+ people are visible and well-represented claims Taylor et al. (2018). LGBTQ+ employee resource groups, or ERGs, can also help to improve how LGBTQ+ employees view the company since they show a commitment to diversity and inclusion, according to Meyer (2017). The perception of LGBTQ+ employees in the workplace can be significantly improved by allies, or people who support LGBTQ+ rights and equality. LGBTQ+ employees may be perceived more favorably in an environment at work that emphasizes diversity and inclusion and encourages allies to speak out against discrimination, according to Taylor et al. (2018). Meyer (2017) opines that a good perception among LGBTQ+ employees can also be facilitated by managers and staff receiving training on how to be allies and foster inclusive workplaces.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NATURE OF PERSPECTIVES

An important concern for organizations is how perceptions affect workplace culture and productivity. It is especially important to foster an inclusive and friendly work atmosphere when there are LGBTQ+ employees present.

Positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals at work can significantly affect the culture and productivity of the company. Taylor et al. (2018) believe that LGBTQ+ employees are more likely to be engaged and devoted to their work, which leads to better job performance and productivity. This is because they feel appreciated and included at work. In addition, LGBTQ+ workers are less likely to encounter prejudice and harassment, which can have a detrimental effect on their mental health and general well-being, if they feel supported by their coworkers and management, says Meyer (2017). Collaboration and teamwork at work can both benefit from positive perceptions. Along with attracting top talent and boosting the company's brand image, having a welcoming workplace for LGBTQ+ employees can help the organization's reputation as an employer that promotes diversity and inclusion according to Roberson (2019).

On the other hand, Meyer (2017) says that a company's culture and productivity may suffer if LGBTQ+ employees are seen negatively in the workplace. LGBTQ+ employees may experience exclusion and lack of support at work as a result of discrimination and harassment. The productivity and financial health of the company may be impacted as a result of low job satisfaction, rising absenteeism, and high turnover rates, according to Taylor et al. (2018). Roberson (2019) also believes that the reputation of the business may suffer if LGBTQ+ employees have a negative view of it, which may prompt candidates to look for work elsewhere.

PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS LGBTQ+ MEMBERS DURING HIRING DECISIONS

There exists literature that dates to as early as the 1980s, that speaks about the influence of perceptions based on the genders that are considered as 'normal' in society, on hiring decisions in the workplace. Horn & Gaeddert (1984) conducted two studies where they set out to determine if it was the gender of the applicant that affected hiring decisions or rather the perceptions of the gender of the applicant. In this study, the decision-makers were presented with descriptions of the applicants and were asked to decide whom they wanted to hire, without meeting the applicants themselves. The results of their study indicated that the decision-makers in the hiring process preferred to hire candidates that they perceived to be more androgynous (not appearing to be either male or female) over candidates that the decision-makers perceived to be presenting female characteristics. The responses received from the decision-makers also reveal the presence of stereotypes. In this case, the perception of these decision-makers was supported by the stereotype that women cannot work as effectively as a man can nor could a woman be as agreeable to work with, in comparison with a man. Their hiring decision was not impacted by the observation of male characteristics in the applicant's description but by the lack of male characteristics and the observable presence of female characteristics. The findings from Clarke et al. (2018), showed that when the sexual orientation of the applicants is known to the decision-makers. They perceive the gay male applicants to be androgynous in characteristics, which is consistent in nature with what Horn & Gaeddert found almost 35 years ago. Clarke et al. (2018) even went on

to say that the world might be starting to accept gay men, without attaching them to stereotypes when it comes to hiring them for jobs. Further research in the future might be able to shed light on the question if the other members of the LGBTQ+ community are also getting opportunities to share the same fate as gay male applicants seem to be having currently.

Buzzanell (1999) believes that the bias that seeps into the hiring decisions made about candidates belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, does not stem from a purposeful act of wanting to discriminate against them. These biases are rather an inattention to the experiences that the LGBTQ+ candidates are coming from, which leads the decision-makers to compare the mannerisms and characteristics of LGBTQ+ candidates to those of the more heteronormative candidates, impacting their decisions. The biases displayed by the decision-makers are sometimes observable by the other employees too (employers, clerks, and other employees), according to Lee Badgett et al. (2009).

LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY IN INDIA

According to Kealy-Bateman (2018), the estimated population of the LGBTQ+ community in India was 45.4 million, as of 2011. In 2011, the LGBTQ+ population made up about 3.8% of the total Indian population. Kealy-Bateman (2018) also notes that an average Indian member of the LGBTQ+ community will most likely not share the same experiences in terms of culture when compared to a member of the community in other parts of the world. But it is safe to assume that the discrimination an average member of the community faces across the world will share some commonalities. There is no exact figure on the number of LGBTQ+ members residing and/or working in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research mainly focuses on understanding the perceptions of employees towards colleagues belonging to the LGBTQ+ community in Bengaluru, India. The primary objective is to understand in detail how the employees feel toward their colleagues belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. The other objective is to understand how much awareness the employees have towards corporate policies that are formulated for the protection and upliftment of the employees belonging to this community.

For the research purpose, a structured questionnaire was used for the collection of data. The questionnaire includes a mix of multiple-choice questions and check-box questions. The questionnaire was distributed through online channels to respondents within Bengaluru, India. The respondents included a mix of employed and other individuals with work experience.

The responses were obtained by collecting data from thirty-five respondents residing in Bengaluru. Data collection is done quantitatively, the data collected includes only primary data. Inferential analysis has been implemented for the study, i.e., results for the study have been formulated from the data collected through the questionnaire. Simple percentage analysis and frequency analysis have been utilized for understanding the data for the research study.

IV. INTERPRETATION OF SURVEY RESPONSES

Perspectives Of The Respondents Towards The LGBTQ+ Community

The survey asked participants whether they have seen or interacted with any LGBTQ+ members in their workplace, and the responses can be categorized into three groups:

- 56.4% of the participants have seen or interacted with LGBTQ+ members in the workplace.
- 25.6% of the participants have not seen or interacted with LGBTQ+ members in the workplace.
- 17.9% of the participants are not aware if they have seen or interacted with any LGBTQ+ members in the workplace.

This highlights the need for greater awareness and education about LGBTQ+ identity in the workplace, as well as the importance of creating an inclusive workplace culture that supports diversity and inclusion for all employees, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Similar observations were found for the question that aimed at understanding if the participants were aware if their family & social circles include any members belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, as well as for the question pertaining to if they have ever worked with a member from the LGBTQ+ community.

On the other hand, almost half of the participants were not aware if their companies employed members from the LGBTQ+ community. This lack of knowledge can point to a possible absence of inclusion and diversity in the workplace, as well as a dearth of communication and training on the subject. Over a quarter of the participants had heard or witnessed instances of harassment towards members of the LGBTQ+ group in the workplace. The fact that more than a quarter of the participants had heard of or seen cases of harassment involving members of the LGBTQ+ community underlines the persistent difficulties that LGBTQ+ people have in both the workplace and society. The mental health, well-being, and productivity of LGBTQ+ employees may suffer as a result of the prevalence of discriminatory behavior, says Tate et al. (2017). It's crucial to note that the responses say nothing about the frequency or intensity of the harassment that was seen or heard. To further understand the nature of these instances and their effects on people's lives and workplace cultures, additional research may be required.

A small percentage of the respondents do not believe that it is important for non-LGBTQ+ employees to learn about and understand the experiences and challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. This observation is concerning as it implies that there is a segment of the public that might not appreciate diversity and inclusion at work and might not understand the value of fostering a welcoming atmosphere for all workers. According to Konrad et al. (2006), encouraging diversity and inclusion at work can have a variety of advantages, such as increased job satisfaction, staff retention, and productivity. However, a lack of diversity and inclusion can have unfavorable effects as well, including higher stress, absenteeism, and turnover says Cox et al. (1991). Notably, the majority of respondents understand the value of educating non-LGBTQ+ employees about the struggles and hardships encountered by LGBTQ+ people. This is a good trend because it shows that businesses and society as a whole are becoming more aware of the value of encouraging inclusion and diversity in the workplace.

Another finding was that nearly 3/4 of respondents believe it is inappropriate to inquire about LGBTQ+ coworkers' private lives, such as their sexual orientation or gender identity, and that a similar number of respondents think those who identify as LGBTQ+ should not be required to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to their coworkers or employer. These findings emphasize the significance of respecting people's privacy and personal boundaries in the workplace. According to Griffin et al. (2017), LGBTQ+ people frequently experience harassment and discrimination at work, which can have a detrimental effect on their mental health, sense of fulfillment at work, and chances of progress in the workplace. In this situation, it is critical to foster an environment where LGBTQ+ employees feel safe, accepted, and supported. Respecting people's privacy and personal boundaries is one technique to foster such an environment. It can be viewed as intrusive and insulting to inquire about someone's sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace, and this can create a hostile environment, believes Rankin et al. (2018). In addition, LGBTQ+ people may have good reasons for keeping their sexual orientation or gender identity a secret, such as a fear of discrimination or harassment, states Grant et al. (2011). It is crucial to respect these people's decisions and offer them support.

Only a slight majority of the respondents had responded in positive when asked the question if they have ever had conversations about LGBTQ+ issues in the workplace with a colleague. This may indicate a lack of knowledge or instruction regarding LGBTQ+ issues in the workplace. This is especially troubling given that workplace harassment and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people is common, and that having talks about these issues might help to lessen these difficulties.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, a number of suggestions can be made to help employees adjust their ideas in order to be more accepting and helpful to their LGBTQ+ coworkers. First and foremost, it's critical to spread knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ+ concerns and experiences in the workplace. Workshops and training programs for managers and staff can accomplish this. These programs might cover topics like LGBTQ+ identities, discrimination experiences, and how to foster an inclusive workplace. Second, businesses can seek to develop practices and policies that embrace LGBTQ+ staff. This can involve anti-discrimination laws, gender-neutral restrooms, and the participation of LGBTQ+ people in programs for diversity and inclusion. These laws may improve the working conditions for LGBTQ+ employees according to Kosenko, Rintamaki, Raney, & Maness (2013). Thirdly, it's critical to show LGBTQ+ employees that you support them in the workplace. This can entail displaying outward signs of solidarity, such as rainbow flags or bumper stickers, and giving LGBTQ+ staff chances to socialize and network. Finally, it's critical to foster an inclusive and respectful working atmosphere. This can be accomplished by promoting open discourse about LGBTQ+ problems and providing leadership and management support for LGBTQ+ employees. Fostering such a culture can benefit LGBTQ+ employees' experiences and professional outcomes, according to Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell (2007).

Overall, by putting these suggestions into practice, businesses may try to make their workplaces more welcoming and inclusive of LGBTQ+ workers. This may result in better outcomes and experiences for these workers, as well as help create a more supportive and effective work environment for all employees.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

There are certain restrictions on this study, which should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the study's tiny sample size of just 39 individuals may not have been representative of the overall community. The findings' applicability to other contexts or workplaces may be impacted by this. Additionally, the study only used closed-ended questions, which restricted the participants' ability to give in-depth or complex responses. As the study was conducted online, it may not have been possible for the researchers to fully and in-depth explore the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Larger sample sizes that are more representative of the community being investigated, as well as mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative data-gathering techniques, may be considered in future studies.

VII. CONCLUSION

Numerous studies have emphasized the value of teaching non-LGBTQ+ employees about the struggles and difficulties encountered by LGBTQ+ people. A more inclusive and inviting work environment for all employees can be fostered by such education by increasing empathy, understanding, and awareness. Education can also make non-LGBTQ+ workers into supporters of the LGBTQ+ community, which can be a significant force for change in the workplace's efforts to promote diversity and inclusion.

Some of the participants' responses highlighted the need for more education and enforcement of policies and practices supporting LGBTQ+ inclusion and safety in the workplace by expressing that they did not feel that their workplace was safe or supportive enough for members of the LGBTQ+ community to work there. Overall, the results of this study show that there is a need for increased knowledge about and education regarding LGBTQ+ identity as well as for the development of an inclusive workplace culture that encourages diversity and inclusion for all employees, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

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