

INCLUSION AT WORK

Perspectives on
LGBT+ working lives

Executive summary
February 2021

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

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Executive summary

The CIPD believes that social justice should be the primary driver for more inclusive workplaces, built on the principles of fairness, transparency and equality of opportunity. An individual's sexual orientation and gender identity should not affect whether they get a job, benefit from development opportunities or receive a promotion. Everyone deserves the opportunity to develop their skills, be fairly rewarded and use their voice in a safe and inclusive working environment.

However, we know this is not always the case. It's clear that organisations need to be more inclusive for LGBT+ employees and do more to eradicate discrimination and harassment, and create psychologically safe and inclusive workplaces.

In our report, *Inclusion at Work*, we draw on four sources of data to better understand the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees:

- 1 pooled data from our 2018, 2019 and 2020 [Good Work Index](#) to understand experiences of LGB+¹ employees
- 2 one bespoke survey on trans working lives
- 3 an additional survey on trans allyship
- 4 insights from senior people professional roundtables on LGBT+ inclusion.

Our findings highlight three areas where organisations need to act:

- workplace conflict
- psychological safety and wellbeing
- LGBT+ inclusive policies and practices.

In this executive summary, we highlight the key findings and recommendations in these areas, to support people professionals to create more LGBT+-inclusive workplaces. For detailed findings, methodology and implications for policy-makers, see the [full report](#).

Key findings

LGBT+ employees experience heightened workplace conflict

LGB+ and trans workers report higher levels of workplace conflict than heterosexual, cisgender workers, with 29% of heterosexual employees saying they had experienced workplace conflict in the last 12 months, compared with 40% of LGB+ employees.

Fifty-five per cent of trans employees said they have experienced conflict in the past 12 months, notably higher than heterosexual and LGB+ employees, although it should be noted that trans worker data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, which could have contributed to this difference.

When conflicts occurred, many reported the issue hadn't been fully resolved. Close to half (44%) of LGB+ workers who had experienced being undermined or humiliated said this had not been resolved, and almost four in ten said this had only been partly resolved (38%).

Similarly, 23% of trans workers said they had experienced discrimination because of a protected characteristic, but over half (62%) said discrimination because of a protected characteristic had not been resolved, or only partly resolved (20%).

¹ The term LGBT+ is often used to describe the lesbian, gay, bi and trans community. We also use the term LGBT+ in this report, but in the research findings sections we also use the term LGB+. This is because the findings from our *UK Working Lives* survey do not include data on gender identity, so the findings reflect the experiences of LGB+ workers. The + refers to those who identify as another sexual orientation, such as pansexual or asexual. We ran a bespoke survey of trans workers and report the findings of this separately.

Recommendations for people professionals

Our findings highlight that organisations' handling of conflict and harassment needs to improve. People professionals have a key role to play here and need to make sure anti-discrimination policies and practices are fit for purpose, well understood, and carried out throughout the organisation:

- Policies should set clear expectations of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, with practical examples, and provide robust guidance to managers on how to report and deal with incidences of conflict.
- Employers should ensure people feel able to report conflict and that it is investigated seriously. A significant number of conflicts, including very serious ones, remained unresolved according to data.
- Employers should build a peer support and allyship network that LGBT+ employees can approach as the first point of contact when they have faced bullying and harassment. Members of this network should have appropriate training to be able to signpost to sources of internal and external support. It is important to remember that they shouldn't seek to resolve issues themselves or act as a counsellor.
- Employers have legal obligations to prevent and address discrimination, and should take a zero-tolerance approach to this.

Key findings

LGBT+ employees experience job dissatisfaction and less psychological safety

While 85% of heterosexual workers reported 'somewhat' to 'very good' working relationships, this dropped to 80% for LGB+ and 75% of trans workers.

However, psychological safety – or rather, lack of – is an issue for LGB+ workers, and even more so for trans workers. A higher proportion of LGB+ workers than heterosexual workers (16% vs 10%) reported feeling psychologically unsafe, rising to 18% of trans workers.

Around 66% of both heterosexual and LGB+ workers reported being 'somewhat' to 'very satisfied' with their job, but for trans workers that fell to just over 50%. Job dissatisfaction ('somewhat' to 'very dissatisfied') rose from 15% for heterosexual workers to 19% for LGB+ and 33% for trans workers. However, as previously noted, the trans worker data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, which could contribute to this gap.

Previous CIPD research on inclusive workplaces highlights the importance of an inclusive culture that allows organisational members to feel valued, have a voice and thrive at work and within their teams, yet our findings show that LGBT+ people are less likely to feel positive about this.

Recommendations for people professionals

- Foster positive and inclusive work relationships. Enable opportunities to create a shared purpose. Encourage conversations about the value of inclusion and understanding people's differences, and why they are important.
- Gain buy-in and support from senior leadership – this is vital for building more inclusive workplaces. For example, the trans survey discussed here highlighted the importance of top management support in creating trans-inclusive workplaces, and our *Diversity Management that Works: An evidence-based view* report identifies buy-in as a key part of inclusion and diversity strategies and provides recommendations to secure this.

- Ensure LGBT+ employees have access to voice mechanisms and feel comfortable using them – their insight and challenge is critical for progress. Help establish and sustain LGBT+ employee resource groups/staff networks that, as well as being a safe space and support mechanism, can provide valuable opportunities for LGBT+ employees to collectively raise important issues and suggestions to improve inclusion and diversity within the organisation.

Key findings

LGBT+ employees are more likely to report that work has a negative impact on their health

Good work should have a positive impact on wellbeing – however, the CIPD Good Work Index has identified a decline in workers reporting their job has a positive impact on their health in recent years. LGBT+ and trans employees are slightly less likely to say work has a positive impact on their health than heterosexual workers (35% and 26% vs 38%).

Trans workers may be experiencing relatively poor wellbeing; however, as this data was collected during the pandemic, some caution is warranted when interpreting these findings.

Recommendations for people professionals

- Investigate low wellbeing scores, and evaluate your wellbeing programme through a diversity and inclusion lens. Our findings suggest that LGBT+ workers may have poorer work-related wellbeing and more struggles with their wider mental and psychological health.
- To ensure your wellbeing offering meets the needs of all employees, make sure you look at it from the perspective of different employee groups (this means evaluating it through an LGBT+ lens too).
- During unprecedented times, it's important to think about the support and training that all staff may require to cope with stress and anxiety, job insecurity and psychological uncertainty, as well as the pressures of homeworking.

Key findings

Trans policies and practices need targeted improvements

Disclosing one's gender identity at work is deeply personal and can be a difficult process. Our analysis indicates that of the 193 trans workers we surveyed, 26% are not open about their gender identity at all at work, while 39% are mostly or completely open about their gender identity at work. The remaining 35% are split between being open to a few close people at work, and open to a broad range of people at work.

Just over half of trans workers surveyed feel they have heterosexual, cisgender allies within the organisation who are supportive and inclusive (58%); a similar proportion also feel they have lesbian, gay and bisexual allies within the organisation (59%).

However, there's also a gap between perceptions of allyship by trans workers and cisgender workers. For example, 90% of cisgender workers said they would offer support to trans workers, but only 61% of trans workers thought that cisgender, heterosexual colleagues would offer support.

We also asked trans workers about the adequacy of various trans-specific policies and practices in their organisation. Areas that were seen as least fit for purpose were:

- **inclusion and diversity training** that includes gender identity (49% viewed this as inadequate)
- **trans-inclusive language** in corporate/marketing communications (48% viewed this as inadequate)
- **providing guidance to managers** on how to support trans workers (43% viewed this as inadequate).

Recommendations for people professionals

- Training on LGBT+ inclusion should clarify the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation. Assumptions should not be made about the gender (or sex) of someone's partner. Training should also explain the nuances across the different gender identity spectrums, particularly with regard to non-binary identities, as these identities may be the least well understood.
- Strengthen trans-supportive organisational policies and practices. If you don't have the expertise in-house, consider external engagement by, for example:
 - getting expert advice
 - working with other employers who have made progress in this area
 - seeking feedback from your LGBT+ employee network.
- Review HR policies through a trans lens, and ensure the language used is gender-neutral. Examples include making sure family policies are inclusive of different gender identities as well as different sexual orientations, that dress codes (if required) are gender-neutral, and that you have a policy in place that details the support you provide for an employee who would like to transition.
- Our trans survey highlights that trans employees do not always engage in staff networks, so it's important to consider whether networks feel representative and accessible to trans employees.



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