Nurturing workplace inclusivity

By Jared Daniels   29 Jun 2020

In much of the world, the LGBTQ+ community has made great strides toward 'equal' even though the odds have been against them. The LGBTQ+ community knows adversity well and discomfort still abounds. By some basic measures, LGBTQ+ employees in many parts of the world have progressed in the workplace but behind the outward signs of progress, LGBTQ+ employees experience often unseen - but deeply felt - challenges and privately held fears on the job.

Jared Daniels, Technology Consulting Manager for Products business at Accenture in Africa

At Accenture, we prioritise issues of workplace equality and as such, have conducted research that not only guides our internal processes and measures, but is also valuable information for other organisations to implement.

Our research paper *Visible Growth; Invisible Fears Getting To Equal 2020: Pride*, reveals the impact of discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees on their ability to thrive and shares proven ways to help them advance, while being themselves.

How are you, really? The statistics

Our survey of more than 28,000 employees in organisations across 26 countries reveals that at the global level, LGBTQ+ employees are highly likely to excel and aspire to leadership positions in the workplace. Of the participants in the survey, 37% of LGBTQ+ employees had reached manager level, versus 35% among non-LGBTQ+ respondents. Furthermore while 27% of LGBTQ+ employees aspire to be in a leadership position, just 24% of other employees do.

Although our data suggest a fair representation of LGBTQ+ employees among management, the survey questions dug deeper to reveal less expressed fears these employees face, showing that only 21% of LGBTQ+ in senior leadership were open about their gender identity/expression or sexual orientation at work. Out of 195 countries, only 77 prohibit discrimination in employment because of one's sexual orientation, and even in the most socially progressive countries only around 40% of LGBTQ+ employees are fully open about their gender identity at work.

As the world battles a pandemic, experts warn that the LGBTQ+ community is likely to disproportionately experience negative economic and health impacts such as job loss. An OutRight Action International report predicts that this already vulnerable group will experience greater anxiety, fear of societal stigma and risk of family violence. Workplace cultures that aren't truly inclusive, and leaders who don't have their ear to the ground, are largely responsible. There exists a large gap in the perception of what leaders think is going on versus what employees say is happening in their workplaces.

These perception gaps might help explain why many LGBTQ+ employees feel relatively unsupported at work and why others remain afraid to be open with their colleagues in case they are discriminated against. Only 14% of LGBTQ+ employees feel fully supported by their employer when it comes to issues like improving diversity of gender expression or identity and 57% agree that their company is very welcoming toward other members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Nurture inclusivity to unleash innovation

At Accenture, we believe that fully tapping into all sources of talent in your organisation is not just the ethical way to lead, but the imperative way to grow and succeed in a post-pandemic, post-digital disruption world. The incentives are undeniably attractive. If perception gaps were narrowed by 50%, we estimate that global profits would be higher by 33%, equivalent to $3.7 trillion in 2019. Furthermore, our 2019 research found that an innovation mindset is six times higher in the most-equal cultures than in the least-equal ones.

Our accompanying report *The Hidden Value of Culture Makers* reveals the top-five cultural issues that employers should address to create a workplace where LGBTQ+ employees in particular can not only rise, but also feel supported, heard and understood:

1. Senior leaders must talk openly about their own personal issues and challenges to convey bold leadership.
2. Comprehensive action should be taken to ensure that flexible working arrangements are not only available, but properly supported and encouraged.
3. The workplace should be an empowering environment in which employees who are different from the majority are able to settle in quickly and thrive from the outset.
4. Employees should feel empowered and understand that it's okay to fail at work sometimes without fear or recrimination.
5. Employees should feel safe raising concerns with (and about) leaders, especially when it comes to harassment and discrimination.

Accenture is proud of the ways that we've included and uplifted our own LGBTQ+ community and we're still learning and improving. We encourage other leaders to play their part in ensuring workplace equality for all, not just for Pride Month, but all year round.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jared Daniels, Technology Consulting Manager for Products business at Accenture in Africa