Being Out at Work

Exploring LGBT women's workplace experience in the UK.

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Workplace Culture and LGBT

It is my pleasure to publish this piece of research focusing on the experience of LGBT women who work within the UK's financial and professional services industries. We aim to explore the perceptions, realities, and trends around how women interpret their environment whilst at work.

Our respondents to this UK survey are mainly readers of TheGlassHammer.com, some of whom attended our 2012 event "Managing Multiple Identities: Being Out at Work," which was held in London. Our methodology was both qualitative and quantitative for this research and we formed questions around the following hypothesis:

"Competence assumed and compensation being equal, LGBT employees feel more engaged at work if they are shown increased organisational and managerial support."

This approach to our research is very much at the core of the work we do at Evolved Employer. We engage with clients to examine and improve organisational culture and work with leadership to increase competency around diversity and inclusion issues so that talent and business strategies can be successful. After all, if culture can be defined as "the way we do things around here" then it is critical for leaders to understand how to engage and include different types of people. This has been shown to increase performance and engagement and this is the business case for diversity work.

The most striking finding from this report is that many LGBT women, despite being out to everyone, still find their immediate environment to be less advanced culturally than senior leaders would profess to be the case. This begs further investigation around best practices in the middle ranks, which directly affect day-to-day experience.

Reassuringly, several companies were recognized as going above and beyond in their efforts to ensure organisational and managerial support, reinforced with strong networks and programmatic solutions.

Straight allies are also stepping up and increasing their knowledge and skills around their role in making the LGBT experience a better, more inclusive one, so that LGBT women can stay engaged, build their networks, and continue to navigate their career.

I hope that you enjoy this whitepaper and share it with leaders, managers, employee networks, straight allies, and LGBT employees alike.

Sincerely,

Nicki Gilmour
Founder and CEO
The Glass Hammer
Evolved Employer

# Spreading Inclusion Throughout the Entire Organisation

Recent research on the subject of LGBT employees has focused on how being "out" can help individuals advance more quickly in their careers – because they are able to be more authentic. Bringing their "whole selves" to the office every day enables people to focus on the work at hand, without wasting energy trying to hide parts of their lives or pretending to be someone else. Employers who build inclusive, supportive workplaces where LGBT employees can feel comfortable being out reap the benefits of higher engagement, and possibly higher performance, since trust also increases in an inclusive workplace. Yet, much research, including this study, shows that there is still a significant number of employees who fear that revealing their LGBT status may damage their careers.

When LGBT individuals belong to one or more other minority groups in the workplace – such as being women – they face an even steeper challenge. According to Stonewall research, many LGBT women choose not to come out for fear that the "double glazed glass ceiling" effect may limit their career prospects. Add other identities to the mix, like being an ethnic minority, or having a disability, or coming from a different socioeconomic background than the majority, and employees' and managers' perceptions around advancement become even more complex.

Recent research by The Glass Hammer and Evolved Employer on LGBT women in the financial and professional services in the US showed just how important top-down support can be for this group. Our respondents said clear, loud, and frequent affirmation by senior management on the importance of LGBT inclusion can make a big difference in setting the tone throughout an organisation.

However, leadership support is just the beginning. Taking our research a step further, we asked over 100 individuals in the financial and professional services in the UK how their organisations could be more inclusive. Our female LGBT respondents said that leadership support is definitely important, but there are many other factors at play; in particular, ensuring that support is actual, and not just verbal.

Respondents were quite candid in telling us they believe being out *might* still hurt their careers in those companies where inclusive behaviours are yet to permeate throughout the ranks. Energizing middle management by providing more awareness, knowledge, and skill building opportunities around being better allies could be the turning-point in creating truly inclusive organisations.

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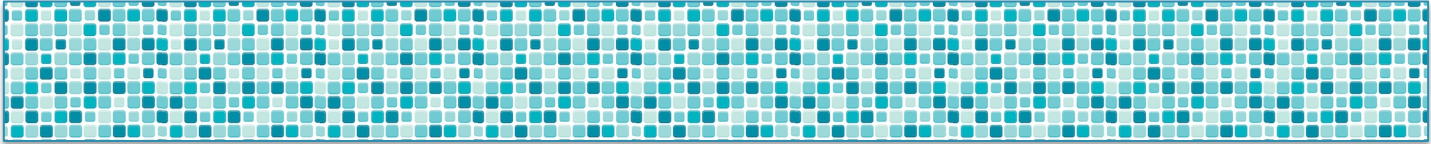
Being Out

In our survey of UK LGBT female professionals in financial and professional services, slightly more than half of our respondents (57.4%) were out to all of their colleagues. About a third (35.1%) said they were out to some but not all colleagues, and only 7.4% of our respondents were only out to HR or not out at all.

Are you "out" or openly LGBT?
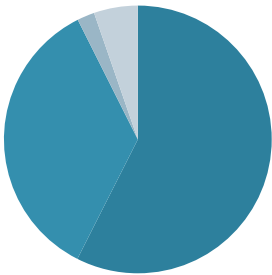
■ a) I am out to everyone (57.4%)

■ b) I am out to a few colleagues or team members within my company (35.1%)

■ c) I am only out to HR (2.1%)

■ d) I not out (5.3%)

According to our survey, 36.7% of LGBT women who had come out during their career felt that they had become more interested in career advancement since coming out, and 21.7% said coming out had no effect on their career ambition. A quarter said they had always been out since beginning their career, so there was no change in ambition due to coming out for them.

In an open-ended question, we asked respondents whether coming out has or would hurt their career, and the answers were mixed. According to our respondents, the answer would depend on one's firm, colleagues, or manager – revealing the importance of the culture of trust that varied across different organisations. Nevertheless, over half of respondents (58.1 %) said that, personally, coming out has not actually hurt their career nor do think hypothetically that it would hurt their career advancement prospects. Just over a quarter (25.8%) said they weren't sure. Almost one in ten (9.7%) said they were sure that coming out has already hurt their career or would hurt their career if they were to come out. Overall, it seems that those have come out have felt it was worthwhile or somewhat of a contributor to their success.

Do you think "coming out" has or would hurt your own job advancement prospects?

"Absolutely not."

"The gay partners in our firm weren't openly known to be gay before being appointed partner. That makes me worry that I've been too open and it might work against me when it comes to being a partner."

"No - it has helped me find jobs!"

"No, but I would not have been authentic about myself had I not come out, and that might have affected my confidence in the long run."
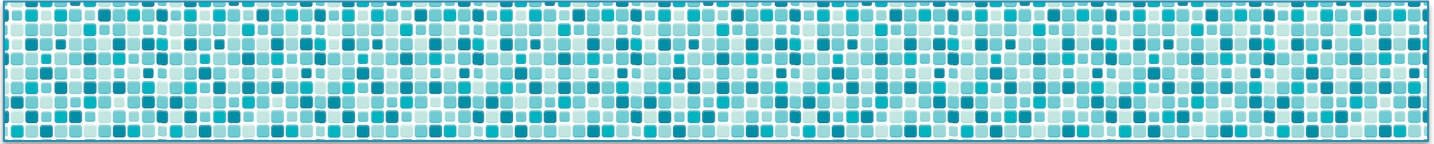
Cultural Support

Our research into workplace support for LGBT women illustrated an interesting aspect of culture – our own perceptions are often shaded by the context in which we operate. By and large, women rated their colleagues positively when asked directly about their supportiveness. But a more descriptive question on day-to-day experience revealed a different viewpoint.

Just over three quarters (75.4%) of our respondents said that their colleagues are supportive of them most or all of the time. Similarly, 78.7% of respondents said negative comments or behaviours directed against LGBT people were not tolerated by their manager or that they have never come up on their team.

Just over one in ten respondents (11.5%) said negative comments about LGBT people might be acceptable on their team, depending on the situation. And 4.9% said, yes, definitely, this kind of behaviour is tolerated. That amounts to more than 15% of LGBT women whose description of their workplace experience is one that still culturally tolerates overt defamation of an employee group.

And, what may be most illustrative about the level of work that still needs to be done on LGBT inclusion and ally education is that almost three in five (59%) respondents said they have been made uncomfortable by a joke or statement about LGBT people in the last two years.

In the past two years, have you ever been made uncomfortable by a joke or statement about LGBT people?

- a) yes (59%)
- b) no (37.7%)
- c) can't remember (3.3%)
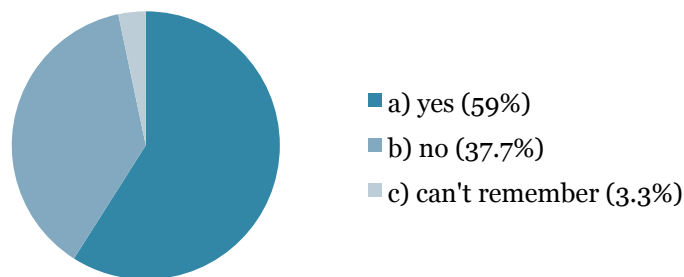
It is an interesting juxtaposition that almost three in five individuals have encountered negative comments about LGBT people in the workplace in the past two years, yet the majority of respondents say their colleagues are supportive of them. This warrants further investigation into what kinds of behaviours are characterized as truly supportive by LGBT women at work. It also suggests that more work needs to be done at the mid-management level, in order to create consistency and accountability around acceptable behaviours within teams.

Senior Level Support

Senior level support can set the tone when it comes to LGBT inclusiveness – and that message (good or bad) will permeate throughout all levels of the organisation. Beyond the audio, leaders' actions need to match what they are saying, or the visuals will override any messaging on inclusiveness.

We asked our respondents an open-ended question about how they would describe senior management's support for LGBT individuals and initiatives at their company. The women who responded were quite candid in saying that while they appreciate the support they do receive, on average, more could be done.

For example, based on a qualitative analysis of answers to this open-ended question, 31% of respondents described senior management support of LGBT inclusiveness as vocal or emphatic. Almost a quarter (22.2%) of *those* respondents (women whose leaders are vocal on inclusiveness) said that their leaders' vocal support had little impact on their day-to-day experience as LGBT women (13.8% of all respondents said senior level support had little impact on their daily lives). Investigating and measuring the consistency of middle-management practices is beyond the scope of this report, but this analysis could be useful in understanding the effects of espoused leadership values on managers.

Almost a quarter of respondents (22.4%) described their leaders' support for LGBT individuals and initiatives as mediocre, using words like "token," "average," or even "grudging." Distilling total responses even further, 8.6% of responses were purely negative, 36.2% of responses were purely positive, and 46.6% of responses were in-between, discussing the good and the bad, which shows that the majority of our respondents believe their leaders can do better. A few examples follow.

Please describe senior management's support for LGB individuals and initiatives.

"Diversity is taken very seriously in the organisation - the chairman regularly speaks to the external market about the firm's points of view on D&I issues."

"I think they support it and there's a PRIDE network. However, I'm not really sure what the impact would be on my day-to-day environment."

"Incredibly supportive - willing to attend a panel of Straight Allies and talk about why this is important to the firm."

"Senior management make all the right noises about supporting LGB employees. However, when it comes to stumping up the cash to support network activities, LGB specific training, putting resources behind client engagement events, it just doesn't seem to happen."

"None! They pay lip service to D&I, but I don't see much in reality - the boys club is still in charge."

We also asked our respondents if they felt they had a role model at the firm. While almost two in five (39.7%) said they did not, the majority of (60.4%) said there was someone they looked up to as a role model at work. One in five respondents (20.7%) identified an LGBT person in their firm as a role model.

**Do you have someone you look to as a role model at your company?**
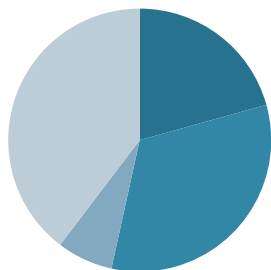
- a) yes, and they are "out" or openly LGB (20.7%%)
- b) yes, and they are straight (32.8%)
- c) yes, but I am not sure of their LGB status (6.9%)
- d) no, I do not have a role model at my company (39.7%)

Interestingly, over a third of our respondents (36.2%) said they were aware of lesbians in their company's senior management, yet few said that their role model was LGBT. This may illustrate that LGBT status is not viewed as a prerequisite when it comes to choosing a role model. Rather than choosing a role model based on similar demographic characteristics, our respondents choose role models based on other traits. This finding was consistent with recent research by The Glass Hammer on LGBT professional women in the US.

This data could warrant further investigation as junior and middle level LGBT women may not be interpreting LGBT-identified senior management behaviours as favourable. Research shows that assimilated behaviours are common for senior women executives in order to minimize their differences in the boardroom or leadership team. LGBT as a minority social identity could have similar effects, with gender likely to compound assimilation to dominant group behaviours. Further research could help clarify why LGBT employees are not choosing LGBT leaders as role models.

Research by organisations like Catalyst and the Centre for Talent Innovation has also revealed the importance of sponsorship when it comes to career advancement. A sponsor is a powerful senior person who supports an employee by advocating for them behind the scenes and suggesting stretch opportunities that will help build their career. The vast majority (69%) of our respondents said they did not have a sponsor at their company.

Do you have a sponsor within your company (formal or informal)?
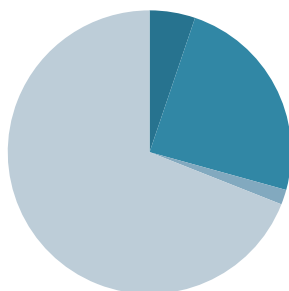
- a) yes, and they are "out" or openly LGB (5.2%)
- b) yes, and they are straight (24.1%)
- c) yes, but I am not sure of their LGB status (1.7%)
- d) no, I do not have a sponsor at my company (69.0%)
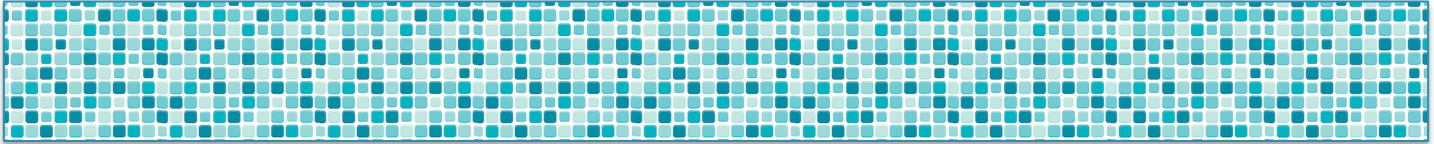
The percentage of our respondents who had a sponsor seems small (31%), but this is much higher than the percentage of UK women who have sponsors reported by a recent CTI study with a much broader sample (full time women at large firms). It may indicate that the financial and professional services do a better job of cultivating a culture of sponsorship than other industries.

Networking

Our study suggests that our respondents are actively involved in LGBT initiatives and networking activities within their firms. For example, more than three quarters (77.6%) of our female LGBT respondents said they were members of their company's LGBT / Pride network (although some said they were not active members).
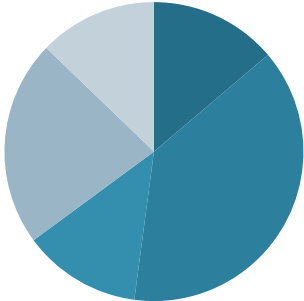
### Are you a member of your company's LGBT / Pride network?
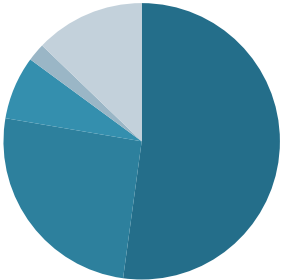
- a) yes, I am an active member (52.1%)
- b) yes, but I am not an active member (25.5%)
- c) no, I am not a member, but I participate in the network's activities (7.4%)
- d) no, I am not a member and I never participate in the network's activities (2.1%)
- e) we do not have an LGB / Pride network (12.8%)

The percentage of respondents involved in their company's LGBT network was higher in the UK than in the US (61.4%), based on a similar recent survey by The Glass Hammer. We considered that a possible reason for the striking disparity might be general higher affiliation with networking groups in the UK than the US, but we don't believe this is the case. In fact, many of our respondents stated that they were members of their company's LGBT network, but not members of their company's women's network. Just over half (52.1%) of respondents are members of their women's networks.

Are you a member of your company's women's network?

- a) yes, I am an active member (13.8%)
- b) yes, but I am not an active member (38.3%)
- c) no, I am not a member, but I participate in the network's activities (12.8%)
- d) no, I am not a member and I never participate in the network's activities (22.3%)
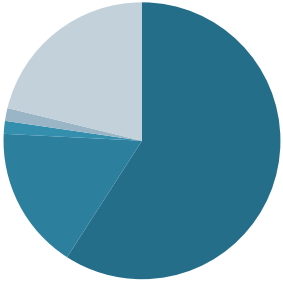- e) we do not have women's network (12.8%)
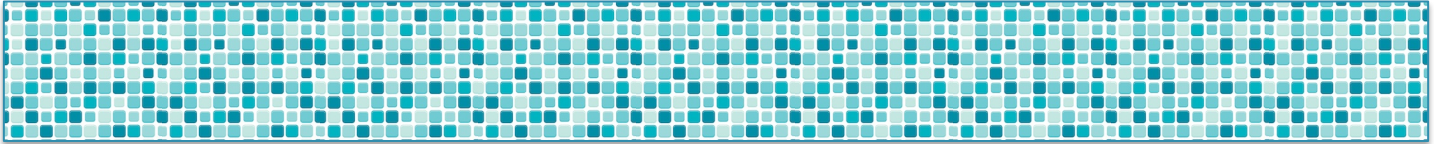
Not only were our respondents more likely to be members of their company's LGBT network than their women's network, but they were also much more likely to be *active* members (52.1% compared to 13.8%).

By further investigating the individual needs and values of LGBT women, employee resource groups (ERGs) such as women's networks could consider their wider constituents' needs or use the data to join forces with other ERGs, such as LGBT or ethnic/cultural employee groups to better serve their members.

We also asked our respondents how they felt about the gender make-up of their company's LGBT network. Despite our *respondents'* high rate of membership, the majority of respondents (59.1%) said there were "very few" women (less than 20%) in their company's LGBT network.

If you are a member of your firm's LGB / Pride network, how many women do you see at events or meetings?


- a) very few (less than 20% of attendees are women) (59.1%)
- b) some (20-40% of attendees are women) (16.7%)
- c) about even (40-60% of attendees are women) (1.5%)
- c) many (60-80% of attendees are women) (1.5%)
- e) don't know / not a member / we do not have a network (21.2%)

Almost half (43.8%) of respondents said they feel lesbians' interests are represented in their LGBT network. Two in five (21.9%) indicated they were not, and 23.4% said lesbians' interests were sometimes represented or that groups were increasingly trying to reach out to women (10.9% of respondents to this question said the question was not applicable to them because they did not have a network or for other reasons).

When asked an open-ended question about why the percentage of women in LGBT networks is so low, the most popular suggestion (25% of respondents) was that the group was male dominated, so women perceived that it would not be welcoming or interesting to them, thus perpetuating the cycle of low female involvement.

Other common answers were that the low percentage of females reflected the gender make-up of their firm, or that LGBT network events tend to be of a social nature that may be less interesting to women. Respondents also suggested that women may be less likely than men to be out at their firm, so may not be comfortable attending company-sponsored LGBT events.
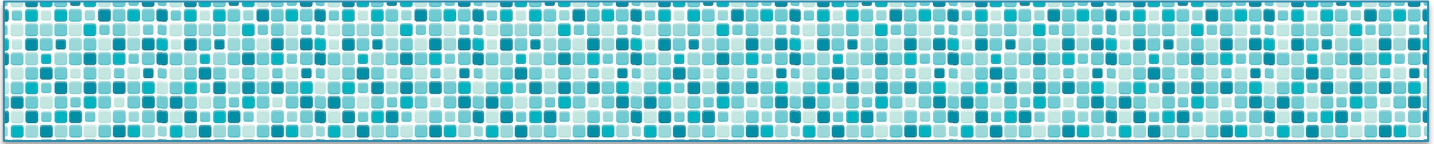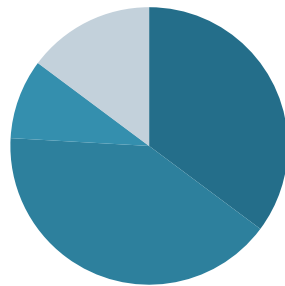
Allies

In his recent book *Allies at Work*, David M. Hall discusses the importance of allies for creating a "safe environment" for LGBT colleagues – and it is possible that ally groups could bridge the gap between senior management's rhetoric about inclusiveness and what really happens on the ground by providing immediate support and modelling positive behaviour. Ally networks have grown from casual groups to formal corporate initiatives in recent years. More than two in five of our respondents (44.4%) said allies were a topic of discussion by senior management (although 13.0% said they themselves had not heard the term before).

Overall, our respondents were overwhelmingly positive about allies, with more than three quarters (75.9%) classifying them as "crucial" or "helpful."

How would you characterize the support of allies for the LGB community at work?

- a) crucial (35.2%)
- b) helpful (40.7%)
- c) neither helpful nor unhelpful (9.3%)
- d) unhelpful (0.0%)
- e) not sure (14.8%)

In fact, almost three in five (59.3%) of our respondents said they could name particular colleagues whom they would identify as vocal allies (24.1% said they could not think of anyone, and 16.7% said they weren't sure).

Almost half of our respondents (48.1%) said allies were encouraged to attend meetings or events with their LGBT network and 18.5% of our respondents said they had a separate employee network for allies. In fact, 100% of those individuals whose firm had a separate ally network said allies were discussed by senior management. And over half (53.1%) of individuals who could name a specific ally said allies were discussed by senior management. This suggests that senior management support for allies may be critical for building this community. Our research also proposes an interesting concept – that allies want to gather in a legitimate way that doesn't necessarily mean as part of the LGBT network.

Our respondents shared their feelings about the value of allies in an open-ended question. Many emphasized the importance of building support from the majority for minority groups.

Conclusion

LGBT women face the challenge of being a double minority at work, contending with what Stonewall has termed "the double glazed glass ceiling."

While the majority of our respondents reported that their firms were supportive of them, the majority also suggested that their workplaces are not truly inclusive environments, and they are occasionally made uncomfortable by the comments or behaviour of their colleagues. This ties back to our original hypothesis on culture change management and how good behaviours must be rewarded, with zero tolerance applied to bad behaviours.

We commend leaders who speak out about the importance of LGBT inclusiveness, but the research shows this message isn't necessarily permeating throughout their firms' cultures. We suggest further education for managers around intercultural competency and unconscious bias. Our research suggests the following solutions to the challenge of developing culture-wide inclusion:

- • Encourage senior management to speak out about the importance of creating an inclusive workplace for LGBT employees. It seems that speaking on this topic outside the firm is particularly meaningful, such as when CEOs state that they will go as far to turn down business if client firms are homophobic.
- • Ensure leaders' actions match the messages that we refer to above.
- • Align systems, programs, and policies to help enable consistent management practices around espoused values such as LGBT inclusiveness.
- • Ensure gender is a topic discussed within LGBT networks and that LGBT topics are discussed within women's networks. This can also be achieved through partnerships between diversity groups on particular events and initiatives.
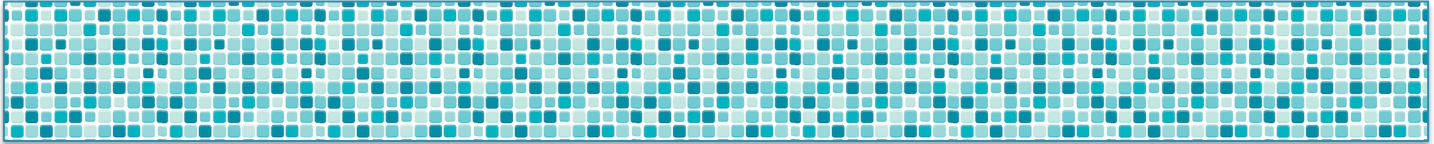
- Ensure diversity networks incorporate educational and cultural elements rather than focusing mainly on social or "drinks" outings to attract a wider range of participants.
- Encourage allies to step forward vocally and visually in their support for LGBT colleagues, and to speak up when they see a difficult situation. Provide them the tools to be better allies.
- Create opportunities for "majority" employees (straight in this case) to be responsible for improving culture and environment, so that accountability and buy-in can occur for LGBT or other diversity initiatives.

Beyond this survey, at our "Managing Identity" events, it should be noted that a number of LGBT men turned up in both the UK and the US, and unfailingly asked how they could encourage more LGBT women to be involved with the LGBT network at their firm. This positive trend could be leveraged to boost inclusiveness within these networks. Indeed, on a practical, day-to-day level, LGBT professional women may not be reaping the full benefits of efforts toward LGBT inclusiveness *or* those toward gender equality, as they are minorities within minority groups.

And what of those LGBT women with other minority identities – those who are also multicultural or who also have non-traditional educational backgrounds or any other additional facet of the myriad dimensions of diversity? What additional challenges do they face in an environment where it is difficult for colleagues to "place" them?

Grassroots efforts and advocacy work should engage LGBT employees and allies alike, as both have an important role to play. It is important that individuals feel that their needs and values are being met at work for maximum engagement. Our study highlights the importance of creating a welcoming culture where organisational commitment is shown to employees in the form of employee resource groups, verbal and actual support from leaders and managers, and role modelling. The strategic mission of creating an environment where all employees can be their authentic, most effective selves can only be accomplished if there is leadership vision backed by systems that reward good behaviours.

Companies that educate their employees and managers to understand that differences in individuals (visible or otherwise) should not be minimized have a greater chance to create teams where someone's strengths and accomplishments determine their opportunities. Paradoxically, as research by Catalyst has suggested, this often requires firms to identify diversity targets, track metrics, and hold managers accountable for achieving diversity goals. It also requires cultural buy-in of this approach, as well as support for the business value of inclusive practices.

In our opinion, being an "Evolved Employer" means getting past the compliance stage and forming key performance indicators (KPIs) around converting organisational learning into effective behavioural change – which leads to culture change. This is not an easy task, and those who have done it continue to work hard to manage their culture and live their values.
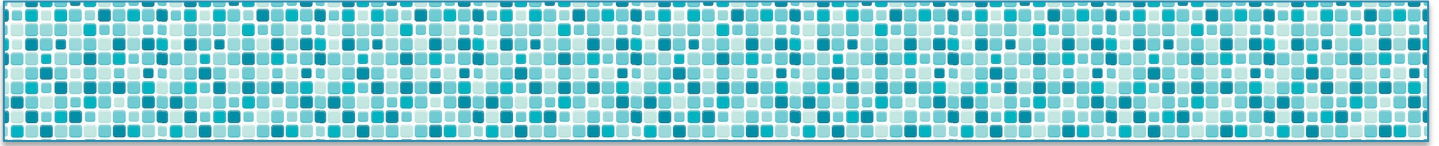
There is some very positive indication that many individuals – especially those at the top – are aware of the need for building inclusive organisations. The challenge for leaders is to develop the appropriate strategies and mechanisms that will get them there, while ensuring the culture is proactively shaped to support these strategies.

Our suggestion is to start by addressing tough questions at the top of the house. Are we limited by our stereotypes around what a leader looks like? How do power and authority dynamics play out in corporate life? Who feels authorized to make decisions in teams? Does doing nothing amount to colluding with traditional structures that don't legitimize minority social identities, such as LGBT, as equal players?

How can managers actively manage conflict when diversity of thought is present for better team performance? And finally, what have the clients traditionally expected and what are they now expecting from financial and professional services firms' servicing teams?

By delving into these questions, leaders can begin to unlock the benefits of true inclusion, and move toward being an Evolved Employer.
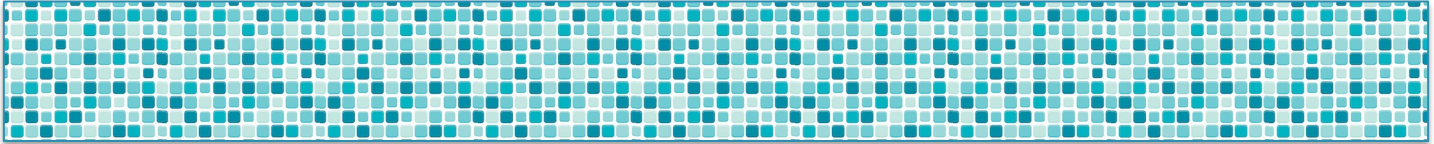
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About Us

The Glass Hammer is the leading career management site for women in financial and professional services and we realize that informing, inspiring, and empowering women via our advice and events is useful for all kinds of women in the industry.

This whitepaper report is written as part of our think tank research arm, Evolved Employer, and aims to investigate how professional lesbian women perceive their workplace experience.

Report Authors: Melissa J. Anderson, Nicki Gilmour
Report Editor: Melissa J. Anderson

We would like to thank the readers of The Glass Hammer for their candid and detailed responses to our Workplace LGBT survey. This research was presented at our Managing Identities: Being Out at Work event. We would like to thank the sponsors of the event, who made this report possible: Bank of America Merrill Lynch and Goldman Sachs.

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