

Coming out, works better!
Best Practices for the establishment of an LHBT-network

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www.comingoutworksbetter.nl

www.fnv.nl

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LHTB

Is the collective term for lesbian women, homosexual men, bisexual and transgender persons, derived from the English term LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi Transgender). LGBT is the internationally used terminology. LHTB is about same gender sexual orientation (LH) or both (B). T is, first and foremost, about gender identity.

Transgender

The collective term for transsexuals (gender identity that differs from the gender identity at birth), transgenderists (undecided gender identity), transvestites (gender identity identical to own gender but differs in gender-expression by means of cross-dressing).

Transgender past

People with a different gender identity than their gender identity at birth whom have completed gender transition to a different gender identity, both physically (surgical) as legally (identification documents).

Diversity policy

Policy that deals with the 'organization of difference'. Diversity policy recognizes, acknowledges and appreciates differences between people in gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability and religion, Diversity policy is sometimes also referred to as inclusion policy.

Inclusive

The term 'Inclusive organization' is derived from the English word inclusion. Inclusion does not behold diversity as a problem but as a luxury and recognizes the importance of cooperation and cohabitation. With inclusion the emphasis lies, unlike exclusion, on the insertion of all.

Best practice.

The English term 'Best Practice' assumes that there is a work method, process or activity in existence that is more efficient in obtaining certain results than any other method. Central in assessing this, is the day to day routine. It is based upon the deliberation that with the correct modus operandi a project might be executed that presents less problems, less unforeseen complications and better final results. It is imperative for organizations to know the best practice within their line of business and to compare this to their own procedures.

Lessons learned

The English terminology 'Lesson Learned' stands for the sharing, and the explicit making of, experiences and insights, so that others may learn from this.

Straight Ally

A straight ally is a heterosexual person who openly supports the LHBT-community and who, as an LHBT-ally, contributes to the promotion of social safety and acceptance.

Executive Sponsor

The executive sponsor to the LHBT-network is a CEO or member of the Board of Directors of a company that has (LHBT)-diversity in its portfolio, or sponsor the LHBT-network. This Person guarantees the synergy between the LHBT-network and corporate objectives.

Unmerited Treatment

Subtle expressions of unequal treatment. Inappropriate humour, impertinent questions, subtle expressions of exclusion and unsolicited remarks. Particularly unequal treatment, evident discrimination and open violence against LHBT, hardly ever occur at Dutch workplaces.

Coming out/Closeted

To disclose one's sexual orientation or transgender(past) / concealment of one's sexual orientation or transgender(past).

FNV

The Netherlands Trade Union Federation (FNV) is a association of 19 independent trade unions that represent the interests of employees and social benefit claimants. The Collective Labour Agreement negotiators of the FNV unions, negotiate directly with employers about policies concerning conditions of employment. The Netherlands Trade Union Federation is also represented in the Social Economic Council and the Labour Foundation, in which both employers and employee organizations are represented. The Netherlands Trade Union Federation has 1.4 million members.

Company Pride Platform (CCP)

CCP is a non-profit umbrella organisation seeking absolute social acceptance of LHBT at the workplace and in society. The members of CCP consist, among others, out of LHBT-employee networks, freelancers and students.

LHBT in the Netherlands

According to Dutch penal code, homosexuality in the Netherlands is no longer punishable since 1971.

In the years after, Amsterdam developed into the international gay capital.

Civil rights for lesbian women, homosexual men, bi- and transgender persons are in general increasingly viewed as a human rights theme. The government also develops more policy favouring homosexual emancipation.

The universal Equal Treatment Act (AWBG) was enacted in 1993. Henceforth unequal treatment, based upon sexual orientation, may be submitted to the Equal Treatment Committee (CGB).

In 2001, the Netherlands becomes the first country in the world where marriage between people of the same gender is accessible. 'Gay-marriage' is a fact. However, civil servants of the registry office who experience conscientious objections in marrying two persons of the same gender, may decline to perform the wedding ceremony. Commonly, these are referred to as 'refusal officials'.

In 2011, ten years after same gender marriage became accessible, we have arrived at the 3rd phase of LHBT-emancipation. The 1st phase (1971) was the abolishment of punishability of homosexuality. The 2nd phase (2001) was characterised by the achievement of equal rights (gay marriage). In the current 3rd phase, LHBT is widely accepted in Dutch society. However when lesbian, gay, bi or transgender comes too close, then (even) the Netherlands has not yet achieved complete social acceptance.

Five to ten percent of the Dutch population is LHBT.

Research from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relationships in 2011, shows that the amount of registered reports on discrimination and violence to LHBT has increased with 54 percent in comparison to the previous year.

Research by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research shows that:

- 28 percent of homosexual men and 14 percent of lesbian women are confronted with negative reactions at work;
- 21 percent of homosexual men and 13 percent of lesbian women has felt increasingly more insecure during the previous year;
- with transgender persons the above mentioned percentages are higher. Three-quarter of them face negative reactions due to their sexual orientation or preference;
- half of the LHTB-youths have suicidal thoughts:
- a third of the LHTB-youths state that it is impossible to be open about their sexual orientation or preference at school.
- In many sports (e.g. football) LHBT is invisible and unmentionable.

The report 'Discrimination is Not the Word' (*Discriminatie is het woord niet*) which was commissioned by the Equal Treatment Committee and conducted by the Verwij-Jonker institute, reports that a third of the LHTB's are not open at the workplace, about their sexual orientation.

The same report shows that, after coming out, 30 percent of lesbian and 21 percent of homosexual interviewees, deal with unmerited treatment at the workplace.

Introduction

This manual is meant for every lesbian, homo-, bisexual or transgender employee, who would like to create a network within the company that they work for, or wishes to fortify a existing LHBT-network within the organization.

This manual can also serve as support for LHBT-employees who do not have the possibility to establish an LHBT-network within their company

Obviously, this manual may also be of interest to Human Resource Management (HRM) and to diversity- and line mangers, who wish to know more about the benefits of an LHBT-network, and how this network may provide a meaningful contribution to a successful diversity policy and an inclusive shop floor.

Successful diversity policy is policy that succeeds, not just on paper, but also in its interpretation and execution. The review for this takes place at the shop floor. An all-encompassing work climate is a climate in which every employee 'belongs', is visible, can be his own person safely, and is able to work free from hinder. The shop floor climate is the ultimate indicator for a successful diversity- and inclusion policy.

Such a policy enables every employee to be his own person, to 'find one's niche', feel appreciated and thus feel highly committed to the organization. In other words; successful diversity policy enlarges social safety and acceptance on the shop floor.

That is why LTHB-acceptance on the shop floor is not merely about the interest of lesbian- homo-, bisexual and transgender employees, but in particular about the interest of any employee deemed 'different'.

The LHBT diversity policy is often compared to the canary in the coalmine. In the early days, prior to descending themselves, miners would send a canary into the mine shaft to test whether the air was safe. Diversity policy is a method of reviewing shop floor safety and whether there is a so called 'inclusive environment' in which everyone belongs and is able to be their own person.

Where gender, ethnicity and age are visible, LHBT may not be. A young Caucasian lesbian woman, may find it hard to hide her age, skin colour and gender. Her sexual orientation however, she can.

LHBT runs straight through all layers of the working population and thus also through all company layers. Despite the wide acceptance of LHBT in the Netherlands, absolute social acceptance is still not accomplished. As soon as LHBT becomes more apparent and more personal, tolerance seems to diminish, also on the shop floor. Where jokes about ethnic minorities or women are perceived as 'not done', gay humour is often more permissible.

That makes it even more important that there is an active LHBT-network within a company.

The network can provide LHBT-employees with support and defend their interests. It can ensure, that because of their LHBT-identity, people are no longer bullied, treated unfairly, or become excluded, but feel safe and accepted. Moreover, such a network can make LHBT visible, provide information about it and instigate discussions.

As such, the LHBT-network contributes to a good diversity policy in both the corporate world and in government. Hence, a policy that stimulates reduces social exclusion and in which people learn from differences.

Corporations and organizations that recruit employees from all layers of the working population and carry out a good diversity policy, are appealing to employees. In such a company an inclusive working climate may arise. An organization has therefore an interest in successful diversity policy.

Only then can the company make optimum use of the quality of its employees and utilize their differences to such an extent that they compliment each other whilst working in teams, resulting in better collaboration. All factors that are beneficial to productivity and innovative abilities.

The initiation of an LHBT-network is often pioneering work. This manual wishes to provide guide lines.

How to start such a network? Where can you find other LHBT-colleagues? What would you like on the agenda? In which way can you make a network successful? What activities can you organize? Why is support from the management important and how to get the top on one's side?

This manual offers answers to the questions, describes the do's and don'ts, and provides useful tips.

being your own person at work

Shop floor networks

Networks established from an employer initiative are not new. Formal -and informal- networks for women, young employees under 35, or networks based on ethnicity are already frequently active within companies and institutions. These networks serve the sharing of knowhow, social gathering, and to record the specific needs of these diversity groups.

“Whilst I was talking to colleagues from the young people-network about erecting our own LHBT-network, the chair of the young people-network stated; “Nonsense, a network for gay’s. I don’t use the workplace to find a partner, do I?” Like that’s the deal! Remarks like these are never made when it concerns a women- or young people-network. People still make these weird assumptions. They still associate LHTB with sex, and hence deny the purpose and use of such a network”.

The experience of this employee concisely summarises how much a LHTB-network differs from a conventional corporate network. LHTB-employees form a diverse and diffuse group of people within a company. Some are clearly visible, others step into the lime light less.

In addition, LHBT-employees are not connected via one single, well-defined, work- or career related, purpose or circumstance, as might be the case in a woman- or young people-network. What interconnects LHBT is a form of indiscernible ‘being differed’, which might relate to sexual orientation or gender identity.

This diffuse character also arises due to the fact that one LHBT-employee chooses to stay ‘closeted’, and as such remains to hide certain parts of his personality from his peers, whilst another LHTB-employee chooses to be outspoken about this aspect.

If you are female it shows, just like ethnical origin or age can be seen in most others. However, sexual orientation, or gender history, is much less obviously displayed. These circumstances make the establishment of LHTB-network just a tiny bit more difficult than the sep-up of another company network.

That goes for the LHBT-initiators themselves, because how does one reach the different stakeholders, if some people remain 'closeted'? And it might also prove difficult for your non LHBT-colleagues, to get a grasp of such a new network. Is it really necessary, some might wonder? Or as a HR-manager put it into words; "I never hear anything about this, so it not an issue here".

Some colleagues find workplace network-building unnecessary. These usually are those colleagues that are quite conventional and normative. That there might be colleagues who are different, simply doesn't come to mind.

Yet, LHBT-employees do have a common interest, the realisation of social acceptance, the ability to be your own person openly, and the creation of conditions for a more secure working environment within their company. It must be possible for them to be open about who they are, without being confronted with annoying jokes, offensive remarks or impertinent questions.

"Ever seen these newspaper headlines: bespectacled boy bullied out of Leidsche Rijn? Or: boy evicted from house by parents, after they discovered that he was fair-haired? Or: man bullied from work after his colleagues discovered that he was actually a man?"(from Fabien van Gent's presentation).

An LHBT-network is a genuine inclusive network: it wants to ensure that each LHTB-employee of the company in question belongs. It is a network for all people, both high and low ranking. It runs straight through an organisation, resulting also in the arising of new, vertical, communication lines.

"LHBT? 4800 People work at this company, personally I knew two homosexuals. My HR-staff didn't know a single one. I have always assumed that within this company, every employee could be his own person completely. Until I joined the first meeting of the network. It then turned out that a lot of LHBT's were still 'closeted'. I really never knew, or noticed. I therefore support the network completely".

Unconditional support given to the LHBT-network, as stated in the above citation, is essential for a sound functioning network. Because, first and foremost, this should provide protection for the LHBT-employee who is being treated unjustly.

Those at the workplace who get to endure annoying jokes and remarks, or have become the topic of hearsay, slowly but surely, find themselves in a highly stressful situation and could develop physical or/and mental health issues. Nervous-breakdown, burn-out or physical ailment might be the result.

Whether, and to what extend, someone is troubled by such hindrance, or subtle forms of exclusion, depends on the defensibility of the person. It is obvious that defensibility means something different to everyone. How defensible someone is often depends on his, or her, personal background. How went did someone's 'coming out'? What is someone's social position and what level of education has he, or she, obtained?

At the workplace this is combined with the departmental climate. When this is fitting, inclusive, and there is for example, an LHBT-network in existence, then one is less vulnerable in case of unpleasant confrontations.

An inclusive work climate

Best practices

There is no blueprint for the formation of an LHBT-network; after all, every company has its own culture, values and history. Yet, all the hereunder mentioned tips, are -each and every one of them- all 'best practices'. Well-tried methods that have proven to be successful in other companies, despite the fact that some might be in need of some minor adjustments in order to fit the specific needs of a workplace.

Formation board

The formation of a network requires effort, commitment and is time consuming. It might help if you do not have to devise and implement this all by yourself. Gather a few LHBT-colleagues around you who, together with you, can constitute a board. Chairs from other existing LHBT-networks recommend to find at least two colleagues that are prepared to invest a lot of time and effort into the network.

Good reflection

An effective method in increasing the network influence to a maximum and to create adequate support in the organisation, is to ensure that the members of the board sufficiently reflect the group that they represent. As a general rule, the initiator of the LHBT-network is usually a man. Likewise, men seem to be more inclined to join an LHBT-network than women and transgenders. A diverse make-up of LHBT among the network board members is unquestionably desirable. Additionally, it is favourable if the board members come from different departments, have different functions and are from all ages.

Shared chair

In reality, convincing female and transgender colleagues in joining the network, turns out to be a daunting task. "We would love to have women on our board, but we can't find them" is an often heard remark. A shared chair might provide the answer. Significantly more LHBT-people participate in a network with a shared chair and a wide LHBT- arrangement, than in a network being dominated by male board members.

Past experience has taught that transgender employees are somewhat reluctant in joining networks and that a double chair, and more LHBT-colleagues, might have greater appeal. As to the question which conditions work best, the female and transgender employees responded; "an approachable and accessible climate during meetings". Also, people like to see a poised alternation in network meetings; in other words, next to the pleasant network-drinks, lectures and workshops with interesting (female) speakers or transgender role models.

Alliance partners

Also arrange representatives from Human Resource Management, Communications, Marketing or PR, who by nature are often interlocutors to other employee-networks. Company locations outside the 'Randstad' or locations that do not consist of offices but are factories or production- or postal departments, are habitually difficult to approach. Yet, it is often important that especially these parts of the business gain better insight, knowledge and understanding about LHBT. Get someone involved in the network who represents these departments and may function as contact to the board.

Management lingo

It is advisable to find at least one board member who speaks 'management lingo' and who has access to both management and board.

Discreet operation

At first, you will find enthusiastic LHBT-employees by asking acquainted colleagues. It is imperative that this happens in a respectful and discrete manner. Not every LHBT-colleague wants to, openly and actively, contribute to -or sees the need and importance of- an LHBT-network. In actual fact, a substantial part of the opposition that network-founders experience during the formation of networks, comes from LHBT-employees. Don't let this discourage you, be prepared for, and take opposition into account. Try to understand and respect everyone's personal motives, even though some remarks might really get to you. In order to get well prepared for the potential opposition you may encounter, you can ask other promoters of LHBT-networks about their experiences.

BCC

The same amount of discretion is required in the use of mailing lists. Not every LHBT-colleague wishes their network involvement to be out in the open. Out of respect for this, the members list is to be rendered invisible via blind carbon copy.

Management and HRM support

All is impossible without support from the Management, Human Resource Management and of Higher and Middle Management. The sooner management supports the network, the better. In this fashion the management shows that they find LHBT-acceptance at the workplace important. Next to that, their 'Go' helps to generate support within the rest of the organisation, not to mention the mental support you will encounter, which will encourage you to persevere and to conquer any opposition from within the company. Management support often starts with finding one single person, either part of- or affiliated to the management, who is willing to commit himself to the network as a dedicated sponsor. These sponsors are often not LHBT themselves. In which case such an ally is referred to as a 'straight ally'.

You will need HRM in the formation of a varied board. HRM staff can help and advise in finding the right board members. After all, they have an understanding of the workforce and might have even played an advisory role in the formation of the women- or youth-networks.

Involving HRM in the LHBT-network also ensures that this department gets acquainted to LHBT, thus creating the possibility that LHBT may become part of their diversity policy. Besides HRM staff it is also advisable to get in contact with other departments and key staff who are involved with diversity policy, like: confidants, an ARBO- or company doctor, the employee council, the union consultant and the Compliance & Integrity department. In order to get your colleagues excited about your plans, you can have individual meetings and/or provide amazing presentations on the subject of objectives, vision and strategy of the LHBT-network.

Role model

A role model can initiate openness about LHBT. For example, in a monthly company magazine there was an interview with its CEO, which was accompanied by a photo of this CEO and her wife. Some reactions were negative, but the majority were heart-warming. The publication of their photo was not merely an excellent way to observe the prevailing outlook on LHBT in a different perspective -and to discuss it-, but it also gave birth to a role model for LHBT in general, and for lesbian women in particular. LHBT-colleagues stated that they drew much support from the photo and the accompanying article.

Contact with employer-networks

Chances are that within the company that you work for, there already exists an active women- or young professional-network. Their board members can tell you how they established their network, what works and what doesn't. Keep in mind, and as stated before, each company is different and has its own culture. Do's and Don'ts from experts thus become valuable information. They also know which members of management support diversity and who possibly oppose diversity networks, how you can get news published on the intranet, or in the company magazine, and whether the marketing department is aware of the marketing value of diversity-networks. In other words; there is no need to reinvent the wheel.

Next to that, a growing number of companies in the Netherlands already possess an LHBT-network. The Company Pride Platform plays a significant role in this development.

This platform for LHBT-policy has grown from three to over twenty LHBT-employee networks, in companies and government agencies, since its foundation in 2007. This rapid growth shows, that not only more and more LHBT-employees, but also businesses and government alike, acknowledge the need for visibility and social acceptance of LHBT at the workplace.

Approaching companies

Approach the LHBT-networks of other companies. Ask the chair or a board member for an individual meeting, presentation or invite him/her to a network drink. Or get somebody from the Company Pride Platform in touch with your (HR)manager. Herewith you provide leverage, for yourself and your network lobby. Also, the chair of an LHBT-network, from a company that operates in the same sector as the company you work for, might be able to paint a realist picture of what the network yields, for both employees and the company.

Next to that, the FNV has fought actively for equal rights and treatment of LHBT-employees, for decades. FNV unions such as; Abvakabo, Aob and Npb have an active network of executives. Them too, you can contact -either via the Trade union Federation or via the union that holds your membership- for advice and support. Another manner of external support in founding is the so-called 'business quality index', a type of criterion for companies in the area of (LHBT-)diversity and LHBT-marketing of companies in the same field. The Company Pride Platform, together with the FNV, are developing a so-called 'benchmark' in which companies are questioned about specific LHBT-policy. The results from this are subsequently compared to other companies in order to reach an index.

Name and logo

A new fitting name and an appealing logo belong to a new network; this proves beneficial to the noticeability and recognisability of the network. It's important to devise a name and to design (or have it designed) a logo that indicates that this is 'your' company and that it is an LHBT-network. Sometimes an external designer is hired in order to design the logo, but mostly name and logo are concocted by the board members together with the Communication department. They ensure that the design is in unison with the corporate identity and that it fits the existing PR-strategy and external communication.

As to the recognisability of LHBT most companies revert to expressions like; pride, pink and rainbow. Some examples: Pink Pearl (Shell), GayNB (DNB), Over the Rainbow (KLM) Trainbow (NS) and TNT Pride.

Familiarity

Obviously, the joyful news of the birth of an LHBT-network needs as much publicity as possible. Clear internal communication via intranet, the company's magazine or messages on bulletin boards, in elevators, offices and the restaurant, is the quickest way to reach the networks board members and other colleagues. Another efficient technique to publicise the LHBT-network is via a poster campaign.

For example: the diversity-networks of a company internally spread posters as part of the, by Human Resource management organised, 'Diversity-Week'. One depicted a Muslim employee, who was glad that the company had a designated prayer room. Another depicted a young woman: she was pleased that thanks to the fact that the company introduced 'the new way of work', she was able to combine her busy management function with the upbringing of her children. A third poster depicted a man who did not need to keep his partner out of sight; within the company he could be open about his husband. The reaction that this last poster induced, caused quiet some discussion among the staff; people talked openly about the 'Gay-poster'. Much more than about the two other posters. The usefulness and necessity of the LHBT-network was herewith confirmed.

Sailing along

Participating in the Amsterdam Gay Pride has generated verifiable positive attention to the LHBT-networks. For as far as almost all participating companies were concerned, the abundant reactions of both staff and outsiders were positive. Next to that, there was also ignorance, opposition and (official) protest. The reactions were sometimes emotional, fierce, and discriminating in nature. Despite all this, it seems that participating in the Gay Pride has done a lot of good. Because all these reactions made the existing views among staff - on the subject of LHBT- visible, and based upon this visibility a dialog could emerge. Executive sponsors and/or CEO's play an important part in this process.

It might work if one of them, via internal media, would state his commitment to participating in the boat parade and explain why sailing along is important, and how this will contribute to a better diversity-policy within the company. Other means of propagating this policy is by placing the Gay Pride participation in a broader diversity perspective: the boat functions as an internal, and external, marketing- and communication tool. Like so, it advertises the versatility of the company and guarantees the corporate objectives. The core values and fundamentals of the company can express themselves via the boat's decorating. Here too, cooperation may be realized between the LHBT-network and the departments HRM, Marketing and Communication and other networks like: Young professionals- and/or women-networks, resulting in new communication lines and vertical partnerships.

And then: the kick-off

And so we arrive at the time of the first meeting, the kick-off. The brand-new LHBT-network presents itself to the internal organisation. Fantastic, if the management is there to openly support the network. This support can outline itself in a slightly more formal manner: a member of the board of directors, together with the executive sponsor, signing a declaration of ambition. Even better, if representatives from the Company Pride platform and the FNV make an appearance. Then those present will forever remember this network launch as a exceptional, inspiring and successful first meeting.

Social safety and acceptance *The road towards a inclusive work climate*

No network, yet an LHBT-friendly work environment

Is there, within the company that you work for, no possibility of erecting a network because of its corporate situation? Here are some tools for making your work environment a little more LHBT-friendly.

What's not visible, does not exist. In other words: if you want to make LHBT open to discussion at your workplace, then the first step is to express the fact that you are LHBT. Chose a manner of visibility and openness concerning your orientation or gender expression, that suits you and that makes you comfortable. In order not to stray too much from what is desirable in your work environment you take your heterosexual colleagues as an example. If they are commutative about their private life, so should you be.

Your direct manager plays an important role. There are limits to behaviour. If one, or several, colleagues are making jokes, remarks, innuendos or ask you questions of a personal nature, then try to make this discussable. When you discuss issues like this then perhaps you can make your colleagues and manager beware of biased and stereotype reactions to LHBT, regardless whether they are made unwittingly or not. Try and see whether you can resolve this together. If you clearly define your boundaries, they are also visible to your colleagues. Do they have little knowledge of LHBT or LHBT-issues at the workplace? On occasion, ask you manager to assist you in ensuring that gossip and jokes remain within the limits, and whether he's willing to intervene if boundaries are being overstepped.

Is there an active employee-counsel within he organisation? Or a Union representative? Confidant or Human Resource department? With them as well you can discuss LHBT-issues like; wellbeing at the workplace and social acceptance. You can report to those colleagues, especially when there are issues at hand.

Next to internal, you can also contact outside organisations about LHBT at the workplace. For instance the FNV-union that holds your membership. There is a good chance that they have an active pink-executive network. Or the Company Pride Platform, that also offers students, individuals or free-lancers the chance of a membership. The Transgender Network Netherlands and the COC can also advise and support you.

Those that are candid about LHBT can function as a role-model to other LHBT-employees. AN LHBT role-model at work can be a great source of support and inspiration to your other colleagues, LHBT and heterosexual. Your colleagues will appreciate you standing-up for yourself.

It's all about your qualities. You are a good employee, you find joy in your work and you deliver quality. The ability of being yourself at work is important to you, as well as feeling appreciated. Because it are these elements that determine your commitment to work, to your co-workers and to your employer. Coming out works better.

Lesson Learned

Next to best practices there are also a number of lesson learned that existing networks are more than willing to pass on. They are 'Golden Rules' which you can use to your advantage whilst forming your own network.

Remain modest

And then the network has been launched and you, as the initiator, are extremely elated -maybe even a bit euphoric-, partly due to the positive reactions from your surrounding and the support from management. Herein lies the danger of 'overexposure'. Dosage in exposure thus becomes an art-form. So, don't go over the top with excessive amount of flyers, putting up posters everywhere (including places that are less appropriate) or posting on the intranet daily. An LHBT-network is a sensitive issue, much more so than the women- or youth networks. Some colleagues will be of opinion (and will stick to it) that LHBT is a private matter. Subsequently, too much publicity will not help in getting these people on one's side. Allow colleagues time to familiarise themselves with LHBT and the LHBT-network.

Be cautious

Some prudence in the choice of images used as promotional material is required. For example, the initiators of a unnamed network had a really hard time (to say the least) when they used pictures of scarcely clothed men at the Amsterdam Gay pride boat parade, for their flyers. As colleagues associated this with eroticism, they assumed that the network's only goal was organising parties and social activities. It took the chair of that particular network an enormous amount of time explaining that the primary objectives of the network were, in fact, quite different.

Ensure continuity

The organisation of the network has to be transparent to everyone, high ranking and low ranking. After all, it has been founded to defend the interests of all LHBT-employees. Yet, during the course of events, the network's board can become caught-up in adding members of management to the network. Or the network is overly preoccupied with gaining influence on HR management policy advisement, key-staff and external PR-policy. Then the situation can arise where it becomes indistinct what the network does for them in specific.

Moreover, the network's board runs the risk of becoming so entangled with the board of directors that it becomes obstructed by an excessive amount of 'substitution thinking', resulting in a diminishing of the autonomous character of the LHBT-network, up to the point where the LHBT-network board becomes apprehensive in indicating issues that arise at the workplace. Another factor that may render the successes and activities of the network indiscernible to other colleagues, is the arising of a 'like knows like' atmosphere. Contact with the workplace is safeguarded best, if there is excellent and regular communication, whether that be face-to-face, via e-mail or newsletters.

Keep equilibrium

There has to be a certain amount of equilibrium between the different interest that an LHBT-network takes to heart. If all is well, you should ensure that issues like; equal rights and social acceptance of LHBT-colleagues, are balanced to the amount of attention given to the business case of LHBT-acceptance. However, in striving to gain management support for the formation of an LHBT-network, sometimes the LHBT-board is too focused on presenting and promotion of its economical advantages. In some networks this has led to protests from its own LHBT-members. Positive attention to the economical side works best as long as the LHBT-issues at the workplace are not neglected.

Is it ever finished?

Once the LHBT-network is erected and has been firmly anchored in the company. And once it has been included within the diversity-policy, the annual social reports and regular forums, the thought might arise among (HR)managers and the board of directors, that LHBT at the workplace is finally done. Yet, the need for information on LHBT, its clarity and the ability to debate LHBT will remain undiminished in order to guarantee an inclusive working climate. Absolute acceptance of minority groups is a transformation process regarding behaviour, assumptions, and group dynamics. As long as collaboration at the workplace occurs, an inclusive working environment is key.

Gay-Hetero alliance at the workplace

Everyone benefits from a workplace that is socially secure and where each employee is appreciated. After all, the more content employees, the better the work environment. Heterosexual colleagues, so called 'straight allies', can be allies to LHBT-colleagues as means of a positive contribution.

- Ask yourself the following questions: what do you know about LHBT? Do you know any LHBT-colleagues at work? Do you know whether they securely can be their own person at work? What means; 'coming out' at work? Is that scary? What will be the impact if someone is open about LHBT at work? What conditions must one meet in order to create a secure social work climate?
- Don't automatically assume that everyone is heterosexual.
- Those who support LHBT-colleagues contribute to a general feeling of wellbeing at work. Be noticeable as a straight ally. If the workplace is LHBT friendly, you may assume that this environment is also friendly to women, the elderly and non-occidental employees. Remember the canary in the coalmine.
- At work, will you allow that the phrase 'gay' is used in a negative connotation? If there are rumours about colleagues who are deemed 'different'? Speak out if you witness annoying jokes, impertinent questions or harassment.

Do you know any LHBT-colleagues at work?

"I don't know any gay's in my direct surroundings or at work".

5 to 10 percent of the Dutch population is lesbian, homosexual or transgender

Is there a network for LHBT-colleagues at your work?

"I don't think they need it, I've never heard that any gay or lesbian colleagues have a hard time at our work".

40 percent of all LHBT-colleagues are still "closeted" at work

Are lesbians, homosexuals, bi- or transgender colleagues, being fully accepted at your work?

"Of course! As long as they act normal, that is".

40 percent of all lesbian women and 21 percent of homosexual men admit to being subjected at work to ill treatment (gossip, hinder, insecurity, jokes, intimate questions).

Are lesbian, gay, bi, or transgender colleagues part of your company's diversity-policy? Just like women, young professionals and immigrants?

"At this moment, there is little room for this within our HR-policy. We now focus primarily on 'women to the top'".

21 LHBT-networks have been united in the Company Pride Platform. These companies have a diversity-policy for LHBT. A number of these companies have already come quite far in this. The FNV has 19 unions. Pink (framework) is executed primarily at FNV Bondgenoten, ANBO, AOb and the NPB.

How do you feel about LHBT-diversity?

"I would love to deliver a positive contribution to social safety and acceptance. I just don't know how"?

Go to: www.comingoutworksbetter.nl

Business case: the economic advantages of a sound LHBT-policy

An LHBT-employee network has economic advantages for a company. CEO's and higher management of large international companies like IBM, Cisco, KLM and Shell, have been aware of the value of an LHBT-network for a long time. They have realised that the better LHBT-employees are accepted, the higher the success of their diversity-policy. Cost-benefit calculations show that an LHBT-friendly working environment grosses more than its costs. Commissioned by the Ministry of Economic affairs, the research department of the Erasmus University (SEOR) conducted an investigation into the benefits of a gay-friendly work climate for Dutch companies. Some recommendations:

The combination of potential advantages and the low costs of a gay-friendly policy, combined with the increasing diversity in the labour market and the increasing interest in Corporate Social Responsibility, should provide corporations with sufficient incentive for the development of gay-friendly entrepreneurship.

Because fortification of the position of homosexuals on the labour market and the workplace is also of public interest, there is enough ground for the government (and other parties) to stimulate further development of gay-friendly policies.

The economic advantages of a sound functioning LHBT-network are abundant. Here are a few.

- Content employees

Getting noticed, being appreciated and accepted for who you are and the work that you do. That is what everyone wants. If both the direct managers and the top of the organisation show their acceptance by endorsing the LHBT-network, than this will directly influence the amount of work satisfaction. Furthermore, an organisation that facilitates an LHBT-network at the workplace may count on a very committed LHBT-employee.

“When during my job interview, I was told about the various networks active within the company, I immediately became very enthusiastic, and I knew: this is where I want to work! It’s great that my new employers support the LHBT-network!”

The LHBT-employee is capable of influencing his immediate work environment and thus, by means of communication with policymakers, influence the culture, procedures and policy of the organisation and management. This is also referred to as ‘driven change’.

- Less health-related absenteeism and staff turnover

Minority stress and the constant monitoring of whether a environment is secure, can have an adverse consequences to the wellbeing and commitment of the LHBT-employee. It can lead to health-related absenteeism and in some case to job termination.

“looking back at my former job, I realise that my burn-out and quitting, definitely had to do with the fact that I was still closeted. The fact that I had to be constantly vigilant about what I could say -and couldn’t- gave me stress, drew immense energy and ultimately took my health”.

- Increased productivity and quality

Committed staff is productive and enhances the quality of corporate performance, which may lead to a rise in turnover. A positive work climate, LHBT-included, can give rise to creativity and innovation.

- Appealing to employees

A company that proclaims (LHBT) diversity in its job advertisement (“...a diverse workforce is important to us...”), is appealing to a larger number of potential applicants. In times of obsolescence and labour market scarcity it is of major importance that employers enhance their attractiveness.

- Reputation of Corporate Social Responsibility-friendly companies.

“By sailing along during the Gay Pride, we sent a strong message to our clients, suppliers and into the world. By utilising the diversity theme, our LHBT-network has, in cooperation with the other networks, delivered a enormous performance, that gave us a great deal of positive response.

- A diverse workforce

An LHBT-network can make the hitherto invisible, visible. If there are LHBT-employees in the organisation. This enlarges the staff diversity yet a little.

“During a first meeting of the network, I noticed how diverse and colourful the group of employees is. It shows a wonderful cross-section of the organisation.”

Positive contribution to organisation objectives

The realisation of organisation objectives is often focused on quality, profit and well-being. Optimal performance from every employee is key in achieving these objectives. Moreover, the LHBT-network will be able to provide positive feedback on core organisations values such as integrity, cooperation and transparency.

- A better diversity-policy

The LHBT-network shows, both internally and externally, that the company has an active diversity and inclusion policy. By showing commitment to the LHBT-network, the employer demonstrates that his diversity-policy also applies to the more complex diversity groups within the organisation.

- In direct touch with the shop floor

Employer-networks are an excellent way of being in direct touch with the shop floor. A network forms a non-hierarchical cross-section of the organisation.

Better communication

Policy makers and management are directly informed by the LHBT-network members about what is happening on the shop floor. How is the visibility of LHBT, what are the personal stories behind it all (coming out, treatment, etc), how do the non-LHBT colleagues respond? This information provides a realistic image of the shop floor atmosphere. Moreover, higher management gains direct insight into how -and or-, the diversity policy works in day-to-day practice. Vice versa, this exchange enables the network members to obtain a better view into corporate process- and decision making.

From practice: LHBT-issues at the shop floor

The seats remain empty

A young man works at the mailroom of a large financial institution in the capital. He has worked in his current position for over year. His colleagues continuously ridicule him about him being gay. When during lunch one of his colleagues jokingly remarks "I'm not going to sit next to a gay", the seats to his left and right are -accompanied by thunderous laughter- kept vacant. His manager is also present at the table.

What started as a one-off joke, quickly turned into a situation where the seats to his left and right remained vacant for many months after. To the outside world, the boy shrugs his shoulders about this situation, he's gotten used to it by now. Yet, at the same time he finds the behaviour of his colleagues awful. He realises that he feels angry and upset and reluctantly goes to work every day. He does not wish to discuss this situation with his manager as he himself is an every day part of this drollery.

He has also little faith in the confidant, personnel officer of other members of management. Besides that, he does not want to become known as a 'problem' or as the 'pathetic gay'. Once, he joined a network-drink, but he felt little at home in between all the 'suits'.

Business diner without her

A management team goes on a business trip abroad for a week. One of the managers has been employed since two months. Once abroad she starts to notice that two of her colleagues are avoiding her. She is somewhat in doubt about her own observations at first, but when, whilst on business trip, she learns of a business diner to which she was not invited, her feelings are confirmed. She tries to focus on the job at hand and refuses to admit to feelings of amazement and outrage. After all, she is relatively new to the team and is not quite sure what causes the behaviour of the two women. Upon her return, she discusses this matter with a colleague. She thus learns that just prior to the trip, her two management colleagues found out about her marriage to another woman and had reacted quite appalled. They stated that due to their Christian religion, they had problems with her sexual orientation and that as such, they preferred not to cooperate with her, or have her as a team member for that matter. She attempts to discuss this matter with her two colleagues, but they decline. When she involves her own manager, he states that these two particular ladies have an excellent track record and have been in service of the company for a long time. *(note page numbers..)*

Just get to it

He further states that her sexual orientation is to be a private matter and that the opinions of her colleagues are, personal opinions. He decides that the matter does not belong at the shop floor and requests all involved to return to work as usual. The manager is extremely disappointed, calls in sick and in the end, never returned to work.

Male employee becomes female employee.

An office employee tells his manager that this year, he wishes to use a long summer holiday for a so called 'transition'. The employee wishes to become a woman and explains the emotional and practical issues that came to pass during recent years, which ultimately led to this decision. Emotional, because the employee had to inform his wife and three children, family and friends about his transgender desires, and because such a sex change operation requires certain strategy and loads of planning. Straight after the meeting the manager contacts the company doctor, the confidant and the HR-manager. Together with the employee they draw up a plan in which the responsibilities of both the employee and the company are stated and defined. Three weeks prior to the summer holiday, as pre-arranged with the employee, the manager calls a department meeting, during which he informs the staff about the transition plans of the employee. He adds that he counts on his staffs understanding and cooperation and that he, and the employee, are more than happy to answer any questions. After the summer holiday the employee returns back to the office. The majority of the reactions of her colleagues are compassionate and interested, yet there are some less positive reactions too. The latter are, as agreed, discussed by the manager and the colleagues in question. After a few months everyone is accustomed to the situation and its business as usual.

Role of HRM

In most cases diversity-policy is the direct responsibility of the Human Resource Management (HRM) department. The promotion of visibility and social acceptance of LHBT is not only the responsibility of the members of the LHBT-network, but also of HRM.

That is why it is important that HRM is familiar with LHBT at the shop floor and realises that an inclusive working climate, for both employees and organisation, is essential. Especially on the subject of LHBT, it sometimes happens that this does not effectively penetrate the organisation but remains stuck in the higher policy regions. Procedures might be drafted by HRM and the LHBT-network, but subsequently miss-out on connecting to the shop floor.

Training can ensure that HRM-officers are well informed about for instance, 'being invisible' and other LHBT-issues. This training can be provided by members of the LHBT-networks or by individual LHBT-members acting as field experts. The Company Pride Platform, as well as the FNV, can also play a part in this.

HRM Checklist

Meetings with HRM-officials from different companies and organisations have resulted in a list of tools that can support HRM departments during the promotion of LHBT- acceptance.

Company Quick scan

A sort of measuring instrument to assess companies diversity-policies for the LHBT-target groups. There are several quick scans available via internet, among others; scans from TNO and Forum, who quickly and effectively show the status of diversity within the organisation. These quick scans can be upgraded with specific LHBT-questions.

MTO/MBO employee survey

In order to assess the atmosphere at the shop floor this survey enables specific questions relating to LHBT-safety and acceptance.

Corporate vision and strategy

Define LHBT-diversity and incorporate this with other diversity groups in the corporate vision and strategy.

MVO diversity-policy

Incorporating the diversity-policy in the Corporate Social Responsibility (MVO) allows the company to broadly anchor this in the organisation.

Positive Code of Conduct

The drafting of a code of conduct, and having it signed by each employee, can make people aware of the fact that the company takes its diversity-policy serious.

Annual social report

Incorporate all diversity-networks and their activities, including any entries, in the annual social report.

Recruitment

Consistently incorporate in recruitment advertisements, that the organisation gives importance to a diverse workforce. Job vacancies can be published in specific media and on sites also. Always ask during job interviews, whether the applicant is used to handle diversity.

Performance- or exit interview

LHBT-issues should be addressed during performance- or exit interviews. With the employee should be discussed what could be improved in his -or her- work situation. During an exit interview with an LHBT-employee, who no longer feels at home in the company, due to his -or her- LHBT nature, this issue should be addressed also.

Regular consultation

HRM-officials, confidants, company doctors and LHBT company-network chairs, keep an eye out on the LHBT-situation, via regular consultation.

Work shop

Taking the workshop can support HRM-officials, executive managers, confidants, company doctors and Works Council members in the establishment and execution of LHBT-policy.

How to...

A complimentary information set containing movies and case examples is available at: www.comingoutworksbetter.nl

Coming out works better!

The workshop LHBT, the canary in the coalmine.

Company Pride Platform and FNV collectively started a workshop. It is meant for managers -from HRM, ICT and facility, to technical or legal departments- who wish to know what an inclusive shop floor entails. Direct managers or executive managers, play an important role in the augmentation of social acceptance on the shop floor. After all, they are the ones who are in charge daily, and as such influence the work climate. At this point, support from the top is important. In the day to day execution of core values and corporate objectives it is the executive manager that monitors employee behaviour and interaction on the shop floor. For example, he -or she- can adjust offensive behaviour.

1.

Diversity at the shop floor is a reality. LHBT-employees are less obviously 'visible'. This makes it harder to regulate maltreatment of this group. Better understanding of, and knowhow about, this diversity group can measurably enhance safety and social acceptance at the shop floor.

2.

5 To 10 percent of the total population is LHBT. The shop floor is a reflection of society.

3.

30 Percent of the lesbian women and 21 percent of the homosexual men state that they are confronted with maltreatment at work. The result of maltreatment has a direct, or indirect effect on the well being of the LHBT-employee. The work shop provides a better understanding of these kind of processes and shows a manager how to correct.

4

The separation between work and private life has faded due to the flexibility of the labour market. Via Facebook, Hyves and LinkedIn, colleagues also gain a better insight into each other's personal life.

5

The 'New Way of Work', is becoming increasingly implemented into Dutch shop floors. The office is no longer the most obvious place of work. Work can be done from home, on the road and outside of office hours.

The duration of the workshop is about 2 hours.

Order this workshop? www.comingoutworksbetter.nl

LHBT Laws- and regulations and politics

There are various national and international laws regarding equal treatment and discrimination.

Article 1 of the Constitution

Article 1 of the constitution states: 'All that reside in the Netherlands, are equally treated in equal circumstances. Discrimination based on religion, philosophy of life, political affiliation, ethnicity, gender or any other ground, is not permitted. Article 1 is further elaborated upon in the General law equal treatment (Awgb).

In may of 2010, member of parliament Boris van der Ham, submitted an initiative bill to adjust article 1 of the Constitution. This bill is co-signed by GroenLinks former member of the House of Commons, Naima Azough and PvdA member of the House of Commons, Anja Timmer. In 1983, during the debate on the constitution, the deliberate choice was made to explicitly name 5 discriminatory grounds -religion, philosophy of life, political affiliation, ethnicity and gender- as anticipatory suspected grounds of discrimination. Van der Ham, Azough and Timmer wish to add 'disabled' and 'hetero- or homosexual orientation'.

General law equal treatment

In the General law equal treatment (Awgb) it is stated that direct and indirect discriminating is prohibited. Direct discrimination means that someone is, for instance, rejected for a job on grounds of skin colour or for wearing a kerchief. Indirect discrimination is often much harder to recognise. For example, someone is rejected for a position as a cleaner because he -or she- does not speak Dutch, although it's not really a job requirement. In practice such a unnecessary language demand is deemed discriminatory, as certain groups are thus excluded. According to the Awgb, discriminating in, among others, admittance to restaurants or discotheques and at work is illegitimate. This manual is confined to work and income.

The law has one important exemption. Groups that are disadvantaged, may be awarded a minute advantage in order to reduce or eliminate inequality. During staff recruitment, priority may be given to employees from minority groups and/or women as they are underrepresented in the labour market.

The FNV send a letter to the House of Commons about the revision of the Awgb in 2009. The FNV focuses primarily on the so called, 'single fact-construction' that provide inadequate protection to homosexual employees in religious institutions. The 'single fact-construction' means that people may not be rejected, based solely on the fact that they are gay, or engage in homosexual relationships. Yet, 'circumstantial conditions' do make this refusal possible. For example, based on the 'single fact-construction', organisations with a religious foundation are allowed to banish a teacher from school because of 'circumstantial conditions'. In this case, the fact that the teacher openly confesses his sexual preference, and in doing so violates the foundation of the organisation, would be considered 'circumstantial conditions'. Some other examples: joining the Gay Pride, membership to a gay-organisation or openly discussing living with your partner during class. The FNV believes that some 'circumstantial conditions' should be abolished. The European Committee questions the legal exemptions on the ban on discrimination. These legal exemptions regard, among others, the safeguard of privacy and the freedom of religious associations. The by Boris van der Ham submitted initiative bill is being endorsed, by not only GroenLinks and the PvdA but also by SP and VVD, and has hence a parliament majority. Council of State has to render its advice, before the initiative bill can be discussed in parliament.

Civil law and Criminal law

The General law equal treatment is covert by Civil law. Citizens can take legal action to one another if they are of the opinion that something transpired outside the law. For example, often it is possible to claim damages rendered. Next to Civil law there is Criminal law, under which a citizen can file charges with the police after which the authorities will come into action. A fine, or even incarceration might follow.

Penal code

Also in the Penal code, there are several anti-discrimination articles of law. For example, that discrimination based upon ethnicity is prohibited. In these article is dealt with misconduct, abuse and the provoking of hate towards other groups.

For example: distribution of discriminatory folders or chanting slogans against foreigners. Next to this, as discotheque owner or landlord, it is illegal to discriminate against people.

Equal Rights Committee

In situations that are contrary to the General law equal treatment, one may call upon the Equal Right Committee (CGB). The findings of the committee are not binding. They offer advice, but people are not legally obligated to respect this. This in contrast to the verdict of a regular judge, to whose verdict both employees and employers must abide. Yet, the advice of the committee is usually taken to heart, and judges often incorporate the committees advice into their verdict. Not always though, like in the case of the applicant from Rotterdam, who based on his religious beliefs, refuses to shake hands with women. He was hence rejected for the position he applied for. The committee ruled that in this particular case unequal treatment applied. The city counsel of Rotterdam disagreed with the committees findings, and took the case to court. The judge decided that the city counsel of Rotterdam had acted correctly.

European and International law

As a member of the European Union, the Netherlands have to abide to the rules drawn up by the EU member states in Brussels. In the treaty of Amsterdam it is stated that discrimination is prohibited. All EU member states have to ensure that their national laws and regulations in reference to racial discrimination, meet the demands of the European Union. All UN member states have to rapport bi-annually about their country's state of affairs. An equality command and a discrimination prohibition, both based on ethnicity, are defined in the International Treaty regarding Civil rights and Political rights. In the European Human Rights Treaty it is stated that the rights and liberties mentioned in this treaty, must be ensured, without distinction on whatever grounds.

Sources and bibliography

Transgenders en Werk, een onderzoek naar de arbeidssituatie van transgenders in Nederland en Vlaanderen (*Transgenders and Work, research into the work situation of transgenders in the Netherlands and Flanders*)

In 2010, the Centre of Expertise for sexuality Rutgers Nisso Group, commissioned Paul Venix to research transgenders and work

Verklaring van Amsterdam (*Declaration of Amsterdam*) On July 1st 2011, The Company Pride Platform presented the declaration of Amsterdam.

The declaration of Amsterdam calls employers, employees, unions and the government to develop a joint measurable benchmark for a gay-friendly shop floor. The declaration contains ten points of action for employers and employees, that need to be imbedded in corporate policies in order to create a comfortable work environment for LHBT-employees.

Voordelen van een homovriendelijk werkklimaat voor het Nederlandse bedrijfsleven (*advantages of a gay-friendly work climate for Dutch businesses*)

In 2010 the Ministry of Economic Affairs commissioned the independent research institute of the Erasmus University SEOR to conduct an inquiry into the advantages of a gay-friendly work climate for Dutch businesses.

The inquiry's outcome into the economic advantages that are to be gained by improving the work climate for LHBT-employees are published in this report.

The publication contains the following topics

Business case: theoretical clarification;

Literature: potential of a business case;

Analysis based upon existing data;

Policy design.

Discrimination is Not the Word

In 2009 the Equal Treatment Committee commissioned the Verwij-Jonker institute to research the subject of rebuff at a municipality, a hospital and a transport- and communication company, in order to ascertain the possibilities that homosexual (m/f) employees have to raise discrimination issues at work.

This publication contains the following subjects:

Literature research

Research at three employers: a municipality, a hospital and a transport- and communication company.

Just get to it: social safety at the workplace for homosexual men and lesbian women.

The current (2011) administration has the enhancement of LHBT-safety at the forefront in their LHBT-policy. At the request of the Rutte-administration, the SCP reports on current situations regarding LHBT-social safety at work.

Face the facts: literature research homosexuality and labour

In 2009 MOVISIE (centre of expertise and consultancy for social development) outlined all the research on homosexuality and labour that has been published during the last decades. An upgraded version of this literature research was published in 2011.

Corporate networks: Natural Allies for Human Resource Management

The company Pride platform commissioned Lin McDevitt-Plugh to research the role of LHBT-networks as allies to human resource departments in 2009.

Accountability

This 'Best Practices for an LHBT-network' manual is part of 'LHBT at the shop floor', a joint-effort project of the Company Pride Platform (CPP) and FNV.

The success- and failure factors contributing to LHBT-networks have been researched by means of extensive research-interviews with members of the Company Pride Platform. LHBT-networks are an important source of knowhow and information, because they have often already succeeded in acquiring a position within the corporate culture. Besides these, interviews took place with active executives from FNV and FNV-Pink networks. In order to test the effectiveness of these success- and failure factors in daily practice, close contact was kept with companies that were either in the midst of founding a network, or were planning to found a network for the duration of the entire project.

Interviews with LHBT-employees, HRM (diversity)managers, key-staff like confidants and company doctors and others involved, provided a realistic outlook on the current LHBT-shop floor climate and the manner in which an LHBT-employee network can provide safety at work for all LHBT-employees.