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The value of LGBTQ+ Diversity and Inclusion in the workplace

In this article, Prof Debolina Dutta and Prof Vasanthi Srinivasan of IIM Bangalore examine the business imperatives for LGBTQ+ inclusion and the initiatives and commitment needed to build a truly inclusive culture.

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Key Takeaways

- HR managers need to recognize that

there are arguments which are beyond the business case

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that need to be brought in when diversity decisions are made.

- If managerial processes are robust and fair, organizations will reflect the diversity in societies.
- If HR processes are inclusive, they will provide access and opportunity to potential applicants and internal employees, and the employee pool will become more diverse.
- Diverse teams provide higher opportunities for learning and ideation and tend to make decisions that incorporate multiple perspectives.
- **LGBTQ+** inclusive culture requires D&I accountability with a senior leader, infrastructure support, enabling HR Information System and partnerships with external entities.
- All diversity conversations need to go beyond the business case and talk about equity, justice and rights.

As the **Diversity and Inclusion** agenda gains momentum through both regulatory enforcements and normative changes in society, HR leaders are called up to play advisory roles to the business.

HR practices have often been shaped by external market demands and internal financial and organizational constraints and opportunities. Rarely have the dimensions of equity, justice and inclusivity been the criteria while making people's decisions. It is in this changed context that the case on LGBTQ+ inclusion at Thoughtworks assumes salience.

Thoughtworks, a mid-sized IT global consulting firm, has undertaken multiple initiatives and introduced progressive policies to demonstrate its support toward the LGBTQ+ community. However, LGBTQ+ inclusion has also created dilemmas for the organization. Our case examines the business imperatives for LGBTQ+ inclusion and the initiatives



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and commitment needed to build a truly inclusive culture.

An interesting point that HR managers are often asked is about whether there is a business case for diversity.

Several consulting reports and studies have demonstrated the business case for gender diversity. However, as an HR manager, it is important to recognize that there are arguments which are beyond the business case that need to be brought in when diversity decisions are made.

Three important paradigms can inform HR decisions from a diversity perspective: the **Fairness paradigm** which argues that if the managerial processes are robust and fair, organizations should reflect the diversity in societies. Are our recruitment and selection processes inclusive?

A second paradigm is about **access and legitimacy**. If our HR processes are indeed inclusive, they should provide access and opportunity to potential applicants and internal employees. Therefore, automatically the employee pool will become more diverse and finally the **learning and effectiveness** paradigm.

It is recognized in team literature that diverse teams are known to provide higher opportunities for learning and ideation and tend to make decisions that can incorporate multiple perspectives. It is also known that higher levels of diversity are related to increased conflict and managing conflict is a key capability in such contexts.

The above mentioned three paradigms allow HR practitioners to shape the narrative of inclusion and inclusive cultures in organizations in a more meaningful way.

The Thoughtworks case clearly shows that **LGBTQ+ inclusive cultures require strong structural and behavioural**

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interventions. The structural mechanisms include strong D&I responsibility and accountability with a senior leader, infrastructure support like gender-neutral washrooms, enabling Human Resource Information System (HRIS) to acknowledge the appropriate pronoun, and partnerships with external entities to sensitize and create awareness within the organization.

Additionally, supportive policies such as health coverage, gender-neutral anti-sexual harassment, gender transition support, and employee assistance programmes will be needed. The Behavioural Interventions include the creation of affinity groups, ongoing awareness and sensitization initiatives, purpose-led leadership, value-based interviews for the selection process, and sharing of stories of inclusion, empowerment and change.

The case also deals with tensions and dilemmas that organizations face when they champion the diversity agenda: sometimes business imperatives may be in conflict with the inclusion agenda; all leaders walking the talk and internalizing the values of inclusion may not be the reality; employees could share information about the cause which could be misconstrued in the social media as organization position. How organizations resolve these tensions and dilemmas will determine employee perceptions of a strong or weak culture of inclusivity.

HR leaders play a pivotal role in reframing and shaping the organizational decision-making narrative by using the three paradigms mentioned above. Finally, HR needs to ensure that all diversity conversations go beyond the business case and talk about equity, justice and rights.

The LGBTQ+ and the inclusion agenda offer an opportunity for HR leaders to tie in to the board agenda as the building blocks of the “S” in the ESG (Environment, Social and

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The authors, Debolina Dutta and Vasanthi Srinivasan, are Professors in the Organizational Behaviour & Human Resources Management Area at IIM Bangalore.

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A three-pronged approach to address diversity issue

Ever since hybrid and remote models of working have become the new normal, experts say it is important for organisations to know how diverse employees across demographic groups, genders, life stages and geographies experience company culture in terms of inclusion.

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Shailesh Singh, Chief People Officer of Max Life Insurance, shares four major initiatives that the company took to ensure a diverse workplace and reached a feat of having 45 per cent of sales agents as women, which he says, is "the highest in the Indian life insurance sector".

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GlobalLogic launches Women Influencers Program to promote greater gender diversity

As part of the company's focus on DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion), GlobalLogic is aiming for greater diversity at all levels in the workforce across gender, sexual orientation, colour, ethnic origin, age and ability, according to a statement.

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Court blocks California law to put more women on corporate boards

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Maureen Duffy-Lewis imposed an injunction against Senate Bill 826, which former Governor Jerry Brown signed into law in 2018 at the height of the #MeToo movement exposing harassment and abuse against women in the workplace.

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Japan's Recruit sees more female executives as key to growth

The push for more women at the upper levels of Japan's largest staffing agency is part of a diversity drive to ensure a flow of bright business ideas, said Chief Operations Officer Ayano "Sena" Senaha, its most senior female executive.

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Goldman Sachs boosts recruiting team in push to meet diversity goals

The bank has added roughly 25 new recruiters focused on hiring diverse employees since the beginning of the year, bringing the team up to 50 people.

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Justice Raja Vijayaraghavan V was considering a petition (WP-C No. 26904/2021) filed by three contract employees of Kerala University of Health Sciences (KUHS) questioning denial of maternity benefits.

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Ireland introduces gender pay gap reporting

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