

Coming out at work is not a one-off event

August 16 2018, by Raymond Trau



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

For many LGBTIQ+ workers coming out is a never-ending process. A recent study in the UK shows [coming out at work is still a problem](#). [Our research](#), to be [launched in Sydney on August 27](#), supports this finding and further unpacks the reasons for these continuing difficulties.

As LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/gender diverse, people with intersex variations, and queer) individuals navigate their careers, meet

and work with new people, enter new workplaces and change their jobs, they continually face the dilemma of whether to come out at work. Even those who feel comfortable about their sexual orientation or gender identity need to assess this decision carefully because discrimination against LGBTIQ+ workers still prevails in some workplaces.

Why does coming out matter so much?

Unlike women and minority groups, LGBTIQ+ individuals hold an invisible identity that they can hide to avoid prejudice and discrimination at work. However, being able to hide their identity can also be a curse.

Research shows that not being authentic at work can increase [stress](#) and reduce [satisfaction](#). For LGB workers, hiding [sexual orientation](#) leads to [disengagement and dissatisfaction](#) at work. A similar dynamic applies to trans and gender-diverse employees who experience lower levels of satisfaction with their job when they are [misgendered by co-workers](#).

Then why don't people come out?

Participants in our research told us that, while coming out is important to them, the decision to come out is not always a real choice because the fear of negative consequences often constrains them.

At work, people are often calculating the consequences of their actions. They only take actions that lead to positive outcomes and avoid actions that lead negative outcomes. For many LGBTIQ+ workers, [coming out often presents both social and career risks](#). Research continues to show that LGBTIQ+ workers face considerable disadvantages at work, including [fewer job opportunities](#).

Many LGBTIQ+ workers also live in fear that coming out might adversely impact their relationship with co-workers. Workers who have experienced discrimination in previous jobs have an even [greater fear of discrimination and are less likely to come out](#).

The workplace or occupational environment may affect the decision to come out or not. Some LGBTIQ+ workers even [avoid jobs that require interactions with other people](#) so they don't have to grapple with this decision.

Coming out is complicated

The decision to come out is often a "Catch-22" situation – many LGBTIQ+ workers are damned if they do (e.g. facing discrimination) and damned if they don't (e.g. the anxiety of not living authentically). Unfortunately, LGBTIQ+ workers continue to live throughout their lives and careers with this dilemma of why, when, to whom, where and how to come out.

Coming out is never a one-off event. It is a repetitive process, particularly when one meets new co-workers or supervisors, or starts a new job. It involves juggling multiple tactics, based on different audiences and environments, and weighing up different social and professional risks and rewards.

This all happens at different times during their career and even [multiple times during a week](#). One participant in our research reflected: "You have to come out again, and again, and again, and again..."

Inclusive culture is the key

We measured the inclusiveness of respondents' workplaces and,

ultimately, [our study](#) revealed it was having an LGBTIQ+ inclusive culture that makes LGBTIQ+ people feel safe to be themselves at work and able to have a real choice about being out at work.

Previous workplace research shows an [inclusive culture encourages LGBTIQ+ people to be out at work](#). This also increases [their commitment and career satisfaction](#).

Organisations with an inclusive workplace culture are [employers of choice for LGBTIQ+ employees](#) because they have a sense of belonging and feel their uniqueness is valued and respected. In these organisations, LGBTIQ+ employees feel they are an integral part of the organisation and their identity or status is respected.

Simply recognising the existence of LGBTIQ+ workers through workplace policies can make a huge difference to the [workplace experience](#). [Using inclusive language or including LGBTIQ+ employees in policies and practices](#) enhances their positive attitudes towards their employer.

Being supportive of LGBTIQ+ colleagues can make [a positive difference](#) to their coming out experience. Working in an inclusive culture means that everyone is inclusive of all groups, and that we can make a difference to the lived experiences of all workers.

Also, being inclusive means organisations need to have inclusive and bold leaders. They are willing to take a stand and to call out homophobia, transphobia, biphobia and intersexism, even if it comes from important stakeholders such as potential and current clients or customers.

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Coming out at work is not a one-off event (2018, August 16) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-08-one-off-event.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.