National College of Ireland

Exploring LGBTQ+ Workplace Experiences in Ireland to Inform

Human Resource Management Approaches

By Tara Adams

Abstract

The research qualitatively explored the workplace experiences of LGBTQ+ employees in Ireland to inform HRM diversity policies and practices surrounding this talent group. Fourteen queer employees were interviewed using semi-structured interviews and the data were combined with existing literature on the LGBTQ+ workforce. The problem the research addressed is the lack of research on these experiences in general, the apparent complete lack of data concerning this subset of talent in the Irish context, and the subsequent deficit of information available at the disposal of HRM to adapt to changing social dynamics as a result. While Ireland has become more socially liberal and legislation has increased workplace equality, the narratives of the LGBTQ+ employees at the recipient end of diversity management is largely absent. These narratives are necessary to inform HRM approaches.

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Introduction

The literature on LGBTQ+ experiences in the workplace is limited but provides a solid foundation for the complexities of managing a stigmatized identity for LGBTQ+ individuals and why it is of interest to business. These experiences in Irish workplaces are apparently completely lacking from existing literature. This research intended to overcome this dearth of data, and the presumed deficit of information available to HRM, in order to best inform HRM approaches to this talent group.

The Irish Context

The LGBTQ+ community is a minority, but a quite a large minority. There are currently no official census data on the numbers of LGBTQ+ people in Ireland, but according to survey data compiled by the Oireachtas – the Irish legislature – those who self-identify as LGBTQ+ range from 1.2%-7% of the population in Ireland; equivalent to 45,000-262,800 individuals. Additional data which measured those who experience attraction or sexual activity considered LGBTQ+ raises these figures to 10.8% of the population or the equivalent of 405,500. (Oireachtas, 2019) For context, the Irish population in 2021 was estimated to be 5.01 million. (CSO, 2021)

A historically predominantly socially conversative country, cultural attitudes in Ireland have undergone a profound liberal shift with growing acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. Sex between people of the same gender was legalised in 1993 and the referendum for marriage equality for LGBTQ+ individuals was voted in favour of by the electorate in 2015. The Gender Recognition Act 2015 allowed transgender people in Ireland to change their legal gender via a gender recognition certificate, and adoption rights for LGBTQ+ parents were guaranteed in Ireland in 2017. (Stonewall, 2019)

In the workplace, the Employment Equality Act 1998, made illegal discriminatory employment practices on the basis of sexual orientation amongst other protected categories. (Ibid) Though trans people weren't addressed directly under the act, the Equality Tribunal has interpreted discrimination against trans people in the workplace to be forbidden under the other protected categories, specifically disability and gender. (IHREC, 2011)

According to survey data, the rates of LGBTQ+ employees out to some or all colleagues at work has been growing, but despite liberal trends in Irish society, survey data suggests continued high rates of homophobic and transphobic discrimination persist in the form of workplace bullying, verbal abuse, physical assault, and sexual violence directed at members of the LGBTQ+ individuals. (Oireachtas, 2019)

As a small but highly globalized economy, Ireland is influenced by EU legislation which mandates inclusive employment practices (EC, 2008), and by the massive role that US firms play in the Irish market which have brought not just a large number of jobs but also the influence of US human resources practices. (Boucher and Collins, 2002)

LGBTQ+ Experiences

The literature illustrates a number of important themes which contribute to an understanding of the LGBTQ+ experience in the workplace. Of particular importance is the shared experience of discrimination and stigmatization across the LGBTQ+ community but also the unique and contested experience of each subgroup within that categorization, the iterative process of identity management, and the potentially mixed results of the coming out experience.

Despite liberalizing trends in Ireland and much of the world, LGBTQ+ individuals must face heteronormativity in the workplace and in their personal lives, which assumes that an individual is heterosexual by default and that those falling outside that norm are effectively otherized. LGBTQ+ youth generally experience higher rates of absenteeism from school, have few or no role models, and face greater career indecision, which impacts their future careers. Fear of stigmatization for LGBTQ+ adults in the workplace is common and discrimination can take subtle forms even in the presence of diversity policies. For example, indicating one is LGBTQ+ on a job application can lessen one's chances of success. (McFadden, 2015)

Heteronormativity also constructs binary poles of sexual orientation, which then constitute yet further means of stigmatization for others in the LGBTQ+ community. While lesbians and gays might be accepted as individuals who violate a norm, they are understood to be doing a kind of explicable polar opposite. For bisexual people, who can be attracted to varying degrees to multiple genders, this may effectively erase their sexual orientation. (McFadden, 2015)

The literature indicates that bisexual people are often rendered linguistically part of the LGBTQ+ community but made invisible as their specific needs are rarely addressed independent of gays and lesbians. Bisexual people may experience biphobia from monosexuals whether straight or gay and lesbian where their orientation is incorrectly assumed to be a changing phase and lacking legitimacy. (Kollen, 2013)

Cisnormativity, which assumes one's gender identity or gender expression aligns with the gender assignment one received at birth, likewise constructs an additional stigma for trans members of the

LGBTQ+ community who generally suffer greater impacts from discrimination and marginalization than others in the LGBTQ+ community. (Goryunova et al, 2021)

A central part in the lives of many LGBTQ+ people is one's sexuality and/or one's gender identity . The expression of one's identity leads to greater personal and professional fulfilment, but in the presence of the assumptions of heteronormativity and cisnormativity, LGBTQ+ individuals must consistently engage with a process of identity management in social interaction. An LGBTQ+ person needs to weigh the worth and necessity of revealing one's identity against passing as someone who fits the assumed norms. Identity management can take the form of actively fabricating an external identity that normalizes the LGBTQ+ person, avoiding the communication or expression of details that indicate one is LGBTQ+, or actively outing oneself as LGBTQ+. In practice, this process is often used in some combination and requires a lot of internal mental resources. (McFadden, 2015)

The coming out process is often associate with many positive outcomes. An LGBTQ+ individual who has come out may feel greater levels of self-acceptance, higher self-esteem, and even have better physical health. In the workplace, the ability to come out in an accepting environment may lead to greater job satisfaction, commitment to one's role, better relationships with co-workers, higher productivity, and networking opportunities with other LGBTQ+ people. (Salter and Sasso, 2021)

LGBTQ+ people are more likely to come out women, people equal or lower in status hierarchies, other LGBTQ+ people, but the most significant factor whether the person being come out to by an LGBTQ+ person is likely to be positively receptive. (King et al, 2017)

However, integrating an LGBTQ+ identity with a professional identity is not always desired, where one may prefer to normalize their LGBTQ+ status and not make an issue of their identity. (McFadden and Crowley-Henry, 2018) The process may be recursive, effectively reinforcing social norms around sexuality and gender, where coming out is dependent on the creation of the construct that needs to be come out from. (Benozzo et al, 2015)

The Business Case

The significance and value of informing HRM approaches to LGBTQ+ employees rest in the business case for diversity.

The literature indicates that there is a business case for diversity where diversity policies and practices that focus on LGBTQ+ employees improve the bottom line and generate competitive advantage rather than business adapting only to social and cultural change.

With roots in 1960s antidiscrimination legislation, the 1980s and 1990s saw US firms developing equality practices that went beyond federal equality rules. Corporations took the lead over government in developing diversity management because businesses adopting such policies enhanced their performance. (Kelly and Dobbin, 1998)

Fortune 500 companies today overwhelmingly practice diversity management with 91% prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and 83% on the basis of gender identity. (HRC, year unknown)

According to Wang and Schwartz (2010), stock prices were positively associated with diversity policies and that companies with progressive practices had higher stocks than similar companies without these initiatives. The researchers suggest that investors may view companies who practice diversity management more positively, and within the organization itself there may be enhanced ability to recruit and retain talent, increase employee productivity, and potentially open access to new markets.

An economic trend of chronic talent shortages emphasizes the importance of all practices to attract and retain talent. LGBTQ+ talent is more likely to work for a company that practices diversity management and more likely to stay longer at that company (Pichler et al, 2017). LGBTQ+ employees in diverse organisations have a greater sense of perceived organisational support and this creates a desire for reciprocity or to return good treatment in kind. (Day and Greene, 2008) A company accepting of LGBTQ+ employees may also gain competitive advantage by creating an organizational culture and a workforce that's difficult for competitors to imitate. (Pichler et al, 2017)

LGBTQ+ employees at diverse organisations are more likely to be out and tend to have higher rates of job satisfaction (Badgett et al, 2013), which leads to better relationships with co-workers and supervisors and greater productivity (Pichler et al, 2017). These organisations benefit from a variety of life experiences and perspectives (Mallory et al, 2011) that leads to higher innovation and creativity amongst employees, while presenting a brand that is open to new ideas (Day and Greene, 2008)

It is suggested that more diverse organisations have a better brand image amongst the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ people may prefer to purchase from diverse organisations in much the same way they prefer to work such businesses. (Wang and Schwarz, 2010) Market research indicates that LGBTQ+ buying power in the US is close to $1trn. (Witeck, 2016) Separate data for Germany puts this figure at

$201bn and the UK at $150bn, but no data exists for this segment of the Irish consumer market. (Statista, 2015)

In addition to the above organisational factors underpinning the business case for diversity, the literature disputes suggestion that these initiatives are expensive or not worth it. Diversity management is generally a low-cost aspect of the HR function and actual costs are offset by improvements to the bottom line. (Mallory et al, 2011)

Given the business case and the global context of the War for Talent, the need for a robust HRM role in diversity management can be inferred. The literature indicates some of the broad responses that may best fulfil this role, including enforcement of diversity policies, providing for LGBTQ+ employee voice, and addressing each subgroup's individual needs.

Diversity policies signal to all employees the values and beliefs held by an organisation, indicates to non-LGBTQ+ individual how their LGBTQ+ co-workers should be treated, and indicates to LGBTQ+ employees how they expected to be treated on the job. However, the existence of diversity policies alone doesn't create a diverse organisation. Policies need to be communicated frequently and enforced or they run the risk of being interpreted as lip-service. (Webster et al, 2018) A challenge for HRM in meeting this requirement is that discrimination may be informal, less overt, and more deeply rooted in heteronormativity. McFadden and Crowley-Henry (2017) vividly illustrate subtle discrimination experienced by a lesbian woman who's marriage to another woman was not celebrated in the office the same way as her heterosexual co-workers.

LGBTQ+ networks within organisations may be a crucial source of employee voice for LGBTQ+ employees. The networks may provide a sense of social support and an antidote to a feeling of isolation, and perhaps even assist in the process of identity management. Through the network LGBTQ+ employees may have a means of address issues of workplace discrimination either formally or informally. But as previously indicated, some LGBTQ+ people do not wish to be out at work and the presence of a network may make these individuals more silent. Accommodating the needs of LGBTQ+ employees on an individual and group level is indicated. One possible solution to give the silent employee a voice is an anonymous suggestion scheme. (McFadden, 2015)

The literature indicates that individuals within each subgroup within the LGBTQ+ community may need different HR responses to address their needs. For bisexual employees who have a need to be addressed by their employers as distinctly bisexual rather than contained in the LGBTQ+ label, it has been suggested

that communications internal to the business might address this segment of talent specifically. (Kollen, 2013) For transgender employees who often – but not always – go through a much more obvious gender transition process, HR responses might include awareness training for staff and enforcing norms about privacy over medical history. (Goryunova, 2021)

Ireland has become increasingly socially liberal in recent decades and the LGBTQ+ community has gained significant legal protections as a result. Equality legislation and the influence of diversity management trends are expected to have made Irish workplaces more accepting for LGBTQ+ individuals. Discrimination and stigmatization of LGBTQ+ people still exists however and for LGBTQ+ individuals a complex process of identity management and coming out must be managed. Each subgroup different experiences and needs, and bisexual and transgender individuals often have their unique challenges subsumed into a larger LGBTQ+ grouping which may effectively mean monosexual, cisgender, gay men, and lesbian woman. The business case for diversity has been well-established as positive impacts to recruitment and retention, productivity, and access to markets as a result of diversity management practices has been shown to improve stock performance. The literature indicates the approaches available for HR diversity management and outlines the key activities of enforcing inclusion policies, facilitating employee voice, and meeting the particular needs of each subgroup.

Literature Review

The literature on LGBTQ+ experiences in the workplace in general was found to be limited and the lack of data concerning the LGBTQ+ experience in Irish workplaces was identified as a clear gap in the research. To develop an understanding of the current knowledge surrounding LGBTQ+ experiences in Irish workplaces and how this informs HRM, a thorough literature review was performed.

Relevant literature was accessed through the NCI library online initially using keyword searches. For example, the terms: 'LGBTQ+', 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual', 'transgender', were used in combination with 'workplaces', 'human resources', 'HRM', 'diversity and inclusion', 'Ireland', 'employees', and 'workers' to locate initial relevant academic articles. Journals were considered relevant if they focused generally on the following topics: human resource management, diversity and inclusion, general management, organisational behaviour, sexuality and gender, and employer branding. Further sources of literature to review were found in the reference lists to these academic articles to develop an accurate picture of the current knowledge base.

Several key themes indicating the LGBTQ+ experience in the workplace were repeatedly revealed in the literature where the LGBTQ+ community collectively faces certain shared experiences with discrimination and stigmatization, identity management, and the coming out process. More specifically, each subgroup in the LGBTQ+ community faces experiences unique to their cohort, and experiences are also unique to each individual employee. The business case for LGBTQ+ diversity management emerges as a key theme where positive impacts on recruitment and retention, productivity, and the employer brand make LGBTQ+ experiences a concern for the bottom line. A further key theme is the existing state of knowledge surrounding HRM approaches to LGBTQ+ diversity management, or more literally, how HRM strategies and policies fulfil the business case for diversity by meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ employees. These themes were first situated in the Irish context generated from data collected on the LGBTQ+ community and their experiences in the workplace.

The Irish Context

The LGBTQ+ community is a minority but quite a large minority. There are currently no official census data on the numbers of LGBTQ+ people in Ireland, but according to survey data compiled by the Oireachtas (the Irish legislature) those who self-identify as LGBTQ+ range from 1.2%-7% of the population in Ireland; equivalent to 45,000-262,800 individuals. Additional data which measured those who experience attraction considered LGBTQ+ raised these figures to 10.8% of the population or the equivalent of

405,500. (Oireachtas, 2019) For context, the Irish population in 2021 was estimated to be 5.01 million. (CSO, 2021) Comparative figures from the US, where most of the literature on LGBTQ+ diversity management originates, similarly estimate the size of the LGBTQ+ community at 8% or at least 20 million Americans. The US data also indicate that bisexuals are numerically the largest group within the LGBTQ+ community standing at 4% of total, and the percentage of those identifying as transgender is equivalent to 1% of the US population. (HRC, 2021a) The US population in 2022 was estimated to be 332.43 million. (Census, 2022)

A historically predominantly socially conversative country, cultural attitudes in Ireland have undergone a profound liberal shift with growing acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. (Bacik, 2004) Sex between people of the same gender was legalised in 1993 and the referendum for marriage equality for LGBTQ+ individuals was voted in favour of by the electorate in 2015. The Gender Recognition Act 2015 allowed transgender people in Ireland to change their legal gender via a gender recognition certificate and adoption rights for LGBTQ+ parents were guaranteed in Ireland in 2017. In the workplace, the Employment Equality Act 1998, outlawed employment practices that are discriminatory based upon sexual orientation amongst other protected categories. (Stonewall, 2019) Though trans people weren't addressed directly under the act, the Equality Tribunal has interpreted discrimination against trans people in the workplace to be forbidden under other protected categories, specifically disability and gender. (IHREC, 2011)

As a small but highly globalized economy, Ireland is influenced by EU legislation which mandates inclusive employment practices (EC, 2008) and by the massive role that US firms play in the Irish market. American businesses have brought not just many jobs to Ireland, but also the influence of US human resource management practices into the country. (Boucher and Collins, 2002)

LGBTQ+ Experiences

The current state of knowledge of LGBTQ+ experiences in the Irish workplace may be lacking, but following this basis for the Irish context in which LGBTQ+ employees are located the literature not specific to the Irish context provides relevant grounding to understand the LGBTQ+ experience in the workplace. The key themes emerging from the literature are shared experiences around discrimination and stigmatization and identity management, as well as experiences that are unique to each subgroup within the LGBTQ+ community.

Discrimination and Stigmatization

The experience of discrimination and stigmatization is commonplace for LGBTQ+ employees and this phenomenon is widely reported in the available literature.

LGBTQ+ employees may feel in the workplace that they're excluded from typical social interactions, their identity is stereotyped or exoticized, that their presence generates discomfort in others, that discussion that references their identity, e.g. dating, is met with silence, and that have a "marked identity". (Roberts, 2010, p. 668)

According to survey data, continued high rates of homophobic and transphobic discrimination persist in Ireland in the form of workplace bullying, verbal abuse, physical assault, and sexual violence directed at LGBTQ+ individuals. (Oireachtas, 2019) Younger LGBTQ+ people in Ireland, the next generation of employees, overall have significantly higher rates of self-harm, suicidal ideation, attempted suicide, and mental illness than their straight counterparts, which are explicitly linked to discrimination and stigmatization in society more broadly. (LGBTQ+Ireland, 2018) Similar data generated by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention generally posit these effects of discrimination and stigmatization are generally three times as high amongst LGBTQ+ young Americans than their straight counterparts. (CDC, 2019) These data are relevant in understanding what LGBTQ+ employees may have experienced before joining the workforce and also indicates some of the continuing issues they may be experiencing as adults. Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth generally experience higher rates of absenteeism from school, have few or no role models, and face greater career indecision, which impacts their future careers. (McFadden, 2015)

Discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees may be quite subtle and less overt than direct discrimination, such as the marriage of a lesbian colleague not being celebrated in the office as was typical for heterosexual staff (McFadden, 2015) or even the less favourable evaluation of LGBTQ+ job applicants. Bryant-Lees and Kite (2019) found that non-heterosexual job applicants were evaluated "as less hireable, competent and socially skilled" than their straight counterparts.

The phenomenon of heteronormativity is posited at the base of discrimination against, and stigmatization of, LGBTQ+ employees and is understood that an individual is heterosexual by default. (Ibid) Heteronormativity is discussed as a concept borne of a kind of biological determinism where one's physical body must by default lead to a particular gender identity and that gender identity includes. LGBTQ+ individuals, by their non-normative sexual orientation and/or gender identity, pose a challenge to these supposed defaults. The basis therefore for heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia can be found largely in this biologically determinist viewpoint. (Bowring and Brewis, 2009)

Fear of discrimination and stigmatization even in their absence may also be a significant source of stress for LGBTQ+ employees affecting their job satisfaction, productivity, and well-being (McFadden, 2015 and Ragins and Singh, 2007) and they may suffer from what has been identified specifically as "minority stress" where one's identity and ways of being in the world do not fit those of the majority (Huffman et al, 2008, p.238) This kind of stress for LGBTQ+ minorities is similar is some regards to the stress faced by ethnic minorities, but where the markers of one's identity might not be as visually pronounced as someone with a minority ethnicity this may (or may not) produce additional stress.

Identity Management

Fear of discrimination and stigmatization is perhaps the most significant factor which informs the process of LGBTQ+ identity management, literally how LGBTQ+ employees choose to reveal information about their identity or not. Furthermore, the fear must be managed in the context of the existence of heteronormativity where one is assumed to heterosexual by default and the opportunity to conceal one's identity is raised. The potential for being subject to abusive or exclusionary behaviour in the workplace, discriminatory hiring practices, or just not wanting to be seen as other is situated in the assumption that an individual is heterosexual by default.

According to McFadden (2015), the ability to fully express one's identity leads to greater personal and professional fulfilment, but in the presence of the default assumption and where one's identity isn't easily visibly read by others, LGBTQ+ individuals must consistently engage with a process of identity management in the workplace. It is not a one-and-done process where an LGBTQ+ person can reveal their identity and forever be known to others in ever social encounter as possessing said identity, but rather it is an iterative process.

The decision whether to disclose one's identity is repeated when an LGBTQ+ employee enters a new position, joins a new team, or meets a new colleague, manager, or client for example. Identity management in the face of heteronormativity is therefore an imperfect process and one that is energy intensive for an LGBTQ+ employee. For those choosing to conceal their identity, they might edit personal information out of workplace conversations, e.g. the pronouns of the person they're dating, or they might create false personal narratives that allow them to pass as heterosexual, or they may avoid particular colleagues in the office. Similarly, if an LGBTQ+ person decides against coming out, they may feel greater fear of losing their job or being outed and suffer from increased stress and anxiety. For those choosing to reveal their identity – and where they're met with a supportive working environment – the stress of

identity management will ease, job satisfaction will increase, and workplace relationships will be stronger. The benefits may also be particularly pronounced if one is in a long-term relationship, where coming out at work may reduce incongruity between one's identity in work and one's life with their significant other. The importance of the workplace as a physical space where an LGBTQ+ employee can share their identity has grown. As working hours have increased so too have the lines between one's working and personal lines become blurred. (Bowring and Brewis, 2009)

An LGBTQ+ employee needs to weigh the worth and necessity of revealing one's identity against passing as someone who fits the default. Identity management can take the form of actively fabricating an external identity that normalizes oneself, avoiding the communication or expression of details that indicate one is LGBTQ+, or actively outing oneself as LGBTQ+. In practice, this process is often used in some combination and requires a lot of internal mental resources. (McFadden, 2015)

How one chooses to manage their identity varies by each individual LGBTQ+ employee, the situation, and the environment in which they find themselves. The primary factor that influences their decision whether to reveal or conceal is the perception the LGBTQ+ employee has whether the recipient of this personal information will be positively receptive. Allies may be found amongst any gender or sexual orientation or level of seniority in the organisation. LGBTQ+ employees look for signs in the recipient and in their environment to test the safety of revealing their identity and in turn may provide signs that give the impression that they're LGBTQ+. Identity management can be further defined as an "ongoing stigma management process." (King et al, p. 498)

According to Salter and Sasso (2021), the coming out process is often associate with many positive outcomes. An LGBTQ+ individual who has come out may feel greater levels of self-acceptance, higher self-esteem, and may even have better physical health. In the workplace, the ability to come out in an accepting environment may lead to greater job satisfaction, commitment to one's role, better relationships with co-workers, higher productivity, and networking opportunities with other LGBTQ+ people.

However, integrating an LGBTQ+ identity with a professional identity is not always desired, where one may prefer to normalize their LGBTQ+ status and not make an apparent issue of their identity. (McFadden and Crowley-Henry, 2018) Coming out in itself may be recursive and unwittingly reinforce heteronormativity, whereby the default is taken for granted and an LGBTQ+ employee is expressing their difference to the default. (Benozzo et al, 2015) LGBTQ+ employees may prefer to completely separate

their personal identities from their professional identities, see the workplace as a sexuality-free environment, and meet the silence of their colleagues concerning their identity with their own silence. (Roberts, 2010)

Subgroups

The experience of discrimination and stigmatization and the process of identity management is shared across the LGBTQ+ community, but an additional key theme emerging from the literature is that this experience is also felt in different ways across subgroups of the community. Lesbians and gay men are found in the literature to be often the specific subgroups in the LGBTQ+ population which are taken to represent the entire community on a whole. Research on discrimination and stigmatization and identity management is often dominated by the experience of lesbians and gay men as cisgender, monosexuals, but this assertion is perhaps more specifically true of gay men based on this literature review.

Lesbian employees as a subgroup of the LGBTQ+ population, however, face unique challenges as women and not just resulting from their sexual orientation. It is estimated that 1.7% of the total adult population identify as lesbian or gay, and 3.4% of adult women population identify as lesbian. (Williams Institute, 2011). Like their GBT counterparts lesbians face the same issues concerning discrimination and stigmatization based in heteronormativity or straightness by default. Homophobic attitudes then give rise to the view that lesbians are lesser than straight people and a population to be feared. As women, lesbians also face the sexist and misogynist attitudes common to all women, but they may also be additionally perceived as threatening for being relative independence from men and following less traditional gender roles. Research about the experiences of lesbians is often subsumed into that on the general LGBTQ+ population or that of women as a general category, and they are rarely specifically addressed by businesses. Lesbians choose their level of outness in the workplace depending on their perception of safety as both homosexuals and women, and generally they are less identifiable than gay men. (Gedro, 2006)

Bisexual employees as a subgroup of the LGBTQ+ population face many of the difficulties as their LGT counterparts, including homophobia and the energy demands of identity management, but they uniquely experience biphobia. Heteronormativity not only assumes heterosexuality by default, but reinforces binary poles of sexual orientation or monosexuality. While lesbians and gay men might be seen as less than straight people, they are understood as individuals who violate a norm in an explicable way. For bisexual people, who can be attracted to varying degrees to multiple genders, this may effectively erase

their sexual orientation. (McFadden, 2015) It is estimated that 1.8% of the adult population identify as bisexual making them the most numerically prevalent group amongst the LGBTQ+ population. (Williams Institute, 2011)

Biphobic attitudes towards bisexuals have been found to be commonplace not just amongst heterosexuals, but amongst gay men and lesbians as well. Bisexuals may find themselves apparently discriminated against from all sides. Identity management for bisexuals tends to follow many of the same pattens as for their LGT counterparts though bisexuals may also opt for presenting themselves as monosexual, either gay or straight, as a form of self-protection. Research on the bisexual population is often subsumed under research on the general LGBTQ+ community and rarely addresses bisexuals specifically. The literature indicates that bisexual people are often rendered linguistically part of the LGBTQ+ community but made invisible as their specific needs are rarely addressed independent of gays and lesbians. Bisexual people may experience biphobia from monosexuals whether straight or gay and lesbian where their orientation is incorrectly assumed to be a changing phase and lacking the same legitimacy as a monosexual orientation. (Kollen, 2013)

Despite being the largest of the LGBTQ+ subgroups, bisexuals are generally viewed as the most unseen of those groups. They are rarely represented in workplaces, media, or the larger LGBTQ+ community and can feel a sense of rejection alike from heterosexuals and gay men and lesbians. Biphobic attitudes stereotype bisexuals as less valid, more uncertain of their sexuality, dismissed as closeted gay men or lesbians, and perhaps even less willing to commit to a significant other. It is suggested in the literature that because humans tend to favour fixed labels for understanding others, biphobic attitudes may arise because bisexuals are attracted to different genders to varying degrees and are not easily categorised. These attitudes may contribute to data indicating that bisexuals have higher rates of mental illness than monosexuals. Bisexual men may face comparatively more discrimination in the workplace than bisexual women, because a certain amount of fluidity in female sexuality may be afforded to women where men's sexuality is more rigidly defined. (Corrington et al, 2019) Bisexual employees have even been found to be less likely than gay men and lesbians to report discrimination to HR. (Badgett, 2013)

Cisnormativity, which assumes one's gender identity or gender expression aligns with the gender assignment one received at birth. Like heteronormativity it's based in a kind of biological determinism, which assumes a fixed link between one's body, one's gender, the gender role one must therefore perform, and the gender to which one is attracted. While transgender employees have similar experiences to their LGB counterparts regarding discrimination and stigmatization, and the process of identity

management, they also have unique experiences due to the existence of transphobia. Cisnormativity assumes that if one's body does not correspond with the gender normatively attributed to that body it is interpreted as somehow unnatural. Transphobia then may be based in a fundamental discomfort that a trans person's gender is not fixed to biology and that they are not following norms for their assigned gender. (Beauregard et al, 2018)

It is estimated that .3% of the entire population are transgender, which makes trans people numerically the smallest subgroup in the LGBTQ+ population. (Williams Institute, 2011)

Transgender people are generally considered the most marginalized subgroup of the LGBTQ+ population (Goryunova et al, 2021) and the most targeted for abuse and physical violence. Data compiled on a yearly basis by the Human Rights Campaign on the rate of fatal violence inflicted against transgender people found 2020 to be the worst on record. (HRC, 2021b)

Research on transgender employees is scarce and is often subsumed into the general LGBTQ+ population, but these employees are generally viewed as the group most discriminated against in employment. It is very uncommon for diversity policies or statements in businesses in the UK to include reference to trans employees, despite there being strong legislative protections in place. Conversely where there is only a patchwork of state and local legislative protections for trans employees in the US, diversity policies and statements are significantly more common. (Beauregard et al, 2018) Despite the prevalence of American enterprises in this country it may be reasonable to assume that Ireland follows more closely the HRM practices in the UK regarding trans employees.

Transgender employees, due to the nature of the transition process (if they choose to transition), e.g. physical changes or changes to name and preferred pronouns, may not have the ability to remain closeted like their LGB counterparts giving them a different experience with identity management. While they may be rendered more visible, they are also the least likely subgroup to be out at work due to fear of discrimination. (Badgett et al, 2013) Transgender people may also place a higher value on passing as cisgender where they have an opportunity to do so, particularly following transition. (Goryunova, 2021)

The trans community is perhaps the least heterogeneous of each of the LGBTQ+ subgroups, where there exist multiple voices within the trans community. Due to employment discrimination, where disclosure may lead to questions about mental health and job fitness, many trans people remain closeted for self-protection. Following gender transition, trans people may be subsumed into the larger relevant category of men or women and may not wish to disclose due to fear of discrimination or perhaps strong identification with their post-transition gender. (Beauregard et al, 2018)

Non-binary people may identify as somewhere along a spectrum between male and female genders, or as a separate gender, and much like bisexuals are subject to stigma for not fitting into a fixed category. (Williams Institute, 2021)

It is estimated that 11% of the LGBTQ+ population are non-binary which equates to 1.2m people in the US (no similar data exists for Ireland). While not all non-binary people also identify as transgender, (HRC, year unknown-a) it is estimated to be around one-third of this population who also identify as transgender.

The Business Case

The experience of LGBTQ+ employees is illuminated by the literature and the Irish context for LGBTQ+ people is established despite a dearth of research on this group specific to Irish workplaces, but an important sub-question for this research is raised by reviewing the literature: why does any of this matter to business and HRM in particular? Generally liberal societal trends in Ireland, North America, and Europe have certainly increased acceptance of LGBTQ+ people and it is reasonable to assume that organisations have adapted to social change. More specifically, however, what emerges from the literature is that there is a business case for diversity, where organisations engage in diversity management because it makes good business sense and positively impacts the bottom line.

According to Kelly and Dobbin (1998), today's focus on diversity, equality, and inclusion in the workplace has roots in US federal government antidiscrimination legislation emerging in response to the 1960s Civil Right Movement and saw the development of affirmative action and equal employment opportunities primarily focused on addressing historical racial and ethnic inequalities. During the subsequent Reagan administration these legislative measures were rolled back in an apparent effort to take government out of the way of business, but the lasting impact was not a reduction in concern for diversity by US corporations. Instead during the 1980s and 1990s businesses developed equality practices that went beyond legislative mandates and took the lead over government in developing diversity management. Businesses were motivated to develop inclusive workplace policies because adopting such these initiatives enhanced their performance.

Indeed, the Corporate Equality Index figures for 2022 compiled by the Human Rights Campaign indicate that the vast majority of Fortune 500 companies practice some degree of diversity management with 93% having non-discrimination policies based on sexual orientation and 91% including similar policies based

on gender identity. Domestic partner benefits are provided by 56% of these companies and 66% had transgender-inclusive benefits. (HRC, 2022)

Amidst a continuing global economic trend toward chronic talent shortages, perhaps the main benefit to the bottom line that results from diversity management comes in the form of improvements to recruitment and retention. LGBTQ+ talent is more likely to join, and stay longer at, a company with inclusive practices, and some research suggests that these practices may also have a positive impact on recruitment and retention of non-LGBTQ+ employees as well. (Pichler et al, 2017) Diversity management practices "maximize a firm's ability to attract labor in tight labor markets." (Ibid, p.274) The presence of openly LGBTQ+ employees or an LGBTQ+ network at a business also increases the likelihood of attracting new recruits either through direct contact with LGBTQ+ employees already working for the company or the draw that a visible LGBTQ+ presence has on those potential new hires. (Roberts, 2010)

An additional important benefit to the bottom line comes from the likelihood of improved job performance. LGBTQ+ employees in diverse organisations perceive a greater sense of support from their employer, which in turn creates a motivation to give back to a company that has treated them well. (Day and Greene, 2008) When employers engage in diversity management, these employees are more likely to be out and being out in turn tend increase rates of job satisfaction (Badgett et al, 2013). Greater job satisfaction similarly leads to better relationships with co-workers and supervisors, and these enhanced relationships contribute to greater levels of productivity (Pichler et al, 2017). These organisations may benefit from a greater variety of life experiences and perspectives (Mallory et al, 2011), which in turns leads to higher innovation and creativity amongst employees, while adding to a perception that the company is open to new ideas. (Day and Greene, 2008)

Indeed, companies who manage well how they're perceived – or their employer brand – benefit from improved recruitment, retention, and employee performance, which further illustrates the business case for LGBTQ+ diversity management. Initially developed as a concept by Ambler and Barrow (1996), an employee who holds a positive perception of the employer brand is more likely to perform better on the job and attract new recruits through word-of-mouth.

Changing demographics have deepened the business case for diversity and a successful employer brand, where competition for talent has become increasingly globalized as an aging workforce is expected to lead significant decreases in productivity in coming years. Research suggests that an employer brand will be more successful if it stands apart as attractive to potential recruits, but perhaps more significant is

whether the brand as it's expressed is felt to be accurate as experienced by the employees. The employer brand has been distinguished from a product brand because it is experienced over a long period and behind the scenes. Employees aren't merely buying a disposable product but investing in a relationship where they have deeper access to the brand and can form a strong perspective about the company's values. (Moroko and Uncles, 2008) Diverse employees especially may act as ambassadors for the employer brand to potential new recruits, but if there is an incongruity between the brand expressed to current and potential employees regarding diversity and what is experienced on the job, then the brand is likely to feel inaccurate and may generate negative publicity. (Wells et al, 2021)

According to Barney's resource-based view of organisations a competitive advantage may be found in the complexity of its human resources where competitors may find it difficult to copy the social dynamics within the business, including the culture, the reputation this generates, and the interpersonal relationships amongst co-workers and their managers. It might be suggested that an organisation pursuing diversity management and a successful diverse employer brand may generate value for the bottom line through this competitive advantage. (Barney, 1991)

Diverse employers may further benefit from access to new perspectives of products and services thanks to their LGBTQ+ employees. (Wells et al, 2021) It is suggested that more diverse organisations have a better product brand image amongst the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ people may prefer to purchase from diverse organisations in much the same way they prefer to work such businesses. (Wang and Schwarz, 2010) Market research indicates that LGBTQ+ buying power in the US is close to $1trn. (Witeck, 2016) Separate data puts this figure for the UK at $150bn and Germany at $201bn, (Statista, 2015), but these data do not exists for this segment of the Irish consumer market.

Stock prices are positively associated with the business case for diversity policies outlined above and that stocks from companies with progressive practices performed better than similar companies without these initiatives. The researchers suggest that investors may view a company who practice diversity management more positively, in turn attracting more investment, and within the organization itself there may be enhanced ability to recruit and retain talent, increase employee productivity, and potentially open access to new markets as already discussed. (Wang and Schwartz, 2010) A final point in favour of the business case for diversity is that these measures are generally a low cost to the organisation. Research disputes the suggestion that these initiatives are expensive or not worth it, and costs are offset and overshadowed by improvements to the bottom line. (Mallory et al, 2011)

HRM Approaches

The intention of this research is to inform HRM approaches in Irish workplaces through original data collection, but following the business case for LGBTQ+ diversity management, HRM approaches to the implementation of inclusion policies and practices in workplaces in general emerges as another key theme in the existing literature. Given the business case and the global context of talent shortages, the need for a robust HRM role in diversity management can be inferred. The literature indicates some of the broad responses that may best fulfil this role including the adoption of inclusion policies and practices, taking on an ally role, facilitating LGBTQ+ employee voice, enforcing the non-discrimination elements of inclusive initiatives, addressing each subgroup's individual needs, and taking into account other employees with stigmatised identities.

According to Badgett et al (2013), statements of inclusive practices made by the organisation, the presence of non-discrimination policies, the provision of LGBTQ+-inclusive benefits in packages offered by the business, and voluntarily enacted practices that go beyond legislative requirements have all been found to be important components in the development of a supportive "workplace climate". (p.9) This climate is seen as foundational to both the positive individuals impacts on LGBTQ+ employees, such as increased job satisfaction, less stress, and improved workplace relationships, and the positive impacts on the bottom line that derive from improved rates of recruitment and retention, increased productivity, and enhanced innovation.

Skills in relationships, leadership, and training and development, and the role of the HRM function across business units mean that HRM professionals may be ideally situated to act as allies to LGBTQ+ employees in the implementation of inclusive policies and practices. HRM can provide diversity education for employees and managers, address issues of discrimination, advocate for inclusive practices, and aid the development of leaders that will endorse diversity. (Brooks and Edwards, 2009)

HRM may be in a position also to play a role in the facilitation of an LGBTQ+ network within the organisation, whether the network is a formal function initiated by HRM, formalised by HRM recognition after it's initiation by LGBTQ+ employees, or even if it remains a less formalised social outlet for those employees. An LGBTQ+ network may be a crucial source of employee voice for LGBTQ+ employees. The networks may provide social support, reduce isolation, and even offset some of the energy demands of the process of identity management. Through the network, LGBTQ+ employees may have a means of address issues of workplace discrimination either formally or informally. (McFadden, 2015) Where

LGBTQ+ employees do not wish to be out at work, the presence of an LGBTQ+ network may in fact make these individuals more silent and will not be a source of employee voice. To accommodate the voice needs of these LGBTQ+ employees, one possible solution is the introduction of an anonymous suggestion scheme. (Ibid)

Diversity policies signal to all employees the values and beliefs held by an organisation, indicates to non-LGBTQ+ individual how their LGBTQ+ co-workers should be treated, and indicates to LGBTQ+ employees how they expected to be treated on the job. However, the existence of diversity policies alone doesn't create a diverse organisation. Policies need to be communicated frequently and enforced or they run the risk of being interpreted as lip-service. (Webster et al, 2018) A challenge for HRM in meeting this requirement is that discrimination may be informal, less overt, and more deeply rooted in heteronormativity. McFadden and Crowley-Henry (2017) vividly illustrate subtle discrimination experienced by a lesbian woman whose marriage to another woman was not celebrated in the office the same way as her heterosexual co-workers. As already indicated, an employer that embraces a diverse brand must ensure that internal and external messages match to ensure that the felt experience of the brand is accurate in the light of what is communicated by the organisation. Should there be a mismatched perception amongst employees or potential recruits, there may be a breach of psychological contract, recruitment and retention efforts may falter, the brand may be compromised, and a negative reputation may be inadvertently garnered. (Wells et al, 2021)

In line with the varied experiences of each subgroup of the LGBTQ+ population, the literature indicates that LGBTQ+ employees may need different HRM approaches depending on their subgroup. For bisexual employees, there is a need to be addressed by their employers as distinctly bisexual rather than subsumed into the LGBTQ+ label and it has been suggested that internal diversity communications address this segment of talent specifically. (Kollen, 2013) For transgender employees who often – but not always – go through a gender transition process that makes their LGBTQ+ identity more visually pronounced, HR responses might include awareness training for staff about gender identity and enforcing norms about privacy over medical history to ensure transgender employees are not asked questions about their bodies that are not appropriate for the workplace. (Goryunova, 2021) LGBTQ+ employees who are lesbian may benefit from diversity training for staff that addresses their needs specifically (Gedro, 2006) while gay male employees can benefit from mentoring and promotional prospects that may be provided by the existence of an LGBTQ+ network. (Roberts, 2010) Diversity management broadly may be important for organisations to address talent shortages, but HRM must address the implementation of inclusive

practices strategically to gain the benefits of these approaches. Policies and statements may be easily adopted at a corporate level where it makes marketing sense to do so, but changes to workplace climate happen within work groups. HRM approaches therefore need to include internal communication and enforcement of policies. (Kossek et al, 2002)

Interestingly, the literature indicates that there is great deal of crossover between LGBTQ+ as a stigmatised identity and other stigmatised identities, which may be negatively stereotyped. These identities may be generally visible such as ethnicity, age, appearance, language, dialect, or more invisible, like religion, national origin, physical ability, or illness. For employees who may possess another stigmatised identity a similar process of identity management forms part of their workplace experience, and the workplace climate informs their decision whether to pass or conceal (if possible) at work. Diverse workplace cultures with supportive co-workers, managers, and other out employees generally lead to greater openness for all those who hold an invisible stigma. (Clair et al, 2005) HRM approaches to LGBTQ+ diversity management may need to take into consideration the impact that inclusive policies and practices may have on all employees, including those employees who may possess other stigmatised identities.

Conclusion

The literature review has indicated the current state of knowledge on LGBTQ+ experiences in the workplace. In the absence of research specific to Irish workplaces, the literature provides a foundation for the context in which LGBTQ+ employees find themselves in this country. Ireland has become increasingly socially liberal in recent decades and the LGBTQ+ community has gained significant legal protections as a result. Equality legislation and the influence of diversity management trends are expected to have made Irish workplaces more accepting for LGBTQ+ individuals.

The theme of LGBTQ+ workplace experiences in general is thoroughly illuminated with key subthemes emerging in those experiences surrounding discrimination and stigmatization, identity management, and the differing experiences of LGBTQ+ subgroups. Discrimination and stigmatization of LGBTQ+ people still exists however and for LGBTQ+ individuals a complex process of identity management and coming out must be managed. Each subgroup different experiences and needs, and bisexual and transgender individuals often have their unique challenges subsumed into a larger LGBTQ+ grouping which may effectively mean monosexual, cisgender, gay men, and lesbian woman.

The business case for diversity is another main theme found in the literature with subthemes surrounding improvements to recruitment and retention, productivity, employer branding, access to markets and

innovation, and the positive impacts these processes have on stock performance. The business case for diversity has been well-established as positive impacts to recruitment and retention, productivity, and access to markets as a result of diversity management practices has been shown to improve stock performance.

And the final main theme concerns HRM approaches, which are ultimately the focus of this research. The literature indicates subthemes of importance to HRM approaches include the create of diverse policies and practices, enforcing non-discrimination policies, acting as allies, facilitating LGBTQ+ employee voice, and tailoring approaches specific to LGBTQ+ subgroups and other stigmatised identities. The literature indicates the approaches available for HR diversity management and outlines the key activities of enforcing inclusion policies, facilitating employee voice, and meeting the particular needs of each subgroup.

Research Question

Exploring LGBTQ+ Workplace Experiences in Ireland to Inform Human Resource Management Approaches

The research intended to qualitatively explore the workplace experiences of LGBTQ+ employees in Ireland and develop data that can inform the approaches taken by HRM regarding this employee group. The problem this research intended to address is the lack of data addressing the experiences of LGBTQ+ employees in the literature generally and its apparent absence regarding the Irish context specifically, and the impact this deficit of available information has on the ability of HRM to adapt to changing diversity dynamics in the workplace.

Based on the literature review the research question then focused on the recurrent themes that emerged from our existing knowledge, namely the broadly universal experiences LGBTQ+ people have regarding discrimination and stigmatization, identity management, and the coming out process, as well as experiences generally unique to each subgroup within the LGBTQ+ population.

The research question was honed further to explore how these common experiences amongst the LGBTQ+ community are typically experienced by employees in Irish workplaces and what kind of organisational culture – informed by HRM policies and practices – is prevalent in those workplaces.

Key sub-question or sub-objectives developed in the research question sought to identify the methods of identity management used by LGBTQ+ respondents, e.g. remaining closeted versus coming out or some point in between; how identity management is impacted by experiences of discrimination and stigmatization (or the fear of those negative experiences); and how the coming out process is managed generally as a reiterative process where identifying oneself as LGBTQ+ needs to be repeated (or avoided) with each new encounter. An additional key sub focus sought to develop insight into the organisational culture as perceived by LGBTQ+ respondents.

The overarching aim of the research question was ultimately to develop data to be used by HRM to inform approaches to LGBTQ+ diversity management, best policies and practices, and an LGBTQ+-friendly organisational culture.

Methodology

The aim of this research was to explore the experience of LGBTQ+ employees in the workplace, specifically in workplaces in Ireland, and to generate data to inform HRM approaches to policies and practices that concerns this subset of the workforce.

The literature review repeatedly revealed several key themes concerning the LGBTQ+ experience in the workplace generally. It showed that experiences with discrimination and stigmatization, identity management, and the coming out process are broadly experienced collectively across the entirety of this community to one degree or another. Interestingly, however, it revealed that there are significant differences in the experiences and challenges faced by each subgroup in the LGBTQ+ community. The business case for LGBTQ+ diversity management was thoroughly illustrated and the Irish cultural context for the community was set. Insights into existing HRM approaches have also been explored in the literature, but the relative dearth of existing information regarding best policies and practices reinforces the need to fill in the gap.

Based on the existing state of knowledge, and the non-exhaustive depth of available research, it was felt that the generation of primary data concerning the workplace experiences of LGBTQ+ employees by itself would have provided a contribution to the understanding of HRM approaches, but the literature review exposed a more precise gap in our existing knowledge, specifically concerning the experiences of LGBTQ+ employees in Irish workplaces. Most research on LGBTQ+ workplace experiences derive from the US or the UK, and indeed, only one research paper using a similar methodology to this research concerned the LGBTQ+ experiences of those in the Irish workforce. (McFadden and Crowley-Henry, 2018) It is evident that, "A gap exists between what is known and what we need to know to solve our problem." (Baker, p.373, 2001)

According to Heath and Tynan (p.156, 2010), "After defining the research problem and establishing the aims of the research, based on existing literature, it is time to explain how those aims are to be achieved," and any "methodological decisions should be matched to their research purposes."

It was determined for the purposes of fulfilling the aims of this research that a qualitative rather than quantitative approach would be used. The researcher was personally drawn to qualitative approaches based on her undergraduate and previous postgraduate studies, professional work experience, and as an HRM professional she perhaps meets a stereotype of being more inclined towards people than numbers. This tendency was only bolstered by the use of qualitative methods in several key academic articles

included in the literature review. In each of Bowring and Brewis (2009), Roberts (2010), Benozzo et al (2015), McFadden and Crowley-Henry (2018), and Goryunova et al (2021), in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with between ten and sixteen interview subjects. Due to the challenges associated with finding a relatively small and often hidden part of the population, those research papers each used snowball sampling to find interviewees and often set the sampling in motion through personal contacts. The data is limited and was not intended to be generalizable, but "the benefits of a qualitative approach allowed richer data and a better capture of the individual nuances of [subjects'] experiences in the workplace, which would have been lacking had a quantitative approach been adopted." (Roberts, p. 671, 2010)

This subjectivist methodology corresponds accordingly to the interpretivist philosophical approach as defined by Saunders et al's six-layer "research onion". (2019, p.130). "The purpose of interpretivist research is to create new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts. For business and management researchers this means looking at organisations from the perspectives of different groups of people." (p.149) Peeling further into the next layer of the onion, it follows naturally that the research is therefore "inductive" rather than "deductive" (p.154-155), because it concerns the complexity of individual human interpretation and social interaction within organisations where strictly logical reasoning just isn't feasible. According to Saunders et al, "theory follows data rather than vice versa, as with deduction." (p.155)

This dissertation followed the best practice indicated by these existing research papers and used in-depth semi-structured interviews with interview subjects sourced through snowball sampling. Using the Meetup app, which is a platform to facilitate the development of social groups around common interests, e.g. sports or cultural activities, contact was made with lesbian, gay, and bisexual-specific Meetup groups. Through contact with Meetup group organizers, interview subjects were found, and through those subjects, subsequent interviewees were found. No Meetup group existed for the trans community in Ireland, so contact was made more formally through the Transgender Equality Network Ireland and a similar process took place. It was initially intended to conduct approximately eight interviews, but as indicated by Roberts (2010) the researcher was mindful that sample size was not as important as the quality of the interviews conducted.

The choice of semi-structured interviews corresponds further with an "ethnography" (Saunders et al, p.199, 2019) strategy as the next layer of the research onion. It is meant to further distinguish the strategic approach of the research where interviews may be used in other strategies. The ethnographic definition

is appropriate for this research, because it studies "the culture or social world of a group" and uses the "language of those being studied". The next layer of the research onion provides the researcher with a choice between mono, mixed, and multi-methods research strategies. Suffice to say that the choice of a qualitative, semi-structured interviews is indeed a decision to choose a mono method approach. The following "time horizon" (Saunders et al, p. 130, 2019) layer of the research onion can be similarly succinctly said to be cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, because the interviews qualify as a snapshot of time in the interviewees lives rather than including a longer period of time.

In total fourteen interviews of approximately twenty-five minutes in length were conducted and these took place through Microsoft Teams to reduce any potential health hazards from the ongoing COVID-19 endemic. The criteria for including interview subjects in the research was defined as having a non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender identity but given the multiplicity and complexity of LGBTQ+ identities it was decided to follow an "emic approach" (Heath and Tynan, p.157, 2010) and give space for interview subjects to self-identify rather than impose "identity labels" (Roberts, p.671, 2010) upon them. Due to the varied experiences of each LGBTQ+ subgroup, however, it was determined to source a panel of interviewees that was relatively balanced between each cohort. In total the research included four lesbians, two gay men, five bisexuals, and three trans people (two trans women and one transmasculine non-binary person) and several of those interviewed also identified generally as queer. The interviews were carried out in May 2022.

Interviewees were assured of complete confidentiality in line with National College of Ireland ethics guidelines for conducting research. Names, workplaces, and other identifying information was anonymised, and gender neutral they/them pronouns were utilized to further pseudonymise the data, as appropriate for presentation in this dissertation. Data collected in the form of recorded interviews were deleted when the data was analysed and anonymized/pseudonymized interview transcriptions will be stored securely in electronic format in line with statutory requirements.

The research was conducted impartially with the aim of producing data that informs HRM approaches to LGBTQ+ diversity management with an ultimate view to improving the bottom line for business, but due to the sensitive nature of the interviews it was felt that revealing a shared identity between the researcher and interviewee would build trust and rapport and ultimately lead to better data. The researcher identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community and this "insider status" (Roberts, p.673, 2010) was shared with interviewees to put them more at ease and encourage greater participation.

The final layer of Saunders et al's research onion (p.130, 2019) concerns data collection and data analysis. With a thorough illustration given on how the data was collected, the relevant discussion here concerns how that data was analysed. Following the literature review where key themes about LGBTQ+ experiences in the workplace emerged from the existing body of knowledge, "thematic analysis" (Ibid, p.651, 2019) was utilized to identify key themes in the data collected.

Findings

Data collection

The data collected through qualitative interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). As the psychology researchers summarize, the technique "is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data." (p.79)

Braun and Clarke (Ibid) assert that "it is important to acknowledge our own theoretical positions and values in relation to qualitative research" (p.80) as they acknowledge a limit to the objectivity a researcher can follow using thematic analysis.

Following this approach, I disclose that I identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community and my own identity has been a motivating factor in pursuing this research. My identity was disclosed in all requests for interviewees as a way to make it easier to find willing candidates and as a means of developing rapport with research participants.

The thematic analysis process described by the authors outlines six phases (Ibid, p.87) that repeatedly refines the data and ultimately produces a report of the findings.

The first phase of the analysis was concerned with the researcher becoming familiar with the transcribed data. The interviews conducted through Microsoft Teams were automatically transcribed by the software. The transcriptions were read the first time initially in conjunction to correct errors in the automatic transcription, e.g. "jumping away" was transcribed by the software when one of the interview subjects said using a typical Irish turn of phrase, "do you know that way?" During this reading, the transcription was also anonymized to remove the participants' names and the few incidences where identifying information may have been recorded. The transcription was read a second to become more familiar with the data and make initial notes.

The second phase of the analysis involved the generation of initial codes based on these notes and first readings where a data point "appears interesting to the analyst" (Ibid, p.88), meaning effectively significant to the intentions of the research. An example data extract taken verbatim from one interview transcript is as follows: "So this haircut obviously shows, you know, it's, it's a pretty tight haircut that it would be kind of a classic, you know, gay woman haircut." This data extract was initially coded as: concern with queer appearance.

The third phase of the analysis next sought to generate themes from the initially coded data. Braun and Clarke (n.d.) updated their 2006 paper to reflect their understanding that themes are generated from the data via the researcher rather existing objectively for the analyst to 'find'. Following the process as outlined by the 2006 paper the initial codes were compiled into a "thematic map" to generate initial themes. (p.89) The codes were written into bubbles using pen and paper and tentative themes that seemed to fit several codes were written into bubbles on the opposite side of the page, and lines were drawn from the code bubbles to the theme bubbles. An example from this phase of the analysis found the codes: 1. concern with queer appearance, and 2. concern with queer voice, combined into the theme: concern with passing.

The fourth phase of the analysis further reviewed and defined the main themes until they accurately reflect "the meanings evident in the data set as a whole". During this iterative process "some candidate themes are not really themes … while others might collapse into each other (e.g. two apparently separate themes might form one theme)." (Ibid, p.91) An example from this phase of the analysis found that the theme 'concern with passing' is a valid main theme as it was reinforced by another code: heteronormative expectations on the job.

The fifth phase was about defining and naming themes with a focus on "identifying the 'story' that each theme tells … how it fits into the broader overall 'story' that you are telling about your data, in relation to the research question or questions, to ensure there is not too much overlap between themes." (Ibid, p.92)

The focus of the sixth phase of the analysis was to "tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis" (Ibid, p.93) in reporting the findings. Braun and Clarke (2019) further illustrated that "qualitative research is about meaning and meaning-making, and viewing these as always context-bound, positioned and situated, and qualitative data analysis is about telling 'stories', about interpreting, and creating, not discovering and finding the 'truth' that is either 'out there' and findable from, or buried deep within, the data."

Producing the Report

Five key themes were generated from the data that were further named and refined to tell a story about the data.

1. ***I'd go to my manager***

Perhaps the most significant theme to be generated from the data indicates the centrality of the role of line managers in the experiences of LGBTQ+ employees in Irish workplaces. Managers set the tone with regard to diversity, what is and isn't acceptable behaviour within the team, and the general air or sense of support and trust (or the lack thereof).

One interviewee's response encapsulates this sentiment shared broadly, where the manager's role is seen as "extremely important, because that's the person who is actually leading the whole team … he's going to set the rules, you know, how you're going to interact with others, how it's going to be within the team."

Another interviewee commented that a previous manager who set an air of distrust in their team by engaging in "controlling" behaviour made the interviewee mistrustful of the manager's knowledge of their LGBTQ+ identity. The interviewee had reason to be concerned, because that manager – whether intentionally or not – on one occasion outed the interviewee to a colleague without permission causing significant distress. "This was my thing to say!" the interviewee exclaimed recalling the incident.

An additional interviewee with a middle of the road manager could be described as "a very open-minded individual" who "might know of my identity", but still doesn't provide the interviewee any reassurance they don't have "unconscious biases", and this contributes to a guarded identity management.

A further interviewee with a highly supportive manager reported that "I instantly thought she's cool" when the interviewee first met the manager, "she was a bit of a laugh … quite down to Earth." The interviewee also added that "my manager couldn't give two hoots, like, you know what I mean, she doesn't care if you're gay or straight or whatever." Confirming that the interviewee would approach their manager in the event of issues of discrimination in the workplace, the interviewee said that "it wouldn't go down well" for the person causing the problems.

Related to the story of the manager's role in setting workplace culture is enriched by applying to it an important subtheme generated from the analysis. Interviewees very commonly reported that in the event of a negative incidence in the workplace, going to HR would be an "an absolute last resort" as it's seen as a very formal, perhaps even nuclear, option. One interviewee said that making any kind of complaint in the IT industry would be to "torpedo yourself" and being labelled as a complainer would follow them even to another job with a different organization. While interviewees generally felt they could go to an HR person if needed, it was near universally agreed that one would "deal with it myself".

HR may be akin to a defender or monitor of sorts that employees would be "afraid" of if they were to openly express bigoted views to coworkers, but very significantly, if an interviewee felt they needed to

speak with someone about issues of discrimination arising, it would be their line manager who would be the first port of call if they could not deal with the issue informally. One interviewee said their manager "would take it quite seriously", which encapsulated a strong theme generated in the data.

There was very little general awareness amongst interviewees of HRM's role in recruiting and selecting line managers, setting company diversity policy, and providing training and supports to line managers with the exception of one interviewee in a senior leadership who worked closely with the HR function on their company's diversity practices.

2. *Sussing things out first*

Interviewees very commonly reported little or no understanding of their organization's culture concerning LGBTQ+ diversity prior to and during the recruitment process. Where interviewees did have some sense of the organization's public pronouncements about diversity before the onboarding phase of their employment, these were not taken at face value, and only accepted if and when the felt experience on the job matched these claims.

One interviewee who worked at a US-owned company that was originally an Irish startup, reported that the organization had a lot of "US driven" diversity policies and there is a vibrant culture of affinity groups for the LGBTQ+ community, various ethnicities, and mental health advocacy in the company's UK office, but these are lacking in the Dublin location where the interviewee worked. The interviewee also reported distressing incidences of homophobic behaviour from coworkers at the Dublin office and said "there's no point in a tick box saying we're a very diverse company" given these recurrent issues.

Another interviewee discussed their disappointment with an organization involved in advocacy and support services that claimed progressive LGBTQ+ policies only to find out during the interview process that the NGO's efforts did not extend to, and explicitly excluded, transgender people.

An additional interviewee who hadn't researched their organization's approach to diversity prior to their job application was pleasantly surprised by the approachableness of the hiring manager (who would become their line manager) and reported thinking at the time, "I hope that the whole company's like that and it is."

This theme focusing of the unknown that LGBTQ+ employees are getting into when they onboard with a new employer appears generally consistent with each of the interviewees' reports of how they manage their identity in the workplace. None of the interviewees were open about their LGBTQ+ identity with

potential employers during the recruitment process because many interpreted this as "dangerous" and only if the workplace culture was determined to be "safe being visible" did they come out publicly with their identities. If a workplace was determined to be safe, some amount of being out publicly usually was more likely, and if there was any indication that a workplace wasn't safe, the interviewees reported remaining closeted.

Consistent with the existing literature, the interviewees managed their LGBTQ+ identities on a person-by-person basis depending on how safe a colleague was perceived to be. An interviewee reported being "quite attuned" to the signals people at their workplace put out about their acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals. Another interviewee who had opened up to a colleague they assumed would be accepting of their identity was met with a cold response and as a result would then "avoid" that particular coworker. An additional interviewee worked with an older person who made comments deemed to be "traditional" or conservative and the interviewee would avoid conversation with this person about many topics and certainly would not have discussed their LGBTQ+ status.

An additional element to identity management, that constitutes a subtheme, is a commonly reported concern with appearance where one's style of dress or hair, or their voice or physical appearance, indicated to colleagues something about one's LGBTQ+ identity. Many interviewees reported having a "gay haircut", a "gay voice", wearing "bi knickknacks" around the office, or "being really tall for a woman" which meant that they were outed whether they intended that outcome or not. Consistent with the existing literature, it suggests that there's a degree to which one's LGBTQ+ identity is not managed entirely by choice.

One interviewee made an interesting statement about a term used in the job description for their current position that made them concerned: "well presented". A seemingly innocuous term, and one likely common to job descriptions for the Dublin area, made this interviewee – from another European country – worried that their queer appearance did not fit the bill and that they would face discrimination at interview. Though not generalizable across the data set, this experience does fit with statements and reports from many interviewees who felt that heteronormative ways of being are the "gold standard" and that signs of queerness may be seen as less favourable in the workplace.

3. Everyone's sound here

Where interviewees felt their LGBTQ+ identity was accepted in their workplace, and especially if they felt comfortable enough to come out, another key theme generated from the data is that job satisfaction was

reportedly high, the employees felt motivated to perform, and consistent with the existing literature, they felt a strong bond with their respective organizations.

One interviewee's response captured this thread of the story when they described a "really powerful" talk given online to the entire company by a transgender colleague based in the UK office. The interviewee clearly related to the speaker and how that person described being "abandoned" by other companies in their industry, but how their organization proved accepting to its LGBTQ+ employees. The talk had been given through the company's LGBTQ+ network of the which the interviewee was an organizing member. The network was established by staff and is staff-led, but receives funding from the company's budget and other organizational supports. The interviewee described the company as a "nice place to work", where they generally "feel support", and where the "people are generally sound".

Another interviewee, who reportedly said they "love" the environment in which they worked, compared their job favourably to previous jobs were they had experienced discrimination. They said, "it's definitely different and nice to be able to talk about … what we did at the weekend [with the other staff] or you know for [partner's pronoun] to be welcome and whenever [partner's pronoun] pops in that it's grand like."

An additional interviewee spoke positively of their organization's effort to promote LGBTQ+ diversity. Though also based in the UK office, a queer staff network put on regular "lunch and learns" that the interviewee found "helpful". Guest speakers were often brought in to speak with staff and this included one prominent international sports person who came out publicly. The interviewee felt motivated to suggest that LGBTQ+ initiatives could be extended further to include things like sponsoring the Pride parade in Dublin.

A subtheme that develops this narrative is that where the interviewees felt comfortable coming out in their workplace, being out was not just a source of authenticity and congruity between one's personal and professional life consistent with the existing literature, it was also a helpful source of networking with other LGBTQ+ employees. Out of those interviewees who were explicitly out about their LGBTQ+ identity in the workplace, all had connected out with other queer people as a result of their openness. Furthermore, the presence of out LGBTQ+ employees within an organization provided motivation to interviewees to come out in the first place.

The interviewee who was an organizing member of their LGBTQ+ committee in their workplace in fact only came out at work after speaking with someone already a member of the committee. While still

generally closeted at a previous job in a different organization, the interviewee recalled coming out to another closeted queer colleague because they saw them as a "safe person", but this person had said to the interviewee "you'll never be able to be open". The interviewee had agreed at the time. Following the interviewee's move to their current organization, coming out, and becoming a visible and vocal part of the LGBTQ+ committee, they had even been able to avail of a mentoring opportunity with a senior person, also queer, based in the UK.

It's apparent that there is a kind of positive snowball effect where diversity acceptance and outness begets the same.

4. They can get lost

The converse is also true, however, where if interviewees felt their LGBTQ+ identity was not accepted in their workplace, and especially if they did not feel comfortable enough to come out, reports of job satisfaction were replaced by a general sense of edginess and defensiveness where identity management became a drain on energy, employees were not motivated so much by enthusiasm for their jobs but got on with things as a way to keep oneself distracted by an unwelcoming environment, and consistent with the existing literature, they felt antagonistic to their respective organizations.

One interviewee who adopted a self-reportedly "gay" appearance choice was met the following day by a provocative stare by a fellow colleague that the interviewee found intimidating and interpreted to be clearly homophobic. "I didn't fit", stated the interviewee in regard to the coworker's notion of an appropriate gender and sexuality presentation. The incident had happened on the same day as the interview and the interviewee had spent the day prior trying to be distracted by their work but had faced intrusive replays of the incident in their mind. "I just had to brush it off and continue with my day, but I was really just so annoyed inside by that." Though they reported that they would deal with any further incident's informally, and if needed they could go to their manager or HR, they also expressed dissatisfaction with the organization and felt that the extant diversity policies were only giving lip service to the notion of LGBTQ+ inclusion. "Yeah, just a lot of changing of culture needs to happen," stated the interviewee, placing the responsibility squarely on the organization.

Another interviewee working in a healthcare setting reported very negative experiences working with someone who was "completely homophobic and transphobic". This person even at one time said to the interviewee "it's unnatural" in reference to a transgender patient under their care. The interviewee dreaded being put on shifts with this individual, but so too were most of the staff made to feel

"uncomfortable" by this person. The interviewee was the newest employee on the team and as a result was paired on shifts with someone who was openly bigoted. Rather than seek support from their manager, the interviewee in this instance was put in this situation by their supervisor. The job became a kind a feat of endurance and tongue-biting for the interviewee until the employee in question moved on from the organization willingly.

An additional interviewee reported a generally negative atmosphere in their workplace where whispered but overt homophobic statements were made in the lunchroom. "He's gone on holidays with his BOYFRIEND," the interviewee recalled hearing with the emphasis placed by the speaker on the word boyfriend as if in shock. In that kind of environment, the speaker remained closeted, did not know any other LGBTQ+ colleagues in their workplace, and spoke about how much of a "drain" it was to "police" oneself there. The interviewee took an antagonistic stance towards their workplace in this regard and had a much more firmly defined sense of divide between the personal and professional aspects of their life.

5. **It's so much better now**

A final key theme was generated from the data, which comprises subthemes that could have readily been added to other themes. While the entirety of the research question concerns workplaces in Ireland, these subthemes were stranded together separately to more fully illustrate the focus on this country.

Around one in three of the interviewees were not originally from Ireland and in every one of the interviews these international respondents thought favourably of the country in general with regard to LGBTQ+ acceptance and likewise this perspective informed their respective decisions to come here; and in some cases, coming to Ireland was part of their process of self-discovery and coming out.

One interviewee reported that they had chosen "to live in Dublin as I had seen it consistently ranked in the top 10 for gay-friendly cities and safe cities, and I found a ton of queer community here, and I feel very, like safe being visible."

Another interviewee stated that while there are a "lot of protective laws for LGBT" in their country of origin, "I feel more free here in Ireland, I feel people are more welcoming and accepting of your differences."

An additional interviewee had moved to Ireland while in a straight relationship, but after two years in the country had found the courage to come out as someone with a same-gender attraction. They have since found and married a partner that fits with their sexual orientation. "Here, if you're actually gonna be rude

to somebody … you try to attack them or say something to them, you're gonna be the minority," they said regarding an expected cultural response to public LGBTQ+ discrimination in Ireland, whereas in the interviewee's home country elsewhere in Europe it "is the opposite".

An interesting thread to the story generated from the data came from a large number of the interviewees originally from Ireland reporting on the importance of the 2015 referendum that returned a vote in favour of marriage equality regardless of gender. One interviewee spoke about coming out in the workplace following the referendum, "just the whole, I can't tell you how great it felt, like, it was so good, like it was just this like platform. I guess that some people, like myself, needed it to kind of really fully like be themselves in all areas of their life, do you know that way?" Another interviewee recalled that "there was a lot of like that kind of conversation happening" around the marriage referendum in their workplace and that the interviewee was encouraged to come out at work because they felt their colleagues were overall very supportive of marriage equality.

A further chapter to the story of LGBTQ+ acceptance and diversity in workplaces in Ireland is that where this segment of talent has experienced good treatment on the job in this country these interviewees were adamant that they would no longer accept a workplace that didn't prioritize equality. "It's non-negotiable for me really because there's no way I would work for a company that's just backwards," and "I wouldn't wanna go backwards, I wouldn't wanna go into an environment where it wasn't like that," and "if they're not OK with it, then I'm not OK being there," were statements from three separate interviewees that encapsulates this sentiment.

Discussion

The following discussion of the research findings was informed by Levack's (2017) summary of this phase of the dissertation process. Based upon reflection of the existing literature, the discussion will restate the research problem, illustrate the key findings, further discuss the significance of these findings for HRM, take account of the limitations of this research, and recommend where future research might advance the field of knowledge.

Research Problem

This research explored the workplace experiences of LGBTQ+ employees in Ireland with the intention of developing data to better inform HRM's diversity approaches regarding this sizable talent group. As discovered in the literature review, Irish government data suggest that perhaps 10.8% of the population may be considered LGBTQ+ underpinning the numerical significance of this portion of the workforce. (Oireachtas, 2019) The problem this research intended to address is the lack of data addressing the experiences of LGBTQ+ employees in the literature generally and its almost total absence regarding the Irish context specifically, and the impact this deficit of available information has on the ability of HRM to adapt to changing diversity dynamics in the workplace. Only one published paper dealt specifically with LGBTQ+ talent in Ireland, i.e. McFadden Crowley-Henry, 2018, whereas the vast majority of studies came from the US and the UK.

Though it could be reasonably assumed that the experiences of employees with LGBTQ+ identities in those Anglophone markets would have similar experiences to queer talent in Ireland – and according to Boucher and Collins (2003) HRM approaches in Ireland have been heavily influenced by US practices – it was not assumed that the experiences of LGBTQ+ talent in Irish industry had been sufficiently developed by the literature. This research attempted to address this gap in knowledge. The existing literature was thoroughly reviewed to adequately situate the research problem and original data was gathered by means of qualitative interviews with a cross-section of LGBTQ+ employees in workplaces in Ireland.

Key Findings

Emerging from the literature review, several recurrent themes grounded the research in common workplaces experiences for LGBTQ+ employees. This talent group almost universally will face some form of discrimination and stigmatization during their working lives, and this informs a process of identity management where a LGBTQ+ employee must typically decide whether to guard or reveal their sexual

orientation and/or gender identity in the face of hetero/cisnormativity. Passing as straight or cisgender may be purposefully or inadvertently disregarded, e.g. through signals communicated through style of dress or choice of haircut, or not be possible for an LGBTQ+ person for a complexity of reasons, leading to an uncertain amount of control in the identity management process. Coming out (or not) is central to the LGBTQ+ experience of identity management. Furthermore, the felt experience of discrimination and stigmatization in the workplace is different for each of the subgroups within the LGBTQ+ talent group.

While it may be seen as broadly socially positive that HRM has a well-developed understanding of LGBTQ+ workplace experiences in Ireland, the true significance of diversity practices rests in the benefits these approaches provide to the bottom line. Data highlighted in the literature review indicate that 93% of Fortune 500 companies have approaches aimed at LGBTQ+ employees (HRC, 2022), and stock prices are positively associated with policies geared toward queer talent. (Wang and Schwartz, 2010)

The original research in this dissertation added to the existing knowledge of this subject through the generation of five main themes relevant to HRM in Ireland that posited: the centrality of managers' roles in setting workplace culture (I'd go to my manager); how identity management in Irish workplaces is characterized by a cautiousness in the early phases of employment (sussing things out first); where positive experiences of LGBTQ+ acceptance drives motivation (everyone's sound here); and conversely where negative experiences leads to antagonism towards one's employer (they can get lost); and lastly how some phenomena are very particular to Ireland and Irish industry (it's so much better now). The specific theme names are not direct quotations, but they were chosen to illustrate Irish idiomatic speech and come close to phraseology used by several of the research participants.

Significance for HRM

1.   *I'd go to my manager*

That line managers play such a significant role setting the culture of the organization – what's acceptable behaviour within teams – and that they're the first port of call should LGBTQ+ talent seek support for issues of discrimination and stigmatization is consistent with existing HRM literature.

Discussing the importance of a manager's role with regarding job satisfaction and employee retention, Taylor (2019) states that "employees are more likely to leave their managers than they are to leave their organisations," (p. 341) and identifies "ineffective leadership" as "a major driver of unwanted turnover." (p. 342) Mey et al (2021) state that "leadership has a significant influence on psychological capital … and talent retention" (p.6) and identified a key competency for effective leaders as the ability to provide their

employees with "a sense of belonging, respect, empowerment, support their personal growth and development, and provide them with flexibility and freedom in executing their duties" (p.1). Similarly Hauer et al (2021) indicate that leadership is central to employee retention as it "strongly affects" the bond between a company and its staff.

Where managers were bad, indifferent, or perhaps even scheduled an LGBTQ+ staff employee on a shift with an openly bigoted coworker, they had either been the source of or exacerbated feelings of discrimination and stigmatization. Though queer talent reported in this research that they would opt to deal with issues of discrimination and stigmatization informally, where line managers were seen as good and supportive, LGBTQ+ employee felt that someone had their back should issues arise. If going to the line manager for support or redress in the face of negative experiences was seen by queer talent as making the issue more serious, going to HR was viewed as an absolute last resort. Bringing a concern to HR was almost universally seen as making a complaint very formal or a kind of nuclear option. Furthermore, HR's role in recruiting, selecting, and supporting line managers regarding diversity issues was generally invisible to the staff. HR may have generally been seen as the source of diversity policies, but the policies were not seen as playing a significant part in the culture of the organization. Policies were seen as a kind of constitution, but what mattered to staff was their felt experience of the culture of the workplace. The key setters of workplace culture were identified by LGBTQ+ talent as line managers.

2. Sussing things out first

Organizations with robust diversity policies could still be the settings where discrimination and stigmatization take place while those with no visible policies could organically have developed diverse and accepting cultures. Interviewees generally didn't search out an organization's openness to diversity pre-recruitment, kept their identity private during the recruitment process, and where there was some degree of visible diversity policies these were not taken at face value. LGBTQ+ employees favoured a wait and see approach to suss out the general safety of the workplace, and each individual person, before coming out.

This approach is consistent with existing literature where identity management can be defined as an "ongoing stigma management process" (King et al, p. 498) and the way in which one chooses to manage their identity varies by each individual LGBTQ+ employee, the environment in which they find themselves, and specificities of each social interaction. The primary factor that influences their decision whether to

reveal or conceal is based in whether the LGBTQ+ employee has a perception that the recipient of this personal information would be positive.

3. Everyone's sound here

Where queer talent felt that they were supported by their managers and that the work environment was diverse and accepting, job satisfaction appeared to be greater, and LGBTQ+ talent was far more likely to be more public about their identities.

Consistent with existing literature, a supportive "workplace climate" (Badgett et all, 2013, p.9) leads to less stress, improved workplace relationships, increased productivity, and even enhanced innovation. According to Salter and Sasso (2021), the coming out process is often associated with many positive outcomes. An LGBTQ+ individual who has come out may feel greater levels of self-acceptance, higher self-esteem, and may even have better physical health. In the workplace, the ability to come out in an accepting environment may lead to greater job satisfaction, commitment to one's role, better relationships with co-workers, higher productivity, and networking opportunities with other LGBTQ+ people.

At a time when talent retention is a constant battle for HRM, practitioners should take note that increased job satisfaction make LGBTQ+ employees more motivated in their roles and it can be reasonably inferred that turnover intention is reduced.

4. They can get lost

Where queer talent felt unsupported by their managers and that the work environment was unaccepting, job satisfaction appeared to be very low and there was a marked degree of antagonism between employees and their organizations. LGBTQ+ staff in workplace environments ranging from unsupportive to outright toxic reported a general sense of unease on the job and did not identify with the organization or other staff. In many cases, employees in these environments were in a sense always ready to jump ship should the environment prove too much for them to handle. The queer talent interviewed as part of this research were generally disloyal to organizations that did not provide a safe and supportive environment to accommodate their identit(y/ies).

This finding is consistent with existing literature on LGBTQ+ workplace experiences where Bowring and Brewis (2009) discussed the energy drain queer talent in unsupportive environments experienced maintain a "fractured identity performance". (p.369) The authors illustrate that these employees

"expended a tremendous amount of effort separating their work and personal identities", which caused them "sadness" and "anxiety and stress". (Ibid)

5. It's so much better now

The final theme generated from the original data captured in the research illustrates two phenomena entirely specific to Ireland that are significant to HRM. Research participants (specifically those originally from Ireland and typically above 30 years old) commonly reported the significance of the cultural shift regarding LGBTQ+ visibility and perception of rights that took place in Ireland as a result of the marriage equality referendum in 2015.

Pichler et al (2018) discussing "perceived organizational support" highlight the significance of LGBTQ+-supportive legislation how "voluntary adoption" by organizations even in the absence of such laws can be "interpreted as a signal of care and support". (p.267)

Perhaps of particular note to Irish HRM is the finding that at least amongst the international participants in this research, Ireland has a favourable image amongst non-Irish LGBTQ+ talent. The existing literature concerning talent attraction across borders due a perception of more supportive workplaces is lacking where it concerns LGBTQ+ or straight/cisgender talent, but it may be reasonable to assume that a similar phenomenon is at work in Ireland (particularly with free movement of labour within the EU) as occurs in the United States where it's common for queer people to congregate in bigger cities.

Limitations

Though the research has made a small contribution to HRM's understanding of LGBTQ+ talent experiences in workplaces in Ireland, no research is without its limitations. Notably, the sample size for a qualitative study of this kind was small out of practical necessity and findings are not generalizable across the queer workforce in Ireland. With only one exception, each of the research participants were college educated and in the majority of cases were ethnically white and Irish. This narrow cross-section of the queer population limited the data to the middle class, mostly professionals, and did not account for class, racial or ethnic impacts on their workplace experiences. Very significantly, the original research did not generate much data consistent with existing literature concerning the divergent experiences of subgroups within the LGBTQ+ umbrella community. Though some bisexual and transgender interviewees reported experiences specific to their subgroup, i.e. a bisexual participant indicated biphobic experiences in the workplace where their sexual orientation was discounted as less valid, and separately, a trans employee

reported confusion over the use of they/them pronouns, the data did not generate a significant understanding of the particularities of these subgroups as found in the extant literature.

Future Research

Future research to address the shortcomings in data on the significance of subgroup experiences is indicated and would perhaps generate data that more fully captures the lived experiences of these subgroups. Such data would provide HRM with more targeted and practicable data upon which to base diversity policies and practices that are specific to both the differences and similarities of these experiences.

Though this research sampled a relatively broad section of the queer talent population, future research could be made richer through the utilization of a larger sample size and a greater diversity amongst participants in regard to socioeconomic class, level of education, ethnicity and country of origin, and age.

While this research generated data that indicated some degree of positive correlation between workplace diversity and turnover intention, future research – perhaps in the form of a quantitative study using a large sample size – could more fully explore this finding.

Similarly, while this research established some findings that indicate that international talent is attracted across borders into Ireland resulting from a generally positive view of the level of LGBTQ+ in Ireland, a future research study could more fully develop this hypothesis.

Conclusions

Several conclusions may be drawn based on the primary research and review of the existing literature that may inform HRM approaches to diversity and in particular LGBTQ+ talent in Irish workplaces.

Recommendations

- Perhaps the most relevant and targeted approach HRM may take is to provide direct support to line managers with regard to diversity policies and practices. Line managers' central role in setting workplace culture and establishing a tone of diversity acceptance may be made explicit to leaders through communications and/or training. HRM already plays a key role in the recruitment and selection of line managers; these practices may be informed by recruiting and selecting managers capable of establishing and reinforcing a diverse culture.

- It was found in the research that 'going to HR' with a workplace issue, even in the face of overt discrimination, was seen as an extreme measure. A conclusion drawn by this research is for HRM to develop informal channels of support for LGBTQ+ employees, e.g. the provision of talk support by an LGBTQ+ HR team member and an anonymous 'suggestion box' using social media channels.

- Easy changes for HRM to make for their organizations is to make all gender pronouns tick boxes on application forms LGBTQ+ friendly by including they/them pronouns. A less easy, but important change to make would be the provision of gender nonspecific bathrooms in all work sites.

- The use of language and dress codes by the organization may be reflected upon to ensure that hetero-cisnormativity is not reinforced, e.g. "well-presented" in a job description may be interpreted as 'straight-looking- and be off-putting to queer talent.

- During the recruitment process the organization's diversity policies and practices may be made explicit to applicants by the recruiters, HR team, and line managers involved in the interviewing and onboarding of new staff.

- Very specific to Irish organizations, HRM can capitalize on the generally positive view of LGBTQ+ acceptance by international queer talent by emphasizing commitment to diversity in international recruiting campaigns.

- HRM should encourage queer talent to come out (if they so wish) with an understanding that out employees encourage others to come out and generally make the organizational culture more welcoming. This may be achieved through the support of existing LGBTQ+ employee networks or encouragements for one to be established where it doesn't already exist.

Implications (Costs and Timescales)

These conclusions are drawn with consideration to the associated costs of implementing them by HRM as part of an organization's approach to diversity policies and practices. As indicated by Mallory et al (2011), these measures would generally be low cost to the organization and any costs, e.g. providing catering to an LGBTQ+ employee network's meeting, would be greatly offset by the benefits to the bottom line.

As these conclusions generally only suggest changes to existing HRM practices, there are no significant costs that may be specifically distinguished and it is expected that the operating budget of the HR function would only be impacted by the time and effort it would take to implement these changes. Similarly there are appreciable timescale implications for their implementation other than day-to-day operational changes to HRM approaches.

Significant costs associated with diversity practices may be expected with the implementation of diversity training, but in the absence of egregious behaviour this action is not recommended. Another significant cost may be associated with physical changes to work environments to accommodate gender neutral restrooms. While this may be the appropriate solution for some organizations, a more cost-effective approach may be to keep the existing built environment but remove the gender association from existing restrooms.

A final point in favour of the business case for diversity is that these measures are generally a low cost to the organisation. Research disputes the suggestion that these initiatives are expensive or not worth it, and costs are offset and overshadowed by improvements to the bottom line. (Mallory et al, 2011)

Personal learning statement

The completion of this research has been both personally and professionally illuminating. On a personal level, I have gained a deeper appreciation of the challenges that all LGBTQ+ people face in the workplace and in particular I have developed a greater insight to my own experiences of identity management in the workplace as an LGBTQ+ person. On a professional level, the insights gained from the research process has allowed me to become a better informed HRM professional and will allow me to better recommend the best approaches to diversity policies and practices within my organization now and future organizations. I have especially developed a solid appreciation of the impact that diversity approaches have on the bottom line. Going forward, I will apply the insights gained as part of this research to my professional life.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

1. Could you tell me a little about **your work and your workplace**?
2. Before you started your current role, how did your understanding of your organization's approach to its LGBTQ+ employees influence your **choice of workplace**?
3. Would you please describe how you **manage your identity** – sexual orientation and/or gender identity – at your job?
4. Would you please describe **your 'coming out' process** (if you had one) when you began your current role?
5. How did you navigate this disclosure during the **recruitment** phase of joining the organization? (e.g. when speaking with recruiters, HR, and during the interview process)
6. Can you talk about times you were **made to feel different** than others because of your identity while at work? (e.g. spoke or acted negatively towards you, or implied that other identities were superior)
7. Thinking about you being [**subgroup(s)**], can you further elaborate whether that played a role in the way you were made to feel different?
8. Can you talk about times when your identity has been a **positive source of networking** or connecting with co-workers?
9. Can you discuss the ways in which the organization's approach to its LGBTQ+ employees **motivates or de-motivates you**, or neither?
10. Regarding the **organizational culture** at your current role, how would you describe the place given to LGBTQ+ employees?
11. How do you feel **HR practices** at your organization has influenced this organizational culture regarding LGBTQ+ employees?
12. What ways would you **improve your company's approach** to LGBT employees?

*Demographic/background questions: age, level of education, sexual orientation, gender identity, industry and role within Ireland, nationality, relationship status