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LGBT+ in the Boardroom: a rainbow agenda for change

Mustafa Özbilgin, Brunel University London, Université Paris-Dauphine,
mustafa.ozbilgin@brunel.ac.uk

Cihat Erbil, Ankara HBV University, cihat.erbil@hbv.edu.tr

Abstract

Diversity by sexual orientation and gender identity remains an underexplored category in the boardroom diversity literature. Yet, LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and others) individuals lack visibility and representation in the boardroom. Drawing on the theory of heteronormativity, we explain why LGBT+ representation in the boardroom is limited. We also outline how heteronormativity in organisations undermines the talent potential and human rights of LGBT+ individuals, causes loss of energy for LGBT+ individuals who are pushed to remain in the closet, and invariably limits their access to positions of power and privilege. Focusing on the boardroom, where heteronormativity is most pronounced, we explain what makes LGBT+ inclusion an international imperative for leadership and boardroom diversity. Finally, we outline how LGBT+ inclusion could manifest in the boardroom and introduce and develop a rainbow plan for change for organisations which choose to support LGBT+ inclusion in leadership positions and the boardroom.

Keywords: LGBT+, sexual orientation, gender identity, boardroom, inclusion, diversity

The theory of heteronormativity posits that contemporary institutions cater for the values and needs of heterosexual individuals (Schlit & Westbrook, 2009). Therefore, heteronormativity is a hegemonic order that enforces normative pressures and social expectations through an individual's life course (Öztürk & Özbilgin, 2014), based on the norms of dominant gender identity, i.e. cisgender, and sexual orientation, i.e. heterosexuality (Lasio et al., 2019). Warner (1991) refers to how prevailing social mores and norms explicitly and tacitly enforce heterosexuality on individuals as compulsory heterosexuality. There has been growing recognition that dominant social expectations based on heterosexual and cisgender standards undermine the talent potential and human rights of LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and others) individuals (Ozbilgin & Soytemel 2020). This normative pressure pushes LGBT+ to society's margins, denigrating their potential contribution to work and life (Ozbilgin, 2017). LGBT+ is the social movement that emerged to combat the human rights breaches and exclusion that individuals experience due to the heteronormative and cisgender impositions in social, economic, and political life (Roseneil et al., 2013).

LGBT+ equality and inclusion are the future challenges in international equality, diversity and inclusion agendas. In a historic speech at the State Department in February 2021, Joe Biden promised to further LGBT+ rights through the diplomatic efforts of the USA:

“To further repair our moral leadership, I’m also issuing a presidential memo to agencies to reinvigorate our leadership on the LGBT+ issues and do it internationally. [...] We’ll ensure diplomacy and foreign assistance are working to promote the rights of those individuals, included by combating criminalization and protecting LGBT+ refugees and asylum-seekers.” (Alper & Shalal, 2021: 1).

This speech marks an essential step towards legitimation of sexual orientation diversity at work and life as a protected category internationally. LGBT+ equality has been called ‘the last acceptable prejudice’ since the early 2010s (Noga-Styron, 2012). Over the last ten years, much progress has been made to legalise LGBT+ relationships and marriages and protect fundamental equal rights for LGBT+ individuals. These achievements were set against the considerable religious and politically inspired backlash, which became rampant against all forms of diversity and inclusion (Saba et al., 2021). Fifty-two years after the Stonewall uprising in New York, there is partial progress in achieving fundamental human rights for LGBT+ individuals internationally (Duberman, 1993). ILGA (2020a) research shows that less than half of the countries in the world have legal protections for LGBT+, and 81 countries have legal protection for LGBT+ in employment. The criminalisation of LGBT+ and concomitant hate crimes against LGBT+ remains unchallenged in many countries.

Although institutional forms of discrimination have reportedly harmed the school and university experience of LGBT+ individuals, Wimberly et al. (2015) identify that their attainment

levels match those of heterosexual and gender binary students. Although schools and universities now graduate students who openly identify as LGBT+, their access to jobs and their ability to remain authentic in their careers is hampered by the strength of the heteronormativity in the labour market (Fric, 2017). What remains unattended in LGBT+ rights has been the challenge of promoting LGBT+ inclusion in positions of power and influence. Only a limited number of studies to date have explored LGBT+ in the boardroom. Even fewer scholars have suggested that boardroom diversity should also include sexual orientation as a diversity category (e.g., Nourafshan, 2017). There is only one remarkable example of regulation to date that covered LGBT+ inclusion in the boardroom: California State legislated that the publicly traded corporations should have either minority ethnic or LGBT+ individuals in their boardrooms (Guynn, 2020). Boardroom diversity, which started initially with demands for more women in the boardroom, has been gaining an intersectional character in recent years (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Samdanis & Ozbilgin, 2020), and sexual orientation diversity will add to the complexity of theorisation and practices of boardroom diversity soon. Byington et al. (2021) showed that LGBT+ issues are on a meteoric rise in management studies. In this chapter, we contribute to this fast-growing field of work, why it is essential to have sexual orientation equality in the boardroom, what it means to have LGBT+ in the boardroom. Finally, we offer a roadmap for organisations to capture LGBT+ talent in the boardroom.

<a>Why is it imperative to consider sexual orientation diversity in the boardroom?

Multiple factors render sexual orientation diversity an imperative for the boardroom. First, there is great *potential to capture top talent* if organisations consider sexual orientation part of the boardroom diversity. As we explained above, heteronormativity permeates every aspect of institution making. The human capital of LGBT+ is often undervalued in a heteronormative context. Inclusion of the LGBT+ individuals could help organisations tackle sexual orientation-based bias and stigma in defining notions such as talent and merit. Talent is traditionally defined as individuals with high levels of human capital (Florida, 2002). Considering the Bourdieusian expansion of capitals with social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013), combating bias and stigmatisation of LGBT+ individuals could help unleash their human, social, economic and cultural capital at work, offering them equal footing with heterosexual staff. Proofing of the definition of talent against bias and stigma is essential for inclusive talent practices. The low representation and invisibility of LGBT+ talent today is causing significant talent waste and exit in traditional sectors such as finance and asset management (Morrissey et al., 2018) which defines talent in narrow ways. New graduates reportedly do not wish to employ in these lucrative sectors, which operate with traditional norms of compulsory heterosexuality and toxic masculinity (Griffin, 2013, Predmore, 2020). New sectors, which come with inclusive talent practices, such as the high technology sector

(Hewlett, 2011), can compete with and attract talent that the traditional sectors discourage due to their inflexible approaches that fail to provide inclusive environments. The competition between sectors for diverse talent is becoming a critical issue for the sustainability and longevity of all sectors of work and employment.

Thanks to the widening of higher education, talented people today come from highly diverse backgrounds. If nurtured in the right way, diverse talent may bring cognitive and experiential richness to organisations (Roberson et al., 2017; Özbilgin et al., 2016). Based on a calculation of 50% women, 60% non-Christian, 20% with a disability, 13% non-white, 7% non-heterosexual making up the overall population in the UK (ONS, 2019), the traditional talent pool of white, able-bodied, young, middle/upper class, heterosexual men from dominant religious group constitute less than 20 per cent of the national talent pool in the UK today. Companies, which only recruit from the traditional talent pool miss out on over 80 per cent of the talent pool. The proportion of talented workers from traditional backgrounds is even smaller in cosmopolitan cities, which host higher diversity across all categories (Kucukaltan & Ozbilgin 2019). Further, Florida et al. (2008) demonstrated that promoting and protecting sexual orientation diversity plays a decisive role in developing talent in the “creative class”, a concept used to define highly talented individuals. In this context, organisations must consider LGBT+ talent as part of their efforts to widen their talent pools.

Second, legitimisation of sexual orientation diversity in the boardroom will allow LGBT+ board members to ***experience authenticity at work***. Authenticity can be defined as “owning one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to know ‘oneself’” (Harter, 2002: 384). Restricting authentic self-expression in the workplace causes individuals to make extra effort to hide themselves and to limit their thoughts and actions (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014). The fact that individuals have to hide suppresses their talents and creativity. Beyond the inclusion of gender and sexual identities, the presentation of the authentic self allows individuals to use their abilities (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014) and spend the energy they would otherwise waste in passing as cis-hetero in the boardroom.

Third, the sexual orientation diversity in the boardroom can ***help transform organisations*** that are constrained by dysfunctional and redundant gender and sexuality hierarchies. Organisations are not neutral settings. Masculine norms widely structure relationships within organisations, and gender and sexuality hierarchies perpetuate male supremacy (Acker, 1990; Ozturk et al., 2020). While gender issues are often tackled by headcounts in boardroom decisions, ignoring the complexity of masculine domination in cultures and structures (Acker, 2012; Bourdieu, 2001), LGBT+ representation in the boardroom could bring idiosyncratic complexities such as removing the need for passing as cis-hetero at work and freedom to disclose LGBT+ identity, which could help organisations to move beyond headcounts in diversity interventions and to start tackling cultural and structural changes that

allow for diversity and inclusion. For example, in a conservative industry, Allyn L. Shaw's board membership as Chief Operations Officer (COO) of the Bank of America is a striking example that could help LGBT+ inclusion in the boardroom be considered in the future. While Yahoo! *Finance* included Allyn L. Shaw on the Outstanding Executives list in 2020 (OUTstanding.com, 2020), his company increased the gender balance from 30% to 41%. Also, Shawn emphasised that being on the board as openly gay encouraged employees to exist with their diverse identities (SALT, 2019). This example highlights the complementarity between gender and sexual orientation diversity, which helped promote the former.

Fourth, representation at the top, e.g., in the boardroom, is of significant symbolic importance for organisations in showing their commitment to ***capturing changing moral and social demands***. There has been a substantial push for social justice regarding LGBT+ equality (ILGA, 2020b). Leadership diversity is an intersectional concern. Leaders play significant roles in crafting their organisations' moral and cognitive worlds (Mergen and Özbilgin, 2021). Lack of leadership diversity in any category may render the organisation less desirable for talented atypical candidates and their well-being at work. Özbilgin and Erbil (2021) demonstrated a significant benefit for organisations to capture the demands of social movements such as #blacklivesmatter, #metoo, and #LGBT+pride in securing well-being work. Therefore, boardroom diversity signals two important commitments internally and externally. The organisation captures the moral and social changes in its immediate environment.

Fifth, as Sloatmaeckers et al. (2016) argued, LGBT+ inclusion is now ***the litmus test*** for all industries, as LGBT+ inclusion often indicates a commitment to other diversity and inclusion categories. Srikant et al. (2020) demonstrated that a broad diversity in the boardroom could present a virtuous cycle and help organisations garner positive social performance outcomes and promote greater boardroom diversity. Overall, there are many reasons why boardroom diversity should include sexual orientation diversity. Notably, there are many organisational drivers and individual benefits for promoting sexual orientation diversity in the boardroom. The following section explores what it means to have LGBT+ inclusion in the boardroom and how this manifests.

<a>What it means to have LGBT+ in the boardroom, and how LGBT+ emergence takes place in the boardroom?

The meaning of LGBT+ inclusion in the boardroom needs to be unpacked at multiple levels. At the micro-level, as explained above, today's talent pool is more diverse than ever before in terms of sexual orientation and other diversity categories. Research shows that talented individuals are increasingly driven to find work that allows them to experience authentic self (Reis et al., 2017). However, there are some prominent examples of LGBT+ boardroom members who disclosed their sexual identities, such as *Tim Cook* (CEO of Apple) and *Beth Ford*

(CEO of Lands O'Lakes) (Abadi, 2018); recent studies highlight that coming out at work remains a challenge for many individuals, especially in the process of their pursuit of leadership positions (Trau et al., 2018).

What complicates the LGBT+ inclusion in the boardroom is similar to the gender diversity in the boardroom: what kind of LGBT+ will be included? There are often uneven power relations among lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans and others. These are considered part of the LGBT+ umbrella, and varying degrees and possibilities of visibility, recognition and respectability are afforded to subgroups of LGBT+ at work and in life. Divergence of experiences among subgroups of LGBT+ means that their subjective experiences and barriers that they face en route to boardroom positions could be markedly different. For example, Dilmaghani (2018) and Buser et al. (2015) showed that lesbians display higher levels of competitiveness than gay men in their careers and that openly gay and lesbian workers would be constrained in career progression compared to their LGBT+ counterparts who pass as cis-hetero at work. Thus there remains a penalty for being out with LGBT+ identity at work.

Similar concerns are raised about what kind of women are appointed (Hillman & Cannella, 2002) and what kind of minority ethnic and black individuals (Peterson et al., 2017) could be selected for boardroom positions through gender or ethnic quotas. Thus we need to attend to the intersectionality of the LGBT+ community. The LGBT+ acronym is an umbrella term, which brings all sexual orientation and gender identity categories together. However, this does not mean that the priorities and experiences of subgroups within the LGBT+ category are convergent. We need to acknowledge that the LGBT+ as a social movement, similar to feminist, anti-racist, postcolonial, and other movements, have a central agenda for fundamental human rights and some tensions and conflicts of interests among its subgroups and members (Kamasak et al., 2019). The most famous of such strains is between demands for acceptance of LGBT+ lives in authentically LGBT+ ways versus needs for normalisation and acceptance of LGBT+ lives as equals in a cis-gender/cis-hetero dominated world. Similar tensions exist between liberal and radical factions of feminist and post-colonial groups in terms of social movements' divergent needs for acceptance, normalisation, and retention of unique and authentic identity. Therefore, it is essential to consider what dimensions of subgroups in considering how LGBT+ inclusion may mean in the boardroom as a broad-brush approach may only promote divisions and create uneven outcomes.

Huse (2011) demonstrated, in his work that used the metaphors of 'golden skirts' versus 'golden sacks', that gender quotas in Scandinavian countries have re-centred the focus of board membership from male domination to talent. This focus shift was because women were solely recruited based on their abilities. At the same time, men could make it into board positions using a more comprehensive range of mechanisms such as social and cultural ties and other unearned privileges. A similar turn needs to be achieved from the focus on LGBT+ identity and the various forms of stigmatisation and discrimination they could face to the potential

contribution of LGBT+ talent to the boardroom. Research shows that LGBT+ talent substantially contributes to their organisations (Cunningham, 2011).

Although we would not like to pursue an essentialist agenda regarding specific LGBT+ talent, some studies demonstrate the unique skills that LGBT+ provide due to their different life experiences. For example, Snyder (2006) explained that LGBT+ individuals make more engaging and effective leaders due to several factors, which he terms as 'G quotient', including inclusion, adaptability, creativity, connectivity, communication, intuition and collaboration, which are specific competencies that they develop due to the challenges that they have faced in their life course. Without adopting a deterministic line of argumentation about LGBT+ talent, we would like to draw attention to some common qualities of LGBT+ individuals regarding their life experiences that prove helpful for their roles in leadership positions. Therefore, LGBT+ specific talents are conditioned by and acquired due to being and experiencing life as LGBT+ individuals. There are several other talents that LGBT+ individuals are reported to possess due to their divergent life and work experiences: First, LGBT+ individuals may develop considerable resilience over their life experiences due to the rampant and endemic nature of LGBT+ discrimination (Asakura & Craig, 2014). Such strength may present a transferable competence that helps them overcome hardship at work. Second, if an organisation provides a safe space for LGBT+ members to come out, the LGBT+ individuals may display authenticity, which is again a sought after quality in leadership positions (Webster et al., 2018). Third, LGBT+ individuals may also benefit the boardroom with their senses of empathy (Valdovinos, 2018), garnered in the process of coming out or passing, sociality and relationality, which are gained as a result of their struggles against stigmatisation, exclusion and discrimination, and adaptability, which is accrued as a result of the ambivalence that they experience across varied contexts.

While an industry or organisation may accrue the above benefits of recruiting LGBT+ talent, in the same way, they may lose such talent if they are hostile or unprepared for LGBT+ inclusion. For example, the asset management industry is the most dynamic part of the global financial services sector (Walter, 1999). However, the asset management industry leaders are alarmed that there may be a diversity drought looming in the asset management industry due to a mismatch with what the industry offers and what talented workers want (Morrissey et al., 2018). In addition, there are changing tastes in the future workforce (work-life balance, sociality at work) as they demand inclusive workplaces (Ng & Burke, 2005). There is increased competition for talented workers from other industries such as high tech and entrepreneurship. Inclusion of the LGBT+ talent, as a litmus test for all forms of inclusion, may help such sectors connect with the new normal and achieve the transformation they need in work redesign. Such inclusive leadership approaches may prepare industries and organisations to recruit, develop and retain talent from more expansive pools. If inclusion is managed well, LGBT+ talent promises new riches to the boardroom, which can help organisations to capture demographic and socio-moral changes in their environments and talent pipelines.

<a>Coming out and LGBT+ talent in the boardroom

Visibility is vital for any talent to be recognised at work. Being visible also goes for LGBT+ talent in terms of symbolic, network-based, and individual visibility (McFadden & Crowley-Henry, 2018). Although organisations' discursive recognition of sexual orientation identities provides extended visibility, LGBT+ talent needs an inclusive environment and culture to be energised.

Coming out provides LGBT+ individuals with dignity and honesty at the personal level, fair and normalised relationships with colleagues (Humphrey, 1999) and a sense of belonging to the community (Toft, 2020). Therefore, processes and experiences of coming out are pivotal for LGBT+ talent to experience inclusion at work. The statement of *Jeffrey Krogh* (Managing Director, Media & Telecom Finance Team at BNP Paribas) regarding the closet experience is representative in this respect (Qvist, 2015; p.1): "There's a lot of worrying, planning and energy that goes into being in the closet. That is energy that could otherwise be channelled to the job that you're there to do". As the quote suggests coming out could provide several benefits for LGBT+ talent to unleash their potential at work.

There are three distinct parts in coming out at work for LGBT+ in the boardroom. First, there is a talent trade-off in the closet. Although progressive movements seek to provide visibility for diverse sexual orientation identities, it is still not always easy to come out at work, even in countries that protect and promote the rights of LGBT+ individuals. According to the Corporate Equality Index (CEI) report prepared by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRC, 2021), even though 94 per cent of Fortune 500 companies have developed policies to prevent discrimination against gender identity, 46 per cent of LGBT+ workers across the United States remain closeted at work. HRC (2018) also revealed the prominent obstacles to coming out at work: the fear of being stereotyped, the possibility of damaging or losing relations with colleagues, the feeling of bothering other people with their concerns, and the fear that colleagues would consider them as making sexual advances urges LGBT+ to stay in the closet. However, as LGBT+ individuals move up in positions of power and influence, they may find it easier to come out with their sexual orientation and gender identities at work. In the closeted stage, instead of using the full extent of their talents, LGBT+ individuals focus on protecting themselves against discrimination and harassment, fighting hard for recognition in hostile environments, which may have homophobic, biphobic and transphobic banter and risk of involuntary outing, and achieve security in the workplace (Denier & Waite, 2019). LGBT+ individuals may trade off their gender identity with job security in such a setting. Thus, in the boardroom case, the above-cited fears could be appeased if the boardroom culture is prepared for LGBT+ inclusion, and the trade-off may be between varied forms of talent that LGBT+ individuals deploy and their performance in the boardroom.

Second, remaining in the closet wastes LGBT+ talent. In addition to stealing time and energy from productive work, being closeted is a transformative stage through which LGBT+ individuals develop cognitive and experiential skills, such as self-reflection, flexibility, originality, empathy, and sociability, among others. For example, while 83% of LGBT workers in the US are in a workplace expecting them to share their social life, feeling obliged to hide their sexual orientation identity keeps them from non-work conversations and prevents them from socialising (HRC, 2014). Even though some organisations support coming out and LGBT+ rights, their culture can create a 'gay-friendly closet' by promoting the concealment of sexual orientation identity marks as required by professionalism, and hiding in the workplace turns into an acceptable practice for LGBT+ workers (Williams et al., 2009; Kelly et al., 2020). This stage of passing as cis-hetero resembles the cocoon stage in the development of the butterfly, where the LGBT+ identity remains dormant and concealed.

The third stage is coming out in the boardroom. For this to happen, LGBT+ individuals would need an LGBT+ inclusive culture. The inclusive workplace enables LGBT+ individuals to focus on their job performance and feel safe rather than concealing themselves (Lim et al., 2019). Supportive policies for coming out reportedly have the strongest correlation with the effectiveness of LGBT+ inclusion at work (Webster et al., 2018). Coming out often breaks the cocoon of LGBT+ and facilitates unleashing potential LGBT+ talent (Hewlett & Yoshino, 2016). In addition, LGBT+ supportive policies help shape the recognition and positive subjective experience of LGBT+ workers (Pichler et al., 2017).

Overall, from hostility to LGBT+ identities to their inclusion in the boardroom, there are three distinct stages of evolution. First, it is crucial to remove homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic cultures and structures that render boardroom environments hostile to LGBT+ individuals. The second stage is to introduce a set of inclusive organisational behaviours in the boardroom so that the boardroom culture and practices allow room for LGBT+ identities to emerge. Third, coming out should be encouraged and made possible by rules and policies of acceptance and compatibility of LGBT+ identities with the boardroom cultures.

<a>Conclusion: Towards a rainbow agenda for promoting LGBT+ inclusion in the boardroom

Boardroom diversity is often framed along gender lines, focusing on equal representation of women in the main (Kakabadse et al., 2015). However, boardroom diversity has gained an intersectional character (Crenshaw, 2017) thanks to the progressive social movements, such as Pride Marches, the Black Lives Matter and the feminist movements, demanding a more inclusive agenda for boardroom diversity beyond gender. However, we also explained in the chapter that the prospects of LGBT+ inclusion meet considerable resistance in compulsory heterosexuality, which informs all aspects of social, economic and political life. In the context of compulsory heterosexuality, the inclusion of LGBT+ individuals in the boardroom is likely to

happen after a long march. In this chapter, we collected evidence of the emergence of LGBT+ diversity in the boardroom, defined its parameters, identified why LGBT+ inclusion is imperative for boardroom diversity and how it would manifest. We concluded the chapter with a rainbow approach to promote LGBT+ inclusion in the boardroom. Reflecting on each colour's meaning in the rainbow flag, we proposed a change agenda to promote LGBT+ inclusion.

The agenda for promoting LGBT+ inclusion in the boardroom is paved with the hurdle of heteronormativity that remains intact across many organisations. Despite these significant roadblocks, the LGBT+ movement has made tremendous progress promoting LGBT+ inclusion in the boardroom. In this section, drawing on the symbolism of the colours of the rainbow in the pride flag, we propose a change agenda for organisations to build LGBT+ inclusion in the boardroom. There are eight colours in the rainbow pride flag, which stands for many social movements, not just LGBT+ rights. Pink is for sexuality. Red signifies life. Orange is for healing. Yellow represents the sunlight. Blue is for arts. Indigo is for harmony. Violet is for the spirit.

Pink is for sexuality:

One of the challenges to LGBT+ inclusion has been the invisibility of LGBT+ individuals as they have not been traditionally counted and accounted for. Quantifiable demonstration of LGBTI+ diversity would make the boardroom more LGBT friendly. Better data and monitoring is essential to provide visibility to LGBT+ in the boardroom. Since not every LGBT+ individual may wish to come out at work due to privacy and safety concerns that are still valid today (Badgett, 2020), it is the responsibility of the boardroom to ensure the safety and inclusion of members if they are to come out. Monitoring and data collection activities often serve to legitimate and make it acceptable for LGBT+ identities to be counted and accounted for. In particular, organisations could capture LGBT+ data in the boardroom and the talent pipeline. For example, IBM was included in the list '250 LGBT+ High Potential/Top Talent Worldwide', which includes companies that monitor high potential LGBT+ staff (Workplace Pride Foundation, 2012). Subscription to such external initiatives or internal data collection and monitoring systems help the boardroom to prepare itself for representational and cultural changes.

However, in many boardroom appointments, the pooling of candidates and recruitment practices are outsourced to recruitment agencies and headhunters (Ozbilgin & Tatli 2007). Therefore monitoring the methods of recruitment agencies and headhunters for LGBT+ friendly recruitment could ensure that LGBT+ relevant data could be collected by these agencies also.

Red is for life:

There is a lifecycle of discrimination that face LGBT+ individuals from birth to death bed (Ozbilgin and Ozturk, 2014; Kamasak et al., 2019). The LGBT+ movement tackles the hegemonic order of compulsory heterosexuality across all life and work domains. This contestation

requires multilevel interventions. Beyond protective legislation and company policies, it is also essential to prevent LGBT+ individuals from being hurt by workplace relationships. LGBT+ often have to distance themselves from or hide their authentic selves to avoid verbal harassment, humiliating jokes and taunting at work (Meyer, 2010; Baker & Lucas, 2017). Forcing LGBT+ individuals to be out against their will is another major problem encountered at work. Organisations should not tolerate mistreatments and take precautions to support inclusive practices for LGBT+ talent. Building structures that will support the security and privacy of LGBT+ individuals against the risk of involuntary disclosure could help gain their trust (Dym et al., 2019). Research suggests that formal policies and practices could be developed to educate non-LGBT+ individuals about acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviours and procedures regarding disclosure and privacy of LGBT+ identities (Webster et al., 2018). Organisations could prove their discourses, policies, and practices against homophobic, biphobic and transphobic elements. This activity could be performed by either internal agents or external consultants who are specialised in this topic. Bias proofing the boardroom would help it prepare for sexual orientation diversity, rendering it a safe space for LGBT+ inclusion.

Orange is for healing:

The past trauma of the history of stigmatisation, symbolic, physical and psychological discrimination and bias that LGBT+ individuals experienced in the hegemonic order of compulsory heterosexuality should be remedied. The remedy could be only possible through healing. However, we do not only propose healing of the LGBT+ community. Healing through individual and institutional level interventions should address the uneven nature of the heteronormative order that haunts personal relationships and institution making practices. Healing is a shared process that should be everyone's responsibility that should take concrete form in organisational discourses, policies and procedures. There are many interventions offered by organisational psychology, such as mindfulness training, unconscious bias training, awareness-raising programmes and institutional interventions such as proofing of systemic and institutional biases and exclusionary practices against LGBT+ (Singh and O'Brien, 2021). Furthermore, organisations could use LGBT+ networks, pride month, and LGBT+ allies and champions to cross-fertilise innovative ideas for collective healing where identity and orientation fault lines could be replaced with new forms of solidarity among staff (Maks-Solomon and Drewery, 2021).

Yellow is for the sunlight:

Sunlight makes it possible to see the world as we believe it is natural and authentic. Visibility through authenticity is an excellent way through which LGBT+ individuals could flourish in the boardroom. Combating compulsory heteronormativity and allowing for expressions of authenticity for LGBT+ individuals that are true to their nature could help save considerable

energy, which they need to use to behave like heterosexuals at work (Best, 2019). Furthermore, allowing atypical board members to display authenticity without losing the trust and respect of other board members could help improve board performance. Such a change would impact LGBT+ individuals and women in the boardroom positively. Women also report similar levels of discomfort with the loss of authenticity when they take up board positions (Sayce and Ozbilgin, 2014).

Blue is for arts:

In this context, arts signifies how LGBT+ individuals, like artists in life, could be the outsiders within, innovators from the margins, like other atypical individuals who can join leadership positions (Samdanis and Ozbilgin, 2020). The innovative potential of LGBT+ individuals could be revealed if they are allowed to enter the orthodoxy as heterodox others (Greenhalgh et al., 2021). When LGBT+ issues are considered, an immediate focus is made on sexual orientation and gender identity aspects of LGBT+ individuals. Such a narrow focus diminishes the humanity of LGBT+ individuals. Like the demands of feminist, anti-racist, disability movements, the LGBT+ movement demands more to an individual than their single demographic category alone (Özbilgin and Erbil, 2021). Recognising the innovative potential of LGBT+ individuals like other atypical newcomers to the boardroom needs to move from purism to pluralism in framing leadership talent in the boardroom. The pluralism is only possible if boardroom paradigms for evidence for talent shift from the lock-in of the traditional mindsets that suffer from heteronormativity towards interdisciplinarity and the recognition of the value of the other legitimate forms of 'being' and 'doing' in the boardroom.

Indigo is for harmony:

Much of the LGBT+ literature on workplaces relations focuses on the deficit model, i.e. the exclusion, demarcation and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation at work. We propose that beyond the deficit model, there is significant potential to see the harmony that effective inclusion of LGBT+ individuals could bring to the boardroom. Most LGBT+ individuals make their career and workplace choices based on the reputation and supportive structures that organisations offer for LGBT+ inclusion (McFadden, 2015). Therefore, bias proofing the boardroom is not enough to ensure inclusion. From how board members interact to how they socialise and conduct themselves should be transformed to provide a supportive and inclusive environment for LGBT+ talent. This transformation could be possible by recognising the unique and idiosyncratic needs of the LGBT+ in the boardroom, such as recognition and legitimation of their work habits, romantic relationships, socialisation patterns (Sears et al., 2018). As most boardrooms are built on heteronormative principles (Rumens, 2011), acceptance and inclusion of the LGBT+ identity would require a deep level of cultural change at the level of fundamental and taken for granted assumptions of the boardroom.

Violet is for spirit:

There is a need for multilevel interventions for promoting the inclusion of LGBT+ individuals in the boardroom. At the micro-individual level, LGBT+ individuals need mentoring and training to qualify for boardroom roles. They also require boardroom level sponsorship for their LGBT+ talent to be recognised better. There is also a significant need for LGBT+ specific leadership programmes. At the meso-organisational level, boardroom diversity should have a concrete case for sexual orientation diversity as an essential inclusion category. This kind of diversity needs buy-in from the boardroom. Furthermore, this effort should not remain at the inclusion of sexual orientation as a category alone. It should be considered part of the diversity-led boardroom transformation at multiple levels.

We argue that recognising, recruiting and retaining LGBT+ talent in the boardroom at a practical level requires multifaceted change. We outline below the kind of changes that practitioners of equality, diversity and inclusion could consider for fostering LGBT+ inclusion in the boardroom:

<c>Change representation - out LGBT+ members in the boardroom and ally role models at the board level could pioneer change of boardroom composition (Fullerton, 2013).

<c>Change the cognitive frames - organisations could define talent in the boardroom in LGBT+ inclusive ways and shape the mental structures in the boardroom in more inclusive ways through the influence and buy-in of champions and agents of change (Wright et al., 2006).

<c>Change the conversation - organisations may tackle banter, and phobic discourses, focus on the positive contribution of LGBT+ in the boardroom, achieve buy-in from current members.

<c>Change policies - organisations could offer supportive coming out policies, bias and harassment proofing policies, tackle client and investor bias, and deliver supportive policies to make the boardroom LGBT+ friendly.

<c>Change culture - create an LGBT+ supportive culture and climate in the boardroom and the organisational ecosystem.

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