

baby steps:
an inclusive workplace
for blue-collar employees





When we think about inclusion, do we think about co-workers and people occupying the same working desk with us or also of the staff that co-exists with us on our work floors, the blue-collar employees? Shanthi Muniswamy, a transgender person speaks on behalf of her community and says, “For the trans community in general, most people are high school dropouts. They often end up in housekeeping or front office desk assistant kind of jobs.”

Given these realities, conversations around inclusion must also cover the interests of blue-collar workers.

There are many ways in which we can extend our support by way of the right behavior, right language, and right provisions to both blue-collar employees, equally as the white-collared workforce.

At Randstad our new study titled ‘Inclusion Without Exception: Where India Inc. stands with respect to the LGBTQ+ community’, aims to bring forth the challenges faced by the blue collared employees and what organizations can do to make them feel welcomed equally as the white-collar employees.

As policymakers and managers, we create policies and literature for all, but do we also disseminate these in languages that are understood by both white-collar and blue-collar employees?



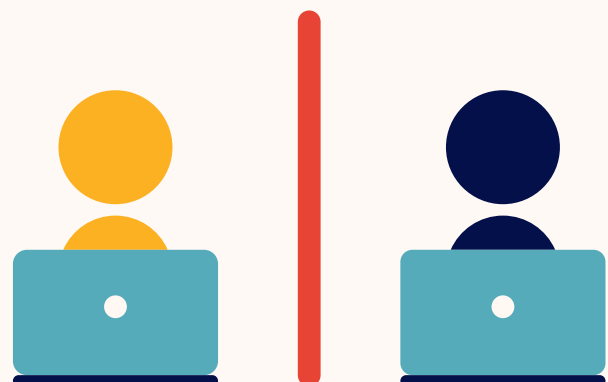
A senior HR leader in a global company that provides facilities management and food services to other Corporates has a high number of blue-collar employees. The company is committed to the agenda of diversity and inclusion and has a number of initiatives for the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ workforce within their internal teams. But, the challenge arises when their employees are placed at client sites.

She says, “We often hire members of the LGBTQ+ community, specifically transgender people, for various jobs. However, when we send them to client sites, we have to check from them if their facilities and culture is open and welcoming of these employees. If they are not, then we do not want our employees to face any kind of discrimination. This becomes a major hurdle in our efforts of inclusion.”

She further elaborates, “The basic challenge that we face is whether or not the client is willing to keep employees who are trans people or openly from the LGBTQ+ community. There could be challenges like what washroom will this person use at the client-side. Mostly we hire people in blue-collar jobs. Many of these employees are also contractual in nature, so while our intent is strongly there, we have to manage our clients also.”

A similar pattern is observed in manufacturing industries, the construction industry, and other jobs like sales jobs which are male-dominated areas. Inclusion in such fields is limited as the first step of infrastructural facilities is unavailable. However, most of the time even if the infrastructural requirements are met, there are more challenges to conquer. Think about your own workspace and the possibility of coming across members from the transgender community? As Shanthi, a trans member pointed out, these would mostly be in housekeeping, janitorial or admin roles, basically shared services. As policymakers, being cognizant of this fact converts this into an opportunity area. Work can be done to increase the awareness level of your organization and impact the behavior of employees directly to create an overall culture of acceptance of LGBTQ+ at work.

Here is what organizations can do to welcome diverse blue-collar employees and make them feel a part of the workplace:



show

Visual cues and display of allyship work best to show your commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion and to reach audiences that are English speaking as well as those that are not. Tenets of inclusion as a visual chart and use of local language will align well with blue-collar employees also and will make them feel included. Signs of support and display of allyship through a common badge for all employees is another way of letting the blue-collar employees know of the intent of inclusion. Targeted video-based awareness campaigns, role plays are another way. Suresh Ramdas, a Cis Gay Man, working as Global Training Lead in a multinational company in Bangalore and winner of Mr. Gay India 2019 says, "Overall, mindsets have shifted a bit. More awareness is brought in through storytelling, movies, and inviting external people."

Specific referral benefits to increase the members of the LGBTQ+ community may also help in giving the right signals of intent to the blue collared employees as well as meeting your internal inclusion goals.

seek

Actively seek employees who belong to diverse communities. Inclusion metric that only measures hiring may not be the best metric but it is a good starting point. Outsourcing blue-collared jobs to vendors and service providers in this space are common. However, when you do so, you can specifically ask for a diverse workgroup, like members from the LGBTQ+ community. You can also seek organizations in the non-profit space that work for the rehabilitation and employment of members of the LGBTQ+ community. When you work with them, they will also help in the process of onboarding and sensitization of other employees. From an employee perspective also, there will be higher acceptance if they understand the struggles of the community through such entities.

We need to be consistently evaluating and tailoring our LGBT+ inclusion efforts and activating them based on the realities on the ground. – Nidhi Jain, Director, and Head Corporate HR, EY India



sensitize

A transgender person (identity withheld) who was a part of the study narrates an experience. She says, “There were instances in my current workplace when a member of the cafeteria called me ‘sir’. Once I was stopped by the housekeeping staff to use the women’s washroom despite wearing a dress and makeup.” This reflects that there is a need for sensitization to extend to all employees, regardless of where in the organisation they are placed.

In the current example, the entire staff and admin was thereafter sensitized about the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community through multiple languages and modules. However, there is merit in adopting a proactive approach rather than a reactive one. The first step is to have training sessions that include both blue collared and white collared employees, as well as talks about inclusion for all.

“My company is like a rainbow.. colorful souls working beautifully together. No discrimination and so much inclusivity. Cis women, allies, and trans community working together in harmony, love, peace, and friendship.”- Shanthi Muniswamy, a transgender person

This is how Shanthi describes her current workplace. Wouldn’t you want the same description for your organization, as an employee and a policymaker? Including blue and white collared employees equally can be the first vital step.



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