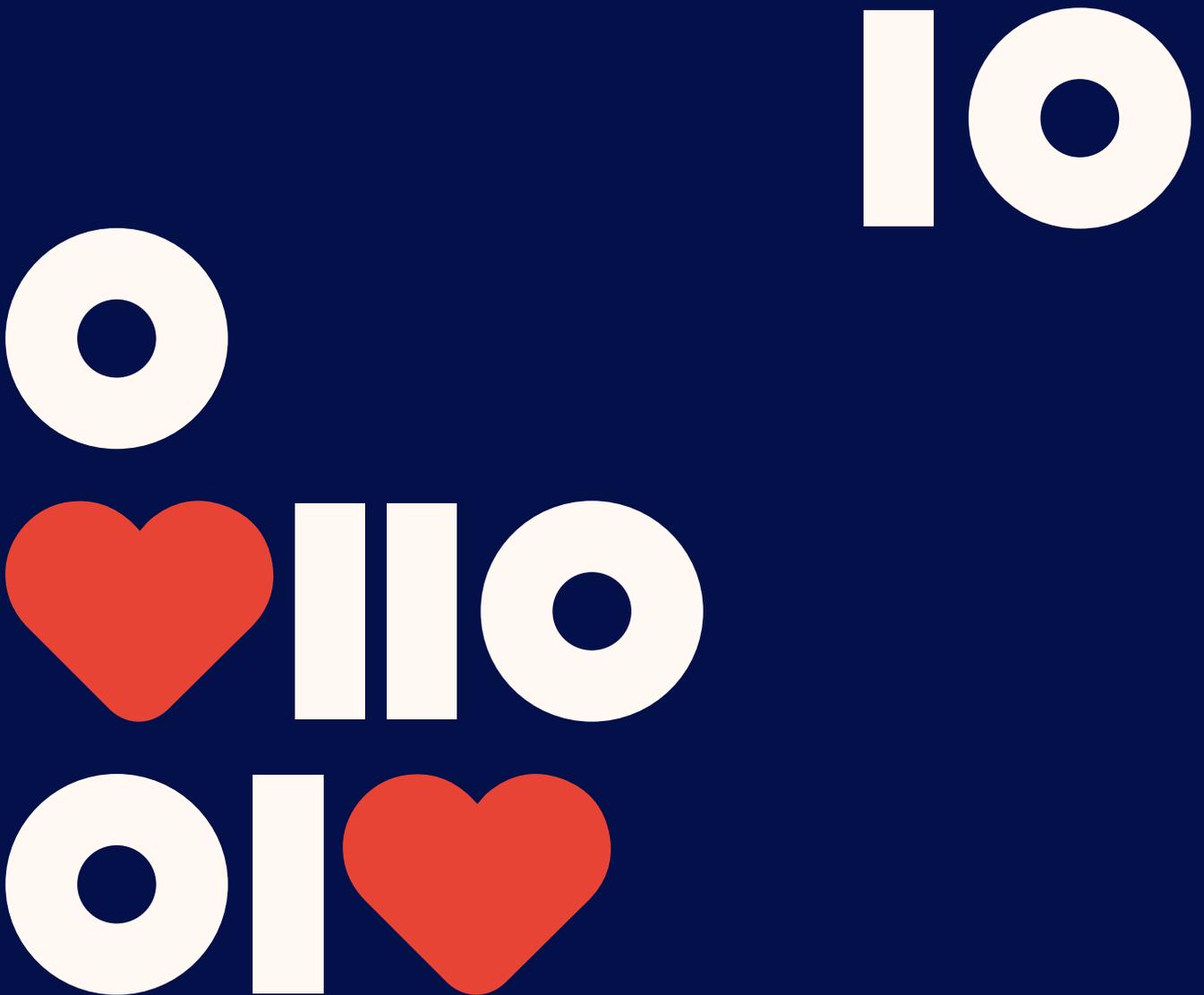


beyond the binary:  
what people with fluid  
identities & orientations  
need at work



As LGBTQ+ inclusion in Indian workplaces is still in its infancy, much of the intent as well as implementation still considers the community as a monolithic entity. As Dr. Shruti Chakravarty, Chief Advisor, Mariwala Health Initiative says, “In the corporate world, LGBT is collapsed together. People are not looking at it individually – the sexualities and genders. It’s basically us and ‘all of them’.”

In reality, whether it comes to challenges with finding work, or broader acceptance from one’s peers in the office, the experiences of a transwoman, a cis-gender gay man and that of a non-binary individual are likely to be quite different; policies and initiatives need to take these into account.

This does not always mean that organizations need distinct policies for people of each specific gender identity or sexual orientation.

Instead, we need policies and initiatives that are flexible and can be adapted to the widest possible range of needs that individuals may have.

To start with, we must accept that we come from a context of ignorance. As Kanav N Sahgal, a queer development professional based out of New Delhi says, “In India, we don’t talk about sexuality much. It’s like it doesn’t exist in the workplace context. At a younger age, you can get away with it. As you grow older, people start asking questions – are you married/single? It gets harder, I think.”

This is exacerbated for people who fall outside the binary, whether in terms of identity or orientation; people who do not identify as male or female, for instance and instead, identify as gender-queer, or people who are not attracted to men or women exclusively, but are bisexual or even pansexual. Such individuals report feeling tremendous isolation from others around them, and sometimes even from other members of the LGBTQ+ community. Sruthi Praveen, a pansexual woman, working in the IT industry says, “I say I am queer (as they don’t understand pansexual) but even people within the LGBTQ community are not very supportive of those with fluid sexuality.”



Moreover, some young people outside the binary may be at a stage where they are trying to understand and come to terms with their own identity. Hence, it is important for employers to make sure that gender sensitization programs exist which help all employees better understand concepts such as gender fluidity, the gender spectrum and the fact that sexual orientation too is far more diverse than we commonly understand.

At Randstad, our new study, 'Inclusion Without Exception: Where India Inc. stands with respect to the LGBTQ+ community', included conversations with non-binary, gender-fluid individuals as well as those whose sexual orientations are fluid, or bisexual or pansexual and with HR leaders; based on these discussions, these were some of the good practices that emerged:

- Gender sensitization for all employees to understand the very existence of non-binary individuals
- Help employees understand how and why misgendering hurts people, and enable them to use the right pronouns
- Sensitization of HR recruiters, including external recruitment partners especially when they deal with non-binary people
- Ensuring that forms have an option to include gender fluid persons
- Sensitizing employees in general to avoid intrusive questions around family and marriage

- Benefits and policies that include same-sex partners
- Official dress codes that do not conform to gender norms and allow people to express their identity

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As Dr. L. Ramakrishnan, Vice-President of SAATHII, a national NGO headquartered in Chennai says, "A top 10 IT company was directed by their SFO office to come up with inclusive policies in India. They felt people are not coming out so we can't do much, but that's a wrong approach. People will not come out until companies can assure that there will be no discrimination, no glass ceiling and protective measures will be in place."

If your organisation has not yet begun on this journey, the time is now! If you have begun working to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ people, this would be the right time to delve deeper and identify how flexible and widely adaptable your policies are.



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