randstad
insights

does equity win over equality
as an inclusion approach?
find out from the
LGBTQ+ at work

abstract

The principle of equality offers equal policies and support to everyone while the principle of equity propagates varied input to reach favourable outcomes. We observe that organizations move through the stages of being an equality-driven employer to equity-driven employer. This depends on where they appear in the zone of LGBTQ+ inclusion - peripheral, deep or immersive. Find out where your organization falls and what other organizations are doing in the equity space.

Lakshmi is a candidate who appears for an interview in your organization. She has applied for a job that is purely technical in nature. You are the interviewing manager, along with the other relevant members of your organization. During the interview, you observe that Lakshmi holds the relevant technical qualification, but is not a management graduate. Her communication skills are also average. Other candidates are better in communication skills, although somewhat equally qualified. How would you then decide whether or not to hire her?

Now, add another dimension to this scenario. Lakshmi is a transwoman. She has faced many challenges to reach a certain level of education. She comes from a small city so her communication skills may be average. But, does she immediately need these skills for her job or can she develop these over a period of time, with training and intervention? Now, would you still base your selection on the visible factors, or would you also consider the context and background of the individual? Would you only take the current skill-set into account or would you also consider the potential of the individual? How about looking at it from the perspective of the candidate? Who according to you will value the opportunity more?

If you consider all of the invisible factors, there are chances that Lakshmi may get the job. This is the mindset shift when decision-making is based on equity over equality.

> When you view people through the lens of 'equality', you offer the same kind of policies and support to everyone, irrespective of their context and background. When you view people through the lens of 'equity', you provide varied inputs and support for those who need it, to reach favorable outcomes.

So, in a sense, equality is more universal, while equity is customized.

One may say that the concept of equality is based on merit and sounds like a fair concept, but the fact of the matter is that equality may not always be inclusive, whereas equity will be.

Randstad's research titled 'Inclusion Without Exception: Where India Inc. stands with respect to the LGBTQ+ community', reveals that employers in India Inc. have started making strides in this direction. 45% of surveyed organizations have policies in place for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals at work. These may still be at initial stages, and through the qualitative study we understand that most organizations fall under three zones, based on their focus on LGBTQ+ inclusion.

the 3 zones of LGBTQ+ focus

Different organizations are at different stages of LGBTQ+ inclusion. To understand the plans for the future, it is important to first understand the zones in which companies can be viewed from the LGBTQ+ lens

peripheral

- Beginners in the journey of LGBTQ+ inclusion
- In the stage of reviewing existing policies
- No support for closeted/out employees
- No dedicated Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)
- Limited commitment from leadership teams

deep

- 4-5 years old in the journey
- Policies and infrastructure support inclusion
- Hiring and allyship as priority areas
- Dedicated Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)
- LGBTQ+ inclusion not built in leadership goals

immersive

- Pioneers in LGBTQ+ inclusion
- Inclusion as culture
- Dedicated focus and infusion of D&I in all processes
- Employees as allies
- LGBTQ+ representation in leadership
- Inclusion goals for leadership (as corroborated by quantitative study on 60% MNC leaders having such goals)

Companies with peripheral focus follow the concept of 'Equality' for inclusion

"It is not one community or section that we are focusing on, its anti-discrimination in general." - Shambhavi Solanki, Associate Director - Corporate HR, Policybazaar.com

Companies with deep and immersive focus follow the concept of 'Equity' for inclusion

"It is imperative that we look at affirmative actions, if we are going to be moving into the social justice, equity space, as an evolved organization." - Zainab Patel, HR Director: Inclusion & Diversity, KPMG in India

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Peripheral: The organizations are beginners in the journey of LGBTQ+ inclusion. They do not have specific policies and provisions in place for LGBTQ+ inclusion, however, they are aligned to the concept, and may have begun reviewing their policies. This means that they will not actively try to include any member from the LGBTQ+ community in their workforce. There may be existing closeted employees, however, there are no Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) or support groups present to help them come out.

Deep: The organizations in this zone are 4-5 years old in the journey of LGBTQ+ inclusion. They have policies and infrastructure in place to support members of the LGBTQ+ community. They also have specific hiring and allyship programmes, and certain ERGs in place. However, D&I inclusion is not a part of leadership goals.

Immersive: The organizations in this zone are pioneers of LGBTQ+ inclusion. They have the necessary policies and infrastructure in place. The overall agenda of diversity and inclusion is infused as part of the language and culture of the organization. Employees sign up as allies and advocates for inclusion, and leaders are actively invested in the D&I agenda, with specific inclusion goals to pursue. Most organizations in this category are MNCs that look to their global teams for driving inclusion.

Organizations operating in the peripheral zone are most likely to conform to the principle of 'equality' while those in the deep and immersive zone will be inclined to the principle of 'equity'.

The organization's graph may not always move from equality to equity.

The change is largely dependent on the overall philosophy and the vision of leadership. A senior HR leader from a global MNC says, "To make any progress, we must first ingrain inclusion as the DNA of leadership first so that it percolates in the DNA of the workforce."

On one hand, we see organizations operating on the basics of equality only, while on the other hand, we see conversations have moved beyond equity, and to the area of social justice. Says Zainab Patel, HR Director: Inclusion & Diversity, KPMG in India, "It is imperative that we look at affirmative actions, if we are going to be moving into the social justice, equity space, as an evolved organization."

Presenting a different view Felix Selvaraj, 36, who identifies as a cis-gender gay man, working in an IT role for an MNC in Chennai says, "All say on paper that they are equal opportunity employers. But they need to address questions like 'Do you have an LGBTQ+ network at the office? Are the senior leaders sensitized and are they driving sensitization of employees.. telling them it's not ok to be homophobic?" If not, then the question to ask is that is equality sufficient?

Here is how using one approach over the other impacts your organization and the people working in the organization:

equity levels the playing field, equality is based on assumptions

Equity refers to fairness and equality in outcomes. It understands that different people need differentiated support for achieving equal outcomes, while equality assumes that a standard environment works for everyone. Equality assumes that the playing field is equal while equity levels the playing field by providing differentiated arrangements and an environment for everyone to be their best at work.

Alok Kulhar is a gay man and heads Talent Acquisition at AXA XL in Gurgaon. He works closely with policy makers to create gender-neutral and LGBTQ+ policies at the workplace. He is the Lead for their PRIDE chapter in Asia Pacific (APAC) region and also a part of the global PRIDE team. A strong believer of the concept of equity over equality, he talks about the incident where he was asked by the management of an organization that he had been working for at that time, to create equal policies for everyone. He says, "They said let's make equal policies. Whatever applies to straight people should apply to others – so gender-neutral policies should be implemented. But I had a problem with that. The needs of people may differ so check what they need and give them that instead of giving everyone the same things. I personally have been privileged with the support from my family and not struggling but it is not available to all LGBT people in India."

He emphasizes that there is a need to look at equality from a lens of privilege. Each individual's life story is different and that should decide the support that needs to be extended.

equity addresses the root cause, equality is a band-aid measure

Equity understands that different people come from different backgrounds and different life circumstances.

> When you approach each individual in the organization uniquely, you are able to address those many unique problems and come up with unique solutions for each situation.

For example, a paternity leave benefit that extends for adoptive children as well. It could also be flexible work timings during a gender reassignment surgery. The crux is that where there is a problem, there is a solution that the organization extends. Shikha Gupta, Director HR, Schneider Electric explains this concept. She says, "The policies are designed and reviewed with the intent that anybody and everybody who's coming from any background, culture, mindset or orientation, is able to utilize one or the other policy for their unique situation. The idea is to have policies which are addressing as many unique situations as possible."

equity is commitment, equality is compliance

When an organization uses the approach of equity, it is more than just compliance to global or legal mandates, it is a commitment; a commitment from leadership and teams toward inclusion and the readiness to make reasonable accommodations in processes like hiring, onboarding, performance management, and leadership preparation.

equity defines culture, equality defines practices

Rakesh Kumar Duan, a 29 years old cis gay man working in HR at Finastra in Bangalore present both views, as an HR professional and as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. He says, "Organizations are thinking of more and more ways of including people. The culture is growing, I am sure people are too."

When policymakers think of more ways to include people, they will need to make more arrangements for it. This will also mean that it cannot be done without the buy-in of leaders and the workforce. As a result, they make more effort to educate and sensitize the workforce, thus paving the way for a more inclusive culture.
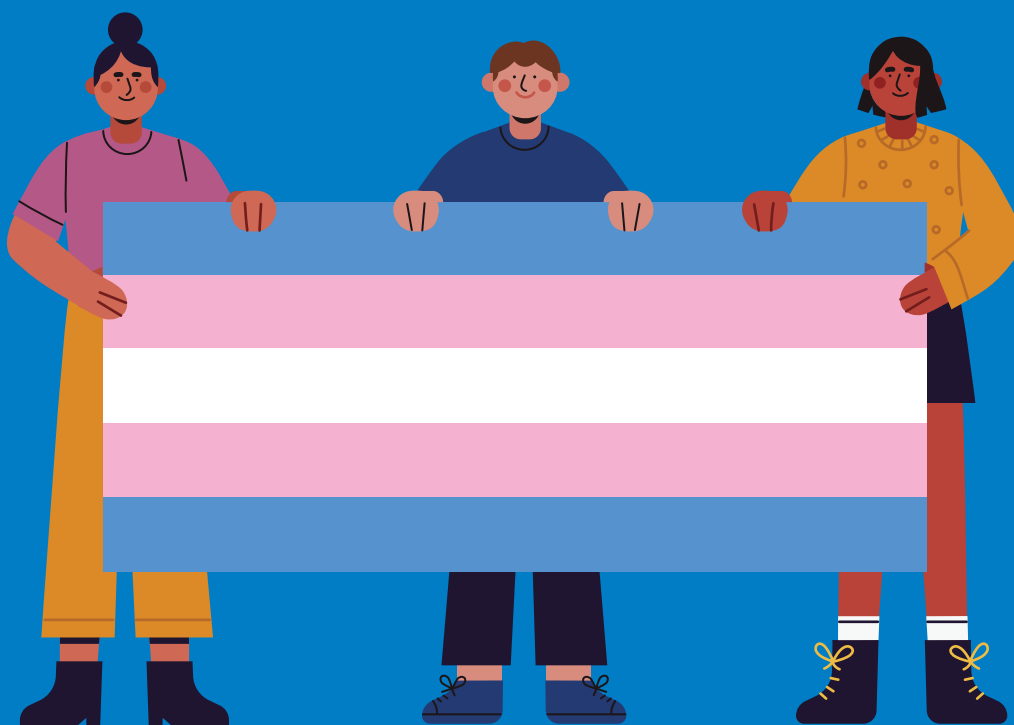
equity is sustainable, equality is transient

When organizations approach any inclusion from an equity perspective, the efforts evolve constantly. They go through the stages of educate, reinforce, act and enable, and each step is progressive. Zainab Patel, HR Director: Inclusion & Diversity, KPMG in India, explains this relation of intent and effort and says, "So while having a tokenistic, gender-neutral washroom is good and seen as a band-aid measure, I think it's important to back it up with the safe bathroom access policies because you want to create spaces and help preserve safe spaces for people."

In the journey of inclusion, not all organizations can be at the same level. Equity requires action and accommodation of differences, which means that the resources have to be in place too. To begin with, transparency in hiring, career progression, consequences, and rewards can be looked at. But an equitable workplace must also provide training and professional development opportunities to correct the conditions that create disadvantages for these marginalized groups. Only then can organizations really facilitate a sense of belonging for all their employees.

Nidhi Jain, Director, and Head Corporate HR, EY India sums it up and says, "Organizations in their quest to be truly inclusive cannot ignore the fact that the LGBT+ community haven't been represented quite well. It is our responsibility to create a work environment where everyone feels that they belong and can bring their unique selves to work. We need to be consistently evaluating and tailoring our LGBT+ inclusion efforts and activating them based on the realities on the ground."

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