



HOW TO

LGBT*IQ – AND YOU? COMING OUT FOR INSIDERS

A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYEES



THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

LGBT*IQ IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

Why should heterosexual employers take an interest in lesbians, gays and other people who are “different”? Why is everyone suddenly talking about diversity, a third gender option and gender-inclusive, gender-fair language? What interest is it to managers if their employees come out and why are some German texts full of stars or underscores? And anyway: what does LGBT*IQ mean?

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LGBT*IQ – WHO'S INTERESTED?

LGBT*IQ IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

— Let's start from the beginning: LGBT*IQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer – in other words, anyone who is not heterosexual or does not fit the typical definitions of male or female. All those who fall into this “traditional category” are also referred to as cis-gender people.

— The concerns of LGBT*IQ people affect the world of work more than you might first suppose. On the one hand, there are more LGBT*IQ people than you think; on the other, only 37% of them dare to come out completely. This is precisely where a key issue arises: people who permanently have to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity can't concentrate properly on their job.

LGBT*IQ – A WORTHWHILE COMMITMENT

— To put it the other way round: If everyone is free to be who they are, talents can be displayed, energies focused and perspectives broadened. This enables an open culture of togetherness to be turned into productive cooperation. LGBT*IQ is not a niche topic, quite the opposite; everyone benefits from a respectful and constructive corporate culture:

| Stronger team spirit | Higher work ethic
| Increased productivity | Greater attractiveness

COMING OUT FOR INSIDERS

— According to a current study, 85% of LGBT*IQ people in Germany are willing to come out – but only just under one in three does so at work. What's almost as sad is that, compared with other countries, Germany is lagging behind here. But why?

— Fear of rejection, discrimination and taking a career hit is considerable – and may be justified. At the same time, being open about your own sexual orientation, gender identity and gender can bring many advantages, such as greater work satisfaction, a feeling of belonging, more creativity and better performance.

*This guide is aimed first and foremost at members of the LGBT*IQ community who want to be completely themselves in their day-to-day working life. It gives answers to important questions and highly practical tips on coming out in the workplace.*

COMING OUT IN THE WORKPLACE: GOOD TO KNOW

Because not everyone wants to candidly answer questions about their sexual orientation, it's difficult to determine the exact percentage of the population that is LGBT*IQ. This can lead to underestimates. The proportion is currently estimated at 7.4 %, although we can assume that the actual figure is higher.

Either way: given that the working population in Germany is around 44.8 million (as of February 2019), this translates into at least 3.3 million LGBT*IQ people employed in all sectors. International research, too, shows that this minority is certainly not that small.





WHO DARES TO COME OUT?

- > As mentioned above: in Germany, only around one in three people come out in the workplace. When it comes to this issue, the differences within the LGBT*IQ community are considerable:
- > Women and non-binary people come out less often than their male colleagues.
- > Bisexual employees are more reserved about their sexual orientation than their homosexual colleagues.
- > Transgender employees come out much less.

LIGHT AND SHADE – ALL KINDS OF SECONDARY EFFECTS

FOR: Coming out in the workplace can be a liberating feeling that has many positive effects. The following findings from many years' research show the changes experienced by the majority of people who decide to take this step.

- > **Health:** The more open LGBT*IQ people are about their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender in the workplace, the fewer psychosomatic complaints they have.
- > **Energy:** If employees no longer have to waste any energy hiding their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender, this leads to an improvement in team spirit, motivation and their own productivity.
- > **Well-being:** Being more open also increases employees' work satisfaction and attachment to the company.

AGAINST: Nevertheless, coming out harbours the risk of discrimination. The following experiences that are relevant to the workplace were revealed by research:

- > **Direct discrimination:** Not getting a job, being moved to a different position or even being dismissed.
- > **Indirect discrimination:** Experiences here range from an uncomfortable interest being taken in employees' private lives, social exclusion and hindrances to work, through to workplace bullying and violence.

These risks are real and should not be taken lightly. This guide aims to help employees better assess and juggle them.

A private matter: Coming out will always be your choice – it's an extremely personal decision. For example, if you think that the whole thing is a private matter or if you don't (yet) feel confident enough to come out – that's fine. Your needs and your opinion are what counts.

ME AND THE OTHERS – THOSE AROUND YOU ARE CRUCIAL

How open-minded your superiors and colleagues are depends on various factors such as

- > Sector: the more conservative the sector is, the more traditional its world view and the less open it will be.
- > Office size: the larger it is, the more open it will be.
- > Corporate culture: e.g. open-minded about same-sex partners, LGBT*IQ employee network, gender-neutral toilets, etc.

Of course, there may also be champions among small companies, conservative sectors and LGBT*IQ novices – the exceptions confirm the rule. Irrespective of this, the attitude of your direct manager and of the people you work with is crucial. Having at least one sympathetic ear among this group can make all the difference.

THE LAW IS ON YOUR SIDE

The German General Equal Treatment Act (*Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz – AGG*), which entered into force in 2006, clearly stipulates that employees must not be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender. Of course, it's not always so easy to prove that one of these factors was actually why you didn't get a job, pay rise or promotion, for example. Nevertheless, it's a good idea to become familiar with the German General Equal Treatment Act and the related rights.

The key provisions:

VA ny agreements that violate anti-discrimination rules are invalid (cf. sec. 7 para. 2)

- > Employers are obliged to protect employees who are affected by discrimination (e.g. by issuing a warning to the perpetrators or dismissing them; cf. sec. 12).
- > If employers don't take suitable measures against discrimination, you have the right to refuse performance as well as claims to damages and compensation. These claims must be asserted within two months (cf. secs. 14 and 15).

Please note: churches in Germany have special status under employment law. If someone who comes out works for the church, the situation could be more problematic.

If all else fails: If you have any unanswered questions or have experienced discrimination, we recommend contacting the appropriate advice and information centres as well as your company's LGBT*IQ network, if one exists. You can find an overview of possible contacts on page 18 onwards.



COMING OUT AT WORK – STEP BY STEP

Coming out is always an individual process that there are no instructions for. What's definitely available, though, is past experience, support and tips. We've tried to bring all this together below so that you can approach the topic without fear and make decisions for yourself. And although coming out about your sexual orientation can differ from coming out about your gender identity or gender – e.g. in terms of the need for explanation – many emotional aspects are certainly comparable.

YOUR OWN ATTITUDE: FROM INSIDE TO OUTSIDE

Stance: For some people, being open about their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender is part of their everyday working life. Others find sharing this personal information in the workplace inappropriate. If you're thinking about coming out at work, you should first work out where you stand on the subject. Your own stance is always outwardly conveyed by your body language, aura, etc.

// Knowing where you stand makes it easier to stand up for yourself.

Self-perception: The more naturally you deal with your sexual orientation, gender identity or gender, the easier it will be for the people around you. An important piece of experience to bear in mind when coming out is that you can't force others to change their views. Either way, addressing your own feelings before coming out is crucial in order to tackle the process confidently and in a stronger frame of mind.

// Understanding yourself makes it easier for others to understand you.

Use past experience: Attitudes are heavily shaped by experience – both positive and negative. Ideally, this leads people to adopt a variety of strategies in all kinds of life situations. Thus, anyone who has already come out in various areas of their personal life can apply the relevant experiences to the world of work: What paid off? What do I want to do differently? Who gave me strength? How did I feel my way through conversations?

// Looking back can help you move forward.

CHECKLIST: WHERE DO I STAND?

- > How comfortable am I with my sexual orientation, gender identity and gender?
- > Is it easy or hard for me to talk about LGBT*IQ issues? Does it make a difference who I'm talking to?
- > Why would coming out be important to me? (Think about topics such as employer benefits, balancing work and family life as well as personal well-being.)
- > What did I experience when I came out in the past (if applicable)? What was the reaction of my family, friends, fellow trainees/students? Any experiences with other employers?
 - / What did I learn? Did I get the same reactions from several people? How did I feel about them?
 - / What reactions would I like to prevent and how can I do this successfully?
 - / How/from who did I find support, and what/who wasn't helpful?
 - / What strategies helped me and how could I use them now? (Think about support from others, feeling your way through a subject or acting self-confidently.)





SUPPORT – YOU'RE NOT ALONE!

Before coming out, people can feel like they're taking on the rest of the world on their own. This isn't surprising: most LGBT*IQ people grow up feeling that they're different – whether they live in the country or the city. Only gradually do they realise that their environment can also be diverse ... and, with the help of others, are strengthened in their own diversity. Asking for and accepting outside support can solve the feeling of isolation – and even replace it with a sense of security and of being valued.

PUT SIMPLY:

No one has to face this alone – various means of support are available to people who decide to come out at work.

IN THE WORKPLACE

- > Your HR department or staff/works council should provide help, advice and copies of information setting out your rights and the company's policies, in particular if a diversity management programme is in place.
- > Trade unions or professional associations can also advise you.
- > Enquire if there's an LGBT*IQ employee network or a regular LGBT*IQ meet-up.
- > People you trust: do you have any colleagues or superiors who you trust? Involve them in your plan.
- > Role models? Look around you – do you have any out colleagues or even superiors? Confide in them: you'll be surprised how much you can benefit from the experiences of others.
- > Figures don't lie: always remember – even if you don't have any out colleagues, it's virtually impossible that your company (or at least your sector) has no other LGBT*IQ employees. By coming out, you can set a positive example and give them courage.

IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE

- Of course, it may be that your company doesn't offer all these things. This makes it all the more important to have family and friends by your side in difficult situations.
- > Personal support network: Talk to good friends, family members and your partner about your plan to come out at work and ask them for support in particular during this period.
 - > Professionals: There are specialist advice centres, self-help groups and coaching sessions for people intending to come out. [1]
 - > Local LGBT*IQ communities will also provide encouragement.

KNOW YOUR WORKING ENVIRONMENT – HOW MUCH SCOPE DO YOU HAVE?

To enable you to weigh up and assess the pros and cons of coming out at work, take a good look at your working environment – try to realistically judge how open it is.

CHECKLIST: CORPORATE CULTURE

- > How does the company generally deal with outsiders?
- > Is there an anti-discrimination policy? Does it also apply to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender?
- > What employer benefits are offered, e.g. in terms of bonus payments and special leave? Are they the same for all employees regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender?
- > Active LGBT*IQ presence: is there an LGBT*IQ employee network or a regular meet-up?
- > Working atmosphere: are, for example, inappropriate jokes made at the expense of colleagues?
- > Are any colleagues out?
- > What are relationships like at work? Do your colleagues talk about their private life? Are you asked about yours? Do you consider the atmosphere friendly and supportive?

THE DIE IS CAST COMING OUT

Coming out is an ongoing process of development. This means that, with every new contact, boss, etc., you'll need to decide whether and how to reveal your sexual orientation, gender identity or gender. Ultimately, there are various ways to approach coming out – some of the following ideas may help you with this process.

COMING OUT IN SMALL STEPS

Take a deep breath: The more relaxed you are about coming out, the more relaxed other people can be in their reactions.

Feel your way forward in conversations: Talk about (current) LGBT*IQ topics such as adoption or specific series. Other people's reactions will enable you to better judge what their attitudes are.

Start small: Come out first to colleagues or superiors who give the most open impression to you. Build a support network for yourself like this.

Create opportunities: Put private pictures, e.g. of your partner, on your desk. This gives your colleagues a chance to ask private questions.

Get informed: Know your rights and where to find readily available offers of support.

Everyday routines: Use recurring situations to develop little routines. For example, if someone asks what you did at the weekend, tell them about the dinner at your partner's parents or about your involvement with the local LGBT*IQ association.

Self-confidence: You are valuable! Your sexual orientation, gender identity and gender are not flaws. On the contrary: from a professional point of view, they're a source of new perspectives, energy, creativity and opportunities for your employers. They allow you to bring more diversity and colour into the world.

[1]

PROUT AT WORK regularly holds seminars entitled "Do I or Don't I? Coming Out in the Workplace". Attendees get the chance to talk to experienced coaches about this important question and can bolster their confidence before coming out at work.

You can contact us at info@proutatwork.de



RESISTANCE? BE WELL PREPARED!

Sad but true: not everyone's reaction may be (equally) open. Discrimination and bullying can be both direct and indirect, open and subtle, malicious or simply thoughtless. Experiences range from not being hired, being transferred to another position, and being dismissed, to an internal letter of wedding congratulations addressed by default to a woman and a man, although a female employee married her female partner.

YOUR OWN ATTITUDE: FROM INSIDE TO OUTSIDE

Sometimes it might actually be due to homo-, trans- or interphobia and hostility, other times it may just be ignorance, prejudice, generalisation or unease.

Although none of this is an excuse for discriminatory behaviour, there is certainly a difference between a person hurting another person on purpose or by accident. So what can you do in either case?

Where is there room for manoeuvre and where are the obstacles insurmountable?

TIPS FOR TAKING THE WIND OUT OF THEIR SAILS

HOMO-, TRANS- OR INTERPHOBIA

The most important thing to remember is that you're not responsible for homo-, trans- and/or interphobic reactions (towards you)! Nor is it your job to educate, let alone change, the person holding those views or to take measures to this effect. This responsibility lies quite clearly – and legally – with your superiors.

ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS

Listen within yourself. How do you feel after hearing a disrespectful statement or experiencing derogatory behaviour? Do you want to be alone or do you urgently need support? What can you do to make yourself feel better? Talk to someone you trust and let them console you. If necessary, seek professional support from therapists or coaches, for example. They can help you work through painful experiences and develop the right strategies for the future.





TAKE IT WITH A PINCH OF SALT

Try to assess whether the other person actually meant what they said or just put their foot in it. If it was simply down to ignorance, allow them to make mistakes and help them overcome their unease. Let them know that it's okay to ask questions. Explain how certain statements could be made in a more appropriate manner. If the person meant what they said, tell them clearly where they crossed the line and ask for support from your direct superior and colleagues.

KEEP CALM

Don't let the other person provoke you. Do they want to have a serious discussion with you or just cause bad feeling? You don't have to respond immediately and to every statement. It's okay just to stay silent and prepare yourself for any future encounter with good arguments and quick-wittedness. A cool head will help you more than a heated discussion. This is of course easier said than done – but still worth a try. To sum up: first take a deep breath, then think, then act.

LANGUAGE

Don't let derogatory statements, jokes and remarks pass without comment. Try to make the other person understand what was insulting and discriminatory about what they said. Propose enshrining the issue of language in the company's anti-harassment policy, if there is one. Involve your colleagues and superiors – discriminatory language is everyone's business.

FACTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

Document every homo-, trans- and interphobic incident that you have witnessed and try to collect as much information as possible. Pass this information on to your supervisor – employers are obliged to protect affected employees.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Study the German General Equal Treatment Act and check whether your employer has any special rights (e.g. the church). Obtain information and support, e.g. from your regional LGBT*IQ community, to develop strategies for building an open corporate culture.

SHARE KNOWLEDGE

Draw the attention of your colleagues and superiors to the use of gender-inclusive and gender-fair language. [2] Share articles about LGBT*IQ topics, show your willingness to answer questions, stick a rainbow sticker to your desk. Perhaps those in charge lack the information and contacts necessary to build an open working environment. Pass on information about PROUT AT WORK to your manager, e.g. HOW TO No. 4 LGBT*IQ for Beginners – Why Diversity in the Workplace Pays Off and HOW TO No. 6 Allies at Work – A Guide for LGBT*IQ Allies in Everyday Working Life.

[2]

You can find detailed explanations and suggestions on this in our HOW TO No. 3: Do You Speak LGBT*IQ? A Guide to Gender-inclusive and Gender-fair Language at proutatwork.de



NETWORKS – BETTER TOGETHER

Discuss,
organise,
inform,
help build,
meet ...
Networking helps.

WORKPLACE-RELATED LGBT*IQ ORGANISATIONS

VARIOUS CORPORATE LGBT*IQ NETWORKS

Are you looking for an overview of
workplace-related LGBT*IQ-organisations?
Or you'd like to find out if your employer
has a LGBT*IQ-Network?
Just follow the link below to our homepage

[www.proutatwork.de/how-to-nr-5-lgbtqi-and-you/
netzwerke-zusammen-stark/](http://www.proutatwork.de/how-to-nr-5-lgbtqi-and-you/netzwerke-zusammen-stark/)

RECOMMENDED READING

OUT AT THE OFFICE?!

Study by Prof. Dominic Frohn, Florian Meinhold and Christina Schmidt
Available at www.proutatwork.de/veroeffentlichungen/out-im-office

TRANSIDENTITÄT AM ARBEITSPLATZ (TRANSIDENTITY IN THE WORKPLACE)

Infographic by Gendertreff (AVAILABLE IN GERMAN ONLY)
Available at tinyurl.com/gendertreff

SCHWUL, NA UND? (GAY, SO WHAT?)

Book by Thomas Grossmann (AVAILABLE IN GERMAN ONLY)
ISBN 978-3499191091

... UND ICH DACHTE, DU BIST SCHWANGER! (AND I THOUGHT YOU WERE PREGNANT!)

Women talk about coming out
Book by Meike Watzlawik and Friederike Wenner (AVAILABLE IN GERMAN ONLY)
ISBN 978-3932855061

OUT@WORK

Study by Boston Consulting Group
Available at tinyurl.com/BCG-studie



**THINK
OUTSIDE
THE BOX**

SIDEGLANCES

Everyday life as well as our own needs and necessities often leave us blind to the perspectives of others. But this need not be the case.

For all employees who want to know more and get a more complete picture, it's worth taking a look at our guide for employers.

**HOW TO NO. 4:
LGBT*IQ – FOR BEGINNERS
WHY DIVERSITY
IN THE WORKPLACE PAYS OFF**

Get a change of perspective at
proutatwork.de
or just email us at info@proutatwork.de

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