

Pride Month

Visibility In Leadership



Why visibility matters

It's well documented that a diverse leadership team, demonstrating the values and behaviours of kindness, respect, and allyship, is a significant enabler of business performance. When leaders authentically embody these inclusive values, they foster a positive and psychologically safe environment where employees can thrive. This environment promotes openness, collaboration, and innovation, leading to enhanced productivity, better decision-making, and ultimately improved organisational outcomes. Leadership that visibly champions diversity sends a clear and powerful signal internally and externally, bolstering employee morale, retention, and attracting top talent who prioritise inclusive workplaces.

Respecting individual choice

It's important to remember that coming out as LGBTQIA+ in a leadership position is a significant, deeply personal decision that can have meaningful implications for both the individual and the wider organisation. For many leaders, coming out can be an empowering act of authenticity that strengthens their leadership presence and builds trust within their teams. It demonstrates courage and integrity, encouraging others to be themselves and their openness contributes to a culture of acceptance and inclusion.

At the same time, coming out at a senior level may also present challenges. Leaders may face concerns about bias, or about becoming a 'spokesperson' for the community, whether or not they wish to take on that role. The fear of being judged or experiencing discrimination remains a valid consideration, especially in organisations where inclusive culture and allyship are not yet firmly established.

Ultimately, the choice to come out should be respected as an individual's right, supported by a workplace culture that prioritises psychological safety, values diversity, and ensures no one is pressured to disclose their identity. When done on their own terms, with adequate support, LGBTQIA+ leaders can play a pivotal role in shaping inclusive workplaces, inspiring others, and driving meaningful change from the top.

How can organisations support leaders to be their authentic self, whilst respecting personal decision making on sexual orientation and gender identity disclosure? Here are some points to consider:

✓ Emphasise Voluntary Visibility

Clearly communicate that visibility is an option, not an expectation and embed this narrative in your communication. Provide support for those who choose to be openly about their sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, while equally respecting privacy and autonomy. It's important to note that 'coming out' is an ongoing process and some leaders may choose to disclose to a few, to many or to all their peers. They may also wish for this information to not be shared beyond the disclosure conversation or in any diversity demographic data set (internally or externally).

✓ Ensure that self-disclosure systems are up to date

Any system that captures diversity demographic information should have the correct descriptions and fields that reflect a modern society, local culture and the legislation of the countries that your business operates in. This may differ across markets, meaning that any use of that data needs to comply with domestic (and in some cases international) legislation.

We recommend that there should always be a prefer not to say option in all fields, allowing team members the option to not disclose. This data should also be recorded in any diversity demographic reporting.

✓ Celebrate Authentic Role Models

Recognise and celebrate LGBTQIA+ leaders who willingly share their experiences, if they give permission to do so. Encourage storytelling that naturally emerges from individuals who feel safe and comfortable. Seek out and promote industry, brand or culturally relevant LGBTQIA+ role models and share the impact of their work throughout the year, not just in Pride Month or other calendar moments. For example, share the story of LGBTQIA+ parents in any 'back to school' communications.

✓ Foster a Culture of Psychological Safety

Prioritise building an inclusive culture for all. Psychological safe spaces are not just labels we announce for our workplaces. There must be clear evidence that there is a culture of growth, learning and trust and that mistakes are used to support continued professional development of individuals and the business.

✓ Promote Allyship and Broader Inclusivity

Encourage senior leaders, regardless of their own identity, to visibly champion LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Monitor their self-driven learning, assess for competency throughout the year, and include inclusive practice performance criterion in mid and end of year reviews. Provide leadership training on inclusive language, allyship, and the impact of biases. Whilst we know that some companies prefer mandating this training, we prefer this to be referred to 'business essential'.

✓ Highlight Inclusive Organisational Practices

Focus on policies, programmes and actions that genuinely advance LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Ensure that policies on anti-discrimination, bullying and harassment include explicit reference to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Provide practical examples of 'policies in practice', for example how trans-inclusive policies support those who are transitioning. This could include a 'transition pathway' that sets out how to change names on work emails or ID badges, or clear and inclusive guidance on using bathroom facilities.

Embed LGBTQIA+ inclusion into your organisation's procurement and supplier processes and consider adding inclusive-practice weighting to scoring criterion.

Develop community partnerships with not-for-profit and charity organisations who advance LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and use Skillanthropy* to support their efforts.

Have leaders sponsor inclusive organisational practices and have the leadership team showcase the impact of this work.

✓ **Build Robust Networks and Communities**

Establish or develop Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), allowing employees to connect and engage organically. Ensure that those who lead these groups are set up for success by providing adequate resources and time to deliver on the ERG activities and to develop ERG leadership skills. Leaders can support by engaging in reciprocal mentoring, routinely lending their voice to promoting ERG activities and by showing up, and engaging, at ERG events.

Externally, provide space and time for leaders to connect with their peers or to engage in development activities that further their inclusive practice competencies.

✓ **Offer Inclusive Development Opportunities**

Provide accessible, transparent development programmes that welcome LGBTQIA+ employees to participate without pressure. Ensure these opportunities are positioned as inclusive of all identities, empowering individuals who choose visibility.

Ensure development pathways are transparent, with fair criteria for selection and progression. Provide coaching, mentoring, and sponsorship that are sensitive to the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, including the impact of discrimination or exclusion they may have faced. When individuals feel seen, supported, and invested in, they're more likely to consider and pursue leadership roles on their own terms.

Crucially, these programmes should also foster a sense of safety and choice. Leaders who choose to be visible should be empowered, not expected, to share their identity as part of their professional journey. Supporting development in this way sends a strong signal: all employees are valued for their potential and performance—not defined by how much of themselves they disclose.

In summary, creating visible LGBTQIA+ leadership must be rooted in respect for individual choice, reinforced by inclusive systems, policies, and everyday culture. Visibility should never be expected or engineered—it must be enabled through psychological safety, trusted self-disclosure mechanisms, and authentic celebration of those who choose to share their stories. By embedding allyship into leadership expectations, supporting robust LGBTQIA+ networks, and ensuring all development opportunities are inclusive, organisations can create the conditions for leaders to thrive as their authentic selves. This approach not only honours personal autonomy but strengthens inclusion, trust, and performance across the entire organisation.

By genuinely embedding these strategies into organisational culture and policy, companies can foster an environment where visibility is safe, voluntary, authentic, and beneficial, eliminating tokenism and ensuring no one feels pressured into disclosure.

Can Inclusion Included support your leadership team to develop their inclusive practice competencies?

Take a look at our comprehensive [suite of solutions](#), including our modular Inclusive Leadership Training.

*Skillanthropy is our professional skills programme, where we donate our time, or expertise to support social causes or not-for-profit organisations.