

What can we do to support LGBTQI people in the workplace?

By [Devan Moonsamy](#)

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LGBTQI people face exclusion and discrimination in the workplace. People who are less advantaged socioeconomically are most at risk of poor treatment and marginalisation, and a different sexual and/or gender orientation to the majority exacerbates this.



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At the level of individual companies in South Africa, there is insufficient, if any, formal and specialised workplace support for LGBTQI people. Informally, some co-workers and employers do provide support and show acceptance in the workplace and don't show favouritism according to sexual orientation and gender. However, overall, there is little effective support, and it is too easy for a recruiter or employer to simply ignore certain candidates who apply for work or promotion on the basis of demographic factors.

There are at least two organisations making headway, however. The Shambhala Organisation promotes and supports LGBT business leaders specifically. Shambhala invests in LGBT owned and managed high-potential businesses. These investments are combined with mentorship and support towards meeting business objectives.

We need dedicated business chambers for and active in the LGBTQI community. We need several focusing on each group because the issues faced by the various members in the community are not the same. Transgender people face a different fight in the workplace compared to people who are homo- or bisexual, for example.

Nevertheless, it is great news that Africa's first business network for LGBTI+ people was launched in 2016. The network has offices in Johannesburg and is called PLUS the LGBTI+ Business Network. It is an 'African trust that advances equality and freedom in southern Africa, with a particular focus on sexual orientation and gender identity.' PLUS champions, promotes, supports and empowers South African LGBTI+ business owners and entrepreneurs with opportunities for learning, networking and conducting business for prosperity. PLUS aims to redress structural and economic injustices of the past. 'PLUS intends to address scarce employment opportunities, and discrimination in the workplace of LGBTI people in South Africa, which are harmful to their wellbeing.'

We are a long way from providing sufficient support and effective legal and other forms of protection for the whole queer community in South Africa in and outside the workplace. People most at risk in the LGBTQI community are among groups struggling financially. A focus on business owners and entrepreneurs is too narrow. The possibility of pitching a winning business idea to an investor may feel out of reach for many. It is thus critical that LGBTQI people be supported at all levels. Entrepreneurship is great, but many people have a pressing need for a stable job and an opportunity to learn and grow in that space.

One organisation which is championing the rights of LGBTQI people in all contexts is the South African Human Rights Commission. In any case of discrimination, which thus equates to an infringement on human rights, the Commission can be contacted for assistance and advice on how to take the matter further. The Commission takes its directive from our Constitution and Bill of Rights and has displayed commitment to achieving justice for LGBTQI people as far as taking matters to court. For example, this year, the Commission ensured that a South Africa pastor was brought to book for hate speech against gay people, and it made a strong argument that one cannot rely on religious views as a defence for such discrimination.

The recent book *Racism, Classism, Sexism, And The Other ISMs That Divide Us* delves into the issues described above and offers practical solutions to problems surrounding sexuality diversity, as well as other diversity issues which can hamper organisational progress and cause deep hurt to individuals if not handled with care.

The book looks at overcoming instant separation magnets (ISMs) in the South African context, and how to manage diversity so that everybody wins. The aspects of diversity are considered in detail with real examples and practical information on dealing with and preventing diversity-related problems.

Racism, Classism, Sexism, And The Other ISMs That Divide Us aims to help readers bring about transformation in their everyday dealings and in their organisations. It is geared toward managers, HR departments, corporate trainers, strategists, students, and anyone facing situations of diversity which require strategic and prudent interventions. It helps in inspiring positive change, changing mindsets, and transforming the status quo for the better of all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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