Explaining sexual minorities’ disclosure: Analysis anchored on trust embedded in Legal & HR practices configuration

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Abstract

Prior research on the disclosure decisions of sexual minorities at work has mostly overlooked the moderating and mediating role of employees’ trust in their supervisor and organization at large. The absence of trust from this field of study limits organizational efforts to foster inclusion at work. Thus, this paper presents a framework for examining the multiple linkages between employees’ trust in their organization hierarchies and the disclosure decision. Trust is proposed to be embedded in work and non-work context both in terms of the legal framework and the HR policies and practices. The paper concludes with recommendations that can help promote diversity management efforts and ultimately contribute to employees' wellbeing and to positive organizational outcomes.
Introduction

The primary purpose of this paper is to explore and propose a new framework for understanding the disclosure decision of sexual minority employees at work. Recent reports from various countries show that over half of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (hereafter LGBT) employees prefer to avoid the potential risks associated with disclosure, and opt to keep the potentially discriminating information about themselves hidden from their colleagues and managers (FRA, 2013; Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2009).

As this population is very large, and the impact of their inclusion at work on their wellbeing and productivity is more and more noticeable, the time has come to better understand this complex decision. The underlying assumption is that when employees do not need to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity, they feel free, comfortable, and empowered and as a consequence, their positive state of wellbeing also spills over to the organizational wellbeing as they become more engaged and more productive (American Psychological Association, 2002; Colgan Creegan, McKearney & Wright, 2006; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, & King, 2008; King & Cortina, 2010). Efforts to create a more inclusive workplace environment for sexually diverse employees are not new to organizational management, yet compared to the inclusion of diversities such as age, race or gender, the inclusion of LGBT employees poses a unique additional challenge. Because LGBT employees can conceal their identity, making progress in LGBT inclusion undoubtedly means first creating the conditions where these employees feel more comfortable in disclosing their identity at work, or what is commonly referred to as “coming out” (Clair, Beatty & MacLean, 2005; Law, Martinez, Ruggs, Hebl & Akers, 2011).

Scholarly efforts aimed at providing insights into the disclosure decision has focused mainly on antecedents such as individual differences, HR systems, and the legal environment (Clair et al., 2005; Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Law et al, 2011; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). Conspicuously, studies have overlooked the relevance of employees’ trust in their organizational hierarchies (supervisor and organization) and how trust is embedded and interacts with work and non-work context factors. This is surprising since trust in these two referents was found to facilitate the disclosure of other types of sensitive information (e.g., Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006; Gillespie, 2003; Mayer & Gavin, 2005). Embedding trust in this line of research is
significant for both theory and practice. Learning more about how trust influences employees’ willingness to come out can serve not only to explain why inclusive HR practices sometimes fail to produce the expected outcomes (Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Waldo, 1999), but also to guide inclusion efforts going forward.

Accordingly, this article intends to provide a better understanding of the disclosure decision by incorporating trust into this field of study. The paper takes a dynamic approach and analyses specifically how trust in one’s organizational hierarchies interact with personality variables and how it is embedded in the legal and organizational HR system context. It is suggested that the interactions of trust with these variables will, in different ways, eventually affect the extent to which LGBT employees will feel comfortable taking the risk associated with coming out. The models developed in this theoretical paper are based on a synthesis of research on LGBT identity and on trust, and on multiple interviews with LGBT employees that helped to confirm and fine-tune our propositions. We believe our theoretical model opens the door for future research that can expand our understanding of both the disclosure of LGBT identity and the construct of trust. Based on our discussion, we also make recommendations that can guide organizations in fostering this form of trust and creating a better environment for their LGBT staff.

To facilitate our discussion we divided this paper into four main sections: The first section provides an introduction to the LGBT disclosure dilemma, and the second discusses relevant scholarly work on trust and information sharing. The third section is where we develop our theoretical propositions, and the final and fourth section is where we discuss our conclusions and limitations.

The disclosure dilemma: Antecedents and consequences of coming out to individuals and organizations

I haven’t come out because I fear some homophobia. I have encountered some homophobia among colleagues from other countries, and I suspect that one of the senior managers at my company may be homophobic. I don’t feel great about my decision not to come out. I may decide to come out on a very limited basis in the future.
—Canadian Lesbian woman (Silvia & Warren, 2009, page 12)
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexuals and Transgender employees constitute a large portion of the workforce. Estimates using census data place the number of LGBT employees in the U.S. alone at a close to 9 million (Sears, Hunter, & Mallory, 2009). Unlike employees with visible diversity characteristics, such as employees of minority race, LGBT employees must decide whether to disclose or conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity (“come out” or “pass”)—and then manage their identity appropriately (Goffman, 1963; Hill, 2009; Law et al., 2011; Ward & Winstanely, 2005). The decision whether or not to disclose this sensitive personal information is not necessarily a single decision as people can be selective in their disclosure, meaning, they can be out to everyone, to some people, or to nobody (Clair et al., 2005), and they can moderate how much real information they share about their private lives (Woods, 1994). For instance, when asked about her latest vacation, a lesbian employee who spent it with her girlfriend, can tell one employee a fictitious story about a vacation with a boyfriend, avoid the question altogether when discussing with another employee, and openly talk about her time with her girlfriend when speaking to a third person.

Research shows that the decision whether or not to come out is a very difficult one in the life of LGBT employees due to consequences associated with disclosure and the invisible nature of the LGBT identity (Clair et al., 2005). This difficult decision is typically referred to as the “disclosure dilemma”: On the one hand, concealing one’s identity has been found to produce high levels of stress and anxiety, mainly resulting from the fear of being outed involuntary (Clair et al., 2005; Ragins, 2008; Woods 1994). On the other hand, coming out involves the risk of discrimination, harassment, and even physical harm (FRA, 2009; Smith & Ingram, 2004). Nevertheless, contingent on the reaction to disclosure, the outcomes may also be very positive. Studies show that employees who encounter a supportive environment report higher levels of wellbeing, and increased job satisfaction (American Psychological Association, 2002; Colgan et al., 2006; Griffith & Hebl, 2002).

It is important to note that while early views tended to see the option to “pass” as straight as an advantage, more recent works indicate that this might not actually be the case (Ragins, 2008). The reason is that the anxiety associated with “passing,” the ambiguity concerning the possible reasons behind certain social interactions, and the constant need to handle situations where people assume they are “straight” can end up wreaking serious emotional havoc (Hill, 2009; Smart & Wegner, 2000; Ward & Winstanley, 2005). Interestingly, some studies show how coming out, in and of itself,
regardless of societal reactions, can be beneficial to an individual’s psychological wellbeing (Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Law et al., 2011; Moradi, 2009).

The consequences of disclosure are important not only for individuals but also for organizations. Decades of studies indicate that the outcome of the disclosure decision has significant effects on employees’ work attitudes and contributions. The consequences for both the employees and their organizations are depicted in Figure 1. As it illustrates, employees who are out in a supportive environment are more committed, productive, and participative than employees who are passing or are out in a hostile environment (American Psychological Association, 2002; Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Colgan et al. 2006; Ragins, Singh & Cornwell, 2007; Waldo, 1999). In other words, when organizations provide a work environment where LGBT employees feel comfortable being out, they get employees who perform better and are more satisfied at work.

Furthermore, creating a welcoming environment for LGBT employees can result not only in more positive workplace attitudes, but also positively affect marketplace results and bottom-line figures. Business research shows that LGBT consumers are very loyal to brands that are gay friendly and are even ready to pay a premium for their products (Gudelunas, 2011; Kates, 2000). Moreover, as experience shows, discrimination can involve serious legal risks and social backlash (Crary, 2012; Hsu, 2013; Stacy, 2013; Wickenheiser, 2010).
Such conclusions have led scholars and legislators to claim that aside from ethical drivers, organizations have a clear business interest in promoting the engagement of their LGBT staff (King & Cortina, 2010; U.S. House of Representatives, 2007). Considering the concealable nature of the LGBT identity, it is apparent that a necessary critical step in the path toward achieving a more inclusive workplace environment is creating the conditions where LGBT employees feel comfortable in coming out.

Trust and the Disclosure of Sensitive Personal Information

Understanding how employees trust in their organizational authorities interacts with work and non-work context factors and how it affects the disclosure decision is important from a theoretical and practical perspective.

Starting from the theoretical angle, exploring the role of trust can help us to draw connections between individual factors and the contextual conditions that go into the decision to come out. We have expanded our research angle from focusing on specific personal or environmental elements such as laws, HR policies, quality of relationships, or how one feels about being gay or transgender (e.g., Huffman et al., 2008; Law et al., 2011; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001), to examining the way in which these elements interact and eventually affect the employee’s decision to come out. For instance, some studies on antidiscrimination policies demonstrate that their presence can have either a very limited or no impact on disclosure (Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Such conclusions may be explained by findings that show that nondiscrimination policies are at times associated with increased hostility toward gay employees (Tejeda, 2006). Consequently, studies suggest that it is not the existence of such policies, but rather the employees’ confidence in their superiors’ support that ultimately determines how comfortable they feel coming out (Clair et al., 2005; Day and Schoenrade, 2000; Waldo, 1999).

Then, exploring the role of trust is also significant from the practical point of view and can help organizations to improve their HR-related practices. While research over the past two decades has expanded our understanding by identifying different antecedents for disclosure, either individual or situational (e.g., Griffith and Hebl, 2002; Huffman et al., 2008; Ragins and Cornwell, 2001), the fact remains that many of them are beyond managerial control. There is very little, if anything, that managers can do to
change employees’ psychological dynamics, the country’s legislative climate, and even the quality of interpersonal relationships at work. Still, the level of trust in the organization and managers is something that can be worked on and improved (Hurley; 2012; Webber, Bishop & O’Neill, 2012). Learning more about the relationship between trust and disclosure can therefore provide guidance to organizations that want to better integrate their LGBT staff.

**Defining trust and disclosure of sensitive information**

The proper definition of trust is still being debated in the academic literature, and various scholars have produced different definitions for this conceptual constructs (e.g., Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995; Tzafrir & Dolan, 2004). Nevertheless, an extended multidisciplinary review of trust within organizations by Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998) concluded that, despite some areas of disagreement, there appears to be a convergence around various key elements that comprise the construct of trust: (1) confident expectations of others and (2) the willingness to become vulnerable or to rely on another person. Consequently, the authors proposed a definition that suggests that “trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another”(p. 395). Trust, as suggested by Das and Teng (2004), reduces the perceived risk associated with the vulnerability that is present in the situation; the more a person trusts the other to take an action favorable to them, the less they perceive putting their faith in the other as risky, and the more likely they are to take this course of action.

Ongoing scholarly work points indicates an established relationship between employees' trust in members of their organization and their openness about information of a sensitive nature. Such findings are consistent with the previously discussed theoretical assumptions relating trust to the willingness to become vulnerable to another. A conscious disclosure of potentially damaging information by one party is therefore seen a risk-taking behavior indicating trust in the other party (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006; Gillespie, 2003). Indeed, results from decades of studies show that trusting others at work is related to disclosure of various types of work-related information, including views, opinions, mistakes, problems, feelings, and knowledge (Arthur & Kim, 2005; Gillespie, 2003; Lee, Gillespie, Mann & Wearing, 2010; Mäkelä &
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Brewster, 2009; Muthusamy & White, 2005; Zand, 1972). A simple illustration of how trust affects disclosure is an individual who takes a risk and shares with his supervisor that he feels under-qualified for a task. The employee knows that sharing such information with a superior could make him vulnerable and hurt his career. Nevertheless, because he perceives his supervisor to be trustworthy and expects her to guide and support him, he decides to take the risk and discuss his concerns.

Trust in the supervisor and trust in the organization

Employees develop different forms of trust in relation to proximity, the nature of the interaction, and the power relationship that exists between them and the target of trust.

Research on trust typically distinguishes between three levels of targets of employee trust: (1) proximate supervisors (2); the organization; and (3) colleagues or team (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012). This distinction is significant as there are important differences in trust at each of these levels. The form of trust employees develop in both their direct supervisor and in their coworkers is considered interpersonal (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012) and is formed based on dyadic relationships (McKnight, Cummings & Chervany, 1998). Nevertheless, trust in the supervisor and trust in colleagues is not the same due to the important element of power that the supervisor has over an employee and that does not exist in the more horizontal relationship that characterizes the relationship between colleagues (Schoorman, Mayer & Davis, 2007; Tan & Tan, 2000). Then, in contrast to the previously discussed forms of trust, trust in the organization is institutional and impersonal (Costigan, Insinga, Kranas, Kureshov & Ilter, 2004; Mayer & Davis, 1999; Mayer & Gavin, 2005) and it addresses more general targets such as the employer (Deery, Iverson, & Walsh, 2006; Robinson & Rousseau 1994) or the top management (Costigan, et al., 2004; Mayer & Davis, 1999, Tzafrir, 2009).

While recognizing the importance of trust in coworkers, our discussion will focus on employees’ trust in their supervisors and the organization simultaneously. Both of these targets of trust refer to organizational authorities that hold formal roles of responsibility and power over the individual. Furthermore, trust in these two referents has already been shown to facilitate employees’ willingness to share other types of sensitive information (Gillespie, 2003; Mayer & Gavin, 2005).
Coming out: Trust and its Interaction with work and non-work factors

Coming out is a voluntary act of sharing sensitive information about oneself, and its disclosure can expose the employee to discrimination and emotional, social, and even physical harm. Similar to the example about the employee who informs his manager about feeling underqualified, this disclosure is meant to benefit the employee (e.g., to reduce the emotional toll associated with concealment or to affirm their sense of identity) although it also increases the employee’s vulnerability, which suggests that trust comes into play. Therefore, the act of coming out appears to reflect employees’ trust in their superiors that they will not be harmed as a consequence of sharing this personal information. It seems clear then that employees’ trust in their organizational authorities should play an important role in the disclosure decision. Nevertheless, considering the unique context of this type disclosure and the different variables involved, the result of the interaction between trust and other important antecedents for disclosure such as individual variables, HR policies and practices, and legislation remains uncertain.

Accordingly, the purpose of this section is to discuss how trust is embedded in work and non-work contexts, and to determine the expected outcome of the interactions between trust and the other critical antecedents for disclosure. Each interaction is discussed separately although the overall discussion leads to a provisional final model. First we discuss the interaction between trust and the individual-level variables, then the interaction between trust and HR policies and practices, and finally its interaction with the legal context.
Analyzing Trust as a Moderator

The literature largely suggests that trust is expected to moderate the interactions between critical individual variables predicting disclosure. Scholars agree that there are individual variables that affect a person’s willingness to come out. Extensive literature indicates two important individual-level antecedents: (1) individuals’ self-view, which refers to the level of identification and comfort with being LGBT; and (2) outness, which is the degree to which LGBT persons are open about their sexual orientation or gender identity in their private lives (Clair et al., 2005; Griffith, & Hebl, 2002; Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, & King, 2008; Ragins, 2008; Law et al., 2011). These two individual variables are closely linked and show people’s motivation to affirm their identity and achieve congruence or harmony across different life domains (Ragins, 2008; Swann, 1983; 1996). Simply put, these findings say that people who feel positive and strong about being LGBT, and who are open about it to their family and friends will have a stronger need to be out at work than those who do not.

Due to the risks associated with disclosure, as shown in other studies (Dirks, 1999; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Fleig-Palmer & Schoorman, 2011; Mayer & Gavin, 2005; Dirks, 1999), it is expected that employees’ level of trust will interact with the individual motivators for disclosure and will moderate (Baron & Kenny, 1986) their effect on coming out. Fleig-Palmer and Schoorman, 2011 provide a helpful explanation of how trust interacts with such personal variables. When discussing trust and information sharing in the context of a mentoring relationship, they suggest that when a mentor’s motivation to transfer knowledge to the mentee is high, this information sharing will happen even without trust. However, when the motivation is low, trust will play an important role in this exchange.
Figure 2: Trust moderates the impact of the individual variables

Trust should then have this same effect on the individual variables predicting disclosure. This argument suggests that two people who are open about their identity at the same level (in their private life) or feel the same about being gay or transgender are likely to come out at work differently, depending on their level of trust in their organizational superiors. The stronger the level of trust—the less critical will be the impact of the primary motivating factors. As is typical in moderating interaction, this relationship can also be considered from the opposite angle, meaning the more the individual is motivated to disclose, the less critical trust becomes. A vivid recent example may be the public coming out (and immediate dismissal) of the gay Russian TV host Anton Krasovsky. Mr. Krasovsky, who was out in his private life and was angered by the latest Kremlin anti-gay laws, decided, as an act of protest, to disclose his sexual orientation on television, with the understanding that he was putting his career at risk (Walker, 2013).

**Proposition 1:** Trust in organizational hierarchies will moderate the relationship between individual variables and disclosure at work: the higher the level of trust, the weaker the relationship between the individual variables and disclosure (and vice versa)
Trust as a Mediator within the HR Practices

In addition to the moderating role that trust may have in the disclosure decision, trust may also play an important mediating role in the process. Trust is likely to serve as an intervening variable that accounts for the relationship between HR inclusion policies and practices to employees’ outness at work (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Trust in this context can help explain how HR antidiscrimination policies that are intended to provide fair treatment to LGBT employees, influence their disposition to come out.

As suggested by Delany and Lundy (1996), one of the hallmarks of equitable HR systems is their enactment of objective standards that remove bias and subjectivity in the implementation of HR practices. With such objectives in mind, over the years, different organizations have implemented a variety of HR practices that are intended to create a more inclusive, fair, and safe working environment for their LGBT staff. Such practices include nondiscrimination policies, LGBT Employee Resource Groups, guidelines for inclusive communication, diversity awareness training, and so forth. A review of the literature suggests that the success of such practices in making LGBT employees feel comfortable disclosing their sexual or gender identity at work may not follow a direct path. While some studies show that these practices predict disclosure (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Law et al., 2001) others do not (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). It seems that the explanation for this inconsistency is found in studies on relationship between HR practices, trust, and employees’ attitudes and behaviors.

Studies on the relationship between trust and relevant HR practices and policies (e.g., concerning fair treatment, support, etc.) show that employees’ trust in their organization and/or their supervisors mediates between HR practices and employees’ workplace behaviors and attitudes (Ayree, Budwar & Chen, 2002; Chen, Aryee & Lee, 2005; Lee, Gillespie, Mann and Wearing, 2010; More & Tzafrir, 2009). It appears that when organizations and managers provide employees with fair and supportive treatment (in our case by adhering to their antidiscrimination policies), they initiate a process that generates trust, a factor that ultimately influences how employees behave and feel at work. These conclusions concerning the mediating role of trust are somewhat echoed in studies on HR policies and practices and their impact on disclosure. For instance, studies by Day and Schoenrade (2000) and Waldo (1999) show that LGBT employees’ perception of their senior managers and organization
support of their inclusion has a much stronger impact on their willingness to come out than the simple existence of relevant HR policies and practices.

![Trust as a mediator between HR practices and Disclosure](image)

**Figure 3: Trust as a mediator between HR practices and Disclosure**

*Proposition 2: Trust in the organization and in supervisors will mediate between HR inclusion practices and LGBT identity disclosure at work*

**Trust as a moderator within the Legal Protection system**

One of important and visible fronts in the efforts to achieve greater inclusion and equality for LGBT individuals has taken place in legislative bodies. In recent years, as closely followed by the media, there have been many developments concerning the legal protection and legitimization of sexual minorities. Overall, the trend in many Western developed countries suggests a greater openness to legislating protections against discrimination. The list of places that have enacted such antidiscrimination laws is growing and includes Australia, the E.U., Israel, states and cities in the U.S. (currently lacking federal legislation), South Africa and more. Unsurprisingly, available research shows that employees are more likely to come out in places where they are protected by such laws (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). This raises the question of how these changes are expected to influence the relevance of a LGBT employee’s trust in her or his superiors in the disclosure decision.
While such progress is welcome, and while antidiscrimination laws have been found to contribute to individuals' willingness to come out at work, legislation alone is not likely to satisfy all of the conditions necessary to make LGBT employees feel comfortable coming out (Ragins, & Cornwell, 2001; Beatty & Kirby, 2006). Although protective legislation has been present in different countries for quite some time, its precise impact on actual acts of discrimination has yet to be determined as official data appears to be difficult to obtain (Ahmed, Andersson, Hammarstedt, 2011; Council of Europe Publishing, 2011; Drydakis, 2009; Sears & Mallory, 2011). Recent studies, however, indicate that there is still widespread discrimination against LGBT individuals even in places where protective legislation does exist (FRA, 2013; Council of Europe Publishing, 2011; Drydakis, 2009; Sears & Mallory, 2011). Nevertheless, while discrimination is not likely to disappear completely or immediately following the enactment of protective laws, both scholars and experts predict that with their enforcement, over time, such laws will create a more equal and safe environment for LGBT employees (Beatty & Kirby, 2006; Council of Europe Publishing, 2011; Budgett, Ramos & Sears, 2008).

What makes the discussion on antidiscrimination laws interesting in our context is that they are meant to offer protection that is not to the discretion of the organization management. This means that employers, even if not intrinsically supportive of LGBT inclusion, must offer equal treatment lest they expose themselves to discrimination lawsuits. Employees in that sense, though not fully protected from discrimination, benefit from both an expected lower probability of experiencing discrimination and from legal mechanisms if they do. Recent court decisions ordering compensation for LGBT employees who were found to be discriminated against will likely reassure employees about the protections that are available to them and deter employers from discriminating against LGBT staff (Stacy, 2013; Diamond, 2008; WorkplaceLaw, 2013). This suggests that from the employee perspective the risk associated with disclosure is now lower, which is likely to have an impact on the role of trust in this complex decision making. As trust and risk are interdependent (Gambetta, 1988; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998), the now reduced risk is expected to make employees' trust in their superiors less relevant in the disclosure decision.
Proposition 3: Antidiscrimination laws will moderate the relationship between trust in organizational authorities and disclosure: The more employees feel protected by such laws, the less important is trust in the disclosure decision.

Implications for research and practice

Our theoretical account of how employees’ levels of trust in their organizational hierarchies is embedded in the relevant HR and legal context and raises several implications for future research and practice.

The proposition that trust influences disclosure of LGBT identity at work can broaden our understanding of the construct of trust due to the very personal nature of this information and the high risk involved in its disclosure. Although research on trust has grown considerably (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012), it has apparently not yet broadened its scope to include the affect of trust on the exposure of this type of highly personal sensitive information. To date, most research involving the
disclosure of sensitive information appears to focus on information that is work-related and not on personal information the disclosure of which could lead to discrimination, social hostility, or even physical harm (e.g., Golden & Raghuram, 2010; Gillespie, 2003; Mäkelä & Brewester, 2009; Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003). Future research could help us to test and expand our understanding of the affect of trust by examining how trust in one’s manager or organization, through its interaction with other relevant variables, affects the employee’s willingness to share such sensitive personal information. Furthermore, by adapting generic scales to the specific situation, researchers can examine the interplay between different types of trust (e.g., generic trust in the supervisor’s ability versus trust in his abilities to support diverse employees).

Similar recommendations can be made for the growing research on the disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity at work. Current research models that seek to explain how employees decide whether to come out at work typically measure the impact of individual and the situational antecedents on disclosure in a relatively linear and direct way (e.g., Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Law et al, 2011). Our model suggests that these factors do not have such a direct effect, rather they influence disclosure following their interaction with trust. Future research could examine the moderating and mediating role that trust is expected to play between the personality and organizational antecedents and the decision to come out and how legislation forms part this complex decision-making process. Such research can help create needed knowledge to drive changes in organizations.

And from a practical angle, it is argued that a greater understanding of how trust affects coming out at work can help foster an inclusive environment in which LGBT employees are more healthy, comfortable, and productive at work.

The discussion in this paper highlighted the drivers for management to increase the level of trust that LGBT employees have in their organization and supervisors. Insights from the extensive body of literature on trust can serve to guide such efforts. As trust is formed based on various dimensions (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006), organizations are advised to focus their efforts on strengthening these relevant areas. One framework that appears very pertinent to our discussion is Mishra’s (1992; 1996) four-dimensional model, which suggests that trust is formed based on the dimensions of care, competence, openness, and reliability. Relying on this framework,
organizations are urged to improve the level of trust by making progress on each of these dimensions. For example, the dimension of competence can be enhanced by managers’ demonstrating professionalism and knowledge in how they talk about and handle issues concerning sexual diversity. The dimension of care can be advanced by taking concrete actions to eradicate discrimination and provide relevant support to LGBT employees. Progress can be made on the dimension of openness by being transparent about the criteria for selection and promotion. Reliability, the last dimension, can be strengthening by maintaining consistency in applying all of the above.

**Conclusion**

This discussion has broadened our understanding of how trust influences the willingness of employees to become vulnerable by sharing sensitive personal information, and how this decision and its outcomes have an affect on both the employees and the organization. Such new insights can promote future research and provide organizations with useful practical information on how to improve their management and HR practices. Research and theory suggest that the outcome of such changes can contribute to both the wellbeing of employees and to the performance and competitiveness of the organizations in which they work.
References


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