

Navigating diversity and inclusion in the South African telecommunications industry: an  
LGBT+ employee perspective



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**Navigating diversity and inclusion in the South African  
telecommunications industry: an LGBT+ employee perspective**

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## ABSTRACT

Despite improvements in global actions and campaigns supporting the LGBT+ community<sup>1</sup>, individuals who belong to the community continue to face immense backlash and challenges in their lives for their sexual orientation, gender identity, life choices, and beliefs. In Africa, there are over 30 countries that criminalise acts of homosexuality. People who identify as LGBT+ often face discrimination, harassment, and violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity in social and workplace settings. This study aimed to understand the experiences of employees who align with the LGBT+ community, and how they navigate diversity and inclusion in the workplace while examining whether organisational culture may enable seamless reasonable accommodation and inclusion of LGBT+ employees in the workplace. The study focused on the South African telecommunications industry to understand if it embraces diversity, equity, and the inclusion of employees who identify as LGBT+.

The queer theory and institutional theory were the two theories which guided the study. These theories assisted in providing a greater understanding of the concepts and phenomena studied. Providing a lens, enabled understanding how an individual's unique experiences in the workplace may be perceived as a deterrence to inclusion. Following a mixed qualitative methodology, data were gathered using a two-phase approach. The first phase entailed purposively selecting five participants who engaged in a reflective diary. The second phase involved interviewing eleven participants. Data gathered from both phases were coded and thematically analysed enabling triangulation of the findings, which revealed that diversity and inclusion measures are unmet in South African telecommunications organisations.

Employees who identify as belonging to the LGBT+ community are challenged each day with many resigning in an attempt to escape discrimination, harassment, violence and abuse. The first limitation was participants' commitment to continue with the diary study for fear of being identified or victimised. The second limitation was the industry's reluctance to share their insights. Trust had to be built to continue with the research process. The recommendations are

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<sup>1</sup> To maintain consistency and clarity throughout this study and its discussions, the acronym LGBT+ is used as a unifying term encompassing various related acronyms such as LGBT, LGBTI, LGBTIQ+, LGBTIQA+, and others. This approach prevents the interchangeability of multiple acronyms and ensures that LGBT+ inclusively represents the diversity within the community under study.

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for further research in this area and studies to include other sectors with larger samples, building trust and relationships before data collection.

The findings of this study will build on existing knowledge and contribute to the literature in the fields of Management, Organisational Studies, Business Ethics, Sociology, Homosexuality, and other related fields. The study was anticipated to make an empirical contribution from the life stories and experiences shared through the reflective diaries. There are a limited number of studies on the South African LGBT+ community, particularly related to their voice in diversity and inclusion studies. By using concepts from the queer and institutional theories, this study would make a theoretical contribution to the body of knowledge by presenting a conceptual framework that can be used by future researchers when studying similar concepts of the workplace experiences of individuals who identify as LGBT+. For the research participants, the researcher aimed to contribute as a voice of reasoning and allyship to the ongoing quest for equal treatment for all, an end to harassment, any form of discrimination and violence, and the reasonable accommodation and inclusion of LGBT+ individuals in the workplace.

The value of this study was finding out how the South African telecommunications industry navigates diversity and inclusion of LGBT+ employees, and whether South Africa is making strides in implementing policies that promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Furthermore, it made recommendations on what could be done in the workplace to create an environment that allows LGBT+ employees to be themselves without fear of being subjected to any form of discrimination, harassment or exclusion.

**Keywords:** Diversity, Experiences, Inclusion, LGBT+, Organisational culture, Reasonable accommodation, South African telecommunications.

### **Relevance of the study**

This paper highlights the different experiences of the minority in the workplace, where they work alongside a group that usually considers them deviant, therefore, treating them differently and sometimes excluding them. Legislation and policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion of marginalised groups both socially and in the workplace are in place, however, there is slow progress towards implementation. Even with legislation and policies those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender plus (LGBT+) are still subjected to homophobic slurs and are discriminated against, harassed, or violated because of their sexual orientation and gender identity (Elias et al., 2018). There is limited research that explores and understands the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community in South Africa. The focus has been on general society in Western and European countries. Therefore, this study sought to research this phenomenon from a South African perspective and understand how diversity, equity and inclusion pan out for the LGBT+ community in the workplace. The study also highlighted the social structures and national legislation in maintaining heterosexual attitudes and perceptions of homosexuals.

***“One thing we have to remember from Darwin to Kinsey to any great thinker about sexuality, its variation is the norm. Biology loves variation; biology loves differences. Society hates it.”***  
*Professor Milton Diamond - Human Sexuality Expert*

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own work except where referenced. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Management at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits Business School), Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or another University.

.....

Xolile Nompulelo Sibande

20 February 2025

Date

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to everyone who identifies as a member of the LGBT+ community, to those who are diverse in any way and to everyone who is a minority in any sphere. It is a homage to resilience, courage, and the unwavering spirit of individuals who navigate complex landscapes where acceptance and inclusion are not always guaranteed.

To the LGBT+ community: your experiences, struggles, and triumphs are integral to the fabric of this research. In a world where stereotypes and prejudices often overshadow individual merit, your stories provide invaluable insights into the realities of workplace dynamics. Your presence in this study underscores the importance of advocating for equality and fostering environments where diversity is not just accepted but celebrated.

To those who are diverse or marginalised in any form: your journey is a testament to the power of perseverance. This dedication serves as a beacon of hope and solidarity, reminding us that diversity enriches our collective experience. Your unique perspectives challenge societal norms and inspire positive change, breaking down barriers and paving the way for a more inclusive future. Always be reminded that everything in life is possible, do not limit yourself to what the world boxes you into, regardless of the labels imposed upon you by others or society, your potential knows no bounds. Uniqueness is not a limitation, but a source of strength.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank God for the blessing of life, for strength and wisdom, and for the opportunity to be able to successfully embark on this journey. To God be the glory. I would like to thank myself for all the hard work, for believing in myself, for the commitment and dedication that went into summing 'mount PhD'.

To my research supervisor, Dr Jenika Gobind; I doubt I would have been successful in this journey if it was not for your support, kindness, understanding, words of encouragement and always being available when I needed you.

To the research participants, words can never express my gratitude for allowing me into your lives and your daily workplace experiences. Thank you for your willingness to share a part of your lives with me, I hope your participation will make a noticeable difference in the world. To all who identify as LGBT+, you matter and do not let anyone convince you otherwise.

To my friends and family, I appreciate the love and support that you have shown me during the years I spent studying and never doubting that one day I'll bring the doctorate home, I made it, and we made it. To everyone who dreams of furthering their studies, it is possible, take that leap of faith and watch life reward you for your hard work.

To the Wits CLM Postgraduate Writing Unit Team, Dr Pia Lamberti and Ms Marike Kluyts, I would like to extend my gratitude for all the time, efforts, and resources you have dedicated and contributed to my journey. You availed yourselves on countless occasions for writing consultations, assisted me in getting back to writing and arranged retreats for candidates to focus solely on research writing. All the hours and days spent were valuable to me and I have met numerous writing milestones to the point where I am now submitting my thesis. I wish you both and the Unit all the success in the future.

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## List of Acronyms

### Acronyms

|          |                                                                              |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AU       | African Union                                                                |
| BCEA     | Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997                                |
| DEI      | Diversity, Equity and Inclusion                                              |
| D&I      | Diversity and Inclusion                                                      |
| DM       | Diversity Management                                                         |
| EEA      | Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998                                             |
| GDP      | Gross Domestic Product                                                       |
| HOD      | Head of Department                                                           |
| HR       | Human Resources Department                                                   |
| HRC      | Human Rights Campaign                                                        |
| HRW      | Human Rights Watch                                                           |
| ILGA     | The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association    |
| LGBT     | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender                                          |
| LGBT+    | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, plus others                             |
| LGBTIAQ+ | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual and queer people plus |
| LRA      | Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995                                              |
| SA       | South Africa                                                                 |
| SDGs     | Sustainable Development Goals                                                |
| UK       | United Kingdom                                                               |
| UN       | United Nations                                                               |
| US       | United States                                                                |

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual and queer individuals or anyone questioning one's sexual orientation or gender identity (LGBTIAQ+) are diverse in many ways. They identify with several groupings, such as gender, social groups, gender expression, sexual orientation, work roles and ethnicity to form a large community (Gates & Viggiani, 2014; Paisley & Tayar, 2016). Everyone has a unique experience of the challenges faced in society, schools or the workplace by belonging to the community (Subhrajit, 2014). The LGBT+ community experiences discrimination, judgement, harassment, violence and bullying because of their sexuality and gender identity (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2014; Ricciardo et al., 2021b). Although the LGBT+ community is extensive, it is one of the least studied groups in the workplace (Ng & Rumens, 2017; Ozeren, 2014).

Society assumes heterosexuality and gender binary as the norm, as a result, anything excluded from this category is considered unnatural or abnormal (Clark et al., 2022; Ng & Rumens, 2017; Tshisa & Van der Walt, 2022). These societal assumptions lead to an increase in the discrimination and harassment of people who identify as LGBT+ (Mackay, 2021). In the workplace, most organisations continue to operate under the female and male binary disregarding other existing sexual orientations and gender identities (Elias et al., 2018). LGBT+ individuals' identities are devalued because of society's acceptance of heteronormative beliefs (Goshorn et al., 2022; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). South Africa (SA) has a National Development Plan (NDP) which includes the aim to reduce inequality, provide equal opportunities for all, inclusion, redress, and to live free from discrimination by 2030.

Although the NDP and organisations have documented policies that are LGBT+ inclusive and address the diversity of all spectrums, LGBT+ individuals still experience a great degree of inequality in the workplace (Cech & Rothwell, 2019; Luiz & Terziev, 2022). Numerous hindrances, such as a lack of safety and acceptance, prevent LGBT+ individuals from disclosing their sexual orientation or gender in the workplace for fear of stigma and ostracism (Paisley & Tayar, 2016). Several African countries still view homosexuality as un-African, and

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therefore, do not accept those who identify as LGBT+, especially amongst the black communities, where these same views are somewhat carried through to the workplace (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Da Costa Santos, 2013; Tshisa & Van der Walt, 2022).

The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the UN in 2015. Goal 5 (gender equality) aims to end discrimination based on gender and promote gender equality. Goal 10 (reduced inequality) aims to “empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status” (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Organisations must align themselves with the UN goals and the South African NDP to create and foster conducive workplace environments. It is also important that organisations that employ individuals from diverse backgrounds, such as the LGBT+ community, understand their challenges, promote diversity, equality, and inclusion in the workplace and reasonably accommodate them.

The African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, Goal 14 (a stable and peaceful Africa) and Goal 17 (full gender equality in all spheres of life) seeks to promote issues of equality and peace. The AU goals are linked to the UN SDGs to ensure that all African people enjoy peace and prosperity. All these initiatives and goals by the UN, AU, and the South African government are efforts in the right direction. However, having all these goals penned down is not adequate; there needs to be action, and there needs to be a drive to implement them. The implementation will create a world, continent, country and ultimately a workplace that people can enjoy freely, peacefully, and equally.

In this study, the focus was on the lived experiences of employees who align with the LGBT+ community and how they navigate diversity, inclusion, and reasonable accommodation in the workplace. It also examined the role of organisational culture in enabling the seamless inclusion and reasonable accommodation of LGBT+ employees in the workplace. The findings from two studies titled “What will it take to build LGBT inclusive workplaces in South Africa?” and “Pride at work: A study on discrimination at work on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in South Africa” (Benjamin, 2019; Benjamin & Reygan 2016)

suggest that South African organisations still have a lot of work to do to make the workplace a conducive and inclusive one for LGBT+ employees.

## **1.2 Historical background of LGBT+ in South Africa**

South Africa, like other countries, has a history of discrimination and prejudice against those who identify as LGBT+ dating as far back as 1872 (Van Vollenhoven & Els, 2013). Individuals' rights based on sexual orientation have been in the interim South African Constitution which came into effect in the year 1994 (Knight & Wilson, 2016). The Constitution which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation was adopted in 1996 (Pushparagavan, 2014). Section 9(3) of the South African Constitution, 1996 states that "The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth."

In 1998, South Africa became the first African country to decriminalise same-sex acts, and in 2006 same-sex marriage was legalised (Da Costa Santos, 2013; Halliwell, 2021; Hildebrandt, 2014; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2014; Van Vollenhoven & Els, 2013). In the early 2000s, corrective rape became popular in South Africa, where the offenders aimed to "cure" the victim of their sexuality and convert them to heterosexuality (Da Costa Santos, 2013; Halliwell, 2021; Pushparagavan, 2014). One well-known victim of this gruesome crime, Eudy Simelane who was openly lesbian and played in the South African women's soccer team, was murdered during a corrective rape incident (Van Vollenhoven & Els, 2013). Many lesbians were subjected to corrective rape in South Africa according to Halliwell (2021, p. 1), "more than 30 lesbians have been reported raped and murdered in homophobic attacks in South Africa since 1998."

Numerous associations, organisations, and movements were formed to support the LGBT+ community. In 1988, the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of Witwatersrand (GLOW) was formed; its primary focus was on gay and lesbian community issues, especially the black communities (Cameron & Gevisser, 2013). In 1994, OUT LGBT was formed and became the



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second oldest LGBT+ organisation in South Africa. It played a significant role in LGBT+-related campaigns and offered amongst others, advice on human rights violations and support (UN Refugee Agency [UNHCR], 2023). In 1997, the GALA Queer Archive (GALA) was founded to support LGBT+ people with social justice and human rights matters and to continue raising awareness of their lived experiences.

The South African government has been progressive in efforts and initiatives towards LGBT+ equality and inclusion compared to other African countries. Several Acts seek to promote equality and inclusion of the LGBT+ community and protect them against discrimination in the workplace. These laws include the Employment Equity Act (EEA), and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) (Dhatemwa, 2014). The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 seeks to achieve equity in the workplace by:

- a) promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and
- b) implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, in order to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce.

The EEA is a key piece of legislation that aims to promote fairness and equality in the workplace, including for the LGBT+ community. The Act helps the LGBT+ community by promoting a non-discriminatory and inclusive workplace culture and supporting measures to correct historical and ongoing disparities in employment opportunities and representation. However, the effectiveness of these provisions can vary depending on how the legislation is implemented and enforced by employers and governments. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 intends:

- to give effect to the right to fair labour practices referred to in section 23(1) of the Constitution by establishing and making provision for the regulation of basic conditions of employment; and
- thereby to comply with the obligations of the Republic as a member state of the International Labour Organisation; and
- to provide for matters connected therewith.

The BCEA helps ensure that SA employment practices meet global standards of fairness and equality, which include non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The BCEA's involvement in the workplace is in ensuring fair treatment for all and protection

against exploitation and unfair labour practices. Therefore, the LGBT+ community is protected from unfair practices that may be experienced in the workplace.

### **1.3 Theoretical background**

The LGBT+ community face unique experiences and challenges in their lives, at home, school, work or all spheres (Bhandari, 2023; Paisley & Tayar, 2016; Subhrajit, 2014). Often other people make assumptions about LGBT+ individuals and their experiences although they have not shared or lived their daily experiences, nor faced their challenges and pains. Although there have been significant improvements over the past two decades in the human rights sphere of sexuality and gender diversity, there is still widespread discrimination against LGBT+ individuals (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015; Bhandari, 2023; Lloren & Parini, 2017). Some challenges faced by those who identify as LGBT+ include exclusion, harassment, violation, and discrimination (Pearce et al., 2016; Terra et al., 2022). Numerous studies have documented instances of bias, harassment, and exclusion faced by the LGBT+ community, which can manifest in subtle ways, such as inappropriate jokes, stereotypes, stigmatisation or unequal treatment (Fassinger, 1991).

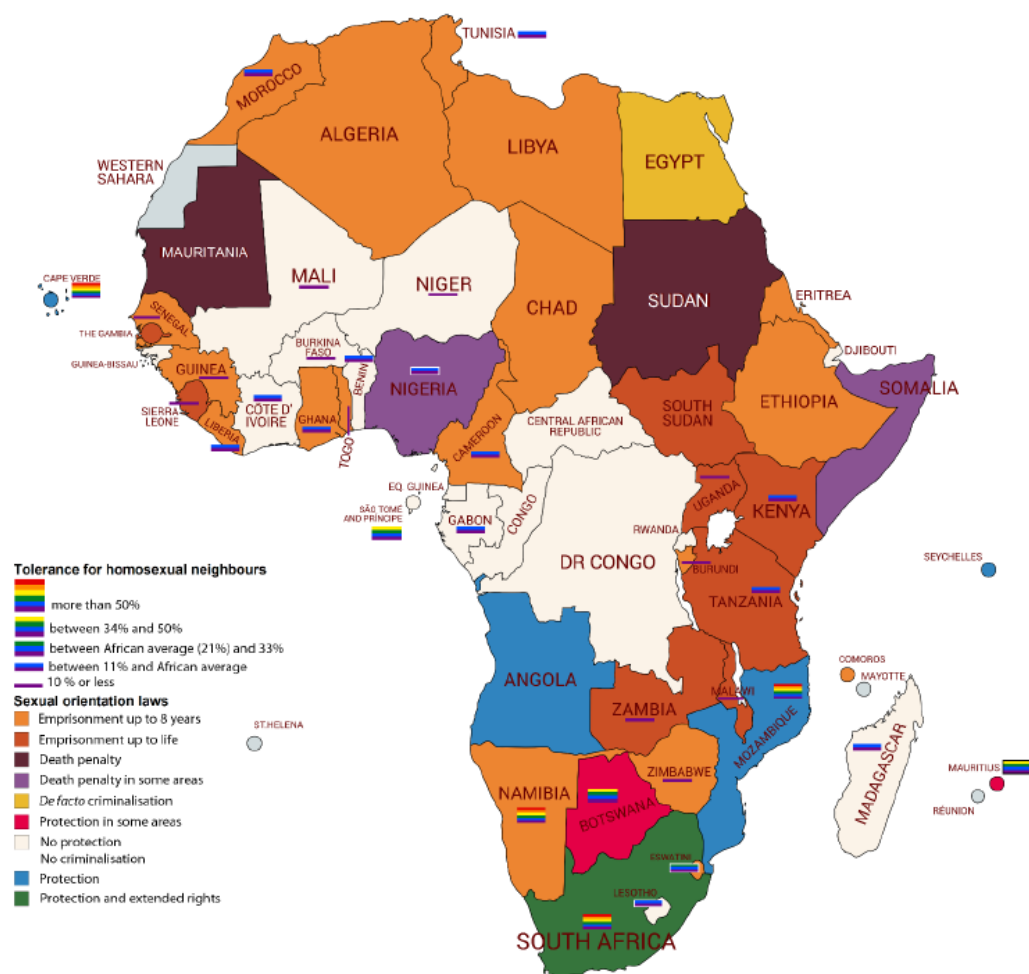
A practical example that paints a picture of matters of the LGBT+ community's rights in Africa, is in March 2023, when the Ugandan parliament voted in favour of a new harsher Anti-Homosexuality Act which replaced the Act of 2014. In May 2023, the Anti-Homosexuality Act was signed into law, which among other issues, prohibits any form, promotion of or recognition of related matters of sexual relations between persons of the same sex (Parliament of the Republic of Uganda, 2023). Any crime related to LGBT+ is punishable by the death penalty (Bhandari, 2023).

Such laws make the lives of the LGBT+ community challenging. In a country like Uganda, a person who identifies as LGBT+ must either conceal their sexual orientation in fear of what could happen to them or leave their family and country to move to an accommodating environment toward them and their sexual orientation. The laws do not make it easier for the LGBT+ community; the abuse, discrimination, harassment, and violence that they are already

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subjected to is perpetuated. One can only imagine what kind of treatment they are subjected to in countries like Uganda where there is a law that “supports” homosexual hate crimes.

To contextualise the phenomena being studied and give a brief overview of LGBT+ rights in Africa, the map below is an illustration of the stats of sexual orientation laws and tolerance for homosexuals in Africa in 2019. In countries, such as Sudan and Mauritania, sexual orientation laws include the death penalty and in Burundi, Kenya, and Zambia there can be life imprisonment.



**Figure 1.1 Map - Sexual orientation laws and tolerance for homosexuals in Africa**

Source: European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) adapted from the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA, 2019).

## Navigating diversity and inclusion in the South African telecommunications industry: an LGBT+ employee perspective

Of the 33 countries where there is no criminalisation, only one country (South Africa) has protection and extended rights, such as same-sex marriage for LGBT+ individuals. The map indicates that in some African countries, there is progress towards legal protection of the LGBT+ community's rights but in others, such as Uganda, there is no progress at all instead there is some form of digression.

Even with programmes and interventions, such as the UN SDGs, the AU Agenda 2063 goals and the South African NDP, the harsh treatment towards LGBT+ individuals has not ceased in many countries and places. Numerous individuals who identify as LGBT+ are still afraid to disclose their sexual orientation for fear of being subjected to harassment, exclusion, violence, or discrimination (Dau & Strauss, 2016; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2014). Although there are these positive interventions, plans and goals (UN SDGs, AU Agenda 2063 goals and South African NDP) in place, they do not create a sense of safety or an environment in which the LGBT+ community feel protected or has the assurance to be themselves. In a recent study, some of the research participants indicated that they have experienced some form of exclusion, harassment, acts of violence or discrimination due to their LGBT+ status (Ricciardo et al., 2021b). These participants' experiences point out that LGBT+ individuals' human rights and lives are somewhat devalued.

Professional bodies must embrace diversity and inclusion, especially in the LGBT+ community (Ricciardo et al., 2021a). Diversity, equity, and inclusion benefit both the organisation and employees and enable business performance (Hunt et al., 2020). In South Africa, individuals' rights based on sexual orientation have been included in the Constitution since 1994, however, LGBT+ individuals are still encountering many challenges and human rights issues (Knight & Wilson, 2016). For example, a newspaper article published on News24.com in August 2022, about a 15-year-old South African boy, who identified as gay, was found lifeless after committing suicide because he was allegedly mocked by his teachers at school for being gay (Khumalo, 2022). Such an event is an example of the different situations, setups, spaces, and scenarios that LGBT+ individuals find themselves in, being discriminated against, mocked, made fun of, and shamed for their sexual orientation or gender identity. This example indicates the need for better efforts to drive diversity and inclusion strategies in a broader spectrum.

## Navigating diversity and inclusion in the South African telecommunications industry: an LGBT+ employee perspective

The South African Constitution mandates equality and inclusion of all, therefore, the inclusion of the LGBT+ community must be enforced as a matter of urgency. Consequence management must be in place for those who infringe on the rights of others based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Ricciardo et al. (2021a) advocate that there is a long way to go and a lot to be done to create environments that promote, demonstrate, and provide support and inclusion for the LGBT+ community. Similarly, Elias et al. (2018) observe that the LGBT+ community is still subjected to poor or lack of support from their superiors in the workplace. In SA, even with a constitution that promotes equality and inclusion of all, the reality on the ground and the experiences of those who identify as LGBT+ are far from positive (Luiz & Terziev, 2022).

### **1.4 Problem statement**

People who identify as LGBT+ form a large community globally. However, they are more likely to be discriminated against, harassed or subjected to some form of violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity compared to those who identify as heterosexual (Subhrajit, 2014). Although there has been a significant improvement over the past two decades in the human rights sphere regarding gender and sexual diversity, discrimination against LGBT+ individuals has not ceased to exist (AHRC, 2015; Lloren & Parini, 2017).

Homophobia is still widespread globally and in a country like Cameroon people can be sentenced to up to five years imprisonment for same-sex relationships (Bhandari 2023; Maidment, 2021). This means people who identify as LGBT+ must conceal their sexual orientation for fear of being ostracised or arrested. In a workplace environment, the majority of those who identify as LGBT+ are fearful of disclosing their sexual orientation as they believe it might lead to losing their job or being subjected to negative treatment (Sears et al., 2021; Subhrajit, 2014).

To date, LGBT+ individuals continue to face exclusion and discrimination in their lives (Pearce et al., 2016; Terra et al., 2022). In countries where members of the LGBT+ community are prohibited, individuals are not at liberty to publicly express themselves or their sexual orientation for fear of what could happen to them or how they may be treated.

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Society still assumes heterosexuality and gender binary as a norm. These societal assumptions lead to an increase in the discrimination and harassment of individuals who identify as LGBT+ (Mackay, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Subhrajit, 2014). The assumptions are also visible in the workplace; those who do not comply or subscribe to them are often gender harassed, violated or discriminated against (Beagan et al., 2022; Elias et al., 2018). LGBT+ individuals are not as free as one assumes; this is exacerbated by the stigma associated with being part of the LGBT+ community, and the treatment and judgment passed on them (Mallory et al., 2020). The LGBT+ community is challenged in larger social contexts, and they continue to face several challenges globally including in the workplace (Subhrajit, 2014). Globally, 64 countries have laws that criminalise homosexuality. In Africa, there are still over 30 countries that prohibit same-sex relationships; in countries, such as Sudan, Mauritania, and Somalia the death penalty is prescribed for those who are homosexual (BBC News, 2023; Bhandari, 2023).

If LGBT+ individuals are still faced with the challenges in most countries as mentioned above, especially in Africa, how much happens in private settings and closed situations, such as schools, churches, social clubs, or the workplace? Mozambique has had a labour code which prohibits employers from discriminating against employees based on their sexual orientation since 2007. However, decriminalisation of such behaviour does not necessarily mean legal protection or that LGBT+ employees will no longer be discriminated against (Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019). Similarly in Portugal, the Portuguese Labour Code prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity; approximately 20% of LGBT+ employees encounter discrimination in the workplace (Beatriz & Pereira, 2022). This could be due to non-discrimination policies failing to address subtler forms of discrimination. Cancela et al. (2022) state that organisations find it challenging to effectively address issues that the LGBT+ community often face in the workplace and as a result, discrimination may occur.

Garba and Kraemer-Mbula (2018) state that organisations with advanced diversity efforts lead to greater motivation and performance due to a high level of innovation. Although many organisations make an effort to reasonably accommodate LGBT+ individuals, the LGBT+ community's freedom to express themselves and disclose their identity remains limited in many countries and organisations (Beagan et al., 2022; Paisley & Tayar, 2016). LGBT+

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individuals are often stereotyped, stigmatised or labelled according to what others perceive them to be without really knowing the person they work alongside (King & Cortina, 2010; Pichler & Ruggs, 2018). For example, in the workplace gays are stereotyped as being more active, fun, and bubbly whereas lesbians are considered to be sexual predators towards fellow female employees (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016). When stereotyping is present in the workplace it can impact the lives of those who experience this and ultimately affects their careers (White, 1999).

Some organisations are still not inclusive, diverse, or reasonably accommodating of LGBT+ individuals whilst others are (Allman, 2016). Some organisational processes and business environments still do not reasonably accommodate employees who identify as LGBT+ (Ricciardo et al., 2021a/b). In South Africa, the rights of the LGBT+ community or employees are protected under several regulations, such as the Employment Equity Act (EEA) which provides procedures to follow and manage discrimination based on sexual orientation (Benjamin, 2019). There are still many organisations that do not take the initiative to be inclusive, considerate or reasonably accommodating of LGBT+ employees, for example, including gender-neutral restrooms, implementing the use of pronouns, or amending human resource benefits, such as adoption or parental leave.

Although individuals' rights concerning sexual orientation have been in the South African Constitution since 1994, from the literature reviewed it is not clear what South African organisations are doing to be diverse, inclusive, and reasonably accommodating to the LGBT+ community in the workplace. This study sought to understand the approach of the South African telecommunications organisation toward being diverse, inclusive and reasonably accommodating of LGBT+ employees in the workplace.

In alignment with this problem, the study's first objective was to investigate the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees within the South African telecommunications industry. This was instrumental in uncovering the challenges, perceptions, and realities faced by LGBT+ employees, thereby addressing the lack of insight into their experiences highlighted in this problem statement. The study purpose (Section 1.6) further explains the study's intention.

### **1.5 Context of the study**

The context of this study was the South African telecommunications industry. The telecommunication industry is one of the largest contributors to economic growth, gross domestic product (GDP), and employment (Shava, 2021) in South Africa. The 2020/21 annual report of the Independent Communications Authority South Africa (ICASA) revealed that the SA telecommunication industry in 2019 had shown exponential growth from R194 billion in 2019 to R201 billion in 2020 which is a 3.6% growth (ICASA, 2021; Shava, 2021). ICASA reported that by 2020, the telecommunication industry had shown significant growth and was valued at R217.2 billion, making it a key driver in the economy and the contribution to the GDP enormous (ICASA, 2021). Employment in the SA telecommunications industry also had an increase of 1.6% unlike the two related sectors (broadcasting and postal industry) which decreased by 2.6% and 5.1%, respectively (ICASA, 2021).

The SA telecommunication industry also makes a significant contribution to the economy through investments, employment creation, and taxes. It plays a crucial role in improving communication services, connectivity and access for individuals and businesses in the country (World Bank, 2021). The growth indicates that the SA telecommunication industry is one of the biggest economic contributors and employers in SA and consequently, employs many South Africans, some of whom identify as LGBT+. Therefore, to understand the extent of diversity and inclusion practices in the workplace one had to investigate the experiences of individuals who identify as LGBT+ in this industry. The study provided insights into whether the South African telecommunications industry was making strides in the inclusion of LGBT+ employees based on their experiences at work. The study was primarily undertaken to understand the experiences of employees that align with the LGBT+ community, and how they navigate diversity and inclusion in the workplace while examining whether organisational culture enables the seamless inclusion of the LGBT+ community.

### **1.6 Study purpose**

This study aimed to understand the experiences of employees who align with the LGBT+ community and how they navigate diversity, inclusion and reasonable accommodation in the



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workplace while examining whether organisational culture may enable the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees in the workplace. Furthermore, it was to understand if the South African telecommunications industry embraces diversity, inclusion and reasonable accommodation of employees who identify as LGBT+. The findings of this study articulate the importance of these factors for the LGBT+ community in the workplace and add to the existing literature in management studies, diversity, inclusion, and related fields.

### 1.7 Study objectives

The objectives of this study were:

- To investigate the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry.
- To evaluate how diversity and inclusion can be used as tools or agents for the reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry.
- To assess whether organisational culture enables the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry.

### 1.8 Research questions

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What are the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?
- How are diversity and inclusion used as tools or agents for reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?
- How can organisational culture enable the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry?

### 1.9 The concept of LGBT+

The acronym LGBT+ is an umbrella term used to refer to a community of individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and others; the plus represents other sexual identities (Knight & Wilson, 2016; Subhrajit, 2014). This acronym is widely used to describe

communities and groups of people included in the discussion of this study. The LGBT+ acronym came about in the late 1990s as a means of expressing and identifying the diverse range of sexualities and gender identities (Fish, 2012). To be consistent and avoid causing any confusion for the reader, throughout this study, the discussions use the acronym LGBT+ as a term unifying the various acronyms, such as LGBT, LGBTI, LGBTIQ+, and LGBTIQA+. This is also done to avoid using all the different acronyms interchangeably. Therefore, when the acronym LGBT+ is used, it includes all the various acronyms that exist when discussing the community being studied.

### **1.9.1 Lesbian**

The term refers to women who identify themselves as having a sexual orientation with other women (Hassan, 2022; Knight & Wilson, 2016). Lesbians are women who are emotionally, sexually, physically, and romantically attracted to other women (Chase & Ressler, 2009; Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019).

### **1.9.2 Gay**

The term refers to a person who identifies as a man and is attracted to other men (Hassan, 2022; Knight & Wilson, 2016). The term gay is sometimes used as an umbrella term or a synonym of homosexual to refer to bisexual, lesbian, and transgender people (Chase & Ressler, 2009; Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019).

### **1.9.3 Bisexual**

The term refers to individuals who can be emotionally, physically, or sexually attracted to either men or women (Hassan, 2022; Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019). Bisexual individuals are usually frowned upon by other LGBT+ individuals and the public as it seems they get to enjoy both heterosexual and queer privileges (Knight & Wilson, 2016).

#### **1.9.4 Transgender**

The term is used to describe individuals who are gender variant, such as people who cross-dress, are transsexual and transgender (Hassan, 2022; Knight & Wilson, 2016). The term is also used as an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity does not associate with the gender they were at birth (Chase & Ressler, 2009; Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019; Sangha, 2015). Transgender is not an indication of sexual orientation but rather a gender (Kendra, 2022).

#### **1.9.5 Cisgender**

The term refers to individuals who identify with the gender they were at birth (Hassan, 2022; Knight & Wilson, 2016). The individuals are sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex (Chase & Ressler, 2009; Kendra, 2022).

#### **1.9.6 Queer**

This is an umbrella term used to refer to people who do not identify as either cisgender or heterosexual (Hassan, 2022; Thomas et al., 2022). The term is often used in political settings when confronting gender and sexual norms (Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019).

#### **1.9.7 Intersex**

The term refers to individuals who are born with more than one sex characteristic. Individuals who identify as intersex do not fit the binary identity of either male or female (Hassan, 2022). Intersex is an umbrella term that is used to describe variations in the natural body, which can be visible at birth or sometimes only at puberty

### **1.9.8 Sexual orientation**

According to Hassan (2022), the term refers to how a person's sexual and romantic desires are directed. The term describes whether a person is attracted primarily to people of the same or other sex, or both or others (Fassinger, 1991). The Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRCF) (2023) notes that a person's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.

### **1.9.9 Gender identity**

Hassan (2022) defines gender identity as a person's deep sense of being female, male or something other than male or female. The HRC Foundation (2023) states that gender identity is one's innermost concept of self as male, female, or a blend of both or neither. It is how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from the sex assigned at birth.

### **1.9.10 Homophobia**

The term describes the fear, apprehension, animosity and hatred that characterise reactions and treatment of LGBT+ people by society, family, friends and colleagues (Fassinger, 1991).

### **1.9.11 LGBT+ an evolving acronym**

The LGBT+ acronym was formed in the late 1990s as a means of describing and identifying a range of sexualities and genders, mostly used by those who were fighting and campaigning for legal and social change (Fish, 2012). This acronym was adapted from the acronym LGB that replaced the term gay which was used to refer to the LGBT+ community in the mid-to-late 1980s as many activists believed that the term gay was not an accurate representation of all those it referred to (Gupta, 2023). The acronym has since evolved as it was recognised that the four letters do not include all sexual orientations. A + (plus) was added to accommodate or include those whose identity fell into other categories, for example, two-spirited (Kendra, 2022; Lentin, 2004). The acronym later changed to LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual people plus others) and in this study, it is now LGBTIAQ+ (lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual and queer people plus others). There are numerous timelines available depending on where in the world or continent you may be, that indicate and track when the acronym changed over time.

In recent years the use of pronouns has been introduced by LGBT+ individuals. Pronouns are a linguistic tool that is used to refer to people, for example, they/them/theirs, she/her/hers, he/him/his or even zie/zir/zirs (Martin, 2022). Some LGBT+ individuals prefer that others refer to them in a gender-neutral manner, such as they/them/theirs (Laville et al., 2021). Pronouns are a concept that many are still trying to grasp. Most people find themselves making mistakes by referring to an LGBT+ individual who prefers not to or does not use a certain pronoun

### **1.10 Diversity and inclusion**

In a workplace context, diversity refers to the presence and co-existence of employees from different backgrounds which could be ethnical, racial, social or cultural (Hossain et al., 2020). Diversity is acknowledging individual differences and embracing each other's uniqueness, perspective, skills, experiences, and knowledge (Lang et al., 2022). Poppas et al. (2020) state that diversity drives excellence. It encompasses a range of visible and invisible qualities, such as race, gender or opinion, socioeconomic status and geography (Poppas et al., 2020). It is evident that embracing diversity, especially LGBT+, is imperative for professional bodies (Ricciardo et al., 2021b). Hossain et al. (2020) advocate that laws in the workplace that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity promote innovation which in turn results in higher performance for organisations.

Diversity and inclusion have proven to widely yield positive benefits, not only to organisations but also to individuals and society (Poppas et al., 2020). The acceptance and inclusion of LGBT+ employees increase the pool of skills and talent in organisations. There is diversity in different roles and this may have strategic benefits for the organisation (Hossain et al., 2020). There is still much to be done to create environments that promote, demonstrate, and provide support and inclusion for the LGBT+ community (Ricciardo et al., 2021a).

## Navigating diversity and inclusion in the South African telecommunications industry: an LGBT+ employee perspective

Diversity is required to achieve balanced development and fairness in societies (Lang et al., 2022). As diverse demographics evolve in the workplace, many societal mechanisms have also evolved so that organisations promote diversity by implementing guidelines, norms or policies (Cole & Salimath, 2013). According to White (1999) and Hunt et al. (2020), diverse organisations and groups have a performance advantage over homogenous organisations by attracting and retaining the best available human talent.

Inclusion is defined as the extent to which an individual or employee is accepted for who they are and treated as an insider in a workplace (Smith, 2020). It includes the removal of barriers, whether visible or invisible, that allow an employee to fully contribute or participate in an organisation (Smith, 2020). Inclusion encompasses individuals who are different, yet find common ground where differences are accommodated (Poppas et al., 2020). Inclusion is related to terms, such as differentiation, individualisation, scaffolding and integration (Stadler-Heer, 2019).

Optimised organisational performance, employee engagement and retention are linked to an inclusive workplace environment (Poppas et al., 2020). Inclusion also relates to how the benefits of diversity can be maximised (Lang et al., 2022). Inclusion responds to and addresses the various diversity of needs (Stadler-Heer, 2019).

In this study, diversity and inclusion are used in the context of LGBT+ employees in the SA telecommunications industry.

### **1.11 Reasonable accommodation**

Reasonable accommodation in the workplace refers to adjustments to a system so that it is fair for an individual based on a proven need to allow individuals to do their job (MacDonald-Wilson et al., 2008). Reasonable accommodation depends on a need which may be physical, religious, employment-related or emotional, and is often mandated by law (Bernard, 2014).

Reasonable accommodation ensures that the laws align with the needs of those for whom the laws were designed. This includes individuals who are discriminated against based on their gender, religion, or age. (Barras et al., 2018). In the context of this study, reasonable accommodation of employees who identify as LGBT+, considers elements, such as fair workplace treatment, non-discrimination based on sexual orientation, making available resources that LGBT+ individuals require to perform their work, and adjustment of policies and employee benefits.

### **1.12 Privilege**

Privilege is the special rights, advantages, treatment, benefits, or favours enjoyed by only a select few, an individual or group that others do not get to enjoy (Harris, 2016). People do not request the privilege, work for it or earn it; it is a special advantage granted to them. These are not based on factors, such as talent, efforts or ability but on circumstances, such as social status, race, gender or rank in a role (Black & Stone, 2005). Privilege exists in different scenarios, contexts, and forms; in most instances, those with the privilege tend not to “see” it or are unaware of it (Black & Stone, 2005; Coston & Kimmel, 2012).

“When one is privileged by class, race, gender or sexuality, one rarely sees exactly how the dynamics of privilege work” (Coston & Kimmel, 2012, p. 97). Privilege is exercised for individuals or groups favoured by the situation or circumstances, whilst the less privileged are excluded from receiving the same treatment, benefits or immunity (Black & Stone, 2005). Privileged individuals or groups get to enjoy benefits that remain unattainable for non-privileged individuals or groups (Harris, 2016).

If you are not reasonably accommodating, it may cause a degree of polarisation which results in the segregation of the LGBT+ community from another community; this is an example of aiding and suggestive of privilege.

### **1.13 LGBT+ community within organisations**

Individuals who identify as LGBT+ form a large group in society, the workplace, and as consumers (Achyldurdyeva et al., 2021). Individuals who belong to the LGBT+ community are no different from any others that form the social and economic landscape of South Africa. In an ideal context, people who identify as LGBT+ should be accepted, embraced, and treated equally at all levels of diversity and inclusion. A study titled “The Persisting Discrimination against Black LGBT Workers amidst Progressive Policies in South Africa” by Dhatemwa (2014), found that although South Africa has progressive legislation meant to protect the LGBTQIA+ community, they remain a group largely treated unfairly, discriminated against, and harassed throughout their careers. LGBT+ individuals form part of the larger community in workplaces; how they engage, interact and associate with others is of interest in the diversity and inclusion spectrum. Therefore, understanding their workplace experiences may indicate if organisational culture has any role in enabling reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunications industry.

### **1.14 Organisational culture**

Organisational culture is defined as a set of assumptions, beliefs, and values that people share in an organisation, it influences and shapes how people behave or conduct themselves in the workplace (Schein, 1985; Schein, 2010). Schein, (2010) further explains organisational culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. Bidokhti (2000) considers organisational culture as the impression that the existing subculture in society creates economies, industries, and organisations. Employees are exposed to an organisation’s culture which may promote or discourage their behaviour (Foucreault et al., 2016). In a conducive work environment where employees are treated fairly when performing their duties, they are more likely to promote their organisation and themselves (Liddle et al., 2004). Organisational culture matters and is of importance as it may influence the recruitment process, and how people behave in a workplace, including productivity, stress, and dedication (Liddle et al., 2004).



## Navigating diversity and inclusion in the South African telecommunications industry: an LGBT+ employee perspective

This study investigated the SA telecommunication industry's means of accommodating LGBT+ individuals through organisational culture, and whether the culture enables seamless integration of the LGBT+ community with the other employees. The study also explored how employees who are part of the LGBT+ community interact or engage with others in the workplace. The question remains, whether organisational culture and reasonable accommodation of LGBT+ employees may have any impact on their workplace experiences. One may also want to know what happens when the concept of organisational culture and LGBT+ come together in a workplace. When the two concepts collide, does something happen in the workplace, is there synergy or disjointedness? Does organisational culture in the SA telecommunications organisations make reasonable accommodation for LGBT+ individuals possible or not?

### **1.15 Contribution of the study**

The current study sought to understand the workplace experiences of employees who align with the LGBT community, and how they navigate diversity, inclusion, and reasonable accommodation in the workplace. The study made three contributions, namely empirical, theoretical, and practical.

#### **1.15.1 Empirical contribution**

It was anticipated that the empirical contribution would be deduced from the life stories and experiences shared through the reflective diaries. The South African LGBT+ community is not studied nor explored extensively in the literature nor given a voice in diversity and inclusion studies.

#### **1.15.2 Theoretical contribution**

By using concepts from the queer and institutional theories, this study also made a theoretical contribution to the body of knowledge by presenting a conceptual framework that can be used by future researchers studying similar concepts related to the workplace experiences of individuals who identify as LGBT+.

### **1.15.3 Practical contribution**

This study developed a conceptual framework for exploring the workplace experiences of LGBT+ in South Africa. The conceptual framework acted as a guideline for the implementation of diversity, inclusion policies and a conducive workplace environment. Therefore, contributes to the body of knowledge for future research in diversity and inclusion studies. For the research participants, the researcher aimed to contribute as a voice of reasoning and ally to the ongoing quest for equal treatment, an end to harassment and the reasonable accommodation of LGBT+ individuals in the workplace.

### **1.16 Limitations of the study**

The study was limited to diversity and inclusion in the context of gender and sexual orientation, particularly of LGBT+; it does not include or expand to other forms of diversity and inclusion, such as race or ethnicity. With that being said, it must be noted that the limitation to gender and sexuality does not mean that matters of other diversity and inclusion do not exist, nor have they been adequately studied. It is rather that these are not the researcher's focus area as this research focused on LGBT+ as a large community.

The study was about the diversity, inclusion and reasonable accommodation of individuals who are overlooked based on their gender and sexuality. Therefore, the research participants included only employed LGBT+ individuals in the South African telecommunications industry. Based on the criteria used to select the research participants, the findings of this study did not apply to all LGBT+ individuals in the workplace. The umbrella acronym LGBT+ was used throughout the study when referring to the group of individuals being studied. Although the acronym has evolved and other letters or identities have been added, more may be added to the acronym while undertaking this study and after.

### **1.16.1 Intention not to cause harm**

The researcher's intention was not to cause any harm to individuals who identify as LGBT+, society and academia. The intention was to be mindful of the language used, the use of certain terms or pronouns, and to be cautious of how certain statements were expressed throughout this study. It was also important to mention and note that a study of this nature may be viewed by others as controversial or sensitive, therefore, the researcher had to be mindful of the language used to avoid causing any harm or damage in any manner or of any nature. However, the researcher's mindfulness and the intention not to cause harm may in itself be a limiting factor as sometimes the researcher may want to use certain terms in the discussions but there is a reminder that those terms can be misconstrued as derogatory; this is a necessary factor to raise from an ethical and non-bias point.

### **1.16.2 Challenges in studying LGBT+ workplace experiences**

Although the LGBT+ community is large, their workplace experiences were not an easy construct to study or investigate. There were various challenges relating to studying this phenomenon, moreover, not being a member of the LGBT+ community made it even more difficult to recruit and convince participants. Many potential research participants could not participate although they met the participation criteria because they feared that they could be identified and as a result be further victimised. The researcher shared the ethics code of conduct that guides the data collection, analysis and reporting process and assured them that their participation would be anonymous and where required a pseudonym would be used. Even with that being shared, it was still a challenge for most of the potential participants to partake in the study.

Some of the research participants disclosed how reluctant they were to participate because of their negative workplace experiences. They feared if their employer found out that they had shared their experiences or the organisation's names they might lose their jobs. The researcher had to build a relationship and trust and assure them that their workplace experiences would not be shared with their employer and their privacy would be respected. Some participants withdrew from participating; their reasons were mostly centred around fear of being further

discriminated against, harassed, violated or victimised if they shared honest details of what they endured at their workplace.

### **1.17 Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher introduced the study rationale, which included discussions of the research background and problem statement. Some of the key concepts that underpin the study were also briefly introduced and discussed along with the study's objectives, purpose, and research questions. To introduce the concept of LGBT+, the researcher also gave a brief explanation of the key terms related to this study and the LGBT+ community. The context of the study and the empirical, theoretical, and practical contributions that were envisaged were highlighted, along with the delimitations and the intention not to cause harm.

The thesis is structured as follows:

#### **Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework**

- The chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of existing research and theoretical perspectives relevant to the study's subject matter, offering a foundation for understanding key concepts, trends, and debates within the field.

#### **Chapter 3: Research methodology**

- The chapter outlines the systematic approach and techniques used to investigate and gather data on the research topic, ensuring rigour and clarity in the study's findings.

#### **Chapter 4: Research findings**

- The chapter presents the results and analysis derived from the data collected, offering insights and conclusions that address the research questions and objectives.

#### **Chapter 5: Discussion of findings and recommendations**

- The chapter interprets the research results in context, explores their implications, and provides actionable recommendations based on the study's outcomes.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

- The chapter summarises the key findings of the study, discusses the significance of the research questions, and suggests avenues for future research based on the outcomes.

The next chapter is the literature review that underpinned this study. The discussions will include literature on the key concepts, the study's theoretical framework and subsequently the conceptual framework.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Introduction

In this section, the existing literature is reviewed and the theories that underpinned the theoretical foundation of the research are discussed. Organisational culture and concepts related to LGBT+ including diversity, inclusion, and reasonable accommodation are discussed. The researcher analysed peer-reviewed published literature to discover what is known and what is not yet known about this study's research questions and then developed clear arguments.

Table 2.1 provides a synopsis of the topic of similar studies that were conducted in the past decade. These studies were identified during the literature review. The purpose of including the past studies is to provide some form of background, insight, and a roadmap of the literature and findings about the LGBT+ community's workplace experiences. The table provides a summary of the studies and their findings which further motivated and prompted conducting this research study.

**Table 2.1 Related work**

| Author (s)                     | Title                                                                                              | Year | Synopsis                                                                                                                                                                  | Findings & conclusion                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| John M Luiz and Viktor Terziev | Axes and fluidity of oppression in the workplace: Intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality | 2022 | The research explores how the historically institutionalised and authoritarian discriminatory South African context continues to affect the experiences of LGBT mid-level | The findings show a multifaceted fluidity of oppression where individuals can move between continuums of advantage and disadvantage. |

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|                                                              |                                                                                                                       |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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|                                                              |                                                                                                                       |      | managers in the workplace.                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| William Rosa, Chelsea Fullerton and Ronald Keller            | Equality in Healthcare: The Formation and Ongoing Legacy of an LGBT Advisory Council                                  | 2015 | This article provides a broad overview of the literature on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) health disparities and workplace discrimination, as well as the context that led to the formation of an institutional LGBT Advisory Council | Though much progress has been made on both national and local levels with regard to LGBT equality in healthcare, health disparities linked to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression demand a continued commitment to improvement. |
| Sarah Barnard, Andrew Dainty, Sian Lewis, and Andreas Culora | Conceptualising Work as a 'Safe Space' for Negotiating LGBT Identities: Navigating Careers in the Construction Sector | 2023 | Using qualitative data garnered from 16 in-depth interviews and a focus group with LGBT workers in the UK construction sector. This article analyses how participants negotiate identities at work and navigate their careers.                         | The findings of this study show that despite enduring heteronormative structures, work was described by participants as a "safe space".                                                                                                                |
| Anna Fountain Clark, Jiwon Suh and                           | Protected, but Not Included? The Role of Workplace                                                                    | 2022 | Using multilevel data analysis, this study focuses on how LGBT federal                                                                                                                                                                                 | The results indicate that LGBT employees' inclusion perceptions play a moderating role between                                                                                                                                                         |

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|                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kwang Bin<br>Bae                                           | Inclusion for<br>Sexual and<br>Gender<br>Minorities in<br>the Federal<br>Service                                                                                                                        |      | workers'<br>perceptions of<br>inclusion at the<br>agency, supervisory,<br>and work unit levels<br>affect their job<br>satisfaction.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | their sexual or gender<br>minority identities and<br>individual job satisfaction.<br>The findings suggest that<br>interventions aimed at<br>developing an inclusive<br>culture that reduces or<br>eliminates traditional<br>heteronormativity and<br>cishnormativity, both agency-<br>wide and at separate<br>organisational levels, may<br>improve job satisfaction<br>among LGBT workers. |
| J. Thuillier,<br>B.<br>Almudever<br>and S. Croity-<br>Belz | Perceived<br>Workplace<br>Discrimination<br>and Disclosure<br>at Work<br>Among<br>Lesbian and<br>Gay<br>Employees:<br>The Role of<br>Prior Coming<br>Out<br>Experiences in<br>Different Life<br>Domains | 2021 | This French study<br>aimed to explore the<br>links between<br>different dimensions<br>of perceived<br>workplace<br>discrimination (i.e.<br>perceived<br>heterosexist events,<br>workplace climate<br>toward LGBT<br>employees,<br>organisational<br>policies against<br>discrimination) and<br>disclosure of one's<br>homosexuality at<br>work among 234 | Findings from the Web-<br>based internet survey<br>revealed that prior negative<br>coming-out experiences with<br>friends moderated these<br>links but in a different way<br>whether individuals were<br>faced with personal<br>discrimination (i.e.<br>heterosexist events) or with a<br>more general discrimination<br>risk (i.e. workplace climate,<br>organisational policies).         |



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|                                                               |                                                                                                                       |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                               |                                                                                                                       |      | lesbian and gay employees.                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Fiona Colgan, Chris Creegan, Aidan McKearney and Tessa Wright | Equality and diversity policies and practices at work: lesbian, gay and bisexual workers                              | 2007 | The purpose of this paper is to identify organisational good practice concerning equality, diversity and sexual orientation and consider the impact of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003. | The research shows that an inclusive organisational response can benefit both LGB employees and their employers. However, an “implementation gap” between equality/diversity policy and practice on sexual orientation was identified. The introduction of the law as a further driver to equality action in the sexual orientation area has been positive. However, LGB employees voiced concerns about how organisations rely on LGB people to come forward with complaints before tackling problems. |
| Anastasios Hadjisolomou                                       | Doing and Negotiating Transgender on the Front Line: Customer Abuse, Transphobia and Stigma in the Food Retail Sector | 2021 | This article presents the story of Kathrine, a female transgender food retail worker, and discusses the abusive, discriminatory and transphobic behaviour of customers, which has received limited                    | The article reveals the stigmatisation of transgender employees by customers, which is expressed through micro-aggressions, such as misgendering, mocking and harassing, and is often neglected and/or tolerated by management. Kathrine discusses the coping strategies she utilises to reduce the negative                                                                                                                                                                                            |

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|                                   |                                                                                                          |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                   |                                                                                                          |      | attention in the sociology of service work literature.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | consequences of the stigma and to negotiate and protect her gender identity. These include confronting and/or refusing to serve transphobic customers, reflecting her resilience towards discrimination and abuse.                                                                                              |
| Erin A. Cech and Michelle V. Pham | Queer in STEM Organizations: Workplace Disadvantages for LGBT Employees in STEM-Related Federal Agencies | 2017 | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals in U.S. workplaces often face disadvantages in pay, promotion, and inclusion and emergent research suggests that these disadvantages may be particularly pernicious within science and engineering environments. However, no research has systematically examined whether LGBT employees indeed encounter disadvantages in science, technology, engineering and | We find that LGBT persons have more positive experiences in regulatory agencies but that supervisory status does not improve LGBT persons' experiences, nor do the youngest LGBT employees fare better than their older LGBT colleagues. LGBT-identifying men and women report similar workplace disadvantages. |

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|                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                  |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                  |      | math (STEM) organisations. We compare the workplace experiences of LGBT employees in STEM-related federal agencies with those of their heterosexual colleagues.                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Ramón S. Barthelemy, Madison Swirtz, Savannah Garmon, Elizabeth H. Simmons, Kyle Reeves, Michael L. Falk, Wouter Deconinck, Elena A. Long and Timothy J. Atherton | LGBT+ physicists: Harassment, persistence, and uneven support    | 2022 | Diversity and inclusion in the field of physics have been important in areas of research in the last two decades. However, such work has scarcely looked at the concerns and barriers faced by LGBT+ physicists, despite numerous indications they face discrimination in wider society. | The results indicated that 36% of all respondents reported considering leaving their institution or workplace with 22% reporting that they experienced exclusionary behaviour in the last year (i.e. being shunned, ignored, or harassed). However, this number varied by gender with transgender participants (49%) experiencing the most exclusionary behaviour. |
| Courtney A. Resnick, M Paz Galupo                                                                                                                                 | Measuring experiences of LGBT microaggressions in the workplace: | 2016 | This was a quantitative study that focused on the development of the LGBT Microaggression                                                                                                                                                                                                | The MEWS was found to be a valid and reliable instrument. Results indicated microaggressions are experienced more frequently for those who                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

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|  |                                                                                     |  |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Initial development and validation of the microaggression experiences at work scale |  | Experiences at Work Scale (MEWS). LGBT microaggressions are subtle forms of discrimination that occur based on one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity. | identify with plurisexual identities, trans* people, LGBT people of colour, and those who live in a state without a statewide employment non-discrimination policy based on sexual orientation and gender identity. |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

LGBT+ employees' workplace experiences have improved slightly, however, there are more negative than positive experiences. For example, Hadjisolomou's (2021) study points out that there is still stigmatisation of LGBT+ employees and management usually tolerates this behaviour. In a recent study by Barthelemy-et al. (2022), about 36% of the participants had considered leaving their current workplace because of the negative and exclusionary behaviour they had experienced. Even in other industries, such as healthcare, Tan (2019) indicates that LGBT+ healthcare providers continue to encounter various distinct challenges and general work-related stresses and biases. These biases encompass being overlooked for advancement, tenure, and leadership roles, as well as being deprived of recommendations from heterosexual peers. In addition, they face social exclusion and are subjected to derogatory remarks and behaviours in the workplace by both colleagues and clients.

### 2.2 Literature on LGBT+

The acronym LGBT+ encompasses the sexual orientation and gender identity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex plus others. Some people who identify as LGBT+ do not disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity due to the fear of discrimination, harassment and silencing experienced in the workplace (Beagan et al., 2022; DeSouza et al., 2017; Paisley & Tayar, 2016; Seiler-Ramadas et al., 2022). Members of the LGBT+ community face workplace discrimination, resulting in the deterioration of their physical and

emotional well-being, along with negative job consequences (DeSouza et al., 2017). Some of their workplace experiences include microaggressions and ostracism (DeSouza et al., 2017).

The social injustices and biases in treatment towards LGBT+ people are not only limited to the workplace but also in society, schools, hospitals and economically. For example, a woman who identifies as a lesbian left her home country, Cameroon, leaving behind her beloved family, friends, and an environment she had known all her life. This would allow her to be openly and freely herself as acts of homosexuality are still considered illegal in Cameroon, and one could be prosecuted for their sexual orientation and gender identity (Maidment, 2021). Similarly, other countries like South Africa also have a history of discrimination and prejudice against those who identify as LGBT+ (Van Vollenhoven & Els, 2013). Some of the challenges that are faced by individuals who identify as LGBT+ are a result of society's accepting heterosexuality or cisgender as the only sexual orientation and gender identity (normal) and anything else is seen as deviant (abnormal) (Ng & Rumens, 2017; Subhrajit, 2014; Tshisa & Van der Walt, 2022). Several African countries are still in denial of the existence of the LGBT+ community (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). In some Christian communities, it is seen as a sin to identify as a member of the LGBT+ community. The dominant religion in Africa is Christianity, thus one can imagine the stigmatisation that the LGBT+ community may be subjected to.

Often, heterosexual people do not have the same workplace experiences nor are they aware of the negative experiences as those of LGBT+ employees (Cech & Rothwell, 2019). In a study by Benjamin and Reygan (2016) that consisted of both LGBT+ and heterosexual participants; none of the heterosexual+ participants were aware of the experiences or challenges faced by LGBT+ employees due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. This revelation suggests that the negative workplace experiences of LGBT+ individuals may not be of concern to them because they are not affected in any way. Unlike LGBT+ employees, heterosexual employees have a favourable work environment and benefits that result in them having positive workplace experiences (Tshisa & Van der Walt, 2022). On the contrary, LGBT+ employees may not be protected against workplace exclusion and discrimination (Luiz & Terziev, 2022). Sometimes they do not enjoy the same positive workplace environment as their heterosexual colleagues.

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In South Africa, individuals' rights based on sexual orientation have been in the Constitution since 1994, however, LGBT+ individuals are still encountering many challenges and human rights issues (Knight & Wilson, 2016). A study titled "The Persisting Discrimination against Black LGBT Workers amidst Progressive Policies in South Africa" by Dhatemwa (2014) found that although South Africa has progressive legislation that is meant to protect the LGBT+ community, they are still a group that experiences a large degree of unfair treatment, are discriminated against, and harassed throughout their careers. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, in Chapter 2, Bill of Rights, section 9 Equality states that:

1. Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.
2. Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.
3. The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.
4. No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3). National legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination.
5. Discrimination on one or more of the grounds listed in subsection (3) is unfair unless it is established that the discrimination is fair.

Van Vollenhoven and Els (2013) indicate that although South Africa has the most progressive constitution globally, violations of the LGBT+ community's human rights have not ceased to exist as reported on various media platforms. In contrast, a recent study by Tshisa and Van der Walt (2022) found that some of the LGBT+ participants had positive experiences and were satisfied in the workplace whilst others were either neutral or had negative experiences. The study by Tshisa and Van der Walt (2022) suggests that not all LGBT+ employees experience discrimination, harassment or violence because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

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There have been some changes and improvements in countries like the US as public attitudes have improved towards LGBT+ people in recent years and they now enjoy more rights compared to the past (Rhodes & Stewart, 2016). In Africa, some countries have shown great improvements toward the rights of LGBT+ individuals, such as South Africa which allows same-sex marriages, unions and child adoption, however, homosexuality is still considered illegal in over 30 countries (Bhandari, 2023; Matebeni, 2023).

There are only a few countries (South Africa, Botswana, Mauritius, Mozambique and Seychelles) that have fully codified their laws to ensure that the LGBT+ community is not discriminated against based on their sexual orientation (Matebeni, 2023). However, more still needs to be done in the workplace for LGBT+ employees to be reasonably accommodated and feel included. LGBT+ employees, especially the younger generation coming from South African townships, face even more challenges of homophobia (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016). They are often stereotyped based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. The issue of equal rights, opportunities, and non-discrimination based on sexual orientation seems to be on paper and not fully implemented or practised. Maji et al. (2023) conducted a study in India to explore discriminatory workplace experiences encountered by Indian lesbian and gay (LG) employees; they found that the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees were far from discrimination-free. Subtle discrimination was evident in the form of microaggression and social ostracism (Maji et al., 2023).

In 1993, the US government implemented a policy that would allow LGBT+ individuals to join the military, however, the condition was that they keep their sexual orientation a secret; the policy was, however, later abolished in 2011 (Sangha, 2015). In Russia, LGBT+ is not illegal, however, the signing of a propaganda law in March 2012 indirectly criminalises LGBT+ individuals resulting in those who are homosexuals not freely living their lives (Knight & Wilson, 2016). In Indonesia, a series of events and movements against the LGBT+ community have been taking place since 2016. Government and public officials have expressed that homosexuality should be banned in Indonesia as it is not part of the culture of the country and is a serious threat to the nation (Rodríguez & Murtagh, 2022). Rodríguez and Murtagh (2022) further point out the following event which demonstrates the state of LGBT+ rights; in 2017 universities joined the movement against the LGBT+ community by not allowing students to participate in organisations that were aligned with any LGBT+-related movements. In 2018, before the national elections, there were protests throughout the country against the LGBT+

## Navigating diversity and inclusion in the South African telecommunications industry: an LGBT+ employee perspective

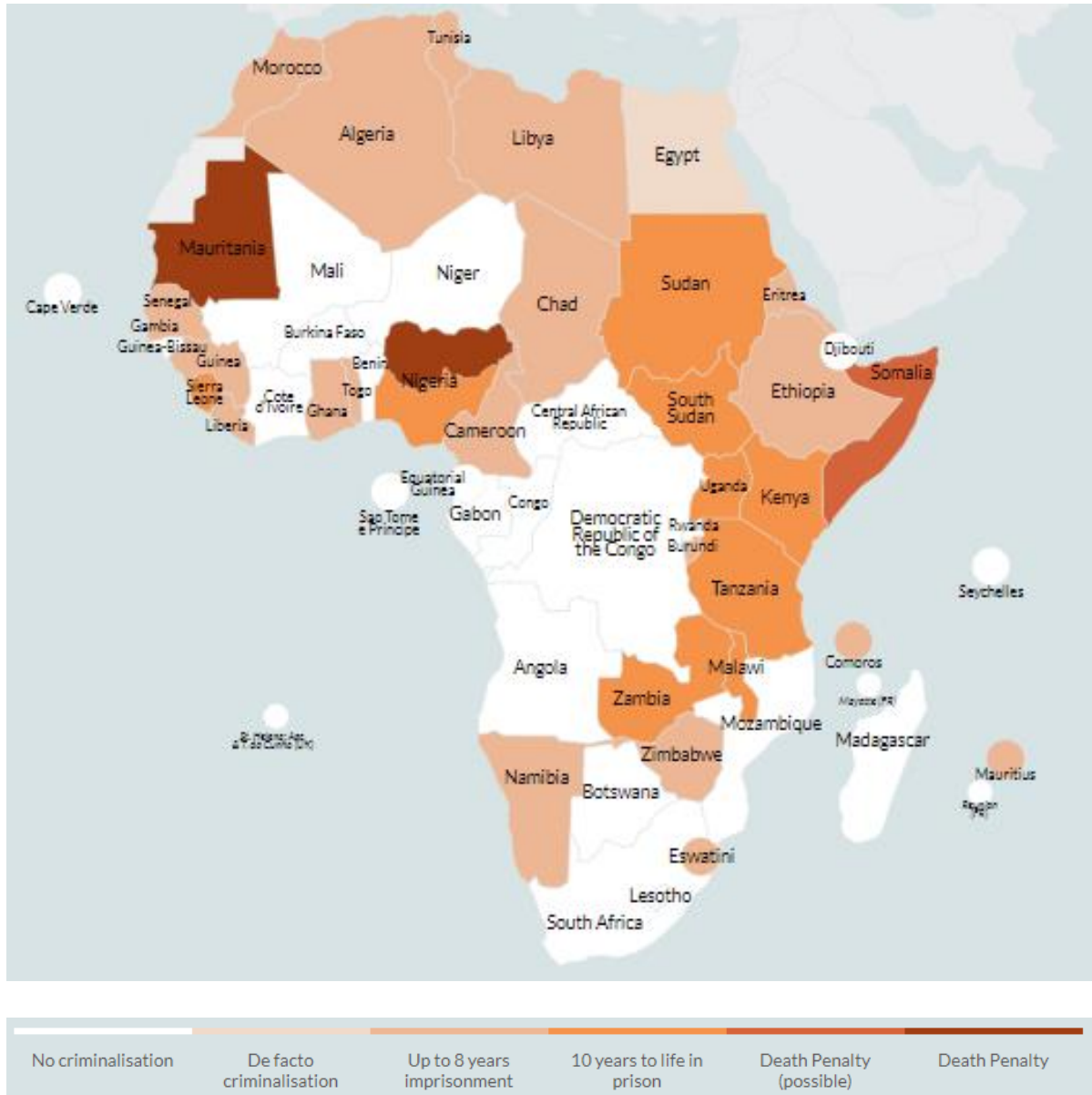
community. In 2019, certain media houses and publications were prohibited from publishing anything relating to the LGBT+ community.

Almeida et al. (2009) and Terra et al.'s (2022) studies found that when compared to heterosexuals, those who identify as LGBT+ are more likely to have suicidal thoughts and mental health-related problems, such as depression because of how they are treated by others. There are many events which can trigger mental health problems for the LGBT+ community, amongst them being the stressful experiences of discrimination, harassment, exclusion and violence (Devís-Devís et al., 2022). Tshisa and Van der Walt (2022) observe that some LGBT+ people have managed to create a positive and meaningful life for themselves regardless of the continuous discrimination they experience.

The map below illustrates an overview of the LGBT+ status quo in terms of the criminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual acts and relationships in Africa. According to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) (2023) in Africa, same-sex relationships are punishable by the death penalty in three countries, imprisonment of more than 10 years, to life in nine countries, and imprisonment of less than 10 years or other penalties in 20 countries.



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**Figure 2.1 Map - criminalisation status quo of consensual same-sex sexual acts and relationships in Africa**

Source: International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA, 2023).

The map also indicates that there are nine African countries, namely, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda, Mali, Niger, Madagascar, and Seychelles which have never criminalised same-sex relationships. Subhrajit (2014) states that unlike those who identify as heterosexual, LGBT+ individuals are more likely to be threatened, treated unfairly, harassed or discriminated against based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.

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The example below is an indication of the barriers that face the LGBT+ community and the long way they still have to go to enjoy the same rights as those who identify as heterosexual. The former president of the United States raised eyebrows when he mentioned the importance of gay rights during his inauguration address in 2013, newspapers even described him as “America’s First Gay President”. This might have been an indication that the world was not ready to accept LGBT+ people and reasonably accommodate them. LGBT+ individuals are still violated, attacked, and discriminated against because of their sexual orientation and gender identity (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2014); these experiences differ across most cultures (Madrigal-Borloz, 2021). Former President Barack Obama in his address mentioned that “our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law” (Encarnación, 2014, p. 90).

A statement by the former president of the US emphasises that LGBT+ individuals are still not treated like everyone else; this could be in the constitution, at school, in the workplace or in society. A study by Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2014) found that LGBT+ university students participating in sports tournaments had to act or behave heterosexually if they did not want to be excluded. These students were subjected to mockery and name-calling because they identified as LGBT+; some of them were told that their poor performance was because they were LGBT+. In African countries, such as Botswana, Mozambique, Mauritius, and Seychelles, LGBT+ individuals are still subjected to employment discrimination because of their sexual orientation (Knight & Wilson, 2016).

Rhodes and Stewart (2016) hold the position that LGBT+ individuals have gained and enjoyed many civil rights, freedom, and social acceptance over a short period in the US. Hossain et al. (2020) also advocate the view that LGBT+ individuals have gained support in the past two decades which has resulted in organisations incorporating employee equality initiatives into their diversity management strategies. Findings by Riggle et al. (2014) suggest that regardless of the challenges, LGBT+ individuals have a positive well-being. As much as organisations like the UN condemn violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, there are still many countries that punish those who identify as LGBT+ (Bhandari, 2023; Matebeni, 2023). In the workplace, LGBT+ employees also face some form of discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. This hostility towards them

prevents them from performing their core functions and negatively affects and lowers their performance (Bonaventura & Biondo, 2016; Hossain et al., 2020).

A survey conducted by Afrobarometer in African countries, except for Algeria, Egypt, and Sudan, found that people were more tolerant of those who have different religious beliefs than themselves but they did not show the same tolerance for people who identified as LGBT+ (Dulani et al., 2016). Some people's views, attitudes or perceptions towards the LGBT+ community are not necessarily based on cultural or religious beliefs and differences but rather on an individual's personal choice, views or perceptions of gender identity and sexuality (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). The openness to religious differences over the acceptance and understanding of LGBT+ individuals may be an indication of how society still views and frowns upon homosexual individuals. If this is how the LGBT+ community is viewed and treated in society, one can imagine how the treatment is carried over to the workplace. The surveyed heterosexual individuals are more likely not to be accepting of LGBT+ individuals in the workplace. In 2021, after the Taliban take-over in Afghanistan, LGBT+ individuals feared for their lives as they were targeted by members of the Taliban and were in danger of being killed because of their sexual orientation and gender identity (Hassan, 2022). The situation intensified to the extent that some members of the LGBT+ community had to flee to neighbouring countries for their safety and well-being.

The group in this study is under-represented in the structures, such as the government and in leadership roles. The resolution of any challenges related to harassment and bullying in the workplace might be even more challenging as there are no avenues in place to report these (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016). Rosa et al. (2015) and Sangha (2015) explain that studies indicate that there are between 15% and 43% of LGBT+ employees who have reported some form of bias, unfair treatment and discrimination while in the workplace. Eleven studies found that LGBT+ lawyers may experience an uncondusive workplace and harassment because of their sexual orientation, and they may also face barriers to career advancement (Knight & Wilson, 2016). Although the acceptance of LGBT+ individuals has greatly increased in the past three decades, LGBT+ individuals are still discriminated against in the workplace based on their sexual orientation and gender identity (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Ng & Rumens, 2017; Sangha, 2015). "Sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace ranges from termination after an employer learns of an employee's sexual orientation to negative performance

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evaluations, unequal pay, limited career advancement or benefits, and sometimes, verbal and physical abuse” (DeSouza et al., 2017; Sangha, 2015, p. 58).

In another study, Sangha (2015) mentions that of the 6,500 surveyed transgender people, 90% confirmed that they have experienced some form of harassment or discrimination in the workplace based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. As a result, they decided that the negative treatment forced them to conceal that they identified as transgender, and it would help them avoid any future mistreatment. Almost half of the transgender participants who were surveyed also confirmed that at a point in their work life, they were either fired, not hired, or not promoted because of their gender identity. Shedding light on some of the treatment that LGBT+ individuals may often be subjected to

*Examples of the kind of treatment a transgender person may experience in the workplace include harassment, co-workers' deliberate and repeated use of the wrong pronoun, inappropriate questions, denial of access to the appropriate restroom, and physical or sexual violence (Sangha, 2015, p. 58).*

In a similar study conducted on LGBT+ physicians' experiences in the workplace, it was found that

*...although rates of discriminatory behaviours had decreased since earlier reports, 10% reported that they were denied referrals from heterosexual colleagues, 15% had been harassed by a colleague, 22% had been socially ostracised, 65% had heard derogatory comments about LGBT+ individuals, 34% had witnessed discriminatory care of an LGBT+ patient, 36% had witnessed disrespect toward an LGBT+ patient's partner, and 27% had witnessed the discriminatory treatment of an LGBT+ co-worker (Eliason et al., 2011, p. 1355).*

There has been an increase in support for LGBT+ rights over the years, especially in Western societies (Ng & Rumens, 2017; Patel & Feng, 2021). However, the lack of legislation that protects LGBT+ individuals from bullying, discrimination, and harassment in the workplace is the reason for their negative experiences (King & Cortina, 2010; Webster et al., 2018).

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According to Eliason et al. (2011), the lack of education of physicians and medical students about LGBT+-related issues results in them being homophobic and heterosexist towards their colleagues and behaving as the general society does. A study by Barton (2012) also revealed that in a survey conducted in 2008, 42% of the LGBT+ participants had experienced some form of discrimination in the workplace because of their sexual orientation, while 78% of them had experienced employment discrimination based on gender identity. Acts of discrimination towards LGBT+ individuals in the workplace include being fired, denied employment opportunities or promotions, receiving unequal pay or benefits, emotional, physical, or verbal abuse, and negative performance evaluation (Elias et al., 2018; Rhodes & Stewart, 2016).

As a result of the societal stigma associated with LGBT+ individuals, some LGBT+ employees still experience unfair treatment, harassment, violence, and systematic oppression in the workplace (Gates & Viggiani, 2014; Webster et al., 2018). In another survey conducted in 2008 by the Williams Institute, it was found that 38% of LGBT+ employees reported being harassed at work, and 27% experienced employment discrimination based on their sexual orientation (Sears et al., 2011). A survey conducted by the National Transgender Discrimination revealed that “approximately 78% of transgender employees reported being harassed or mistreated at work, and 47% reported being discriminated against in terms of hiring, promotion, or job retention” (Webster et al., 2018, p. 193).

A study by Ragins et al. (2007) examined the antecedents that affect the degree of disclosure of a gay person's identity at work, and for those who had not disclosed the factors that influence their fears about full disclosure, found that employees who worked with supportive colleagues had less fear of revealing their LGBT+ identity. The findings of the study by Ragins et al. (2007) show that an organisation's culture and positive environment play a role in the decision to disclose one's sexual orientation or gender identity. Matsúmunyane and Hlalele's (2019) findings reflect that although there is awareness of the LGBT+ community, factors, such as religious and cultural beliefs make it difficult to accept the existence of the LGBT+ community. The few studies referenced in this section indicate that the LGBT+ community and employees are still distressed, face an extensive degree of exclusion and find themselves in workplaces that are not supportive or with colleagues that stigmatise, harass and discriminate against them based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Table 2.2 Comparison of negative workplace experiences related to sex or gender**

| Event                                          | % experienced<br>(2009) | % experienced<br>(1994) |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Refused staff privileges                       | 0                       | *                       |
| Fired                                          | 3                       | *                       |
| Denied employment                              | 8                       | *                       |
| Denied educational programme                   | 5                       | *                       |
| Denied promotion                               | 6                       | *                       |
| Denied medical school entry                    | 2                       | 2                       |
| Denied patient referrals                       | 10                      | 16                      |
| Denied a residency                             | 4                       | 11                      |
| Discouraged from applying                      | 5                       | not asked               |
| Denied a loan                                  | 2                       | 4                       |
| Harassed by colleagues                         | 15                      | 37                      |
| Socially ostracised                            | 22                      | 37                      |
| Any discrimination because of LGBT patients    | 2                       | 5                       |
| Accused of unethical behaviour                 | 2                       | not asked               |
| Ever heard disparaging remarks                 | 65                      | 88                      |
| Witnessed discriminatory care of LGBT patients | 34                      | 52                      |
| Witnessed disrespect of LGBT patient's partner | 36                      | not asked               |
| Witnessed discrimination against LGBT employee | 27                      | not asked               |

\*In the 1994 survey, these first five items were collapsed into one question about job discrimination, and 16% indicated that they had experienced one of these.

Source: Eliason et al. (2011) adopted from Schatz and O'Hanlan (1994)

Although some of the events were not observed in 1994, the study by Eliason et al. (2011) shows that fewer LGBT+ physicians had negative experiences or were discriminated against based on their sexual orientation and gender identity in 2009 than in 1994. This finding suggests that there have been some changes based on the 2009 study, possibly in behaviour

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and treatment towards LGBT+ individuals, as there is a decrease in the occurrence of events, such as being harassed or discriminated against.

The Home-Work Disclosure Model by Ragins (2004) and the Interpersonal Diversity Disclosure Model by Clair et al. (2005) explain LGBT+ experiences at work. Although these two models are slightly different, they do agree on three important aspects that need to be considered to support the elimination of negative emotions and experiences of LGBT+ individuals in the workplace because of their identities. The three important support aspects are “(1) formal LGBT+ policies and practices, (2) an LGBT-supportive climate, and (3) supportive workplace relationships” (Webster et al., 2018, p. 194).

Formal LGBT+ policies and practices consider the support of equality of LGBT+ individuals in the workplace. These policies can signal the organisational culture and acceptable or expected behaviours throughout the organisation (Webster et al., 2018). Organisations must implement LGBT+-friendly policies in the workplace even in the absence of legislation protecting LGBT+ employees (King & Cortina, 2010). This provides organisational commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace for all (Patel & Feng, 2021). Hossain et al.’s (2020) study demonstrates that organisations with diversity policies are more likely to experience higher levels of innovation and overall performance compared to those that lack such policies. By embracing diversity, organisations can tap into a broader range of ideas, insights, and approaches to problem-solving.

In the absence of LGBT+ supportive policies, Elias et al. (2018) remark that organisations should consider the rights of LGBT+ employees more so before they implement any new policies. Lloren and Parini’s (2017) findings confirm that LGBT+ supportive policies alone are not adequate to influence LGBT+ employees’ workplace experiences and overall well-being. Maji et al.’s (2023) findings indicate that most organisations in India have non-discriminatory policies in place, however, negative workplace experiences persist widely. Policies and practices are not adequate if the climate in the workplace is not LGBT+ supportive. Employees must be made aware of the support available to them and the channels or means to follow to address any unfavourable conditions in the workplace. Elias et al. (2018), in addition,

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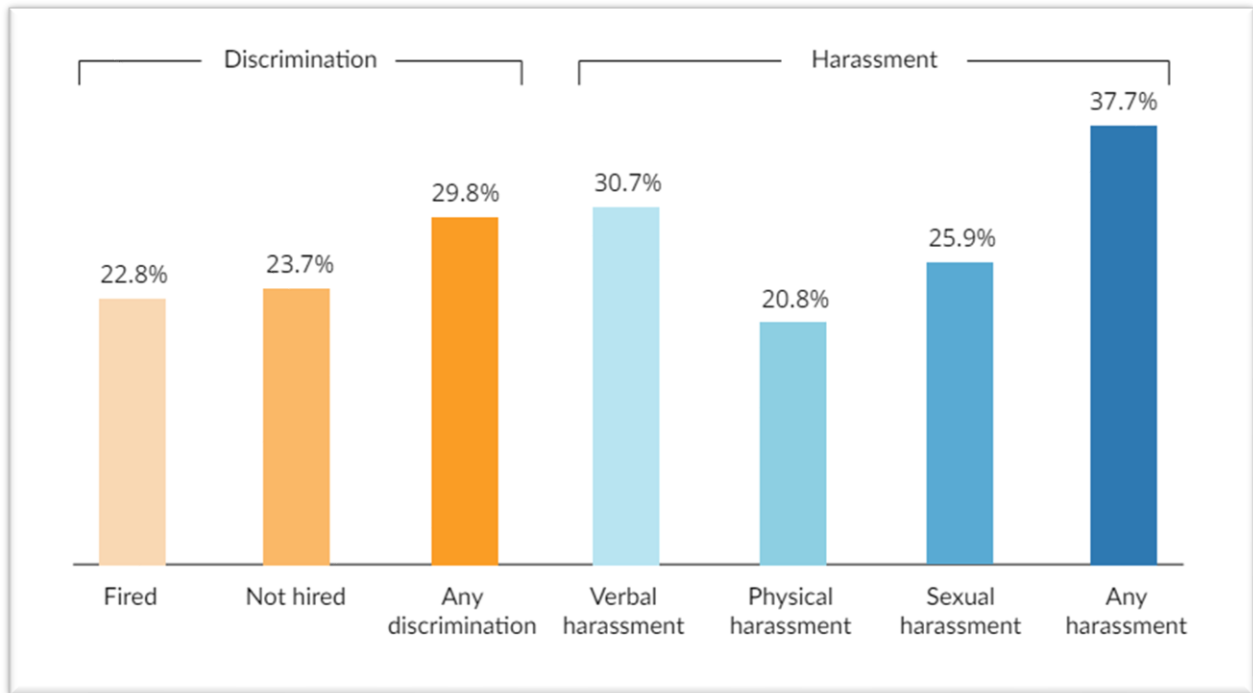
emphasise the importance of organisations incorporating policy and awareness of the LGBT+ community's needs and existence in the workplace.

Benjamin and Reygan (2016) indicate that while South Africa has progressed regarding LGBT+ rights, research reflects that LGBT+ employees point out that policies and laws that protect them from discrimination are inaccessible. Furthermore, the majority of LGBT+ employees state that they are unaware of the procedures to report any incidents relating to violations of their rights (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016). Supportive workplace relationships consider the interpersonal resources available to LGBT+ individuals in the workplace. These can be in the form of support groups or visible allyship. King and Cortina (2010) remark that allyship efforts can greatly benefit the LGBT+ community in the workplace. The support offered can make an individual feel valued and appreciated and with a sense of belonging (Cancela et al., 2022; Webster et al., 2018).

The impact of discrimination and harassment on LGBT+ individuals has resulted in some of them being unable to find employment or having fewer options than those who identify as heterosexual (Medina & Mahowald, 2023; Subhrajit, 2014). Furthermore, their ability to contribute as respectable members of the workforce is severely compromised, with fewer career growth opportunities (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016). Dhatemwa's (2014) findings confirm that LGBT+ employees lose out on employment opportunities and employee benefits. They are mistreated or dismissed from work because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Similarly, Sears et al.'s (2021) findings confirm Dhatemwa's (2014) as they found that 9% of their research participants reported instances of termination or rejection from employment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity in the previous year. The figure below adapted from Sears et al., (2021) illustrates the findings of their study where they surveyed 935 LGBT+ adults. The results indicate that a high degree of discrimination and harassment is still being experienced by the LGBT+ community in the workplace.



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***Figure 2.2 Lifetime experiences of discrimination and harassment against LGBT employees based on sexual orientation or gender identity***

Source: Sears et al. (2021)

Below is a summary of Sears et al.'s (2021) findings:

- One in five LGBT+ employees was either terminated or not hired based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Unfair treatment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity: unfair treatment included not being promoted, not receiving a raise, being treated differently to those with different sex partners, and being excluded from company events.
- More than one in four have been verbally harassed in the workplace based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Examples include being called or hearing the words “f\*\*\*\*t,” “queer,” “sissy,” “tranny,” and “dyke”.
- One in four reported sexual harassment at work because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Many of the LGBT+ employees reported that their workplace environment was unsupportive of LGBT people.

### **2.3 Diversity, equity and inclusion**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace, refer to policies, practices and procedures that encourage representation and participation of people of different socio-backgrounds, genders, races, ethnicities, religions, ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, and classes (Catalyst, 2020; Perry & Li, 2019; University of Pennsylvania, 2023). Simply put, DEI is employed to characterise three values that numerous organisations aim to embrace to cater to the needs of individuals from various backgrounds (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Diversity refers to the composition of individuals within the workforce (McKinsey & Company, 2022; Tan, 2019). Ensuring organisational diversity involves assessing the composition of a group to guarantee the representation of multiple perspectives (Tan, 2019). Equity entails fair treatment of individuals concerning both opportunities and results in the workplace (Arsel et al., 2022; McKinsey & Company, 2022). Inclusion involves cultivating a culture that promotes belonging and the integration of diverse groups, typically manifested as the antithesis of exclusion or marginalisation and how they are enabled to make meaningful contributions (Arsel et al., 2022; McKinsey & Company, 2022; Tan, 2019).

“Diversity management practices consist of the set of formalised practices developed and implemented by organisations to manage diversity effectively among all organisational stakeholders” (Yang & Konrad, 2011, p. 6) and it drives excellence (Poppas et al., 2020). Diversity and inclusion (D&I) are about an organisation's commitment to attracting, recruiting, rewarding, and retaining employees from different socio-backgrounds (Hossain et al., 2020). It also entails implementing measures and guidelines to promote the involvement and representation of individuals from diverse groups in the workplace (Tan, 2019). Diverse organisations with positive workplace environments are prone to boosting employees' job satisfaction and their commitment to the organisation (Kühn et al., 2019; McCallaghan et al., 2019; Perry & Li, 2019). When organisations effectively manage diversity, particularly among LGBT+ employees, it positively impacts their work experience by implementing strategies to reduce discrimination and promote inclusivity. In contrast, diversity management creates a more welcoming environment for LGBT+ employees (Lloren & Parini, 2017). This, in turn, enhances their overall well-being in the workplace. Essentially, by fostering an inclusive culture, diversity management helps mitigate the negative effects of discrimination and

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promotes a more positive and supportive atmosphere for LGBT+ employees (Lloren & Parini, 2017).

McKinsey and Company (2022) further suggest that diversity pertains to the composition of individuals in the workforce. Below are their examples of what diversity in the workplace may include:

- Gender diversity: What constitutes the demographic makeup of men, women, and nonbinary individuals within a specific population?
- Age diversity: Is the group predominantly composed of individuals from a single generation or is there a blend of various age groups?
- Ethnic diversity: Do individuals within the group share similar national or cultural traditions or do they come from diverse backgrounds?
- Physical ability and neurodiversity: Are the viewpoints of individuals with visible or hidden disabilities, considered?

Perry and Li (2019) explain that a diverse climate in the workplace can be described as employees' collective perceptions regarding how much their organisation values diversity. This is reflected by the policies, practices, and procedures the organisation incentivises, supports, and anticipates. HR policies should reflect a commitment to promoting a diverse and inclusive workplace. Perry and Li (2019) further explain that at an individual level, diversity climate is about personal perceptions of how the work environment influences one's well-being.

DEI aims to foster a work environment where all individuals are respected, valued, and provided with equal opportunities for growth and advancement regardless of their differences. DEI have proven to greatly benefit organisations, their employees and society at large (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020; Poppas et al., 2020; Seiler-Ramadas et al., 2022). D&I initiatives often involve creating a culture of belonging, implementing fair hiring and promotion practices, offering diversity training, promoting diverse representation at all levels of the organisation, and actively addressing biases and discrimination. DEI workplaces enhance productivity, spur innovation, and elevate the overall commitment of employees (Alliston et al., 2020). The goal of DEI is to create a more equitable and inclusive workplace where everyone can thrive and contribute to their full potential (Shore et al., 2010). The findings of Colgan et al. (2007) and

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Catalyst (2020) confirm that diverse and inclusive organisations benefit both the employer and employee. Maurer and Qureshi (2021) advocate that organisations characterised by heightened gender diversity and HR policies exhibit correlations with reduced levels of employee turnover.

Blair and Arroyo (2022) advocate that genuine inclusion of LGBT+ employees means understanding their differences, embracing them for who they are and fostering their uniqueness. D&I of LGBT+ employees in the workplace means creating an environment where they can be themselves, are understood and reasonably accommodated. In a report by Coffman et al. (2022), it was found that over 70% of LGBT+ employees do not feel fully included in their workplace. Although some organisations have LGBT+ friendly policies, a study that was conducted in 2006 revealed that some of the organisations with diversity and inclusion policies are not LGBT+ friendly in practice (Fullerton, 2013). In some instances, LGBT+ issues in the workplace are not taken seriously or worse, considered unimportant or non-issues (Ng & Rumens, 2017). Policies on D&I of LGBT+ individuals in the workplace are not adequate if there is no culture shift amongst all employees (Clark et al., 2022; Fullerton, 2013). Harvard Business Review surveyed over 16 thousand employees from 14 countries around the world and found that over 75% of employees from underrepresented groups, such as LGBT+, women and ethnic minorities felt that they did not benefit from the organisation's diversity and inclusion initiatives (Krentz, 2023). Luiz and Terziev's (2022) study point out that the research participants felt that in their workplace sexuality was not regarded in implementing diversity and inclusion policies.

DEI efforts reflect an organisation's level of commitment and engagement to creating a favourable workplace environment and experiences for its employees (Clark et al., 2022). More and more employees are looking for diverse and inclusive employers; it has become one of the requirements that they look for in a potential employer and what efforts are being made to be more diverse and inclusive (Reynolds, 2022). A study found that recently more people are willing to accept a job offering a lower salary than what they are earning if the organisation is more diverse (Choi et al., 2023).

Badgett et al. (2013, p. 1) state that

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*“An existing set of studies demonstrates that LGBT+ supportive policies and workplace climates are linked to greater job commitment, improved workplace relationships, increased job satisfaction, and improved health outcomes among LGBT+ employees. Furthermore, LGBT+ supportive policies and workplace climates are also linked to less discrimination against LGBT employees and more openness about being LGBT”.*

Clark et al. (2022) also advocate the view that an inclusive workplace enhances an employee’s workplace experience.

LGBT+ work equality policies can have several benefits for firms such as:

- “Improved company image,
- Develop and sustain a positive work culture,
- Improve employee retention and human capital,
- Help leverage relational capital within and outside the firm with customers and channel partners,
- Improve returns to intangible assets,
- Enhance brand equity,
- Strengthen culture,
- Revitalise and accentuate stakeholder relations, resulting in net economic benefits,
- This signals that a firm is willing to provide a more open and inclusive working environment to develop its human capital and organisational capabilities to improve customer satisfaction” (Patel & Feng, 2021, p. 8).

Diversity management best practices focus on improving the workplace environment by reducing acts of discrimination and driving financial effectiveness for an organisation (Yang & Konrad, 2011). Therefore, it could be said that a diverse, equitable and inclusive organisation benefits both the employer and employee as there are favourable outcomes for all parties (Edmans et al., 2023). When there are diversity management practices in a workplace, positive work attitudes are present (Yang & Konrad, 2011). Badgett et al. (2013, p. 6) further suggest that organisations can benefit from diversity-enhancing policies, improve revenue and turnover, and enjoy other benefits which include:

- “Lower health insurance costs through improved health outcomes;
- Lower legal costs from litigation related to discrimination;

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- Greater access to new customers, such as public sector entities that require contractors to have non-discrimination policies or domestic partner benefits;
- More business from individual consumers who want to do business with socially responsible companies;
- More effective recruiting of LGBT+ and heterosexual+ employees who want to work for an employer that values diversity;
- Increased creativity among employees could lead to better ideas and innovations;
- Greater demand for company stock because of expected benefits of diversity policies.”

In the UK, legislation protects LGBT+ employees against discrimination in the workplace (Fullerton, 2013). LGBT+ supportive policies that consider diversity and inclusion in the workplace are believed to have a positive impact on LGBT+ employees and increase their productivity levels and retention rates (Badgett et al., 2013). When organisational policies include LGBT+ employees, in turn, there are workplace-related outcomes for those employees, such as:

- increased job satisfaction;
- a sense of belonging;
- improved mental health;
- better relationships with colleagues;
- commitment to work; and
- positive attitudes and behaviour (Badgett et al., 2013).

DEI implies that employees feel that they belong in an organisation and their uniqueness is valued in the workplace (Shore et al., 2010).

Brown et al. (2023) outline five steps that are key for organisations to achieve their DEI strategies. When implemented together, the five steps have proven to aid in achieving internal DEI strategies. These are:

- Aspire: align with the vision.
- Assess: build the fact base.
- Architect: develop the plan.
- Act: mobilise capabilities and resources.
- Advance: measure progress to scale and sustain momentum.

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Most organisations have committed to being diverse and inclusive, however, there seem to be challenges, such as not having strategies and practical implementation plans to achieve their D&I goals. The pace of implementation of D&I goals, strategies and policies is slow or non-existent in other organisations. In diversity and inclusion discussions, there are usually two themes which stand out, belongingness and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2010). This means that employees want to feel a sense of being accepted for their uniqueness and to have a sense of belonging. However, when compared to heterosexual colleagues, it was found that the perception of the levels of inclusion for LGBT+ employees was lower (Clark et al., 2022).

### **2.4 The concept of organisational culture**

Organisational culture interacts with structures, policies, systems, and human resources in the workplace. Hofstede (2001) highlights how organisational culture influences decision-making, innovation, and leadership styles. This includes what is considered important, why they are important and what is not important. Also included are the beliefs which may influence how people act, why they act the way they do, and why they do not act. These result in established behavioural norms (Ahmady et al., 2016). An organisation's culture plays a pivotal role in shaping the norms and behaviour of the employees but can also depress an organisation's success (Hattangadi, 2020). According to White (1999), if one observes the culture of an organisation, one can derive assumptions and conclude how certain aspects unfold. For example, by taking time to observe an organisation's culture one can assume how diversity and inclusion of LGBT+ employees pan out at that workplace. Ahmady et al. (2016) note that some scholars emphasise the values of organisational culture and how this affects employee behaviour and shapes how they perceive their world or respond to its changing nature. The underlying values influence employee behaviour and guide their decisions in the workplace (Gregory et al., 2008). Suppose an organisation has a culture that is open, honest, welcoming and promotes diversity and inclusion. In that case, the employees are likely to be influenced by this and behave according to the values that are aligned with the culture.

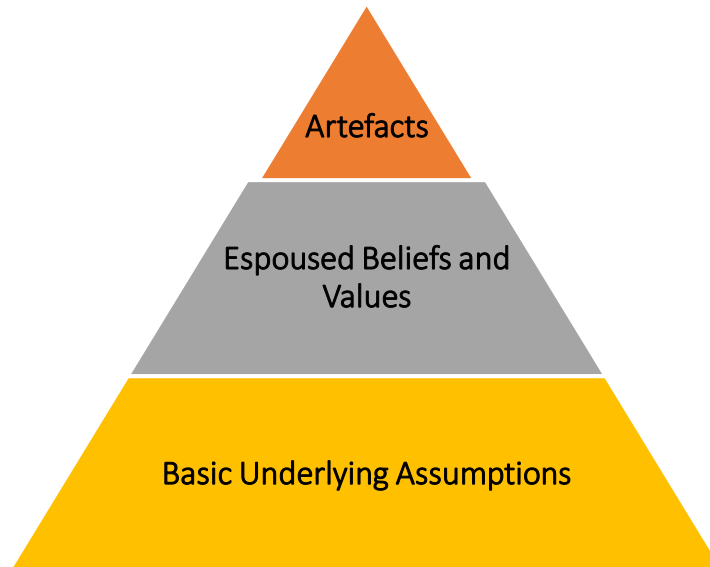
In the workplace, organisational culture can be a powerful tool used for common flexibility, guidelines, and identity purposes (Ahmady et al., 2016; Schein, 2010; Trice & Beyer, 1993). By leveraging organisational culture effectively, an organisation and its leaders can create a workplace environment where flexibility is valued, guidelines are clear and supportive, and

employees feel a strong sense of identity and purpose. White (1999) explains that research suggests that when a person strongly identifies with the mainstream culture in an organisation their career outcomes are enhanced. Changing an organisation's culture is widely acknowledged as a difficult and lengthy process. Culture is deeply ingrained in an organisation's history, leadership practices, and employee behaviours. Schein (2010) notes that culture change requires addressing three levels: artefacts (visible structures and processes), espoused values (stated beliefs and strategies), and basic underlying assumptions (deeply embedded, taken-for-granted behaviours). Organisational culture can assist in fostering a workplace environment that is diverse, inclusive and welcoming (Clark et al., 2022; Elias et al., 2018). Therefore, when the organisational culture is positive and promotes collaboration, inclusion, growth, and diversity, the employees are likely to be positive and welcoming, treat one another with respect, and embrace diversity and inclusion.

The principles of organisational culture could be used in the workplace to facilitate change and stabilise new orientations (Ahmady et al., 2016; Schein, 2010). Implementation can be done by understanding the current culture of the organisation, aligning with the organisation's values, introducing effective and transparent communication about the changes, and continuously evaluating and adjusting the changes that will impact the organisational culture (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Transforming the organisational culture is vital to establishing a work environment where LGBT+ individuals can express their true selves, consequently fostering a safer atmosphere (Beagan et al., 2022). On the contrary, if an organisation's culture is not supportive and the workplace environment is not positive, LGBT+ employees are likely to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity which can result in them being less productive (Mallory et al., 2020).

To better understand the concept of organisational culture, Van Niekerk and Von Solms (2006) recommend examining the three levels of culture. According to Schein's (1985) model, culture exists on three levels, as in Figure 2.3. At the top of the pyramid are Artefacts (these are on the surface), next are values and the last layer is basic underlying assumptions (they are at the core). Organisational culture change requires addressing at all three levels. Figure 2.3 is discussed briefly in the next section.





***Figure 2.3 Edgar Schein's Model of organisational culture***

Source: Van Niekerk and Von Solms (2006) adapted from Schein (1985)

Van Niekerk and Von Solms (2006) examine the three levels of culture adapted from Schein (1985) as follows:

- **Level One: Artefacts:** these are objects that you can see, feel, hear, and observe in an organisation (Schein, 1999). Items, such as the office layout, products, policies, tools, physical environment, and the languages used are examples of Artefacts (Hattangadi, 2020; Geraghty, 2023). Artefacts are visible in organisational structures, policies, processes, employee behaviour and human resources. The organisation's culture is very clear at this level and an observer can easily gauge its impact whether negative or positive (Schein, 1999). Hattangadi (2020) remarks that Artefacts vary per workplace; in some workplaces, Artefacts can be the dress code, i.e. how employees dress says a lot about the organisation's culture. However, observing Artefacts alone will not explain why employees tend to behave the way they do (Schein, 1999). This is because numerous factors could influence their behaviour, such as the organisational culture or their personalities. Artefacts are grounded in values and assumptions, they are audible, visible, and tangible and what an organisation values (Hatch, 1993; Hattangadi 2020).
  
- **Level Two: Espoused values:** These are an organisation's official stance, such as its vision, mission, strategy, rules of behaviour, and any documentation that communicates the organisation's values, mission, vision, ethics, and principles (Schein, 1999, 2010;

Hattangadi, 2020). Espoused values are those that the organisation is known for and live by (Geraghty, 2023). Values are considered to have intrinsic value, such as goals, principles, and standards (Hatch, 1993). They help organisations shape the work environment, define their processes and guide how employees behave (Hattangadi, 2020). However, over time, shared values in an organisation become responsive to changes driven by the shared experiences of those in the organisation (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Schein (2010) advocates that not all beliefs and values will undergo this transformation. Hattangadi (2020) states that employees who share organisational values tend to exhibit greater loyalty, commitment, and a stronger identification with the organisation and are inclined to remain with it.

- **Level Three: Basic underlying assumptions:** These develop in any successful organisation. These are usually formed in the early days of an organisation based on certain strategies that have proven to be successful (Van Niekerk & Von Solms, 2006). Assumptions also represent beliefs about human nature and reality that are often taken for granted (Hatch, 1993; Schein, 2010). They are difficult to decipher, especially within the organisation as they are unconscious and implicit (Geraghty, 2023). Schein (2010) remarks that if a group strongly believes in certain basic underlying assumptions it becomes difficult for them to accept any other behaviour or assumptions. For example, if a group of heterosexual employees view heterosexuality as the norm or the only acceptable sexual orientation, anything outside of heterosexuality, such as homosexuality may be inconceivable to them.

The three levels discussed above shape the culture of any organisation, with the workforce sharing certain artefacts, beliefs and values (Van Niekerk & Von Solms, 2006). “An organisation’s culture determines the ability of out-group members to perform within the organisation” (White, 1999, p. 473). Clark et al.’s (2022) findings indicate that an inclusive organisational culture aids in eliminating the negative workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees and improves overall job satisfaction. A workplace environment is crucial in driving productivity and gaining commitment from employees, and recruitment efforts are enhanced (Hossain et al., 2020). Thus, it is important and beneficial for organisations to promote a positive and conducive workplace environment for all employees. Sears et al.’s (2021) findings

confirm that organisational culture plays a role in how LGBT+ employees are treated in the workplace. Of their research participants, 67.5% reported that the workplace culture was negative as they continued to be made fun of or called by certain derogatory words for being members of the LGBT+ community.

#### **2.4.1 Barriers and enablers for changing organisational culture**

Organisational culture shapes the values, behaviours, and practices in organisations, influencing overall effectiveness and adaptability. Changing the organisational culture is often a complex process, requiring a deep understanding of both the barriers that hinder transformation and the enablers that facilitate it. Barriers may include resistance to change, deeply ingrained traditions, and lack of leadership support, while enablers can range from strong leadership commitment to clear communication and employee engagement. This section explores these factors in detail, highlighting how organisations can navigate cultural change successfully.

Literature presents various critiques on cultural transformation in the workplace:

- **Resistance to Change:** employees often resist cultural change due to uncertainty, fear of job loss, or misalignment with personal values (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008). Resistance can derail change initiatives unless it is properly communicated and managed. Research suggests that active participation, transparent communication, and phased implementation can mitigate resistance (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Additionally, psychological contracts between employees and employers play a crucial role when employees perceive a breach of implicit agreements, and resistance intensifies (Rousseau, 1995).
- **Leadership's Role:** Some scholars argue that leadership is the key driver of culture change, but others suggest that top-down efforts often fail due to a lack of employee buy-in (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Transformational leadership, which emphasises vision, motivation, and employee empowerment, has been linked to successful cultural shifts (Bass & Avolio, 1994). However, leaders must also recognise informal cultural influencers within organisations, middle managers and long-tenured employees often wield significant cultural power that can either enable or obstruct change (Yukl, 2013). Additionally, a leader's ability to identify the enablers and barriers of change positions

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them for success, as it empowers them to recognise challenges early and take proactive corrective action.

- **Structural and External Constraints:** Economic pressures, regulatory frameworks, and industry norms can impose limitations on an organisation's ability to shift culture (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). In highly regulated industries, such as finance and healthcare, compliance requirements can create rigid structures that limit flexibility in cultural transformation. Additionally, globalisation presents challenges where multinational organisations must balance headquarters-driven cultural initiatives with local cultural adaptations (House et al., 2004). An organisation with offices in multiple countries may experience cultural differences influenced by local values, norms, and work practices. These variations can affect communication styles, decision-making processes, and workplace expectations, requiring leaders to adopt culturally adaptive strategies to ensure cohesion and collaboration across global teams.
- **Sustainability of Change:** Many organisations may experience "change fatigue," where employees become disengaged after repeated change efforts fail to yield results (Reeves & Deimler, 2011). Research suggests that change initiatives often fail due to inadequate reinforcement mechanisms, without continuous training, incentives, and cultural reinforcement through leadership behaviours, initial gains are lost over time (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Furthermore, an overreliance on external consultants can create short-term solutions rather than fostering internal ownership of cultural change (Beer et al., 1990).

Below, is a presentation of leading global organisations that have implemented cultural transformation initiatives. Real-world examples provide insight into the complexities of cultural transformation:

- **Microsoft's Culture Shift:** Under Satya Nadella's leadership, Microsoft transitioned from a competitive, individualistic culture to a more collaborative, growth-oriented environment. This transformation was achieved through leadership development programs, a renewed focus on employee learning, and a strategic shift towards cloud computing (Gates, 2018). Microsoft's adoption of a "growth mindset" culture encouraged employees to embrace innovation and experimentation, leading to a resurgence in market performance and innovation (Dweck, 2016).

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**Changes Made:** Nadella introduced a shift toward a growth mindset, which encouraged learning, collaboration, and agility. Key changes included:

**Revamping Performance Reviews:** Instead of the former “stack ranking” system, which encouraged internal competition, Nadella introduced a more collaborative and growth-oriented feedback system.

**Empowering Employees:** Policies were introduced that emphasised employee ownership, flexibility, and innovation. A focus on inclusivity and diversity was also promoted.

**Shifting Away from Control:** Nadella emphasised trust, allowing teams more autonomy to innovate and experiment without heavy oversight.

**Results:** These policy and cultural changes led to increased innovation, which contributed to the company’s resurgence in areas like cloud computing (Azure). Microsoft's market value grew significantly, and it regained a leadership position in the tech industry. Employee engagement and morale also improved. The transformation is generally seen as a success, with a more positive organisational culture and sustained growth.

- **Google’s Adaptive Culture:** Google fosters an innovation-driven culture by continuously evolving its leadership strategies, maintaining transparency, and encouraging risk-taking, which has helped sustain its competitive edge (Schmidt & Rosenberg, 2014). The company’s unique organisational structure, which promotes decentralised decision-making, has enabled teams to experiment freely. Google’s famous “20% time” policy, allowing employees to dedicate time to passion projects, has led to the development of key innovations such as Gmail and Google Maps (Bock, 2015).

### ➤ **American Apparel: From Ethical to Financial Collapse**

American Apparel, known for its ethical stance and commitment to fair labour practices, went through a dramatic cultural transformation under founder Dov Charney. However, the company's leadership and cultural policies are believed to be part of its downfall.

**Changes Made: workplace culture:** Charney’s leadership was marked by a highly sexualised workplace environment and controversial behaviour. Policies around dress codes, sexual harassment, and behaviour at work were either unclear or ignored.

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**Employee Relations:** The company had a progressive stance on labour rights, including offering healthcare and paid time off for factory workers, but the internal culture was often criticized for being toxic and exploitative.

**Results:** The company's culture, driven by Charney's behaviour and policies, contributed to numerous lawsuits and employee dissatisfaction. The company ultimately faced financial collapse and filed for bankruptcy in 2015. While it initially thrived with its "Made in the USA" and ethical labour policies, the negative aspects of its organisational culture undermined its long-term success.

### ➤ **Zappos:** Emphasis on Employee Happiness and Holacracy

Zappos is an online retailer known for its exceptional customer service. In the early 2000s, CEO Tony Hsieh introduced a cultural shift toward employee happiness, believing that happy employees would lead to happy customers.

**Changes Made: holacracy:** In 2014, Zappos implemented a policy known as "holacracy," a system where employees self-manage and there are no traditional hierarchies. The goal was to create more autonomy and flexibility in decision-making.

**Employee Happiness:** The company introduced policies designed to maximize employee satisfaction, including offering employees a \$2,000 severance bonus if they choose to leave the company after training.

**Results:** The results of the holacracy policy were mixed. While the company maintained a strong emphasis on customer service and employee satisfaction, the move to a non-hierarchical structure led to confusion and inefficiencies, with some employees finding it difficult to adapt to the lack of clear authority. Zappos later reverted to a more traditional organisational structure but continued to focus on its employee-centric culture.

### ➤ **Kodak's Cultural Resistance:** Kodak's inability to adapt its culture from film-based photography to digital innovation led to its decline. The company's resistance to change, despite technological advancements, serves as a cautionary tale (Lucas & Goh, 2009). Kodak had developed digital camera technology as early as the 1970s but failed to commercialize it due to a corporate culture deeply tied to its traditional film business model (Christensen, 1997). This case highlights the dangers of cultural inertia, where a company's past successes become barriers to future innovation.

➤ **Netflix: Evolving Culture with Freedom and Responsibility**

Netflix is known for its bold approach to organisational culture, which encourages high performance and personal responsibility.

**Changes Made: no formal vacation policy:** In 2004, Netflix eliminated its formal vacation policy, giving employees the freedom to take as much time off as they felt was necessary, provided their work didn't suffer.

**Culture of Candor:** Netflix encouraged transparency and honesty, even when it meant providing difficult feedback. The company's culture emphasises personal responsibility, autonomy, and a results-driven approach.

**Focus on High-Performance Employees:** Netflix adopted a policy of hiring and retaining only high-performing employees and being willing to part ways with those who didn't meet their standards.

**Results:** These policies have yielded positive results in terms of attracting top talent, maintaining a highly innovative culture, and driving company growth, particularly in content creation and global expansion. However, it has also led to criticisms of a "cutthroat" work environment, with some former employees stating that the pressure to perform can be overwhelming.

➤ **Uber: Culture Shift After Leadership Changes**

Uber faced significant internal challenges related to its aggressive, sometimes toxic corporate culture under founder Travis Kalanick. Allegations of harassment, a lack of diversity, and unethical behaviour plagued the company, leading to a major leadership overhaul in 2017.

**Changes Made:**

**New Leadership:** Dara Khosrowshahi was appointed CEO and focused on restoring Uber's reputation and transforming the culture.

**Policy Revisions:** Uber introduced a new code of conduct, revised its approach to diversity and inclusion, and restructured its leadership. Policies were also made to improve transparency and ethical standards.

**Harassment Policies:** Specific policies were enacted to improve sexual harassment prevention and foster a safer work environment.

**Results:** While the company's reputation improved, the cultural shift has been slow. Uber still faces challenges with employee turnover and maintaining a cohesive

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organisational culture. The results have been mixed, with some progress but continuing issues related to employee satisfaction and public perception.

Culture is a dynamic and evolving concept that requires continuous and deliberate effort to shape and influence. It is not a static entity but rather a complex and adaptive system that responds to various internal and external forces. While certain deep-rooted barriers, such as entrenched values, historical practices, and organisational inertia, will always present challenges, these should not serve as insurmountable obstacles. Instead, organisations must be intentional and proactive in cultivating a culture that reflects their evolving goals, values, and vision. This requires not only top-down leadership but also grassroots engagement, where all members of the organisation are actively involved in shaping the culture. Transforming culture demands a long-term commitment to sustained change, strategic alignment of behaviours with organisational objectives, and an openness to continuous learning and adaptation. With these efforts in place, organisations can foster an environment that promotes growth, innovation, and inclusivity, ultimately driving both individual and collective success. Schein (2010) suggests that true cultural change occurs when deeply held assumptions are altered, which often requires significant organisational crises or sustained leadership efforts. While Lewin (1951) emphasizes the need for "unfreezing" current behaviours, implementing change, and then "refreezing" new cultural elements into the organisation. Kotter (1996) argues that successful cultural transformation requires a compelling vision, strong leadership, and sustained effort to embed new behaviours.

### **2.5 Reasonable accommodation**

The practice of reasonable accommodation in the workplace means that employers need to make changes to some of the working conditions to allow for a certain group to accomplish their work, provided the employer does not suffer an unwarranted burden (Conway, 2012). Employers would accommodate employees provided the accommodations were reasonable and needed (Conway, 2012). Reasonable accommodation is also a framework for the management of differences in society, for example, religion, age, sexuality, gender, and race (Barras et al., 2018).



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An employer that is reasonably accommodating to LGBT+ individuals should not be seen as giving a favour or a nice to have or ticking the box (Fullerton, 2013). However, LGBT+ accommodating policies should be the right or fair way and consistent with corporate values (Sears et al., 2011). LGBT+ employees who do not have to conceal their identity at work feel included and part of the organisation, they do not fear being discriminated against or harassed based on their sexuality. They are more productive when compared to those in a non-inclusive and diverse environment (Hewlett & Sumberg, 2011).

Reasonable accommodation of LGBT+ employees in the workplace can significantly enhance their well-being and productivity. Below are some examples of reasonable accommodation and their benefits:

- **Inclusive non-discrimination policies:** Employers should adopt and enforce comprehensive non-discrimination policies that explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity. These policies help to create a safe and inclusive environment for LGBT employees (Human Rights Campaign (HRC), 2023).
- **Gender-neutral restrooms:** Gender-neutral restrooms can accommodate LGBT+ employees by helping to ensure they feel safe and respected in the workplace (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016).
- **Diversity and sensitivity training:** Providing training programmes that educate all employees in the organisation about LGBT+ issues and the importance of how diversity and inclusion can foster a more inclusive workplace culture (Agovino, 2020).

Reasonable accommodation of LGBT+ employees can be made visible throughout an organisation in various ways, such as executive sponsorships, communicating employee benefits that are considerate of non-binary individuals, including diversity and inclusion policies in the new joiners information pack, and creating support networks in and out of the workplace (Fullerton, 2013). For example, accessing bathrooms/restrooms in the workplace for LGBT+ employees is still a challenge as most organisations still have female and male-only restrooms (Elias et al., 2018). In this instance, reasonable accommodation would consider either designated restrooms for LGBT+ employees or gender-neutral restrooms in the

workplace. Colgan et al.'s (2007) findings indicate that most LGBT+ employees voiced that they are only accommodated after coming forward with complaints in the workplace, meaning that some organisations are proactive when it comes to reasonable accommodation efforts. Considering recent events which have resulted in a shift in policy and public opinions about the LGBT+ community, there are expectations that employers be more inclusive and develop strategies that include LGBT+ employees in the overall organisational culture and improve their workplace experiences (Clark et al., 2022).

## **2.6 Theoretical framework**

In this section, the theoretical frameworks that underpin this study are discussed. The two theories which guided the study were the queer theory and institutional theory. These theories assist in providing a greater understanding of the concepts and phenomena studied. Providing a lens enables an understanding of how diverse individuals' unique experiences in the workplace may be perceived as a deterrent to inclusion. Employing both queer and institutional theories as theoretical frameworks offers a comprehensive lens to understand and analyse the multifaceted dimensions of these workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees. The queer theory, with its emphasis on deconstructing normative assumptions about gender and sexuality, challenges traditional binaries and highlights the fluidity and performativity of identities. This perspective is crucial for examining how heteronormativity and cisnormativity manifest in workplace cultures and policies and understanding how an individual's unique experiences in the workplace may create discrimination or privilege for them based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Meanwhile, institutional theory provides a critical examination of the formal and informal structures, policies, organisational culture, norms and other factors that govern organisational behaviour. By focusing on how these institutional mechanisms either reinforce or challenge normative practices, the researcher can uncover the systemic factors that impact the inclusion, reasonable accommodation and well-being of LGBT+ employees. Together, these theories enable a nuanced analysis of how personal identities and broader institutional contexts intersect to shape the lived experiences of LGBT individuals in the workplace.

### **2.6.1 Queer theory**

Queer theories and perspectives emerged between the 1980s and 1990s, which criticised identity politics that ordered the social acceptance of certain kinds of sexuality and sought to challenge and deconstruct traditional understandings of gender and sexuality (Bendl et al., 2009; De Sousa, 2017). Queer theory “is concerned with the non-essentialising nature of sexual identities and is premised on the notion of resistance to forms of domination, such as heterosexism and homophobia” (Minton, 1997, p. 337). Matsúmunyane and Hlalele (2019) add that research indicates that following the emergence of the queer theory, there has been a notable trend towards the inclusion of individuals with queer sexual orientations in human rights laws and protections. This theory arose from the intersection of gender studies, feminist theory, and LGBTQ+ activism. It gained traction in academic circles through the works of scholars like Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Michael Warner (Jagose, 1996).

Queer theory has been widely used as one of the models that guide queer and sexuality studies. It was created to challenge the view of sexual orientation being limited to only females and males (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). The theory’s premise is to challenge a wide range of traditional notions about gender and sexuality. For example, queer theorists have argued that heterosexuality is not the norm but instead, a social construct that is privileged over other forms of sexuality. The origins of the queer theory in LGBT+ studies focus on gender and sexuality matters (Thiel, 2018). Historically, queer theory has been used to study and analyse aspects of gender and sexuality in organisational studies (De Sousa, 2017). Queer theory was well-suited to this study on the sexual orientation and gender identity of a minority group. It provided a framework for understanding the complex and nuanced nature of these concepts and understanding the workplace experiences of the group being studied.

Rumens et al. (2019) state that queer theory, besides mainly being used in organisational and management studies, is a resource to study the experiences of the minority in the workplace, such as gays and lesbians. Queer theory has also been used by theorists as a framework to make empirical observations, like proper and improper use of gender and sexuality definitions over time, and the role that the definitions play in society and politics (Encyclopedia, 2022). Queer theory has profoundly influenced various disciplines, including literature, sociology, anthropology, and political science, encouraging more inclusive and critical approaches to

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studying identity (Giffney & O'Rourke, 2011). This theory allows researchers to examine how LGBT+ people are marginalised and discriminated against, as well as how they resist and challenge these forms of oppression. This study made use of the queer theory as a theoretical lens and framework to gain a deeper and better understanding of the lived workplace experiences of individuals who identify as LGBT+ in the South African telecommunications industry. The focus was on how they may be considered as the “other” at work based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. This framework not only identifies areas of exclusion and discrimination but also suggests pathways for creating more inclusive and supportive work environments.

In this study, queer theory allowed the researcher to explore how workplace environments are influenced by heteronormative and cisnormativity structures, and how these structures impact LGBT+ employees. The theory was applied in the context detailed below:

- Critically examining how workplace policies, cultures, and practices may reinforce heteronormativity.
- Questioning the assumption that being cisgender is the norm, highlights how this affects LGBT+ employees (Warner, 1993).
- It also considers how various aspects of sexual orientation and gender identity influence workplace experiences.

### 2.6.2 Institutional theory

Institutional theory is based on deeper social structures within an organisation, such as norms, routines and rules that then become authoritative in guiding social behaviour (Delmestri, 2007; Scott 2004). Institutional theory argues that institutions play a significant role in shaping how organisations are structured and managed. The theory sheds light on social orders, social action, and cultural persistence while highlighting the role of rules and norms in society, organisations, and the world (Delmestri, 2007, as cited in Clegg & Bailey, 2007).

To understand the organisational structures that guide behaviour it is important to understand the social environments that exist within organisations as the two cannot be separated (Cox,

2022). Institutions have informal and formal rules and norms that guide and regulate behaviour in the workplace. Therefore, institutional theory was a suitable option as it provides a robust framework for studying the LGBT+ community's workplace experiences by examining how formal and informal organisational structures, policies, and cultures shape and influence the experiences of LGBT+ employees. This framework helped in understanding how institutions perpetuate norms around sexuality and gender and how they can be sites of resistance and change. It also provided a lens to study and understand why certain organisations have the structures, policies, norms and culture that they have and why employees may have certain experiences while in the workplace. Institutional theory has been used in past LGBT+ studies to examine how institutions shape the experiences of LGBT+ individuals in the workplace.

Cole and Salimath (2013) suggest that organisations can proactively promote diversity by incorporating it into the organisation's identity. One could interpret an organisation's identity which Cole and Salimath (2013) refer to as an organisation's culture, shared values, norms and the “why” behind what is done in a workplace. Cox's (1993) model of the multicultural organisation explains that organisations must allow employees to bring their entire set of identities to work to assimilate these into the dominant organisational culture rather than suppressing them. The institutional theory was selected as suitable to provide the researcher with a tool to study and understand the social order, culture and diversity management as it relates to the workplace experiences of individuals who identify as LGBT+. Although institutional theory is complex and nuanced, it does, however, provide a valuable framework for understanding how institutions shape the experiences of LGBT+ individuals.

Concerning this study, institutional theory helped with the following:

- Identifying how workplace policies reinforce heteronormativity, which includes examining dress codes, benefits, and non-discrimination policies to see if they implicitly favour heterosexual and cisgender employees.
- Helping to explore how inclusive policies, such as those that explicitly protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, impact the experiences of LGBT+ employees (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

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- Understanding how organisational culture, including the behaviours, attitudes, and informal practices of colleagues and management, either supports or undermines the inclusion of LGBTQ+ employees.
- Uncovering subtle forms of bias and microaggressions that persist in the workplace despite formal inclusive policies (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000).
- Exploring how LGBT+ employees and allies resist oppressive norms and practices and advocate for more inclusive workplaces.
- Analysing how power dynamics within organisations affect LGBT+ employees, such as the representation of LGBT+ individuals in leadership positions and decision-making processes (Scott, 2008).
- Examining how workplace policies are formulated, implemented, and enforced, and their impact on the well-being and career progression of LGBT+ employees.

### 2.6.3 Conceptual framework

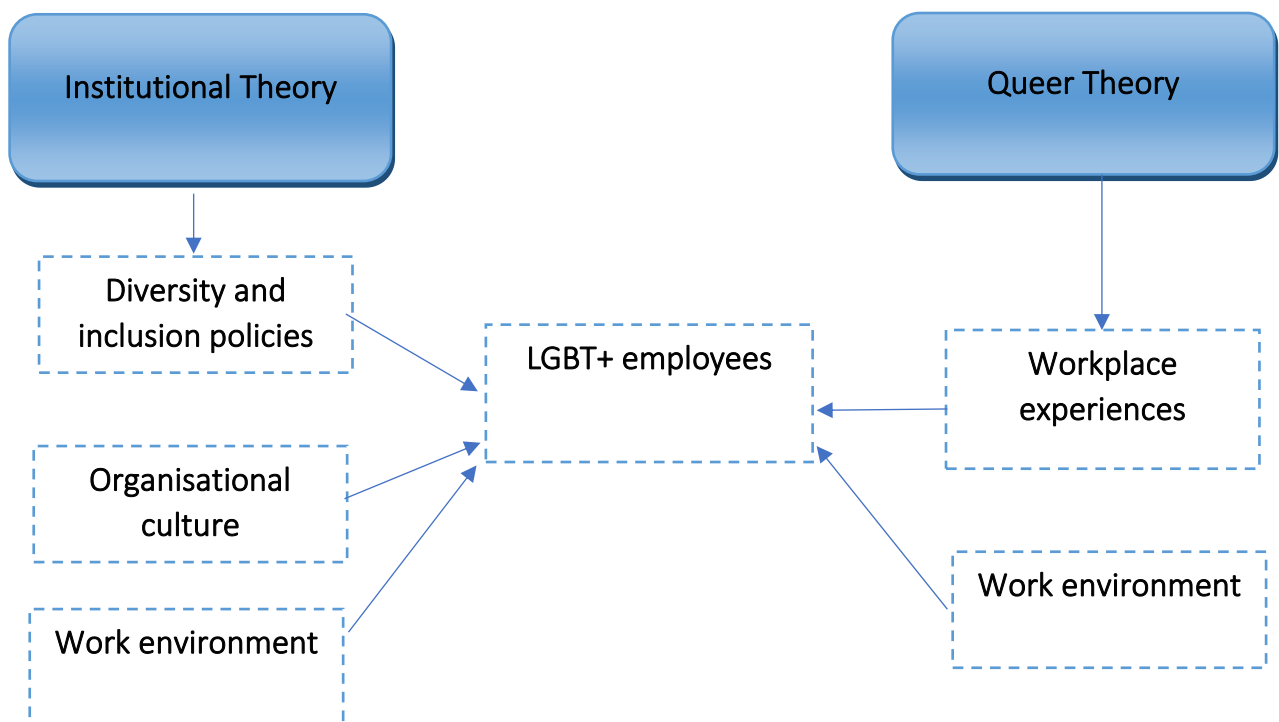
In researching the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees, the conceptual theory was guided by the two theories discussed above, namely the queer theory and institutional theory. In developing a conceptual framework for the study of the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees, integrating the queer and institutional theories offered a comprehensive and nuanced approach to understanding the complexities of these experiences. By combining a few concepts from both the queer and institutional theories, the researcher achieved a holistic understanding of the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees. The queer theory's focus on deconstructing norms and highlighting individual identities complements the institutional theory's analysis of structural forces and organisational practices. Together they provide a comprehensive conceptual framework for exploring and improving the inclusivity and well-being of LGBT+ employees in the workplace.

Figure 2.4 is significant as it diagrammatically illustrates the theory that was used as a lens while examining diversity and inclusion in the workplace and appreciating the experiences of employees belonging to the LGBT+ community. The chosen theories encapsulate each other with the queer theory overarching, guiding the diversity management discourse similarly to a tennis ball and racquet. The racquet resembles the queer theory when the tennis ball bounces

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on it or as it is played/hit back and forth (institutional theory); it is how a diverse group of individuals are managed as they evolve and function within the queer theory.

The concept of diversity and inclusion management in the context of LGBT+ employees' experiences in the workplace and how they navigate within an organisation was studied using the conceptual framework below. This framework guided the researcher in studying and understanding LGBT+ employees' workplace experiences and whether they are reasonably accommodated in SA in the telecommunications industry. Together, these theories enable a multidimensional exploration of the interplay between individual identity expressions and broader institutional contexts, offering valuable insights into the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder an inclusive and supportive workplace environment for LGBT+ individuals.



**Figure 2.4 Conceptual framework**

Source: Own compilation

These interconnected concepts form the basis for analysing how LGBT+ employees navigate their workplace experiences and whether they are reasonably accommodated.

- **Diversity and Inclusion Policies:** Examines how policies are developed and implemented to ensure equal treatment and opportunities for LGBT+ employees.

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- **Organisational Culture:** Explores the underlying values, norms, and practices that shape the inclusivity of the workplace environment.
- **Work Environment:** Investigates the tangible and intangible aspects of the workplace that impact the experiences of LGBT+ employees.
- **Workplace Experiences:** Focuses on the lived realities of LGBT+ employees, including their challenges and achievements in the workplace.

### 2.7 Summary

The literature review provided a comprehensive overview of existing research and theoretical perspectives relevant to the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees, integrating both the queer and institutional theories as conceptual frameworks that guided the study and collection of data required to answer the research questions. The findings of the study inform managers on how they can improve their management style when managing diverse people, as well as propose additional concepts to the theoretical framework for such studies. The following chapter discusses the research methodology used for this study. The researcher briefly provides details for selecting the methodology and its suitability for the study.



## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The research methodology chapter outlines the research design, methods, and procedures used to investigate the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees in the SA telecommunications industry. This chapter provides a detailed account of the systematic approach followed to gather, analyse, and interpret data, ensure the study's rigour and validity, and explain why it was appropriate to investigate the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees. By employing a mixed qualitative methodology, data were gathered using a two-phase sequential approach. In the first phase five participants engaged in the reflective diary journaling, and the second phase involved interviewing eleven participants, with the aim to capture the multifaceted nature of LGBT+ employees' workplace experiences, informed by the theoretical frameworks of queer and institutional theories. These theories guided the methodological choices and ensured that the study not only addressed individual identity expressions but also examined the broader organisational contexts and structures that shaped these experiences.

This chapter begins by describing the research design and rationale, followed by a detailed explanation of the data collection methods, sampling strategies, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. By clearly articulating the methodological framework, this chapter sets the foundation for understanding how the research findings were derived and how they contribute to the existing body of knowledge on diversity, inclusion, and equity in the workplace, particularly regarding LGBT+ workplace experiences. The research strategy that was followed to satisfy the research objectives and answer the research questions below is discussed:

1. What are the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?
2. How are diversity and inclusion used as tools or agents for reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?
3. How can organisational culture enable the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry?

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This study was premised on a qualitative research approach to comprehensively explore and understand the workplace experiences of LGBT employees in the SA telecommunications industry. Also, to explore if there were reasonable accommodation measures in the workplace and whether organisational culture enables seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees.

### 3.2 Research design

A research design refers to the structure, plan, and strategy that a researcher aims to use to answer the research questions or solve the research problem (Kumar, 2011). This allows for a structured, systematic and procedural collection of data and investigation for a research study (Peniel, 2022). This structure, plan and strategy was what shaped the research and can somewhat be viewed as the backbone of the study. The researcher first consulted existing literature, followed by engaging with the research participants who journaled their lived workplace experiences in a reflective diary for a month. The research design should clearly state how data will be collected and analysed, and how ethical matters and challenges will be addressed (Saunders et al., 2012). The chosen design aligned with the study's aim which was to understand the subjective realities of LGBT+ employees and how they navigate their identities in the workplace. To this effect, once the data were collected in the form of journaled reflective diaries, the researcher analysed the diary entries to draw themes and conduct follow-up interviews.

The two main functions of a research design are to:

- Conceptualise a plan for undertaking the steps and tasks required to complete the planned research study; and
- Ensure that the plan is sufficient to achieve the research study objectives to obtain accurate and valid results that answer the research questions (Kumar, 2011).

Bhattacharjee (2012) explains that a research design must at least specify three processes, namely (1) data collection, (2) instrument development, and (3) sampling.

### **3.3 Research paradigm**

Based on this study's research objectives, questions, and nature, the research paradigm was interpretive as the researcher deemed it the appropriate choice. An interpretive paradigm allows for an exploration of how the world is understood (Rahi, 2017) and the diversity of perceptions (Ridder, 2017). Adopting this paradigm was suitable as it allowed the researcher to analyse and understand the phenomena being studied. An interpretative lens was applied to understand the deeper meanings and implications of the identified themes, drawing connections to the broader theoretical frameworks of queer and institutional theories. The application of this paradigm for qualitative studies made it possible to contextualise the research and gain insight and understanding of what was being studied (Saunders et al., 2012). The researcher's focus was on interpreting the participants' lived experiences and giving meaning to their narratives.

An interpretive method allows the researcher to follow an inductive approach where the process starts with data collection, analysis and interpretation to construct a theory (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Therefore, this study used an interpretive, inductive method to collect data from the research participants. In interpretive research qualitative data is collected and analysed to derive insights, gain an understanding of the research problem and answer the research question (Bhattacharjee, 2012). An interpretive method in qualitative research is designed to understand the meaning and significance of human experiences from the perspective of those who lived them. This method emphasises the subjective interpretation of social phenomena, focusing on how individuals make sense of their experiences and construct their realities. In the context of studying the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees, this method allowed for a deep, nuanced exploration of how these individuals navigate their identities and interactions in the workplace. The qualitative data were collected from the reflective diary journaling followed by semi-structured interviews.

The research participants shared their stories and daily workplace experiences by journaling them in their reflective diaries for a month followed by semi-structured interviews to unpack the content of their diary entries and other questions from the researcher. Table 3.1 below provides an overview of the research philosophy of this paradigm and its applicability to this study's methodology approach.

**Table 3.1 Interpretivism research philosophy**

This study was grounded in an interpretative research paradigm, which acknowledges that reality is socially constructed and shaped by cultural and contextual factors. Rather than seeking objective truths, this approach emphasizes the multiple meanings, lived experiences, and narratives that individuals create.

The table below outlines the key philosophical assumptions of this study, including ontology (nature of reality), epistemology (nature of knowledge), axiology (role of values), and typical methods used to explore and interpret complex social phenomena.

| Ontology (nature of reality or being)                                                                                                                            | Epistemology (what constitutes acceptable knowledge)                                                                                                        | Axiology (role of values)                                                                                                                                 | Typical methods                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Complex, rich<br>Socially constructed through culture and language<br>Multiple meanings, interpretations, realities<br>Flux of processes, experiences, practices | Theories and concepts too simplistic<br>Focus on narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations<br>New understandings and worldviews and contribution | Value-bound research<br>Researchers are part of what is researched, subjective<br>Researcher interpretations key to contributions<br>Researcher reflexive | Typically inductive.<br>Small samples, in depth investigations, qualitative methods of analysis, but a range data can be interpreted |

Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012)

### 3.4 Research methods

Research methods refer to and focus on specific activities that are designed to assist a researcher in generating data related to the study (Greener, 2008). These activities include but are not limited to using research instruments, such as questionnaires, case studies, surveys,

interviews, observations, data collection, as well as data analysis and conclusions. Three research approaches can be selected for a study, namely qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the researcher adopted a mixed qualitative research approach to study and understand the lived experiences of individuals who identify as LGBT+ in the SA telecommunication industry and the meanings attached to their workplace experiences. The suitability of a qualitative research method for this study is discussed below.

### **3.4.1 Qualitative research method**

Qualitative research is framed with the use of words and open-ended questions as opposed to numbers and closed-ended questions used in quantitative research (Creswell, 2014). It is, therefore, used to understand human interactions, and how they ascribe to problems whether individually or as a group (Creswell, 2014). In this study, this approach was adopted to understand how individuals who identify as LGBT+ navigate daily in the workplace, and what their lived experiences are. The researcher was intrigued to study, find out and understand how the diversity and inclusion of LGBT+ employees in the SA telecommunications industry panned out and if there were any experiences of discrimination, harassment, or violation of their human rights or privileges, as the literature suggests, amongst any of the research participants.

In qualitative research, examples of research strategies are grounded theory, ethnography, action research, phenomenological research, and narrative research. Data can be collected by observing a setting, using a case study, and conducting interviews and focus groups (Saunders et al., 2012). In addition, this approach assists in providing an understanding of the research question and interpreting the social interactions. Such interactions are not inducted from quantitative research which is more deductible in nature or a mixed-method approach which would be divergent from achieving the study's research objectives and answering the research questions. For this particular study, a qualitative research approach was deemed suitable compared to either a quantitative or mixed method in that the data to be collected required some level of engagement and interactions between the researcher and participants to gain that desired level of interpretation and to make meaning of the data collected. The qualitative component sought to capture the nuanced, lived experiences of LGBT+ employees, focusing

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on how they navigate and negotiate their identities within the workplace. This approach was particularly suited to understanding the subjective and often complex realities of marginalised groups.

### **3.5 Population and sampling**

#### **1.5.1 Study population**

The study population refers to the full set of cases from which the study sample is selected (Saunders et al., 2012). The study population for this research consisted of LGBT+ employees working in the SA telecommunications industry. The goal was to include a diverse and representative sample of LGBT+ individuals to capture a wide range of workplace experiences and perspectives. Bhattacharjee (2012) and Saunders et al. (2012) explain that a population can be an object, group, person, industry or organisation if it possesses the characteristics of what the researcher wants to study.

#### **1.5.2 Study sample**

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subject from a large number to observe that particular population; it is statistical and infers patterns of behaviour within the sample being observed. As it is not practical or feasible to study the entire population, there is a selection of a representative sample of the population (Bhattacharjee, 2012). A non-probability sampling method, specifically snowball sampling, was employed to recruit participants. The researcher initially identified and invited participants from a social group to which they had access. These participants were asked to refer other individuals from their networks who met the study's inclusion criteria. This approach facilitated access to a broader pool of participants while leveraging existing social connections to enhance recruitment.

The targeted sample was 12, however, it would be determined based on the principle of data saturation, which is reached when no new themes or insights emerge from the data (Fugard & Potts, 2015). More than 25 individuals were invited to participate in the study, to ensure sufficient data for reaching saturation. The selection criteria and recruitment strategies were carefully designed to identify participants who could provide rich and diverse insights into the

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workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees as detailed below. Initially, the invited participants expressed interest in participating. However, during the detailed explanation of the study process and expectations, several participants chose to withdraw from the study. Some expressed concerns about potential repercussions from their employers, while one individual shared that the subject matter was triggering and decided not to continue. Additionally, three participants who had agreed to the diary component of the study withdrew during the process without providing specific reasons, despite follow-up attempts by the researcher. Ultimately, 11 participants completed the study. While this number is slightly below the initially planned minimum of 12 participants, the data collected from the 11 participants proved to be sufficient for the study's purpose. The participants shared remarkably consistent and overlapping experiences. During the analysis phase, it became evident that data saturation had been achieved, as themes recurred frequently, and few new insights emerged. This strongly suggested that additional participants were unlikely to introduce novel perspectives that would significantly alter the findings. The details/characteristics of the research participants' selection criteria were as follows:

### **LGBT+ identification:**

- Participants must identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or any other non-heteronormative sexual orientation or gender identity.

### **Minimum age:**

- Participants must be over the age of 18; there was no upper age limit, as the study was to understand experiences across different career stages.

### **Employment status:**

- Participants must be currently employed in the telecommunications industry and at any level (entry-level, mid-level, senior management).

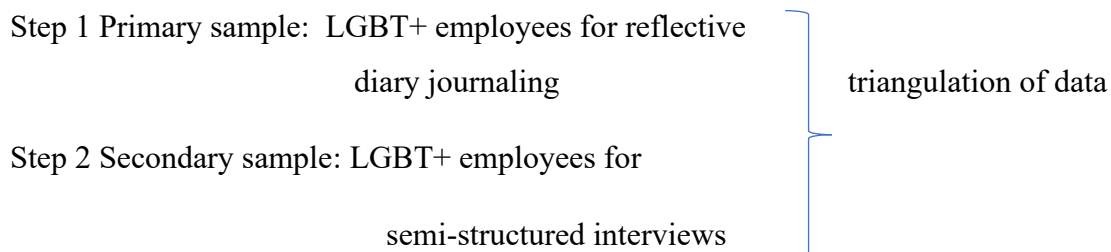
In qualitative research, achieving data saturation is a critical marker of adequacy in sample size, as it indicates that the data are sufficient to address the research questions comprehensively. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) have noted that saturation can often be achieved with a smaller sample size, particularly in studies with narrowly focused research questions and a relatively homogenous participant group. In this study, the consistent patterns

and recurring themes observed among the 11 participants strongly support the conclusion that the data are robust and reflective of the broader workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees.

To ensure transparency, this section acknowledges the reasons for participant withdrawals and justifies the adequacy of the final sample size. Despite the slight reduction in the number of participants, the findings remain valid and credible, meeting the study's objectives effectively.

A sampling technique can either be probability or non-probability; in probability sampling the chances of a sample being selected from a population are equal and known but in non-probability sampling, the chances of a sample being selected from a population are random and unknown (Saunders et al., 2012). Of the options, non-probability was chosen as the most appropriate technique to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives. The research participants were purposively selected based on the eligibility criteria which were sexual orientation, gender identity, age and industry where employed. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that participants with diverse identities and experiences within the LGBT+ community were included. This strategy helped in capturing a wide array of perspectives and experiences. The research participants were recruited using a snowball sampling approach, by asking the initial participants to refer others who met the study's eligibility criteria as mentioned above.

As previously outlined, data was collected in two steps described below:



#### **1.5.2.1 Strengths and limitations of snowball sampling**

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants due to the sensitive nature of the study, as LGBT+ individuals may be difficult to identify through conventional recruitment methods. This approach allowed participants to refer others from their networks, facilitating access to



individuals who may not have been reachable otherwise. However, while snowball sampling is useful for engaging hard-to-reach populations, it also has inherent limitations.

#### **1.5.2.1.1 Snowball sampling strengths**

- Access to Hard-to-Reach Populations: snowball sampling is particularly effective for recruiting individuals who may be reluctant to disclose their identities in a formal setting, such as LGBT+ individuals facing workplace challenges (Nikolopoulou, 2023).
- Trust and Rapport: as participants are referred by people they know, this method can help build trust between the researcher and the participants, leading to more open and honest discussions (Nikolopoulou, 2023).

#### **1.5.2.1.2 Snowball sampling limitations**

- Selection Bias: participants referred people from their networks, which could introduce homogeneity, where participants share similar backgrounds and experiences, limiting the diversity of perspectives (Nikolopoulou, 2023).
- Limited Generalizability: the non-random nature of snowball sampling makes it difficult to generalise findings beyond the study sample, as referrals are based on social connections rather than random selection (Nikolopoulou, 2023).

### **1.5.3 Unit of analysis**

A unit of analysis can be a person, group, organisation, object or any other entity that a researcher wishes to observe, draw scientific references and answer the research question (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Research data for this study were collected from individuals who identify as LGBT+ and are employed in the South African telecommunications industry. The unit of analysis in this study was the individual LGBT+ employee. This focus allowed for an in-depth examination of personal experiences, perceptions, and behaviours related to workplace dynamics.

Table 3.2 below contains demographic details of this study's research participants. Pseudonyms were allocated to each participant to ensure that their identity remained anonymous; DP was assigned to the reflective diary journaling participants. IP refers to the

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participants who were involved in only a semi-structured interview and did not participate in the reflective diary journaling exercise. The DP research participants were included in the reflective diary journaling exercise, as well as the semi-structured interviews. However, the interview discussions were based on the data they had journaled, and if the researcher had follow-up questions and points of clarity.

**Table 3.2 Research participants' demographics**

| Pseudonym | Province       | Role type                | Sexual orientation | Years in industry |
|-----------|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| DP1       | Gauteng        | Team leader              | Gay                | 2                 |
| DP2       | Gauteng        | Portfolio management     | Gay                | 21                |
| DP3       | Gauteng        | Technical support        | Lesbian            | 6                 |
| DP4       | Western Cape   | Experienced professional | Gay                | 7                 |
| DP5       | Gauteng        | Engineering              | Gay                | 14                |
| IP1       | Kwa-Zulu Natal | Customer service         | Gay                | 6                 |
| IP2       | Gauteng        | Middle management        | Lesbian            | 9                 |
| IP3       | Western Cape   | Experienced professional | Gay                | 7                 |
| IP4       | Gauteng        | Marketing                | Gay                | 16                |
| IP5       | Gauteng        | Experienced professional | Gay                | 5                 |
| IP6       | North-West     | Sales                    | Gay                | 8                 |

### 1.6 Data collection method and instrument

The researcher sets boundaries for data collection by various means, such as interviews, documents, observation, focus groups or visual materials. The data assists in answering the research question (Creswell, 2014). According to Adosi (2020), the purpose of the study should guide a researcher in selecting the appropriate data collection instruments which include document analysis, focus groups, questionnaires, observations, interviews or any combination (Abawi, 2014). To address the research problem the researcher carefully considered the selection of the appropriate data collection instruments which were the reflective diaries and semi-structured interviews. The primary aim was to uncover the meanings that LGBT+

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employees attach to their workplace experiences. This involved exploring their narratives, emotions, and perceptions to understand how they interpret and make sense of their professional lives.

A two-stage sequential approach was adopted to collect data from the research participants, that is, first, they were given diaries to document their daily experiences in the workplace for a month. Reflective diary journaling can provide rich and satisfactory data and was selected by the researcher as one of the data collection methods based on the reasons below:

- **Rich, contextual data:** Reflective diaries would allow the research participants to provide detailed, context-rich accounts of their workplace experiences, thoughts, and feelings over time.
- **Participant perspective:** By allowing the research participants to record their workplace experiences in their own words, reflective diaries capture the participants' perspectives directly. This can help the researcher understand subjective experiences, motivations, and interpretations.
- **Flexible and unobtrusive:** The reflective diary entries can be made at the participants' convenience and in their natural environment, which makes data collection less intrusive and more flexible compared to other methods like interviews or surveys. This can lead to more authentic responses and reduce the risk of social desirability bias.
- **Longitudinal insights:** The reflective diary entries collected over an extended period of a month instead of a day or week can provide longitudinal insights into changes, patterns, and trends in participants' experiences or behaviours. This longitudinal data can be valuable for understanding development, adaptation, or shifts in experiences, attitudes and perceptions.
- **Data triangulation:** Reflective diaries can complement other data collection methods, such as interviews or observations, allowing for data triangulation. Data triangulation enhances the credibility and validity of the findings by corroborating evidence from multiple sources.

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Overall, reflective diary journaling can be a valuable tool for collecting rich, nuanced data that captures the research participants' experiences, perspectives, and behaviours in a research study.

The guide below was shared with the research participants for them to have an idea of how to complete the reflective diary journal.

*In this diary, please record your daily workplace experiences as an employee who identifies as LGBT+, noting whether you are experiencing any privileges, benefits or discrimination due to your sexual orientation or gender identity. Please detail how your colleagues, team or management treat you, is it the same or different from heterosexual+ colleagues and employees? Please also detail how diversity and inclusion pan out for you as a member of the LGBT+ community as you navigate the workplace environment daily.*

*Below is a guide to the details that you can include in the reflective journal/diary entry; this is not limited to the suggestions below, you can add as many details as possible:*

- 1. Have you experienced any advancements/advantages or disadvantages due to your sexual orientation or gender identity?*
- 2. Do you view your workplace as being diverse and inclusive towards you as an employee who identifies as LGBT+?*
- 3. Are the organisation's diversity and inclusion policies reasonably accommodating towards you as a member of the LGBT+ community?*
- 4. Do you feel discriminated against or harassed due to your sexual orientation or gender identity at any point in the workplace?*
- 5. Does the organisational culture promote diversity and inclusion of employees who identify as LGBT+ in your workplace, if yes, how?*
- 6. How did today go, how was work, were there any wins or disappointments for you and why?*
- 7. Did you experience anything out of the ordinary at work?*

*Please remember that these are your own workplace experiences whether good or bad, note them down. What/how do certain actions, comments and treatment in the workplace make you feel?*

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Upon completing the month-long reflective diary journaling exercise, the researcher analysed the documented data. Following this, the semi-structured interviews were held. It is important to note that not all research participants engaged in both phases of data collection. Specifically, only five participants completed the reflective diary journals.

Follow-up interviews were held with the reflective diary participants to probe about the documented workplace experiences after data analysis to ask further questions. For some of the participants, the follow-up interview occurred more than once due to the conversations, observations, and for the researcher to gain insight into their shared experiences in either the reflective diary or the previous interview. The second follow-up interview was to clarify a few points and ask participants for clear responses.

The data collection process followed a two-stage sequential approach. In the first stage, participants maintained a journal documenting their workplace experiences over a month. They were given the flexibility to write at their preferred location, whether at home after work, in the office, or in any other setting where they felt comfortable recording their thoughts. Participants reported mixed experiences with journaling, some found it therapeutic and reflective, allowing them to process their workplace experiences more deeply, while others described it as emotionally challenging, particularly when recalling instances of discrimination or exclusion. Despite these challenges, most participants valued the opportunity to narrate their experiences in their own words and at their own pace.

In the second stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams. The interviews were initially scheduled for 45 minutes, though some exceeded the allotted time as participants and the researcher engaged deeply in discussing their experiences. All interviews were recorded with participants' informed consent, ensuring ethical transparency.

The decision to conduct interviews online aimed to provide participants with a relaxed and familiar environment, fostering openness and authenticity during discussions. This approach helped create a safe space, allowing participants to freely share their workplace experiences related to their sexual orientation. As a result, participants were notably open and engaged, offering rich insights into the challenges they encountered at work. The combination of

journaling and interviews provided complementary perspectives, with journaling allowing for introspection and interviews enabling further exploration and clarification of key themes.

### **1.6.1 Strengths and limitations of semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were used in the second stage of data collection and were chosen as a method to allow participants to discuss their experiences in depth while still providing a framework for consistency across interviews. This approach enables flexibility and richer data collection but also presents some methodological challenges.

#### **1.6.1.1 Semi-structured interviews strengths**

- Flexibility and Depth: unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore emerging themes in more detail, giving participants the space to expand on their experiences (George, 2022).
- Balance Between Structure and Openness: this method ensures that key topics are covered while allowing for spontaneous discussions that may yield unexpected insights (Bryman, 2016).

#### **1.6.1.2 Semi-structured interviews limitations**

- Interviewer Bias: the interviewer's presence and questioning style may unintentionally influence participants' responses, leading to potential bias (Kakilla, 2021).
- Challenges in Data Comparability: while semi-structured interviews generate rich qualitative data, variations in follow-up questions can make direct comparisons between participants more difficult (Bryman, 2016).

### **1.6.2 Strengths and limitations of journaling**

Journaling was used in the first stage of data collection to allow participants to document their workplace experiences over a month. This method provided an opportunity for reflection and ongoing data collection over time. However, it also introduced challenges related to consistency and emotional strain.

#### **1.6.2.1 Journaling strengths**

- Encourages Reflection: journaling allows participants to process and articulate their experiences in their own time, which can lead to more thoughtful and detailed insights (Bolger et al., 2003).
- Less Researcher Influence: as journaling is done independently, it reduces the influence of the researcher on participants' responses, leading to more authentic accounts (Alaszewski, 2006).

#### **1.6.2.2 Journaling limitations**

- Participant Commitment: maintaining a journal over an extended period requires consistency, and some participants may struggle to write regularly, leading to incomplete data (Bolger et al., 2003).
- Emotional Burden: recounting workplace discrimination or challenges may be distressing for some participants, potentially affecting their well-being and willingness to continue journaling (Alaszewski, 2006).

### **1.7 Data analysis and interpretation**

Data analysis in qualitative studies is used to uncover patterns and group them into themes (Kumar, 2011). Thematic analysis refers to analysing qualitative data to identify, report on repeated patterns and construct themes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, report patterns, draw meaning and interpret the participants' data. The researcher coded the collected data to identify significant themes and sub-themes from the reflective diary journals and semi-structured interviews that captured the essence of the participants' workplace experiences. A step-by-step process recommended by Kumar (2011) was followed:

- Step 1: Identify the main themes;
- Step 2: Assign codes to the main themes;
- Step 3: Classify responses under the main themes; and
- Step 4: Integrate themes and responses into the text of your report.

The steps mentioned above were employed to analyse the data collected which were systematically coded and thematically organised to identify recurring themes and categories,

using the study's keywords, namely workplace experiences, work environment, diversity and inclusion, and organisational culture. Subsequently, the research participants' responses were mapped to the identified themes and integrated into the research report. The identified codes and themes are discussed in the next chapter.

### **1.7.1 Strengths and limitations of thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis was chosen as the method for analysing the data collected from both the reflective diaries and semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed the researcher to identify patterns and themes within participants' narratives. While thematic analysis provides a structured framework for qualitative data interpretation, it also comes with limitations.

#### **1.7.1.1 Thematic analysis strengths**

- **Systematic and Flexible:** thematic analysis allows researchers to identify recurring patterns while remaining flexible in adapting to new themes that emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- **Accessible for Researchers and Readers:** the process of coding and organising data into themes makes the findings more accessible and easier to interpret compared to other complex qualitative methods (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

#### **1.7.1.2 Thematic analysis limitations**

- **Subjectivity and Researcher Bias:** since researchers play a key role in identifying and defining themes, their interpretations may introduce bias (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- **Time-Consuming:** thematic analysis requires careful and iterative coding, which can be a lengthy and labour intensive process (Nowell et al., 2017).

## **1.8 Reliability, validity and trustworthiness**

Reliability and validity are concepts used in qualitative research to evaluate the quality of the study (Middleton, 2022). Reliability and validity do not only consider the quality of the study's findings but also the quality of the process followed to conclude the study (Heale & Twycross, 2015). The validity and reliability of the data collection instruments are important to ensure that the research results are correct (Heale & Twycross, 2015). The researcher ensured the



reliability and validity of the research process was ethically undertaken, guided by the University of Witwatersrand's ethics code by maintaining openness and honesty, particularly with the research participants and reporting the findings without any emotional attachment or biases.

### **1.8.1 Reliability**

Reliability is the consistency and repeatability of results. The research findings should be achievable over time, across items and different researchers who follow a similar process should achieve similar results (Bailey, 2021; Chiang et al., 2020). Data collection techniques should also be transparent and yield consistent research findings or results (Saunders et al., 2012).

This study implemented the following measures to achieve reliability:

#### **➤ Standardised procedures**

The data collection processes, including the reflective diary journaling and semi-structured interviews, were conducted using standardised protocols to maintain consistency among all the research participants. They were given the same guide on how to complete the reflective diary journals and had the same amount of time. For the semi-structured interviews, the same interview guide was used and the same questions asked.

#### **➤ Detailed documentation**

Comprehensive records of the data collection and analysis procedures were maintained. This included detailed notes during interviews, consistent formatting of reflective diary entries, and meticulous coding processes.

### **1.8.2 Validity**

In qualitative research, validity is concerned with the accuracy of the measurement of a concept (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Saunders et al. (2012) state that validity is about the extent to which methods accurately measure what they were intended to measure and the research findings

truly entail what they profess to be. Validity also refers to the appropriateness of the steps taken to collect data and find out what you ought to find out (Kumar, 2011). To enhance validity, the researcher employed the following strategies:

➤ **Triangulation**

Multiple data sources and methods were used to corroborate the findings. The combination of the reflective diaries and semi-structured interviews provided a comprehensive view of the research participants' workplace experiences.

➤ **Rich, thick descriptions**

Detailed and vivid descriptions of the participants' experiences were provided to convey the context and depth of the data. This approach enhances the credibility and transferability of the findings.

### **1.8.3 Trustworthiness**

Given the sensitive nature of this research and the potential vulnerability of participants journaling personal experiences, ensuring the study's trustworthiness was paramount. Trustworthiness in qualitative research is established through four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These elements ensure that the findings accurately represent participants' experiences, can be applied in broader contexts, and remain free from undue researcher bias. The following measures were taken to strengthen trustworthiness:

➤ **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the confidence in the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings. To establish credibility, it was crucial to build trust with participants through transparent communication and adherence to ethical research principles (Shenton, 2004). Participants were provided with information about the study's objectives, methods, and ethical considerations, including confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any time. Additionally, prolonged engagement with participants ensured a deeper understanding of their lived experiences, while peer debriefing was employed to challenge potential biases and enhance the integrity of data interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To further support credibility, member checking was used, where participants reviewed and validated their own journal entries and interpretations before they were included in the final analysis (Birt et al., 2016). This process ensured that the researcher accurately captured participants' perspectives. Triangulation was also employed by using multiple sources of data, such as journal entries, follow-up interviews, and secondary documents, to cross-verify findings and increase their credibility (Patton, 1999).

#### ➤ **Transferability**

Transferability pertains to the extent to which the study's findings can be applied to other settings or populations. Unlike quantitative research, where generalisability is often a goal, qualitative research emphasises thick description providing detailed accounts of the research context, participants, and processes to allow readers to assess the applicability of findings in other contexts (Geertz, 1973; Tracy, 2010).

In this study, snowball sampling was employed, where initial participants referred other individuals who met the inclusion criteria. This method was useful for reaching LGBT+ employees, as it allowed access to individuals who might not have been easily identifiable through traditional recruitment strategies (Browne, 2005). Snowball sampling facilitated the inclusion of diverse participants across different telecommunications companies, workplace cultures, and professional roles. By providing rich contextual details, the study enables other researchers and practitioners to determine whether the findings are relevant to different populations or organisational settings (Shenton, 2004).

#### ➤ **Dependability**

Dependability ensures that the research process is systematic and well documented, allowing for similar findings to be obtained under comparable conditions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To maintain dependability, an audit trail was created, documenting every stage of the research process, including participant recruitment, data collection, coding frameworks, and thematic analysis procedures (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This allows external researchers to trace decisions made throughout the study and assess their consistency.

Additionally, triangulation was used to compare and validate findings across different data sources, reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation (Denzin, 2012). An external

researcher was also consulted to review the study's methodology and analytical processes, further enhancing dependability by ensuring that conclusions were reached systematically and transparently (Nowell et al., 2017).

#### ➤ **Confirmability**

Confirmability addresses the extent to which the research findings are shaped by participants' experiences rather than researcher bias. One of the primary strategies for ensuring confirmability is reflexivity, where the researcher actively reflects on their assumptions, values, and potential biases throughout the study (Berger, 2015). In this research, reflexivity was practised through the maintenance of a reflexive journal which documented the researcher's thoughts, decisions, and self-examinations as well as engaging with other researchers and peers during the research process to ensure that there is no bias (Finlay, 2002).

Additionally, the audit trail and triangulation provided transparency in how data were analysed and interpreted, allowing others to critically assess the validity of the study's findings (Shenton, 2004). By incorporating multiple perspectives and methods, confirmability was strengthened, ensuring that the study's conclusions were not unduly influenced by the researcher's perspectives alone.

By implementing these rigorous strategies, the study upheld high standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, ensuring the trustworthiness of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These measures contributed to the reliability and validity of the study, providing a well-founded and ethical exploration of the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees.

## **1.9 Ethical consideration**

Ethics is concerned with the researcher's conduct and behaviour throughout the research process, and how they respect the rights of the participants and handle the data shared or made available to them (Saunders et al., 2012). Ethical considerations are paramount in conducting research, especially when dealing with sensitive topics and vulnerable populations, such as

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LGBT+ employees. This section outlines the ethical principles and practices adhered to in this study to ensure the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants. The research was conducted in line with the ethical considerations and guidelines of the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) at the University of Witwatersrand. An ethics clearance certificate with protocol number H22/11/81 was obtained from the University of Witwatersrand ethics committee before conducting the research.

The researcher obtained written consent from the research participants before they took part in the study. The participants were taken through the research process, explaining that their participation was voluntary and there would be no compensation for their participation. The participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. This information was communicated both in writing and verbally to ensure understanding. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained and guaranteed; if there was a need to mention a name or organisation details, pseudonyms would be used. The findings were reported in a manner that ensured the individual participants could not be identified, maintaining their confidentiality.

The researcher assured the participants that any of the information collected during the research period would only be used for this study, it would not be shared with anyone else, and the information would be stored securely for three years. No participants experienced distress due to the nature of the study, therefore, there was no need to refer anyone to state counselling services closest to them or to one offered by the University of Witwatersrand if they were part of the University's community.

Recognising the sensitive nature of this study and my role as a researcher, I was acutely aware of the need to create an environment of trust and transparency. I took deliberate steps to ensure that participants fully understood the purpose, potential risks, and benefits of the study before providing informed consent. This reflexive approach helped to mitigate power imbalances and ensured that participants felt empowered to make voluntary and informed decisions. Given the potential risks associated with disclosing personal information about sexual orientation or gender identity, the researcher reflexively considered how their positionality and actions might inadvertently compromise participant confidentiality. Therefore, implementing measures, such

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as anonymising all data and using pseudonyms, to protect participants' identities. Furthermore, remaining aware of how participants might perceive my role as a researcher and made efforts to reassure them of the commitment to safeguarding their privacy.

As a researcher, I recognised the inherent power dynamics present in the research process, particularly when engaging with participants from potentially marginalised groups. To address this, I reflexively monitored my behaviour and communication during interviews to ensure participants felt respected and valued. I also prioritised creating a supportive space where participants could share their experiences freely, without fear of judgment or repercussions. Given the emotionally charged nature of discussing workplace discrimination and harassment, I assessed how my questions and interactions might affect participants' emotional well-being. I ensured that participants had the option to pause or withdraw from interviews at any time. This reflexive approach underscored my commitment to conducting the study ethically and with empathy.

As someone who supports diversity and inclusion in the workplace, I was aware of the potential for my own biases to influence the framing of questions or interpretation of responses. Reflexively, I engaged in self-critical reflection throughout the research process, maintaining a journal to document my thoughts and feelings and seeking feedback from peers to ensure that my ethical practices were not compromised by personal beliefs.

By adhering to these ethical considerations, the researcher ensured the protection, respect, and well-being of all participants. Ethical principles guided every aspect of the study, from initial planning through data collection and reporting, ensuring that the research was conducted with integrity and respect for the participants' rights and dignity.

### **1.10 The significance of the study**

This study holds significant importance as it contributes to the understanding and enhancement of workplace experiences for LGBT+ employees. By examining the unique challenges and opportunities faced by LGBT+ employees in various organisational settings, the research provides valuable insights that inform the development of more inclusive workplace policies and practices. Given the ongoing issues of discrimination and underrepresentation that LGBT+ employees often encounter, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature, offering

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empirical evidence that can be used by policymakers, human resource professionals, and organisational leaders to foster a more equitable and supportive work environment.

### **1.11 Summary**

In this chapter, the research methodology was discussed and justified for its suitability to answer the research questions. The research methodology chapter provided an overview of how the study was conducted, offering transparency and rigour in the research process. The research design, methods, paradigm, and ethical considerations were also discussed and the reasons for each chosen approach. The chapter provided the key aspects of the research methodology and explained how the chosen approach facilitated the answering of the research questions effectively.

## **CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The data analysed in this section of the study stems from the research participants who identify as LGBT+ and are employed in the South African telecommunication industry. The data were collected following a two-phase approach; in the first phase the research participants completed a reflective diary for a month about their workplace experiences; in the second phase, data were collected from the same participants using a semi-structured interview. The data were collected to gain insights and understanding of the lived workplace experiences of employees who identify as LGBT+ in the South African telecommunication industry. The data collected was to explore experiences specific to LGBT+ employees in terms of their workplace experiences based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, the workplace treatment that they are subjected to, reasonable accommodation efforts, fairness, any harassment or discrimination and any privileged treatment in respect of the differing contexts within which they exist.

This chapter begins by detailing the major themes identified during the data analysis, such as workplace culture, inclusive policies and practices, discrimination and harassment, and support networks. Each theme examined the participants' personal accounts, highlighting both the challenges and positive experiences encountered in their professional lives. Following this thematic analysis, the chapter discusses the implications of these findings, situating them within the broader context of organisational studies and LGBT+ research.

The data analysis was undertaken to uncover patterns from the data collected and then group them into themes. Once grouped into the themes, the researcher could draw meaning from the research participants' data and interpret these after thematic analysis. The researcher developed the themes following the four-step process recommended by Kumar (2011) as follows:

- Step 1: Identify the main themes;
- Step 2: Assign codes to the main themes;
- Step 3: Classify responses under the main themes; and
- Step 4: Integrate the themes and responses into the text of your report.



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The steps mentioned above were used as follows: the data from the reflective diary journals and semi-structured interviews were analysed; the data were themed and coded using the study keywords, namely workplace experiences, work environment, diversity and inclusion, reasonable accommodation, and organisational culture. Thereafter, the participants' responses were mapped to the identified themes and integrated into the research report.

The data collected from the reflective diaries and semi-structured interviews served as an instrument to obtain the answers to the research questions, which were as follows:

- What are the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?
- How are diversity and inclusion used as tools or agents for reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?
- How can organisational culture enable the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry?

The discussion of this study's findings are guided by the conceptual framework which integrates, the queer theory and institutional theory. The conceptual framework provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees within the South African telecommunications industry. The integration of these theories allows for an exploration of the interplay between individual identity expressions and broader organisational and structural dynamics, offering valuable insights into the mechanisms that either facilitate or hinder inclusivity in the workplace. The conceptual framework is built around key concepts that emerged from the literature and theoretical foundations: diversity and inclusion policies, organisational culture, workplace environment, and the lived experiences of LGBT+ employees. These interconnected concepts form the basis for analysing how LGBT+ employees navigate their workplace experiences and whether they are reasonably accommodated.

- Diversity and Inclusion Policies: examined how policies are developed and implemented to ensure equal treatment and opportunities for LGBT+ employees.
- Organisational Culture: explored the underlying values, norms, and practices that shape the inclusivity of the workplace environment.

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- **Work Environment:** investigated the tangible and intangible aspects of the workplace that impact the experiences of LGBT+ employees.
- **Workplace Experiences:** focused on the lived realities of LGBT+ employees, including their challenges and achievements in the workplace.

Figure 2.4, in Chapter 2, serves as a critical reference, illustrating the relationship between these concepts and the theoretical foundations of the study. The conceptual framework positions the queer theory as the overarching lens that deconstructs norms and challenges traditional assumptions about gender identity and sexual orientation while the institutional theory complements this by analysing the structural and organisational factors that shape workplace dynamics.

### **4.2 Main themes identified**

The main themes outlined below were identified from the research questions and during the data analysis stage. The data analysis included the responses from the reflective diaries of the research participants who journaled their month-long workplace experiences and the semi-structured interviews held with a different group of research participants. Eight research participants were given diaries to complete daily for a month but only five completed them; the other three were not analysed as they did not satisfy the reliability, validity and trustworthiness criteria as discussed in Section 3.8. The themes provide insights into the challenges, opportunities, and overall experiences of the LGBT+ community in the workplace.

Below is an overview of the seven themes in answer to this study's research questions and from the data analysis of the reflective diary journals and discussions during the semi-structured interviews. Following the overview of the themes, the researcher provides a graphic illustration of the themes that emerged from the different phases of the data analysis of the answers to the research questions of this study.

#### **Theme 1: Inclusive policies and practices**

This theme is related to:

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- The examination of workplace policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion.
- Identification of supportive HR policies, such as non-discrimination, non-harassment, and equal opportunity policies for all employees.

### **Theme 2: Discrimination and harassment**

This theme is related to:

- Instances of discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression in the workplace.
- Microaggressions and subtle forms of bias experienced by LGBT+ employees in the workplace.

### **Theme 3: Visibility and disclosure**

This theme is related to:

- The extent to which LGBT+ employees feel comfortable being open about their LGBT+ identity in the workplace.
- Factors influencing the decision to disclose or conceal one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

### **Theme 4: Workplace (organisational) culture**

This theme is related to:

- An analysis of the overall workplace culture in terms of LGBT+ diversity and inclusion.
- Exploration of the impact of workplace culture on job satisfaction, employee support and engagement.

### **Theme 5: Career advancement**

This theme is related to:

- Examination of potential barriers to career advancement for LGBT+ employees.
- Identification of factors that contribute to or hinder professional development for LGBT+ employees.

### **Theme 6: Support networks**

This theme is related to:

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- The assessment of the availability and effectiveness of support networks within the workplace for LGBT+ employees.

### **Theme 7: Intersectionality**

This theme is related to:

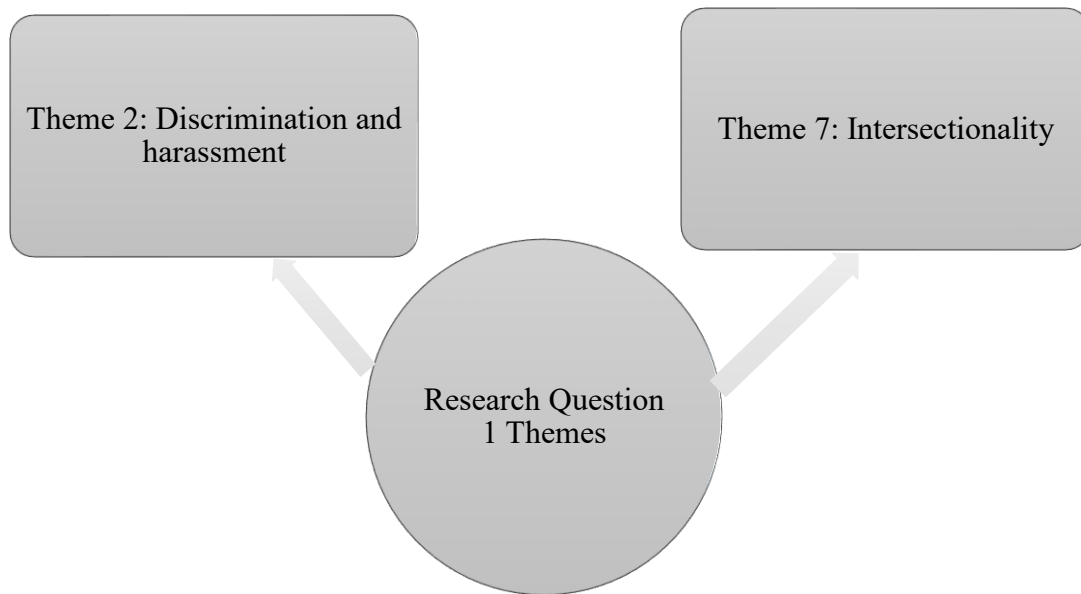
- Exploration of how intersecting identities (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation) influence the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees.
- Understanding the unique challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities.

The themes outlined above will now be illustrated below in Figures 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 respectively. First, it will be the themes that emerged from this study's research questions followed by themes that emerged from the reflective diaries and semi-structured interviews.

#### **4.2.1 Themes identified from the research questions**

The themes that were identified from this study's research questions are illustrated in the figures below:

**Research Question 1: What are the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?**



*Figure 4.1 Themes identified from Research Question 1*

From Research Question 1, two themes emerged, namely discrimination and harassment, and intersectionality. Below is a brief overview of what each of these themes relates to.

Research Question 1, Theme 1 (RQ1-T1): **Discrimination and harassment**

This theme is related to:

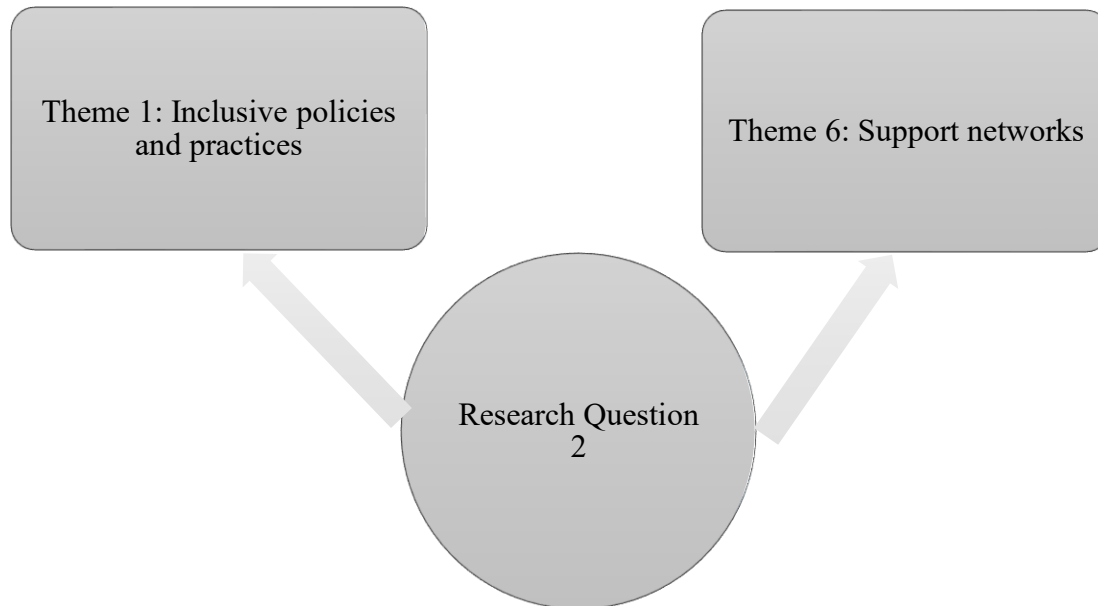
- Instances of discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression in the workplace.
- Microaggressions and subtle forms of bias experienced by LGBT+ employees in the workplace.

Research Question 1, Theme 2 (RQ1-T2): **Intersectionality**

This theme is related to:

- Exploration of how intersecting identities (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation) influence the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees.
- Understanding the unique challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities.

**Research Question 2: How are diversity and inclusion used as tools or agents for reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?**



*Figure 4.2 Themes identified from Research Question 2*

From Research Question 2, there were also two themes; Theme 1 Inclusive Policies and Practices and Theme 6 Support Networks. Below is a brief overview of what each of these themes relates to.

**Research Question 2, Theme 1 (RQ2-T1): Inclusive policies and practices**

This theme is related to:

- The examination of workplace policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion.
- Identification of supportive HR policies, such as non-discrimination, non-harassment, and equal opportunity policies for all employees.

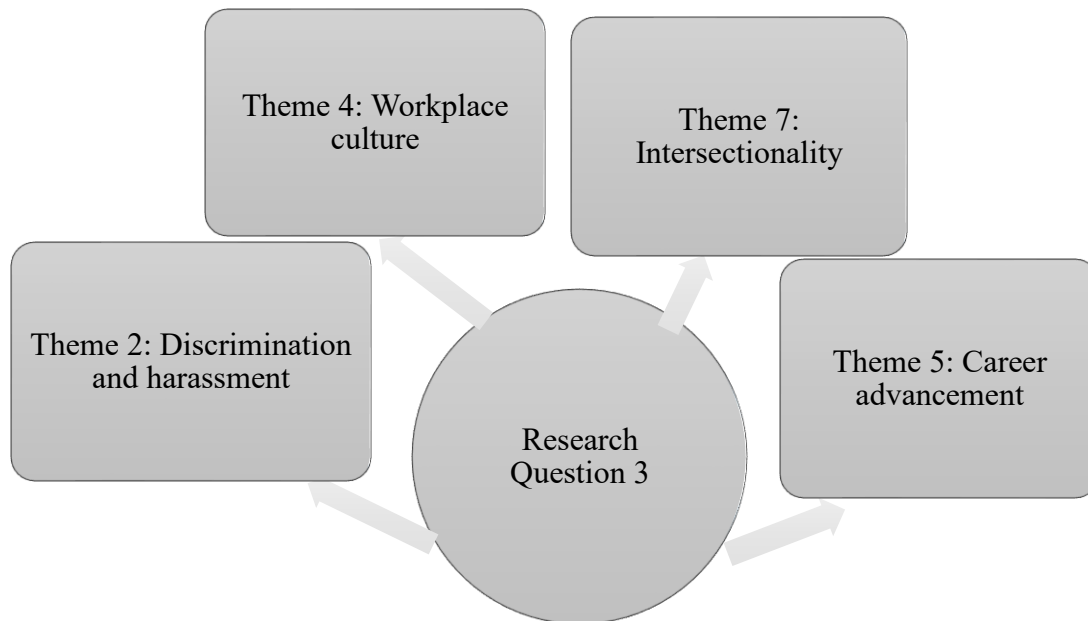
**Research Question 2, Theme 2 (RQ2-T2): Support networks**

This theme is related to:

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- The assessment of the availability and effectiveness of support networks within the workplace for LGBT+ employees.

**Research Question 3: What are the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?**



***Figure 4.3 Themes identified from Research Question 3***

From Research Question 3, the researcher found four strong themes, which were discrimination and harassment, career advancement, intersectionality and workplace culture. These four themes are explained briefly below.

Research Question 3, Theme 1 (RQ3-T1): **Discrimination and harassment**

This theme is related to:

- Instances of discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression in the workplace.
- Microaggressions and subtle forms of bias experienced by LGBT+ employees in the workplace.

Research Question 3, Theme 2 (RQ3-T2): **Career advancement**

This theme is related to:

- Examination of potential barriers to career advancement for LGBT+ employees.

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- Identification of factors that contribute to or hinder professional development for LGBT+ employees.

### Research Question 3, Theme 3 (RQ3-T3): **Intersectionality**

This theme is related to:

- Exploration of how intersecting identities (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation) influence the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees.
- Understanding the unique challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities.

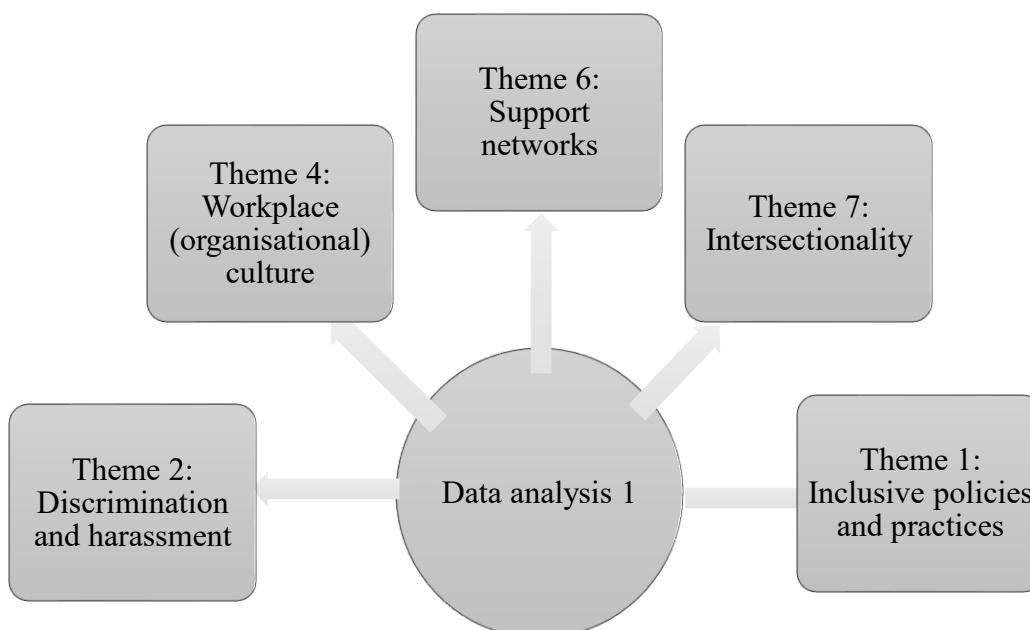
### Research Question 3, Theme 4 (RQ3-T4): **Workplace (organisational) culture**

This theme is related to:

- An analysis of the overall workplace culture in terms of LGBT+ diversity and inclusion. Exploring the impact of workplace culture on job satisfaction, employee support and engagement.

#### 4.2.2 Themes identified from the data analysis

The themes identified from the data analysis included the data collected from the reflective diaries and semi-structured interviews and are illustrated in Figures 4.4 and 4.5 below:



**Figure 4.4 Identified themes from the data analysis of the reflective diaries**



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From the data analysis of the reflective diaries, five themes emerged namely inclusive policies and practices, discrimination and harassment, workplace (organisational) culture, support networks and intersectionality. Below is a brief overview of what each of these themes relates to.

### Diary Theme 1 (DT-1): **Inclusive policies and practices**

This theme is related to:

- The examination of workplace policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion.
- Identification of supportive HR policies, such as non-discrimination, non-harassment, and equal opportunity policies for all employees.

### Diary Theme 2 (DT-2): **Discrimination and harassment**

This theme is related to:

- Instances of discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression in the workplace.
- Microaggressions and subtle forms of bias experienced by LGBT+ employees in the workplace.

### Diary Theme 3 (DT-3): **Workplace (organisational) culture**

This theme is related to:

- An analysis of the overall workplace culture in terms of LGBT+ diversity and inclusion.
- Exploring the impact of workplace culture on job satisfaction, employee support and engagement.

### Diary Theme 4 (DT-4): **Support networks**

- This theme is related to: The assessment of the availability and effectiveness of support networks within the workplace for LGBT+ employees.

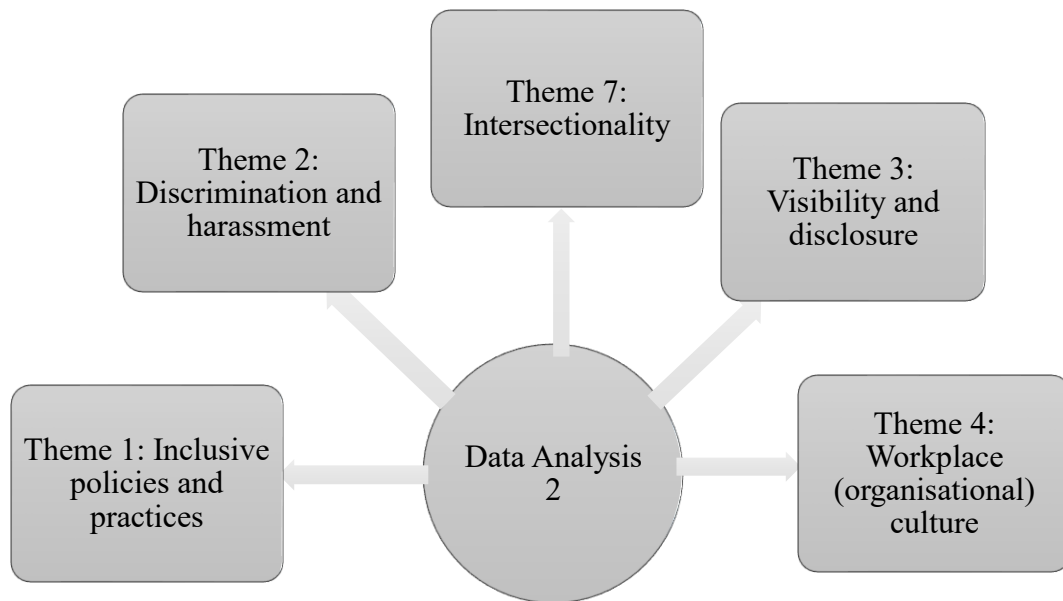
### Diary Theme 5 (DT-5): **Intersectionality**

This theme is related to:

- Exploring how intersecting identities (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation) influence the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees.

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- Understanding the unique challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities.



**Figure 4.5 Identified themes from the data analysis of the semi-structured interviews**

From the data analysed from the semi-structured interviews, five themes emerged namely inclusive policies and practices, discrimination and harassment, intersectionality, visibility and disclosure, and workplace (organisational) culture. Below is a brief overview of what each of these themes relates to.

### Interview Theme 1 (IT-1): **Inclusive policies and practices**

This theme is related to:

- The examination of workplace policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion.
- Identification of supportive HR policies, such as non-discrimination, non-harassment, and equal opportunity policies for all employees.

### Interview Theme 2 (IT-2): **Discrimination and harassment**

This theme is related to:

- Instances of discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression in the workplace.
- Microaggressions and subtle forms of bias experienced by LGBT+ employees in the workplace.

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### Interview Theme 3 (IT-3): **Intersectionality**

This theme is related to:

- Exploring how intersecting identities (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation) influence the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees.
- Understanding the unique challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities.

### Interview Theme 4 (IT-4): **Visibility and disclosure**

This theme is related to:

- The extent to which LGBT+ employees feel comfortable being open about their LGBT+ identity in the workplace.
- Factors influencing the decision to disclose or conceal one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

### Interview Theme 5 (IT-5): **Workplace (organisational) culture**

This theme is related to:

- An analysis of the overall workplace culture in terms of LGBT+ diversity and inclusion.
- Exploration of the impact of workplace culture on job satisfaction, employee support and engagement.

The themes identified from the reflective diary journals and semi-structured interviews were very similar. There were four common themes which emerged from both these data sources, namely inclusive policies and practices, discrimination and harassment, intersectionality, and workplace (organisational) culture. Only support networks emerged as a theme from the data of reflective diary journals whereas only visibility and disclosure emerged from the semi-structured interviews.

## **4.3 Codes and themes**

The main themes identified and discussed above were assigned codes as reflected in Table 4.1 below. The table also includes the research questions and key literature reviewed to give the reader a view of how they all relate to each other.

**Table 4.1 Extracted codes and themes**

| <b>Research Question</b>                                                                                                            | <b>Themes Identified</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Codes Assigned</b>                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. What are the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?</b>                       | <p>Theme 1: Discrimination and harassment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instances of discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression in the workplace.</li> <li>• Microaggressions and subtle forms of bias experienced by LGBT+ employees in the workplace.</li> </ul> <p>Theme 2: Intersectionality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploration of how intersecting identities (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation) influence the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees.</li> <li>• Understanding the unique challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination</li> <li>• Harassment</li> <li>• Microaggressions</li> <li>• Intersectional experiences</li> <li>• Multiple marginalised identities</li> </ul> |
| <b>2. How are diversity and inclusion used as tools or agents for reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA</b> | <p>Theme 1: Inclusive policies and practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The examination of workplace policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion.</li> <li>• Identification of supportive HR policies, such as non-</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive policies</li> <li>• Equal opportunity practices</li> </ul>                                                                                          |

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|                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>telecommunication industry?</b></p>                                                                                                  | <p>discrimination, non-harassment, and equal opportunity policies for all employees.</p> <p>Theme 2: Support networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The assessment of the availability and effectiveness of support networks within the workplace for LGBT+ employees.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive networks</li> <li>• Allyship</li> <li>• Affinity groups</li> </ul>                                                                              |
| <p><b>3. How can organisational culture enable the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry?</b></p> | <p>Theme 1: Discrimination and harassment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instances of discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression in the workplace.</li> <li>• Microaggressions and subtle forms of bias experienced by LGBT+ employees in the workplace.</li> </ul> <p>Theme 2: Career advancement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination of potential barriers to career advancement for LGBT+ employees.</li> <li>• Identification of factors that contribute to or hinder professional development for LGBT+ employees.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination</li> <li>• Harassment</li> <li>• Microaggressions</li> <li>• Barriers to advancement</li> <li>• Professional development factors</li> </ul> |

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|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>Theme 3: Intersectionality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring how intersecting identities (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation) influence the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees.</li> <li>• Understanding the unique challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities.</li> </ul> <p>Theme 4: Workplace (organisational) culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall workplace culture in terms of LGBT+ diversity and inclusion.</li> <li>• Workplace culture on job satisfaction, employee support and engagement.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intersectional experiences</li> <li>• Multiple marginalised identities</li> <li>• Inclusive workplace culture</li> <li>• Impact on job satisfaction</li> </ul> |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### 4.4 The workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the South African telecommunication industry

Discrimination, harassment, and intersectionality were the themes that emerged from the data analysed from the reflective diary journaling and the semi-structured interviews concerning the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry. Below are some of the research participants' comments about their workplace experiences related to the extracted themes.

*Let me tell you a story about an incident of harassment at work. This happened last year, this guy kept changing his voice to be more feminine when he spoke to me, he'd make comments like 'I'm going to get coffee honey, would you like some' and then he giggles. A colleague saw it and asked if I was ok and why I didn't address it. I said if*

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*he did it twice, I would address it the next time as I'll know that it's not a joke. A couple of days he did the same thing again, changing his tone and mocking me by offering me coffee, this time around I told him 'You know what you're doing now, you're making me uncomfortable and I can feel you getting used to this and this is not the first time you're doing it and I want to tell you now, I don't appreciate it. I don't like it. He stopped doing it before I took it to HR. ~ IP6*

When discussing intersectionality, **IP3** said the following:

*I'm comfortable with everyone in my environment and everyone is comfortable with me and my sexuality. I work in an environment where we all respect each other, we are mature, and we know what we are here to do.*

During the interview session, the participants were asked about their workplace experience, and this was one of their responses:

*When I want to work from home because I'm not feeling well or for any other reasons, I am always expected to submit leave because I'm not at the office, although we are allowed to work from home. No one else in the team is expected to submit any form of leave when they are working from home because the company policy allows it. My managers are always making things difficult for me to a point where I sometimes think they are out to get me, I feel victimised the whole time, there's always someone watching my moves, and I am being micromanaged and treated differently than the rest of the team members, and the worst part is that I exceed my performance targets but they're always double checking my work.~ IP4*

*Most people are reluctant to come out and expose who they are in the technology space as they do not want to be subjected to any bias and stereotyping. I for one because of past experiences do not engage in team buildings, team lunches etc. to avoid being mocked by team members. There was a time before I changed departments, every morning when I walked into the office there would be giggles, and someone would mention something like 'Oh my, a pink shirt' the one day I had one on. They watch what I eat and call me a sissy or a drama queen.~DP3*

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The findings from both the reflective diary journaling and the semi-structured interviews indicate that the majority of the research participants still experience negative treatment in the workplace because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. A few of them indicated that they are being treated fairly and the same as all other employees. However, one of the research participants shared that in their career or professional life, they have never been subjected to nor experienced any negative treatment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

*I work in a very great environment. I've been here for 2 years and in my previous company for 8 years. I have never worked in an organisation where I was either discriminated against or excluded based on my sexuality. I come to work every day, do my work, get along with everyone and go home. There are never any quarrels or misunderstandings because someone treats me a certain way. I've always been treated how I'm supposed to be treated. I've always had, like a good working environment experience.*~**DP1**

A supportive and inclusive workplace environment for LGBT+ employees fosters authenticity and engagement, reducing the need for self-concealment due to fear of stigma or discrimination. Some of the participants expressed that they kept to themselves because they were afraid of being mocked or made fun of.

The experience shared by **IP4** indicated that they must conceal their sexual orientation in the workplace if they want to have growth opportunities.

*The area is not a nice workplace if you express yourself as a gay person, you have to hide it.*~**IP4**

The participant added *as a member of the LGBT+ community, when you show your sexuality there will be no opportunities for you, I've seen it happen.*

**DP4** shared the same views as **IP4** of their experiences about growth opportunities in the workplace.

*In my team, you find people in certain roles for a short time, they're getting new opportunities but you're not. I'm not getting opportunities because of my sexual identity. Right now, the team that I recently moved to, my manager is a black Venda*



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*man who has issues with gays from what I see. I deliver more, more than the rest of the team and above my targets but get less recognition. I feel the exclusion. Being told about the future plans of the department and driving me out of the company, you hear him talking about how he wants the team to look in the future without me.~DP4*

For both **IP4** and **DP4** growth opportunities were limited because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. However, one of the participants, **IP2** who is in middle management, did not share the same experiences as **IP4** and **DP4**. They mentioned that they are open and free in the workplace, everyone knows that they are lesbian and since joining the telecommunications company they have changed roles three times, all being growth opportunities. For them being a member of the LGBT+ community has not excluded them, nor have they missed any growth opportunities. **IP2's** workplace experiences align with Tshisa and Van der Walt's (2022) observation that some LGBT+ people have managed to create a positive and meaningful life for themselves regardless of the continuous discrimination they experience. **IP2** further mentioned that

*I am generally a happy person and not bothered by what others say, I come to work to do my job, don't bother anyone and respect the people in my space and they do the same.*

Hossain et al. (2020) present arguments to emphasise that a workplace environment is crucial in driving productivity and commitment from employees and enhancing recruitment.

Whilst **IP5** said:

*I wish they would empower LGBT+ employees to leadership roles or even growth opportunities the same way women are empowered for senior roles. There is no progression for us and how others treat us as members of the LGBT+ community at work.*

**IP1** said:

*There was a time when they would make fun of my dress code and talk to me in a feminine voice all because I'm gay. When I showed up to work wearing colourful clothes my colleagues would make jokes like 'a pink shirt my darling' and giggle. It*

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*was very hurtful and uncomfortable because I had to be conscious of what to wear and what not to wear to avoid being mocked.*

IP6 added that

*Where I work, I find that there isn't anything done for LGBT+ people, we are just the alphabet people. A lot of people see us as a lifestyle unlike disabled people – so certain things are not considered, people can talk down on us or discriminate against us and nothing is done about that.*

### 4.4.1 Synopsis

The findings related to Research Question 1 “*What are the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?*” indicate that the majority of the research participants are subjected to negative treatment in the workplace. They do not work in organisations that accommodate them as members of the LGBT+ community. Some of the research participants indicated that they have experienced homophobic incidents and were harassed or discriminated against based on their sexual orientation. There were research participants who also shared experiences of extreme discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Some mentioned that reporting the incidents to HR did not help remedy the situation in any way. What was also evident is that some telecommunication organisations do promote diversity and inclusion and have resources directed to DEI efforts as two research participants shared that they work in environments that are welcoming and are not subjected to negative treatment of any kind.

The diary participants were more expressive and shared a lot about their workplace experiences. They shared a few examples of events that took place that they believed were because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

DP4 mentioned that

*...when LGBT+ employees ask to be reasonably accommodated it seems like they are being unreasonable, however, for example, people with disabilities have their own bathrooms and certain changes are done to accommodate them, but for us, it is seen as our sexuality*

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*is a choice or a lifestyle hence, they do not see the importance to accommodate us in any way.*

The findings provide an in-depth understanding of the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the South African telecommunication industry. They highlight persistent challenges such as discrimination, microaggressions, and limited career advancement opportunities despite existing legal protections. The study also uncovers the role of organisational culture in shaping inclusive or exclusionary workplace environments. Additionally, it offers insights into best practices for fostering diversity, including the need for stronger policies, leadership commitment, and employee support networks. By bridging the gap between legal frameworks and lived experiences, this research informs more effective inclusion strategies in the industry.

### **4.5 Diversity and inclusion as tools or agents for reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry**

Regarding diversity and inclusion in the workplace, the following themes emerged from the interviews and reflective diaries. These were inclusive policies and practices and support networks. Below are the findings from the interviews and the reflective diaries.

**DP4** and **IP6** shared the sentiment about nothing being done at their workplace to reasonably accommodate them. However, **DP2** mentioned that at their workplace the challenge is the people they work with and not so much the organisation; the organisation does promote diversity and inclusion, but it is not the case in their department. **IP2** shared a couple of examples of the diversity and inclusion efforts that the organisation is making to reasonably accommodate the LGBT+ community in the workplace.

*Honestly, the company doesn't have anything about the inclusion of the LGBT+ community, they don't even have anything touching on LGBT+ from a diversity and inclusion point of view, and no emails or talks of us but there are policies covering harassment and discrimination based on sexuality.~IP6*

*Where I work, I find that there isn't anything done for LGBT+ people, we are just the alphabet people. For example, there are no gender-neutral bathrooms and are no*

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*growth opportunities. A lot of people see us as a lifestyle unlike disabled people – so certain things are not considered. No law forces my employer to reasonably accommodate me, the policies are general and not explicit about LGBT+.~DP4*

*I haven't observed any progress with the internal network regarding the LGBT+ and I strongly believe that the progression is slow. Diversity and inclusivity are not visible enough at work. I wish for people not to box homosexual individuals for the beauty industry only, we should be hired and included in corporate, as well because we have brains too.~ IP5*

*Diversity and inclusion are not a problem at work in the sense that this is not a company problem but a people problem, I have seen and heard of how other LGBT+ community members who are working for the same company as me have a different experience, they feel comfortable and get along with their manager and colleagues. This is because they have understanding and supportive colleagues, our company promotes diversity and inclusion but my team is still hostile towards me.~ DP2*

*I believe there should be talks about the LGBT+ community in the workplace, the company must have LGBT+ dialogues and make people aware of the community and have conversations about the LGBT+ community to avoid situations where people are too curious and start asking inappropriate questions which might be received as mockery. We don't have the conversations openly and I think that is why we are still not being accommodated in the workplace as a community.~ IP5*

*Where I work diversity and inclusion of everyone are taken seriously. When it comes to the LGBT+ community, for example, we have options to use our pronouns, that can be added to our official email signatures. Recently they have been working on implementing gender neutral bathrooms. So, I can say that companies can use diversity and inclusion efforts to reasonably accommodate us.~IP2*

*I believe that my company is not as diverse as other companies in terms of the culture, other colleagues shouldn't be allowed to mock people about their sexualities, if they do there should be serious consequences, such as disciplinary action but I don't see it happening here.~DP3*

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**IP3** mentioned that there are diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace, however, believes that the other employees are the ones that have a certain attitude towards the LGBT+ members. This does not necessarily mean the organisation does not promote diversity and inclusion, people still make their own choices.

*The company should have disciplinary measures in place for those who are in contravention of the policies so others may know and see what will happen if you discriminate against others in the workplace.~IP3*

*I have noticed that other LGBT+ employees in the organisation have different experiences than mine. They work in great teams and are not subjected to some of the terrible experiences as mine. This made me realise that it is not my organisation that is terrible or not inclusive and accommodating but rather the people in my team, such as my boss.~IP4*

*Funny enough there are still people at work who find it strange that there are the likes of me who belong to the community in the organisation, I still get those stares from others and it just makes it awkward and not to be free in the workplace.~IP2*

Most of the research participants stated that their workplaces do not reasonably accommodate them. **DP1** has positive workplace experiences and shared insights on how they navigate diversity and inclusion in the workplace as follows:

*I work in a very great environment; I've been here for 2 years and in my previous company for 8 years. I have never worked in an organisation where I was either discriminated against or excluded based on my sexuality. I come to work daily, do my work, get along with everyone and go home. There are never any quarrels or misunderstandings because someone treats me a certain way. I am a team leader, my team and I meet when we need to etc. Before joining a telecommunication company, I was working in a different industry, a government department. There too it was the same thing, me being part of the LGBT+ community didn't affect my employment opportunities, or how they viewed or treated me.*

*When it comes to sexuality and whatnot, the nice thing about it is that I don't know if it's my personality or how I carry myself, but I've never experienced any negative or bad vibes here at work. I've always been treated how I'm supposed to be treated. I've*

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*always had, like a good working environment experience, etc. One's identity as a human being should not affect anything in the workplace, and I've been fortunate enough. Just to ensure fairness in the workplace and to remove this negativity around the homosexual community, we all just need to be treated fairly. I believe our work environment needs to ensure that we are all comfortable within the environment and you know a happy employee is a productive employee.~DP1*

The insight shared by **DP1** above is an example of how the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees should be when organisations are diverse, inclusive, welcoming and supportive of the LGBT+ community. LGBT+ employees who experience positive workplace environments benefit significantly from inclusive and supportive practices. They feel part of the organisation, their morale is boosted, and in such workplaces, they feel valued and respected, which fosters a sense of belonging and safety.

### 4.5.1 Synopsis

The findings related to Research Question 2 “*How are diversity and inclusion used as tools or agents for reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?*” indicate that diversity and inclusion efforts of LGBT+ employees in the workplace are still lagging. There were only a few participants who shared positive work experiences whereas the majority expressed that they face some form of negative workplace incidents as members of the LGBT+ community. **DP1** shared in the reflective diary that they wish the telecommunication company could make a greater effort to create a culture that promotes diversity and inclusion for all.

When probed about why they believed that they were not treated equally or included, **IP1** mentioned that one of the reasons is that in his team it is because of religious differences

*My manager uses the religion card often, he mistreats me because according to him or his religion, it is a sin for me to be gay. And, unfortunately, there's nothing I can do about it.*

**DP4** shared that

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*...during a boardroom discussion, a colleague once attacked me, and he made so many false statements and how I want to be treated special because I'm gay. My boss did nothing about it besides brush it off and protect the white male instead of intervening or addressing it.*

The example of an incident above illustrates the lack of diversity and inclusion in the workplace for this particular research participant. The findings presented here suggest that the SA telecommunication industry has a lot of work to do to be diverse and inclusive employers. The findings further highlight the gap between legal protections and workplace realities, emphasising the role of inclusive policies, leadership commitment, and employee resource groups in fostering a supportive environment. The research also identifies best practices for embedding diversity and inclusion into corporate culture, such as targeted training, representation in leadership, and proactive policy implementation. By demonstrating how these strategies can create equitable workplaces, the study informs more effective frameworks for LGBT+ inclusion in the industry.

### **4.6 Organisational culture as an enabler of seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry**

Discrimination and harassment, career advancement, intersectionality and workplace culture were the themes that emerged from the data analysed from the reflective diary journaling and the semi-structured interviews concerning organisational culture as an enabler of seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry. Following are some of the research participants' comments about their workplace experiences extracted from the themes. **IP1** shared the following about their workplace experience as a gay person and how organisational culture plays a role in the inclusion of LGBT+ employees in the workplace.

*The telecommunication company is diverse and inclusive in consideration of the members of the LGBT+ community compared to the previous company that I worked for, there is a vast difference in terms of inclusivity, the telecommunication company as my current employer is cognisant of every employee's rights, there are policies and awareness around the LGBT+ community.*

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**DP4** agrees with **DP5** about their experience of the organisational culture in the telecommunication company as an enabler of seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees.

*My workplace experience as a member of the LGBT+ community at this telecommunication company is impeccable. I am free and do not feel judged for who I choose to be, and in return, this has prompted me to perform even better in my job since I can show up as my true self.~DP5.*

While discussing organisational culture with **IP1** they shared an example of how organisational culture is important in fostering diversity and inclusion of the LGBT+ community in the workplace. **IP1** shared the following example of a close friend's workplace experience.

*I had a friend, she's lesbian and she was a teacher at a primary school and the principal told her that she can't be open about her sexuality because it's gonna set discomfort with learners, parents and the school governing bodies. She always complained about how hard it was working in such an environment, and she was having difficulty coping. And this was within a public school in Township community, and she eventually left, you know, she resigned. And she joined another school, which is a private school. And there, that's when she excelled very well. Because she was free, she was able to be her true self and she completely became someone that we all had look up to. It is very, very important to have a workplace with a culture that enables diversity and inclusion I can tell you this from my personal experience that it has changed my life a lot, working where I am free and supported.~IP1*

When discussing career advancement opportunities, two participant said this:

*You have to hide it, hide that you are gay as much as you can because with managers if you can express yourself, there are no opportunities for an applicant like myself because wherever you apply for an opportunity internally, they still have to refer back to your previous boss for a reference.~IP4*

*I have noticed here at work that for our community we have to put in extra work just to show that we're capable, we can do the work and yet I'm still not recognized. I have raised this with HR but nothing came of it, considering that the person I was reporting is a HOD.~DP4*



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*In my team, you find that people who have been in certain roles for a short time are getting new opportunities, but I am not. I'm not getting opportunities because of my sexual identity.~IP6*

**IP5** mentioned the following when asked about whether organisational culture enables seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees.

*In certain departments LGBT+ employees are free but the organisational culture is not fostering a culture of inclusivity, it's a hostile environment.*

From **IP5's** response above, it seems that in certain departments and teams, LGBT+ employees are accommodated, they are diverse and there is inclusion however, it is not organisation-wide, it depends on the team one works in.

*An organisational culture that promotes my inclusion is very important to me, you know that sense of importance and knowing that I can belong here and I can be as free as I wanna be. I don't have to have multiple personalities. I don't need to be a different person when I'm at work than I am when I'm at home. That's like important for you or anyone to belong.~IP1*

SA's legislation, such as the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act and the Employment Equity Act, aims to provide strong legal protection for LGBT+ employees. Organisational culture plays a vital role in ensuring that legislation is embedded into the workplace culture. These laws set a precedence for promoting diversity and inclusion in workplaces, however, organisational culture plays a great part in ensuring implementation and adherence.

*I'm comfortable, everyone in my environment is comfortable with me and my sexuality. I work in an environment where we all respect each other, we're mature and we know what we're here to do.~DP1*

*The inclusion is visible and there is no judgement to the members of the LGBT+ community at my workplace, everyone is equally respected. I believe this is part of the culture to be inclusive and diverse, there are so many minority groups and we are not excluded in any way. Compared to my previous employer, there is a vast difference in*

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*terms of inclusivity, my current employer who is in the telecommunications sector is cognisant of every employee's rights, and there are policies and awareness around the LGBT+ community.*~IP1

From the participants' responses above it is evident that organisations with a supportive organisational culture that promotes the inclusion of the LGBT+ community, create an environment where LGBT+ employees feel safe, valued, and empowered to bring their whole and true selves to work. If the organisational culture does not promote the inclusion of LGBT+ employees, their well-being and a safe workplace, having policies does not help improve their workplace experiences. Transforming the organisational culture is vital to establishing work environments where LGBT+ individuals can express their true selves, consequently fostering safer environments (Beagan et al., 2022).

In instances where LGBT+ employees do not have the support they require, it could lead to them seeking help externally as DP4 below said

*The culture here is extremely behind, they have a long way to go in creating policies about diversity and inclusion. It is a very hostile environment. The other day they were on the news for having non-existent HR because of how much people have been reporting things and they were not being addressed so they ended up reporting our company to the media.*~DP4

### 4.6.1 Synopsis

Findings related to Research Question 3 “*How can organisational culture enable the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry?*” highlight the critical role of leadership, policies, and workplace norms in shaping an environment that supports diversity. The research participants' lived experiences show that an organisation's culture is key to creating a workplace that is welcoming. One of the research participants mentioned that for her a great organisational culture means that she does not need to hide who she is when she is at work or hide her sexual orientation or gender identity to belong. Organisational culture coupled with support networks can be used as tools by the SA telecommunications industry to promote diversity and enable seamless inclusion of the LGBT+

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community in the workplace. The findings further identify key cultural elements such as inclusive leadership, visible representation, and employee-driven diversity initiatives that enhance belonging and psychological safety for LGBT+ employees. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of aligning corporate values with inclusive practices to bridge the gap between policy and lived experience. This study offers a framework for fostering an organisational culture that actively promotes LGBT+ inclusion.

### 4.7 Summary

In this chapter, the findings related to the study's research questions were unpacked and discussed in detail. Some of the research participants described their workplace experiences as depressive and hostile since Human Resources does not take any action when they report some of the incidents or treatment received. The data that were analysed from both the reflective diaries and semi-structured interviews revealed that diversity and inclusion measures are unmet. It was highlighted that employees who identify as belonging to the LGBT+ community are challenged each day with many resigning in an attempt to escape discrimination, harassment, and abuse endured in the workplace.

One of the research participants revealed that although he met his performance targets, for three consecutive years he did not receive a salary increase. When asked why that was the case, he shared that his manager is homophobic and had made it clear that if he does not resign, he will make his life "a living hell". The findings also revealed that the South African telecommunications industry does have policies that are supposed to protect the LGBT+ community in the workplace, however, it seems that there is a gap between policy documentation and implementation which results in the LGBT+ community members not being reasonably accommodated or treated fairly.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This section presents a comprehensive discussion of the data collected through reflective diary journaling and semi-structured interviews with LGBT+ employees in the SA telecommunications industry. The problem statement and purpose of the study are briefly discussed again before interpreting the findings of the research questions. The approach followed in this chapter is first, to provide a brief discussion of the findings related to each research question. Thereafter, there is a discussion interpreting the findings in the context of the literature reviewed earlier in this study. Furthermore, this chapter explores the interplay between individual and institutional factors, illustrating how organisational policies, leadership practices, and cultural norms influence the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees. By linking the empirical findings to theoretical constructs, this discussion not only provides a deeper understanding of the current state of LGBT+ inclusivity in the workplace but also identifies areas for future research and practical interventions.

### **5.2 Problem and purpose of this study**

Despite advancements in legal protection and organisational policies aimed at fostering diversity and inclusion, LGBT+ employees in the South African telecommunication industry continue to face significant challenges in the workplace. These challenges include experiences of discrimination, harassment, violation of their rights, and subtle forms of exclusion that impact their workplace, job satisfaction, mental health, and career advancement. Although there have been significant improvements over the past two decades in the human rights sphere regarding gender and sexual diversity, discrimination against LGBT+ individuals has not ceased to exist (Lloren & Parini, 2017). A contributing factor is that society still assumes heterosexuality and gender binary as a norm. These societal assumptions lead to an increase in the discrimination and harassment of those who identify as LGBT+ (Clark et al., 2022; Ng & Rumens, 2017; Tshisa & Van der Walt, 2022).

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The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of employees who align with the LGBT+ community and how they navigate diversity and inclusion in the workplace while examining whether organisational culture enables the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees in the work environment. It was to further understand if the South African telecommunications industry embraces diversity and inclusion of employees who identify as LGBT+. By examining both the positive and negative aspects of their workplace experiences, this research aimed to identify the factors that contribute to a supportive and inclusive work environment, as well as the barriers that hinder such inclusivity. The literature reviewed indicates that only a small group of LGBT+ employees are treated fairly both in society and in the workplace. There remains a substantial gap between diversity and inclusion policies and practices. To understand the research problem and achieve the objectives of this study, three research questions were asked:

### **Research Question 1**

What are the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?

### **Research Question 2**

How are diversity and inclusion used as tools or agents for reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry?

### **Research Question 3**

How can organisational culture enable the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry?

## **5.3 Synthesis**

In this section, the findings are interpreted and presented based on the themes identified with the research questions (now framed as research statements). This synthesis will involve a

discussion that integrates the academic sources previously consulted in the literature review, the insights of the researcher, and the perspectives of the study's research participants, all addressing the objectives and research questions of this study.

### **5.3.1 Research Question 1: The workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry**

The data collected and analysed for this study reveals a mixture of progress and ongoing challenges that mark the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunications industry. Despite advances in legal protection and increasing awareness of diversity and inclusion, many LGBT+ employees still face significant hurdles, such as being discriminated against, harassed or violated in the workplace. Some participants reported experiencing verbal harassment and exclusion, which aligns with the findings of Sears et al. (2021), who found that over a quarter of LGBT+ employees faced workplace harassment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. This reinforces the argument by DeSouza et al. (2017) that such experiences can lead to emotional distress and negative job-related consequences. Although it was not the focus of this study, some participants shared how the discrimination they had experienced in the workplace has had a negative effect on their mental health and job satisfaction. Some also shared that they have considered resigning without another job offer so they can be away from the negative workplace environment for the sake of their mental well-being. This finding supports previous research (Subhrajit, 2014; Medina & Mahowald, 2023), which indicates that workplace discrimination can limit employment opportunities for LGBT+ individuals and force them into less favourable career paths.

DeSouza et al. (2017) indicate that members of the LGBT+ community face workplace discrimination, resulting in deteriorating physical and emotional well-being, along with negative job consequences. Some of their workplace experiences include microaggressions and ostracism (DeSouza et al., 2017). Benjamin and Reygan (2016) add that LGBT+ employees especially the younger generation coming from South African townships face even more challenges of homophobia. The intersectional challenges faced by LGBT+ employees from township backgrounds, as highlighted by Benjamin and Reygan (2016), further emphasise the varying degrees of discrimination within different socio-economic and cultural contexts. Sears et al. (2021) revealed that more than one in four of their study's participants had been verbally

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harassed in the workplace based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Examples include being called or hearing the words “f\*\*\*\*t,” “queer,” “sissy,” “tranny,” and “dyke”. In some instances, the impact of discrimination and harassment of LGBT+ individuals has resulted in some of them being unable to find employment or having fewer options than those who identify as heterosexual (Subhrajit, 2014; Medina & Mahowald, 2023).

*I wish to see the organisation having more LGBT+ dialogues and make people aware of the community and have conversations about the LGBT+ community to avoid situations where people are too uncomfortable around us and start asking inappropriate questions which might be received as mockery.~DP5*

**IP1** said:

*When I’m working from the office, I keep to myself, I stand up when I need to, to either make coffee or use the bathroom. In team buildings, team lunches etc. I disengage to avoid being mocked by team members. This is because in the past, I was made fun of, they’d discuss my walk, dress code and how I sound. So, I think it’s better if I do not hear any of those nasty things.*

**IP1**’s workplace experiences echo Luiz and Terziev’s (2022) observations that LGBT+ employees may not be protected against workplace exclusion and discrimination. Furthermore, they sometimes do not enjoy the same positive workplace environment as their heterosexual colleagues.

This participant resorts to being “invisible” in the workplace to avoid being harassed and violated. This is not how people should have to be in the workplace; workplaces should be an environment where people can be their authentic selves, have positive experiences, and feel part of the organisation. Beagan et al. (2022) mentioned that a transformed organisational culture is vital to establishing a work environment where LGBT+ individuals can express their true selves.

Some organisations in the telecommunications industry have implemented policies and initiatives aimed at fostering a more inclusive workplace environment. The initiatives include anti-discrimination policies, diversity training programmes, and the establishment of support

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networks and allyship groups specifically for LGBT+ employees. Such initiatives have contributed to a more supportive atmosphere where employees feel safer to express their identities. Some of the telecommunication organisations are not progressive nor implement any initiatives; the participants indicated that not only are there no policies in place but there is no mention of plans or policies that support the inclusion of LGBT+ employees in the workplace. While legal protections and corporate diversity policies indicate positive strides, the lived experiences of many LGBT+ employees suggest that discrimination, harassment, and exclusion remain significant barriers to workplace equality.

*There is nothing touching on LGBT+, and there are no policies covering harassment and discrimination based on sexuality, so that tells me that I do not have any form of protection in the workplace, my employer doesn't say anywhere that it is wrong for people to exclude just because I'm gay. ~IP6*

LGBT+ employees are protected under several legal frameworks in SA, including the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (EEA), the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 (BCEA), and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 (PEPUDA). The EEA mandates that employers eliminate unfair discrimination and promote equal opportunity in the workplace, ensuring that LGBT+ employees are treated fairly in hiring, promotions, treatment, and workplace policies. The BCEA sets out minimum employment conditions, which apply equally to all employees, safeguarding LGBT+ workers from exploitative labour practices. PEPUDA further reinforces protections by prohibiting unfair discrimination in both the public and private sectors, including the workplace environment, and compelling organisations to take proactive steps toward inclusivity.

Despite these legal safeguards and the broader South African Constitution (1996), which upholds equality and non-discrimination based on sexual orientation, progress in creating truly diverse and inclusive workplace environments remains slow. More than a decade after these frameworks were established, discrimination, harassment, and exclusion persist within many organisations. Although legal mechanisms exist to protect LGBT+ employees, their lived experiences often do not align with these legal provisions. Many individuals continue to report incidents of verbal harassment, exclusion from leadership opportunities, microaggressions, and



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overall workplace alienation, indicating a significant gap between policy and practice. This disconnect suggests that organisations must move beyond compliance-driven approaches and actively foster workplace cultures that embrace and implement diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in meaningful and sustainable ways.

While the majority of participants in this study reported experiencing discrimination, harassment, or exclusion in the workplace, a small number shared positive workplace experiences where they felt supported, valued, and treated equally to their heterosexual counterparts. These participants described their workplaces as inclusive and non-discriminatory, with equal opportunities for all employees, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

*For my whole professional life, I have never felt discriminated against for being a member of the LGBT+ community in the workspace.~IP3*

*My workplace is not different as an LGBT+ person compared to a heterosexual, all employees are equal and treated the same. I believe it should stay like this because there is a stigma that gay people are soft and if we start being treated differently in the workplace, this might hinder our chance of getting certain roles like managerial roles because they would believe we are not fit for such stressful roles.~IP5*

These responses suggest that some organisations have successfully implemented policies or fostered cultures that promote genuine equality among employees. Similarly, Tshisa and Van der Walt (2022) found that some of the LGBT+ participants had positive experiences and were satisfied in the workplace whilst others were either neutral or had negative experiences. This suggests that some organisations have efforts or programmes in place to foster a positive and welcoming workplace environment. The small number of those who had positive workplace experiences in this study and that of Tshisa and Van der Walt (2022) indicate that much work remains to be done to create diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces across the industry.

Interestingly, when one participant **IP3** was asked why they believed they had never experienced discrimination, they attributed it to their personal mindset and approach to challenges, rather than the absence of discrimination itself:

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*I made a personal choice that I will not be a victim of circumstances, and I am a positive person, so I think it was more of a personal choice.*

This statement raises important theoretical and practical implications regarding how personal agency and workplace experiences intersect. It suggests that individual perception and resilience may influence how some employees navigate potentially discriminatory environments. While this perspective highlights the power of self-empowerment and positive framing, it also raises concerns about the normalisation of discrimination where individuals may downplay or tolerate subtle forms of exclusion to avoid conflict or protect their career progression.

Seiler-Ramadas et al. (2022) alluded to how some LGBT+ employees choose not to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity due to fear of discrimination, harassment and silencing experienced in the workplace. The events shared by **DP2** disclose how not concealing their sexual orientation has led to a gruesome amount of discrimination and harassment in the workplace for over a decade. **DP2**'s workplace experiences included microaggressions and ostracism similar to those mentioned by DeSouza et al. (2017). When organisations effectively manage diversity, especially concerning LGBT+ employees, it positively influences their workplace experience. This can be achieved by implementing strategies to reduce discrimination and promote inclusivity; diversity management fosters a more welcoming work environment for LGBT+ employees.

These findings contribute to discussions on workplace resilience, suggesting that individual outlook may shape how discrimination is perceived and experienced. They align with minority stress theory, which explains how marginalized individuals develop coping mechanisms to navigate hostile environments. Therefore, organisations should not assume that the absence of reported discrimination means true inclusivity some employees may be enduring microaggressions or bias silently.

### **5.3.1.1 Summary of the findings related to Research Question 1**

The findings presented here are related to Research Question 1, which is now formulated as a statement about the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry. While a small number of participants reported positive workplace experiences, where they felt included and treated equally to their heterosexual colleagues, the majority highlighted ongoing discrimination, harassment, and exclusion. This suggests that despite existing diversity and inclusion policies, many organisations within the telecommunications industry fall short of creating truly inclusive work environments.

Several participants recounted disturbing experiences where they were mocked, shamed, and verbally abused in the workplace because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Some reported that HR departments and management failed to intervene or hold perpetrators accountable, thereby enabling a culture of discrimination. This aligns with previous research indicating that workplace policies alone are insufficient if they are not actively enforced and supported by leadership (Tshisa & Van der Walt, 2022).

Additionally, the findings also indicate that LGBT+ employees often face exclusion from professional growth opportunities, with some reporting that they were overlooked for promotions or not recognised for exceptional performance. This suggests that beyond direct discrimination, systemic barriers continue to restrict the career advancement of LGBT+ employees.

### **5.3.2 Research Question 2: Diversity and inclusion used as tools or agents for reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry**

The data collected and analysed in this study confirm that reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community in the SA telecommunications industry is a work in progress. The findings align with previous research, which emphasises the importance of diverse and inclusive workplaces in enhancing job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and overall employee

well-being. Diversity and inclusion of LGBT+ employees in the SA telecommunications industry have progressed significantly, notably due to legal protection and proactive organisational policies. However, the challenges remain in bridging the gap between policy and practice and fostering truly diverse and inclusive workplace environments. Similar to Lloren and Parini's (2017) findings which confirmed that LGBT+ supportive policies alone are not adequate to influence LGBT+ employees' workplace experiences and overall well-being. Over and above having policies that promote diversity and inclusion, organisations must have an approach to effectively implement those policies, be intentional about the reasonable accommodation of LGBT+ employees and create a diverse and inclusive workplace environment. Leadership commitment and support are key in driving reasonable accommodation efforts of LGBT+ employees that will foster a diverse and inclusive workplace.

Kühn et al. (2019), McCallaghan et al. (2019) and Perry and Li (2019) all highlight how diverse organisations with positive workplace environments are prone to boosting employees' job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation. In agreement, Lloren and Parini (2017) mention that by fostering an inclusive culture, diversity management helps to mitigate the negative effects of discrimination and promotes a more positive and supportive atmosphere for LGBT+ employees.

**IP2** believes that their employer shows concern and is making strides towards reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community in the workplace. **IP2** mentioned an example of a recent change that their employer introduced. It was the use of pronouns throughout the organisation which could be displayed on internal collaboration applications, such as Microsoft Teams and email signatures. However, **IP2** further shared that they believed that even with the pronouns being in place, the telecommunication organisation is still not fully inclusive and accommodating of the LGBT+ community.

*Something as simple as restrooms; there are restrooms and wheelchair ramps for the disabled however, not the same applies to us. We have no gender-neutral restrooms, you get to a point where you wonder if you must use the disabled people's restrooms or hold it until you get home. I know this seems like nothing to the next person but honestly, it's a need for us, it has been raised with the employer on various platforms and we're still waiting.~IP2*

IP2's experience serves as a prime example of how symbolic diversity efforts, while important, are insufficient when deeper structural changes are not implemented. The absence of gender-neutral restrooms within the organisation is a key indicator that reasonable accommodation measures are still lacking. The lack of gender-neutral restrooms contributes to a non-supportive, hostile or unwelcoming workplace environment, which reinforces feelings of exclusion and discrimination for the LGBT+ community. This reflects a failure in reasonable accommodation, as highlighted by Luiz and Terziev (2022), who found that many employers fail to consider LGBT+ employees' unique needs when implementing diversity and inclusion policies. Not using restrooms that align with their gender identity, they may experience heightened levels of anxiety, discomfort, and stress. This can be one of the initiatives which organisations can implement to reasonably accommodate the LGBT+ community in the workplace. Providing gender-neutral bathrooms demonstrates some level of commitment to inclusivity and respect for all employees' rights and identities. It helps create a safer and more supportive workplace environment, where everyone can feel comfortable, welcome and supported. Reasonable accommodation of LGBT+ employees is crucial for fostering a culture of equality, inclusivity, respect, and innovation (Alliston et al., 2020). Clark et al. (2022) confirm that when compared to heterosexual colleagues, the levels of inclusivity for LGBT+ employees were lower. IP2's experience shows that despite the implementation of pronouns, gender-neutral restrooms remain absent, reinforcing the idea that LGBT+ inclusivity is not prioritized in the same way as other diversity measures, such as wheelchair accessibility.

Luiz and Terziev's (2022) study points out that their research participants felt that in their workplace sexuality was not regarded in implementing diversity and inclusion policies. An employer's failure to regard LGBT+ employees' needs to make their workplace experiences better and positive explains how reasonable accommodation measures are not taken seriously by those organisations. However, implementing reasonable accommodation measures for the LGBT+ community in the workplace can assist in creating a more inclusive and supportive environment, ensuring that all employees feel supported, seen, heard, valued and respected.

Some measures that organisations can implement to reasonably accommodate LGBT+ employees include anti-discrimination policies, diversity and inclusion training throughout the organisation and at all levels, gender-neutral bathrooms, use of preferred names or pronouns and parental leave benefits. Webster et al. (2018) and King and Cortina (2010) present arguments to emphasise that the lack of legislation that protects LGBT+ individuals from

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bullying, discrimination, and harassment in the workplace is the reason for their negative experiences.

*The bathroom set up at work, from a reasonable accommodation point of view – there are no bathrooms that accommodate me as a gay man. I am not comfortable going to male toilets because I fear being accused of harassing someone while in those bathrooms. So being at work is sometimes uncomfortable from that point of view.~DP2*

Elias et al. (2018) noted that accessing bathrooms/restrooms in the workplace for LGBT+ employees is still a challenge as most organisations still have female and male restrooms only. Evidently, to date, this is still a challenge experienced by LGBT+ employees in the workplace.

Fullerton (2013) observes that some organisations have LGBT+ friendly policies that seek to promote diversity and inclusion, however, they are not LGBT+ friendly in practice. Similarly, Maji et al.'s (2023) findings indicate that most organisations in India have non-discriminatory policies in place, however, negative workplace experiences persist widely. This is because policies and practices are not adequate if the climate in the workplace is not LGBT+ supportive. Employees must be made aware of the support available to them and the channels or means to follow to address any unfavourable conditions in the workplace. Having LGBT+ friendly or diversity and inclusion policies alone is not enough if reasonable accommodation measures are not implemented in the workplace. Elias et al. (2018) in addition, emphasise the importance of organisations incorporating policy and awareness of the LGBT+ community's needs and existence in the workplace. For LGBT+ employees to have better and positive workplace experiences where they are considered, included and supported, organisations must take a step further and beyond policy documentation to implement initiatives that will promote diversity and inclusion of all. This will also bridge the gap that exists between policy and practice.

*No law forces my employer to reasonably accommodate me, the policies are general and not explicit about LGBT+ and the company does as they please.~DP4*

*There was a time when we had team building offsite. I remember very well when they were still in the planning phase and had to allocate accommodation which sleeps two people per room. I had no one to share with because I am gay, and they couldn't give me a room of my own (budget stories). My own team failed to accommodate me and*

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*respect my privacy. Luckily one of the ladies said she would share with me but that was a painful experience for me. ~IP5*

In the absence of policies on inclusion and reasonable accommodation of LGBT+ employees or the implementation of these, DEI efforts reflect an organisation's level of commitment and engagement to create a favourable workplace environment and experiences for its employees (Clark et al., 2022). Fostering an inclusive environment that reasonably accommodates LGBT+ employees is a moral and legal imperative and a strategic advantage in the competitive business landscape (Colgan et al., 2007).

Lloren and Parini (2017) state that when organisations effectively manage diversity, particularly of LGBT+ employees, it leads to a positive impact on their work experience. By implementing strategies to reduce discrimination and promote inclusivity, diversity management creates a more welcoming environment for LGBT employees.

Hossain et al.'s (2020) study reflects that organisations with diversity policies are more likely to experience higher levels of innovation and overall performance compared to those that lack such policies. Moreover, continuous efforts to bridge the gap between policy and practice will foster inclusive workplace cultures, and providing robust support systems is essential for ensuring that LGBT+ employees are truly and consistently accommodated. Therefore, it could be said that a diverse, equitable and inclusive organisation benefits both the employer and employee as there are favourable outcomes for all parties (Edmans et al., 2023). When there are diversity management practices in a workplace, positive work attitudes are present (Yang & Konrad, 2011). Being an employer that is reasonably accommodating to LGBT+ individuals should not be seen as a favour, nice to have or ticking the box exercise (Fullerton, 2013). However, LGBT+ accommodating policies should be the right or fair thing to do and consistent with corporate values (Sears et al., 2011).

To bridge the gap between policy and lived experience, organisations must move beyond symbolic inclusivity efforts and implement practical, structural changes. Reasonable accommodation measures that can foster an inclusive and equitable workplace for LGBT+ employees include:

- Gender-Neutral Restrooms: ensuring safety and respect for all employees

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One of the most significant barriers to workplace inclusivity for LGBT+ employees, particularly transgender and non-binary individuals, is the lack of gender-neutral restrooms. Traditional male and female restrooms reinforce binary gender norms, which exclude those who do not identify strictly as male or female. This has psychological and emotional impacts, LGBT+ employees who do not feel comfortable using gendered restrooms often experience anxiety, stress, and discomfort, which may lead to reduced focus and productivity at work. Some may even avoid using the restroom entirely, which can negatively impact their health and well-being. LGBT+ employees who do not conform to gender norms may fear being questioned, harassed, or even physically harmed when using gendered restrooms. This creates a hostile work environment that affects their sense of belonging and job satisfaction.

- Implementation strategies for gender-neutral restrooms include converting existing single-occupancy restrooms into gender-neutral facilities with clear signage. Ensuring that new workplace designs include gender-neutral restroom facilities. Normalising discussions around gender-neutral restrooms through employee awareness programs.
- Mandatory diversity and inclusion training, addressing unconscious bias at all levels of the organisation. Even when anti-discrimination policies exist, unconscious biases can persist in workplace culture, interactions, and decision-making. Diversity and inclusion training is essential for addressing implicit biases and fostering a respectful and inclusive work environment.
- Clear anti-discrimination policies that are strictly enforced by HR and leadership. Workplace policies play a crucial role in protecting LGBT+ employees from discrimination, harassment, and bias. However, policies alone are not enough they must be enforced to be effective.
- Equal opportunities for career growth, ensuring that LGBT+ employees are not overlooked for promotions. Many LGBT+ employees experience career stagnation due to biases in promotions and leadership opportunities. Some fear that coming out in the workplace may negatively impact their career progression. Research indicates that LGBT+ employees are underrepresented in senior leadership roles due to bias in promotion decisions. Organisations must actively work to ensure equal access to leadership opportunities.
- Psychological support programs, offering mental health resources tailored to the needs of LGBT+ employees. LGBT+ employees often experience heightened stress, anxiety,



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and depression due to workplace discrimination, social stigma, or exclusion.

Psychological support programs are essential in promoting mental well-being.

### **5.3.2.1 Summary of the findings related to Research Question 2**

The findings related to Research Question 2 indicate that reasonable accommodation measures are not fully implemented. The SA telecommunication industry is not using diversity and inclusion as a tool for reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community in the workplace. The literature reviewed and discussed provided insight into the benefits of diversity and inclusion of LGBT+ employees for both the employer and employee. One research participant indicated that their workplace experiences are positive, there are adequate reasonable accommodation measures in the workplace, and diversity and inclusion are taken seriously.

The majority of the research participants expressed that their workplaces are not doing enough to reasonably accommodate them or be diverse, inclusive, supportive and welcoming. Organisations with supportive workplace environments reduce the stress and anxiety associated with discrimination, allowing LGBT+ employees to be authentic and bring their true selves to work as there is a safe space for them to do so. Organisations that cultivate such positive experiences can build a reputation as inclusive and equitable employers, attracting top talent and fostering loyalty among their employees.

The reasonable accommodation measures outlined above are critical for ensuring that LGBT+ employees feel valued, respected, and included in the workplace. While diversity policies and symbolic gestures (such as pronouns in email signatures) are important, they must be accompanied by structural and cultural changes that actively address the lived experiences of LGBT+ employees. By implementing measures such as gender-neutral restrooms, diversity training, strict anti-discrimination enforcement, career growth opportunities, and psychological support programs, organisations can move toward genuine inclusivity and equitable workplace environments where all employees can thrive.

### **5.3.3 Research Question 3: Organisational culture enables the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry**

The findings relating to organisational culture as an enabler for diversity and inclusion in the workplace revealed both negative and positive aspects. Some of the research participants indicated that their organisations do show commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The majority stated that diversity and inclusion policies are in place, however, the organisational culture does not reflect the same. An organisational culture that promotes diversity and inclusion of LGBT+ employees is built on a foundation of respect, where policies and practices are explicitly designed and implemented to recognise the community's unique differences and value their diversity. Where the organisational culture enables the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees, anti-discrimination policies are rigorously enforced, and diversity training is regularly provided to educate employees about LGBT+ issues and inclusivity, fostering a culture of understanding and allyship.

Hewlett and Sumberg (2011) indicate that an organisational culture that promotes diversity, equity and inclusion is beneficial for employees. LGBT+ employees who do not have to conceal their identity at work feel included and part of the organisation, and do not fear being discriminated against or harassed based on their sexuality; they are more productive as opposed to when in non-inclusive and diverse organisations. Sears et al.'s (2021) findings confirm that an organisational culture plays a role in how LGBT+ employees are treated in the workplace. They noted that 67.5% of their research participants reported that the workplace culture was negative for them as they continued to be made fun of or called by certain derogatory words for being members of the LGBT+ community. Clark et al. (2022) adds that considering recent events which have resulted in a shift in policy and public opinions about the LGBT+ community, there are expectations for employers to be more inclusive and develop strategies that include LGBT+ employees in the overall organisational culture and improve their workplace experiences. Schein (2010), Ahmady et al. (2016) and Trice and Beyer (1993) alluded that organisational culture can be a powerful tool in the workplace when used for common flexibility, guidelines, and identity purposes. Organisational culture as a tool can foster supportive workplace environments that are diverse, inclusive and discrimination-free.

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Bonaventura and Biondo (2016) and Hossain et al. (2020) indicate that hostility towards LGBT+ employees prevents them from performing their core functions, negatively affects their performance and impacts their overall workplace experiences.

The participant elaborated that in their workplace they have provisioned gender-neutral restrooms, however, the change came at a squabble and was not an easy transition. ~IP2

*We have LGBT+ support and network groups and I think allyship too but I haven't observed any progress with the internal network regarding LGBT+ and strongly believe that the progression is slow, the only time there was ever any movement or talk was during pride month, the whole year nothing is said or done.~IP5*

As Schein (2010) explains, organisational culture is deeply shaped by the underlying assumptions and beliefs held by its members. These assumptions, often ingrained over time, can become so deeply rooted that they limit the ability to accept behaviours or identities that deviate from the group's conventional views. In this context, individuals' attitudes toward the LGBT+ community may not necessarily be driven by cultural or religious frameworks, but rather by personal choices, individual beliefs, or misconceptions about gender identity and sexuality (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). These deeply ingrained beliefs can significantly influence how LGBT+ employees are perceived and treated in the workplace. Some people's views, attitudes, or perceptions toward the LGBT+ community are not always based on cultural or religious beliefs; instead, they often arise from individual choices and perceptions regarding gender identity and sexuality (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019).

*I've had instances where I recall asking my direct manager one day after we had a disagreement why he behaves the way he does towards me or treats me differently and I remember very well his response, he said to me being gay is a sin and he will not condone sin in the workplace. that made me realise how they use religion when it favours them.~IP6*

In the case of IP6, the response from the manager, who openly stated that being gay is a sin, exemplifies how personal beliefs can shape interactions in the workplace. Such attitudes are not only disrespectful but also directly contribute to a hostile work environment. In this instance, the manager's statement reflects the use of religion as a justification for discriminatory behaviour, which undermines the organisation's DEI policies and further isolates LGBT+

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employees. Regular training sessions to educate all employees about LGBT+ issues are required to avoid unconscious bias and harassment. People in management and leadership roles must be trained on how to manage diverse groups, be conscious of their behaviour and promote diversity and inclusion instead of making statements such as “being gay is a sin”. Training managers are essential in understanding and respecting LGBT+ employees and can help with better and more effective communication.

The implication of these findings is that while diversity and inclusion policies might be in place, the organisational culture must align with these policies in practice. An organisational culture that promotes the inclusion of LGBT+ employees is not only about creating policies that are supportive but also about creating an environment that enforces respect for diversity at every level. If the organisational culture fails to align with this, employees will continue to experience exclusion, discrimination, or microaggressions, as seen in the case of IP6, where personal biases and misconceptions about sexuality are left unchecked.

A key point that is highlighted is that organisational culture plays a crucial role in determining whether LGBT+ employees feel accepted, respected, and valued. When organisational culture fosters inclusion, it does so by actively challenging harmful beliefs and fostering acceptance of LGBT+ employees as equals. However, when personal biases go unchecked, as in the case of IP6's manager, the culture can create barriers to effective inclusion, leading to a toxic environment where employees feel marginalized or even unsafe.

### **5.3.3.1 Summary of findings related to Research Question 3**

The findings related to Research Question 3 indicate that organisational culture is a critical element in fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace for LGBT+ employees. The participants who shared that organisational culture promotes and supports inclusion in the workplace also shared how conducive and great it is to work in such environments. One mentioned that they do not feel the need to conceal their sexuality as no one cares about them being gay, they are happy and contribute positively to the team and organisation. Organisational culture consistently shows that promoting diversity and inclusion leads to numerous benefits for both employees and the organisation. The participants noted that although some of the organisations

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in the SA telecommunications industry are making strides towards creating a culture that promotes diversity and inclusion for all, there is still a large number of organisations that are not putting efforts or any noticeable changes. Therefore, organisations must prioritize ongoing training, leadership accountability, and policy enforcement to create a truly diverse and inclusive environment. Addressing the underlying cultural assumptions and beliefs within organisations will be key to fostering workplaces where all employees, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, can feel safe, respected, and valued.

### 5.4 Summary

The findings and discussion chapter synthesised the rich, qualitative data obtained from the participants, offering a detailed and critical examination of the lived experiences of LGBT employees. This analysis and discussions not only contribute to the academic discourse but also provide actionable insights for organisations striving to create more inclusive and supportive environments for their diverse workforce. A lot still needs to be done to bridge the gap that exists between policy and practice. Organisations must have plans in place to promote the inclusion of LGBT+ employees in the workplace and how they will implement initiatives that support this discourse. Some participants mentioned that they believe that the organisations have diversity and inclusion policies just to be seen as inclusive while in practice they are not.

South Africa has made notable progress in promoting LGBT+ rights through its progressive legal frameworks and constitution. It was among the first countries to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in its Constitution, and it has enacted several supportive laws, such as the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act and the Civil Union Act. Despite this robust legal foundation, the implementation and effectiveness of these laws and policies in workplaces vary significantly. While some organisations have developed comprehensive policies to protect and support LGBT+ employees, others lag in both policy creation and enforcement.

This study found that LGBT+ employees in the SA telecommunications industry are still challenged in the workplace. They do not have workplaces with environments that allow them

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to be themselves without fear of being subjected to any form of discrimination, harassment or exclusion. Their workplaces are not fully diverse and inclusive.

This study contributes to knowledge by providing an understanding of the workplace experiences of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry. It highlights persistent challenges such as discrimination, microaggressions, and limited career advancement opportunities despite existing legal protections. The study also uncovers the role of organisational culture in shaping inclusive or exclusionary workplace environments. Additionally, it offers insights into best practices for fostering diversity, including the need for stronger policies, leadership commitment, and employee support networks. By bridging the gap between legal frameworks and lived experiences, this research informs more effective inclusion strategies in the industry.

## **CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this section, the conclusion of the findings, recommendations, and contributions are discussed in detail. This study has investigated the workplace experiences of those who identify as LGBT+ in the South African telecommunications industry. The results offer insight into how diversity and inclusion measures are unmet. In conclusion, after unpacking the workplace experiences of those who identify as LGBT+, it is evident that South African workplaces have to make a greater effort to make the workplace a safe space that is an inclusive and welcoming environment for LGBT+ employees. The government, employers, trade unions, and society all have an integral role to play in creating inclusive and safe spaces for the LGBT+ community.

### **6.2 Conclusion**

#### **6.2.1 Summary of Chapter 1**

Chapter One introduced the rationale of the study, including an overview of the research background and the problem statement. Key concepts central to the study were briefly outlined and discussed alongside the study's objectives, purpose, and research questions. To contextualise the concept of LGBT+, a concise explanation of relevant terms and their significance to the LGBT+ community was provided. Additionally, the chapter outlined the study's context, highlighting its intended empirical, theoretical, and practical contributions. The scope and delimitations of the study were also addressed, emphasising the ethical commitment to avoid harm.

#### **6.2.2 Summary of Chapter 2**

Chapter Two presented a comprehensive literature review, examining existing research and theoretical perspectives on the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees. The review integrated queer and institutional theories as conceptual frameworks to guide the study and data collection process. It also highlighted how the findings can inform management practices to improve the inclusion of diverse employees and proposed additional concepts to enhance

the theoretical framework for similar studies. The chapter concluded with a brief overview of the research methodology, outlining its selection and relevance to the study.

### **6.2.3 Summary of Chapter 3**

Chapter Three detailed the research methodology, which was based on a qualitative research approach, providing a thorough justification for its suitability in addressing the research objectives and questions. The chapter offered a transparent overview of the research process followed, emphasising rigour and clarity. Key aspects such as the research design, methods, paradigm, and ethical considerations were discussed, with explanations for the selection of each approach. This qualitative methodological framework was carefully outlined to demonstrate how it effectively facilitated the answering of the study's research questions.

### **6.2.4 Summary of Chapter 4**

Chapter Four presented and discussed the findings related to the study's research questions in detail. The analysis of data from reflective diaries and semi-structured interviews revealed significant challenges faced by LGBT+ employees in the workplace. Participants described their workplace experiences as depressive and hostile, citing incidents of discrimination, harassment, and lack of action by HR when incidents were reported. Many employees resorted to resigning to escape these adverse conditions, highlighting unmet diversity and inclusion measures.

One participant shared that despite meeting performance targets for three consecutive years, they were denied a salary increase due to their manager's homophobia, with the manager explicitly threatening to make their life 'a living hell' if they did not resign. The findings also revealed that while the South African telecommunications industry has policies intended to accommodate LGBT+ employees, a significant gap exists between the documentation and the practical implementation of these policies. This gap leaves LGBT+ employees inadequately accommodated and unfairly treated in their workplaces.



### 6.2.5 Summary of Chapter 5

Chapter Five synthesised the rich qualitative data gathered from participants, providing a detailed and critical examination of the lived experiences of LGBT+ employees. This analysis not only enriches academic discourse but also offers actionable recommendations for organisations aiming to create more inclusive and supportive workplaces. The chapter highlighted the persistent gap between policy and practice, underscoring the need for organisations to develop and implement effective strategies to promote the inclusion and well-being of LGBT+ employees. Many participants expressed scepticism about the authenticity of organisational diversity and inclusion policies, perceiving them as performative rather than genuinely transformative.

The chapter also examined South Africa's progressive legal framework, which has been pivotal in advancing LGBT+ rights. As one of the first countries to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in its Constitution, South Africa has enacted laws such as the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act. However, despite this strong legal foundation, the effectiveness of these laws in workplace contexts varies. While some organisations have established robust policies to protect LGBT+ employees, others lag in both policy creation and enforcement, leaving significant room for improvement.

### 6.2.6 Summary of Research Objectives

In this section, the conclusions have been structured to directly align with the objectives of the study. The following table outlines how each objective has been addressed throughout the research, summarising the key findings and insights.

#### 6.2.6.1 Research Objective 1

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Research Objective | To investigate the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry                                                                                                                     |
| Research Finding   | The findings related to this research objective revealed a mixed range of workplace experiences for LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunications industry. While a few participants reported positive experiences on |

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|            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|            | <p>par with their heterosexual colleagues, the majority highlighted significant issues with diversity and inclusion measures. Many LGBT+ employees continue to face discrimination and harassment, with incidents of being named, shamed, and targeted because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Furthermore, participants noted a lack of action from HR and management, who failed to protect them or take appropriate disciplinary measures against those responsible for the mistreatment. These findings suggest that a high degree of discrimination and harassment remains prevalent in the industry, with some organisations failing to provide adequate protection for LGBT+ employees.</p> |
| Conclusion | <p>The findings indicate that formal policies within the South African telecommunications industry are insufficient to address the workplace challenges faced by LGBT+ employees. Although policies exist, they have not led to tangible improvements in creating safer and more inclusive work environments. Many participants reported exclusion from growth opportunities and a lack of recognition for high performance. This underscores the need for not only comprehensive policies but also their effective implementation to foster more supportive and equitable workplaces for LGBT+ individuals.</p>                                                                                                    |

### 6.2.6.2 Research Objective 2

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Research Objective | <p>To evaluate how diversity and inclusion can be used as tools or agents for the reasonable accommodation of the LGBT+ community within the SA telecommunication industry</p> |
| Research Finding   | <p>The findings related to research objective 2 reveal that reasonable accommodation measures for LGBT+</p>                                                                    |

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|            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|            | <p>employees are not fully implemented within the SA telecommunications industry. Although the literature review highlighted the benefits of diversity and inclusion for both employers and employees, the majority of research participants reported that their workplaces fail to adequately use diversity and inclusion initiatives as tools for reasonable accommodation. While one participant described a positive experience with effective accommodation and a commitment to diversity, the majority expressed that their workplaces lack sufficient support, inclusivity, and a welcoming atmosphere. This suggests that many organisations are not prioritising the creation of environments that allow LGBT+ employees to thrive authentically.</p>                                             |
| Conclusion | <p>The findings indicate that organisations in the SA telecommunications industry are not doing enough to reasonably accommodate LGBT+ employees or foster diverse and inclusive workplaces. When diversity and inclusion are genuinely embraced, organisations can create safe spaces that reduce the stress and anxiety often associated with discrimination. Such positive workplace environments enable LGBT+ employees to be authentic and contribute to a supportive atmosphere. Organisations that cultivate these inclusive practices can enhance their reputation as equitable employers, attracting top talent and fostering employee loyalty. This highlights the need for more intentional and effective implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives to support LGBT+ employees.</p> |

### 6.2.6.3 Research Objective 3

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Research Objective | To assess whether organisational culture enables the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunication industry                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Research Finding   | The findings related to research objective 3 suggest that organisational culture plays a critical role in facilitating the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees in the workplace. Participants who reported positive workplace experiences highlighted the supportive nature of organisational cultures that promote diversity and inclusion. One participant noted that they felt comfortable being open about their sexuality without fear of discrimination, contributing positively to the team and the organisation. These findings reinforce the idea that a good organisational culture focused on diversity and inclusion provides significant benefits for both employees and the organisation. However, while some organisations in the SA telecommunications industry have made progress in fostering inclusive cultures, many others have yet to implement noticeable efforts or changes. |
| Conclusion         | The findings indicate that a supportive organisational culture is essential for the successful inclusion of LGBT+ employees in the workplace. When organisations prioritise diversity and inclusion, they create environments where employees feel safe to be authentic, contributing positively to team dynamics and organisational success. Although some SA telecommunications companies are making strides toward cultivating inclusive cultures, there remains a considerable gap, with many organisations failing to take significant steps in this direction. This highlights the need for more widespread and sustained efforts to build and nurture                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

|  |                                                                                  |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | organisational cultures that genuinely support the inclusion of LGBT+ employees. |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### 6.2.7 Study conclusion

The study's findings have broader implications for promoting diversity and inclusion within the workplace. By highlighting the lived experiences of LGBT+ employees and the impact of organisational culture on their professional lives, this research underscored the importance of creating workplaces that not only recognise but actively celebrate diversity, equity and inclusion for all. This study can catalyse change, encouraging organisations to implement policies and strategies that support LGBT+ employees' well-being, reasonable accommodation and career development. Ultimately, the research aimed to contribute to a more inclusive society where diversity, equity and inclusion are valued, and all individuals have the opportunity to thrive in their professional lives.

This study has provided a comprehensive examination of the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities they encounter in various organisations. Through the use of reflective diary journaling and semi-structured interviews, the research has uncovered key themes related to workplace experiences, such as the importance of diversity and inclusion, the impact of organisational culture, reasonable accommodation and the strategies LGBT+ employees use to navigate their workplace environments. The findings highlight the ongoing need for more diversity and inclusive policies and practices to support the inclusion, well-being and career development of LGBT+ individuals in the workplace.

The study has also demonstrated the value of employing both queer theory and institutional theory as conceptual frameworks to understand the complexities of LGBT+ employees' experiences. Queer theory has provided insights into the fluid and evolving nature of sexual orientation and gender identities, while institutional theory has helped to contextualise these experiences within the broader organisational structures and cultures. Together, these frameworks have offered a nuanced perspective that underscores the multifaceted nature of workplace inclusivity and the critical role that supportive organisational practices play in fostering a positive workplace environment for LGBT+ employees.

It is anticipated that the experiences shared by the research participants, along with the researcher's recommendations, will contribute to the advancement of LGBT+ rights and the enhancement of workplace experiences for LGBT+ individuals in South Africa.

### **6.3 Recommendations for South African organisations**

The third objective of this study assessed whether organisational culture fosters the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees within the South African telecommunications industry. This evaluation informs the recommendations by identifying the cultural barriers and enablers of diversity and inclusivity within organisations, specifically addressing the third research objective. Additionally, the recommendations are aligned with the conceptual framework, which integrates queer theory and institutional theory, emphasising the interconnected concepts of organisational culture, diversity and inclusion policies, workplace environment, and workplace experiences. Based on these insights and findings, the study proposes actionable strategies to reshape organisational culture, including policy enhancements, training programs, and initiatives to promote diversity, inclusivity and equity of LGBT+ employees. By addressing the third objective, the recommendations bridge the gap between existing practices and the ideal state of workplace inclusivity as articulated through both the empirical findings and the theoretical constructs of the study. The following recommendations are proposed to enhance the diversity, inclusion and support for LGBT+ employees in the workplace:

#### **➤ Develop and implement diversity and inclusive policies**

This recommendation aligns with the concept of **diversity and inclusion policies** in the conceptual framework. Organisations should establish clear and comprehensive anti-discrimination policies that explicitly protect LGBT+ employees such policies address structural barriers identified through the institutional theory. The policies should be communicated effectively and enforced consistently to ensure a safe and supportive work environment. The policies should also be clear about what disciplinary action will be taken against those who continue to discriminate, harass or violate LGBT+ employees. Additionally, these policies challenge traditional norms, consistent with queer theory, by promoting inclusivity and ensuring fair treatment for all employees.

➤ **Regularly assess the workplace environment**

Aligned with the concept of the **workplace environment**, this recommendation emphasizes the importance of feedback mechanisms to evaluate diversity, equity and inclusion. Drawing on institutional theory, organisations must conduct regular assessments of the workplace environment through surveys and focus groups which can help identify areas of improvement and track progress over time. Feedback from LGBT+ employees should be actively sought and incorporated into action plans.

➤ **Support employee network groups**

This recommendation supports the concept of **organisational culture** within the conceptual framework. Encouraging the formation and active participation of LGBT+ employee networks and allyship groups can provide a sense of community and support within the workplace. These groups can also serve as valuable platforms for advocacy and feedback on policies and practices. Furthermore, encouraging LGBT+ employee networks fosters a sense of belonging and reflects a diverse and inclusive culture. Queer theory's emphasis on creating spaces for individual identity expression is evident here, as these groups provide platforms for advocacy and support.

➤ **Promote a diverse and inclusive culture**

Aligned with **organisational culture** and **diversity and inclusion policies**, this recommendation focuses on raising awareness and reducing biases, which are critical for fostering inclusivity. Cultivating a diverse, equitable and inclusive organisation requires ongoing efforts to raise awareness and promote understanding of LGBT+ issues. This can be achieved through diversity training programmes, workshops, and events that celebrate and recognise the contributions of LGBT+ employees in the workplace. The combination of queer theory (deconstructing norms) and institutional theory (addressing structural changes) informs the approach to embedding diversity into the culture through training and recognition of LGBT+ contributions.

➤ **Provide training for management and leaders**

This recommendation directly aligns with **organisational culture** and the **workplace environment**. Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping organisational culture. Therefore, training for managers and leaders on LGBT+ inclusivity, unconscious bias, and effective allyship supports structural change (institutional theory) while encouraging an inclusive workplace that respects individual identities (queer theory). Effective leadership ensures that cultural shifts toward inclusivity are both intentional and sustainable.

➤ **Ensure confidential and accessible reporting mechanisms**

This recommendation is aligned to the **workplace environment** and **workplace experiences**. Establishing confidential and accessible channels for reporting discrimination, violation or harassment is essential and ensures that employees feel safe addressing issues of discrimination or harassment, which is critical for fostering a supportive work environment. Queer theory's focus on dismantling norms that perpetuate harm is addressed here, alongside institutional theory's emphasis on structural accountability.

These recommendations are grounded in the conceptual framework that integrates queer and institutional theories. By addressing key elements such as diversity and inclusion policies, organisational culture, workplace environment, and workplace experiences, they offer a multidimensional approach to fostering inclusivity for LGBT+ employees. This alignment ensures that each recommendation not only addresses the immediate challenges faced by LGBT+ employees but also contributes to creating systemic and cultural change within organisations.

## **6.4 Recommendations for future research**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for future researchers studying the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees:

➤ **Comparative studies across different contexts**

Comparative research that examines LGBT+ workplace experiences across different industries, and organisational types can highlight contextual factors that influence



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inclusivity. This will help identify best practices and culturally specific strategies for supporting LGBT+ employees.

### ➤ **Impact of organisational interventions**

Investigating the effectiveness of specific organisational interventions, such as diversity training programmes, inclusive policy implementation, and the presence of LGBT+ employee resource groups, can provide evidence-based recommendations for improving workplace diversity and inclusion.

### ➤ **Intersectionality**

Future studies should adopt an intersectional approach to explore how multiple aspects of identity (such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, and disability) intersect and impact the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees. This can provide a richer understanding of the unique challenges faced by those with intersecting identities.

### ➤ **Expand the scope of populations studied**

Future research should aim to include a broader and more diverse range of LGBT+ identities, including non-binary, genderqueer, and other underrepresented groups within the LGBT+ community such as transgender. This can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the varied experiences and challenges faced by different subgroups.

### ➤ **Longitudinal studies**

Conducting longitudinal studies can provide insights into how the experiences of LGBT+ employees evolve over time and in response to changing organisational policies and societal attitudes. This can help to identify long-term trends and the impact of specific interventions on workplace inclusivity.

### ➤ **Quantitative and mixed methods approach**

Incorporating quantitative and mixed methods designs can complement qualitative insights and provide a more holistic understanding of LGBT+ workplace experiences. Surveys, statistical analysis, and mixed methods research can help to validate findings and generalise results to larger populations.

➤ **Policy analysis**

Analysing the impact of national and local policies on LGBT+ workplace diversity and inclusivity can provide insights into how legal and regulatory frameworks support or hinder LGBT+ rights in the workplace. Comparative policy analysis can highlight effective legislative approaches.

➤ **Employee well-being and mental health**

Future research should focus on the mental health and overall well-being of LGBT+ employees, exploring how workplace environments contribute to stress, job satisfaction, and psychological resilience. This can inform strategies to support the holistic well-being of LGBT individuals.

By addressing these areas, future researchers can build on the current study's findings and contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of LGBT+ workplace experiences. This, in turn, can inform more effective strategies for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in various organisational contexts.

## **6.5 Research contributions**

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on workplace diversity and inclusion by evaluating how these principles can serve as effective tools for the reasonable accommodation of LGBT+ employees within the SA telecommunications industry. This aligns with the second objective, which examines the practical application and impact of diversity and inclusion initiatives. By addressing this objective, the study provides actionable insights for organisations to foster more equitable and inclusive environments, bridging the gap between policy and practice in the workplace. Furthermore, the study offers practical contributions to organisations and theoretical contributions to academia and future research.

### **6.5.1 Practical contributions**

The study has the following practical contributions:

➤ **Enhanced workplace policies:**

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The study provides empirical evidence that can be used by HR professionals and organisational leaders to develop and implement more inclusive workplace policies. This includes anti-discrimination policies, diversity training programmes, and support mechanisms tailored to the needs of LGBT+ employees.

- Clear anti-discrimination policies that explicitly prohibit discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, race, disability, and other protected characteristics.
- Raise awareness about the policies and conduct ongoing diversity training throughout the organisation.

### ➤ **Improved organisational culture**

Insights from the research can help organisations foster a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture that is reasonably accommodating. The identification of key themes, such as workplace experiences, diversity and inclusion, and organisational culture can guide initiatives aimed at creating a more welcoming environment for LGBT+ employees. Organisations can address the following aspects to improve the workplace culture:

- Ensuring that leaders actively champion diversity and inclusion initiatives.
- Encourage open discussions about inclusion and diversity in team meetings.

### ➤ **Support for mental health and well-being**

By highlighting the specific challenges faced by LGBT+ employees, the study provides a basis for developing targeted mental health and well-being initiatives. Organisations can implement programmes and provide resources that address the unique stressors and needs of LGBT individuals, this can be achieved through promoting an environment where employees feel safe to express concerns.

### ➤ **Leadership training and development**

The study underscores the need for training programmes that equip managers and leaders with the skills to support LGBT+ employees effectively. This includes training on unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, and allyship, which can enhance managerial effectiveness and employee satisfaction. Additionally, encourage leadership training on fostering an inclusive culture.

➤ **Employee network groups**

The findings highlight the importance of networks and allyship groups in providing support and advocacy for LGBT+ employees. Organisations can use this information to establish or strengthen networks, ensuring they have the resources and backing needed to be effective.

### 6.5.2 Theoretical contributions

The study makes the following theoretical contributions:

➤ **Integration of queer theory and institutional theory**

The study advances theoretical understanding by integrating queer theory and institutional theory to explore LGBT+ workplace experiences. Queer theory's focus on the fluidity and socially constructed nature of identities, combined with institutional theory's examination of organisational norms and structures, provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the complexities of LGBT+ experiences in the workplace.

➤ **Empirical validation of theoretical constructs:**

The study provides empirical validation for several theoretical constructs related to LGBT+ workplace experiences, such as the role of organisational culture, the impact of inclusive policies, and the significance of social support networks. This empirical grounding enhances the credibility and applicability of these theoretical constructs.

➤ **Framework for future research:**

The integration of queer theory and institutional theory offers a robust framework for future research on LGBT+ workplace experiences. This theoretical foundation can guide subsequent studies in exploring various dimensions of inclusivity, identity, and organisational culture, promoting a deeper understanding of how to create more diverse and inclusive workplaces.

The practical contributions of this study offer actionable insights and strategies for organisations to enhance their diversity, inclusivity and support for LGBT+ employees. The

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theoretical contributions enrich the academic discourse by integrating and advancing key theoretical frameworks, providing a solid foundation for future research. Together, these contributions help bridge the gap between theory and practice, fostering more inclusive and supportive workplace environments for LGBT+ employees.

### 6.5.3 Summary of the body of knowledge contributions

This study contributes to the new body of knowledge in several significant ways, particularly through the conceptual framework that integrates key dimensions like diversity and inclusion policies, organisational culture, work environment, and workplace experiences. The table below outlines the key contributions.

**Table 6.1 Body of knowledge contributions**

|                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bridging Policy-Practice Gaps       | <p>The study highlights the disconnect between the existence of diversity and inclusion policies and their practical implementation in SA telecommunications organisations. By examining these gaps through the conceptual framework, the research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides empirical evidence of how policies often fail to translate into meaningful change for LGBT+ employees.</li><li>• Proposes actionable insights for improving the alignment between policies and workplace realities, contributing to organisational best practices.</li></ul> |
| Advancing Theoretical Understanding | <p>Through the integration of <b>queer theory</b> and <b>institutional theory</b> within the conceptual framework, the study offers a novel perspective by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using <b>queer theory</b> to challenge traditional workplace norms and highlight the systemic marginalisation of LGBT+ employees.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

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|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applying <b>institutional theory</b> to understand how organisational structures and cultures shape, reinforce, or hinder diversity and inclusion. This dual-theoretical approach enriches academic discourse by expanding the use of these theories in the context of workplace diversity and inclusion.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Expanding the Conceptual Framework | <p>The conceptual framework synthesises four critical elements - <b>diversity and inclusion policies, organisational culture, work environment, and workplace experiences</b> to provide a holistic understanding of LGBT+ employees' challenges and opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By focusing on these interconnected dimensions, the framework offers a structured way to examine inclusivity issues across different industries and contexts, making it adaptable for future research.</li> <li>The framework serves as a foundation for assessing how organisational culture and environmental factors influence the lived experiences of employees, bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and practical applications.</li> </ul> |
| Empirical Contributions            | <p>The study's qualitative approach provides rich, contextual insights into the lived experiences of LGBT+ employees in the SA telecommunications industry, which were previously underexplored. Specifically, it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlights the role of <b>organisational culture</b> in either promoting or hindering inclusion.</li> <li>Identifies key barriers, such as workplace harassment, policy gaps, and a lack of managerial accountability, contributing to the understanding of systemic challenges faced by LGBT+ employees.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                        |

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|                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers real-world examples of successful inclusion practices, which can inform organisational strategies and improve workplace inclusivity.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Practical Implications for Organisations | <p>The research provides a practical roadmap for organisations to create more inclusive workplaces by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasising the importance of embedding inclusivity into organisational culture rather than relying solely on policies.</li> <li>• Demonstrating how supportive work environments can improve employee well-being, authenticity, and performance, thereby benefiting both employees and organisations.</li> <li>• Offering evidence-based recommendations for reasonable accommodation measures, which can help organisations position themselves as inclusive employers.</li> </ul> |

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by addressing a critical gap in understanding the workplace experiences of LGBT+ employees in the SA telecommunications industry. Through the lens of the conceptual framework, it advances theoretical discourse, provides actionable insights for practice, and offers a scalable model for assessing and improving inclusivity in diverse organisational contexts. This integrated approach positions the study as a foundational reference for researchers and practitioners aiming to foster equitable and supportive workplaces.

## **6.6 Application of Reflexivity**

This study was motivated by my personal and professional commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion in the workplace. As a member of the senior management team, I actively champion diversity, inclusion, and equity for all individuals in the workplace. As a researcher, I recognise that my perspective on these issues may have influenced the framing of the research questions. To mitigate this, I sought to focus the study in the existing literature and prioritised participants' voices to ensure the findings reflect their lived realities. Reflexivity was a focal component of this study, consistent with the interpretive and qualitative research approach. It facilitated critical reflection on how my positionality, experiences, and assumptions influenced the research process and the interpretation of findings.

As a researcher, my position shaped by my awareness of diversity and inclusion issues in the workplace had a significant influence on this study. While this awareness provided insight into the challenges faced by the LGBT+ community, it also necessitated constant vigilance to ensure that my biases did not overshadow participants' voices.

Engaging with participants' deeply personal narratives about workplace discrimination and inclusion profoundly impacted my understanding of the systemic challenges faced by the LGBT+ community. These experiences deepened my commitment to highlighting the gap between policy and practice and informed the nuanced interpretation of the findings. During the semi-structured interviews, I was mindful of creating a safe space for participants to share their experiences authentically. However, I also recognised that my role as a researcher, coupled with the sensitive nature of the topic, could have influenced how participants articulated their thoughts and feelings. Regular journaling and discussions with fellow researchers, peers and supervisor helped mitigate these potential influences.

Reflexivity played a crucial role in adapting the study design, particularly in refining interview questions to ensure they were both inclusive and respectful of participants' identities. This iterative process enhanced the depth and richness of the data collected, contributing to the study's overall credibility. While analysing the reflective diaries, I noticed a tendency to focus more heavily on narratives that aligned with my preconceived notions of workplace discrimination. Recognising this bias, I revisited the data with a more open perspective, ensuring that the analysis captured the full spectrum of participants' experiences.



## **6.7 Researcher's reflective journey**

It all began as a dream, conversations between friends about what each wanted to achieve in life. I've always been a very motivated scholar throughout my academic life. However, I never imagined that my love for education would lead me to such a challenging yet exciting path. The decision to pursue a PhD was not taken lightly; it represents a culmination of years of academic passion and a desire to contribute meaningfully to the school of knowledge. As I write this and reflect on the journey, I am overwhelmed, one cannot believe that it has come to this moment. A journey I could never imagine would be tough yet enjoyable, I am finding it quite difficult to even put it into words or describe the feeling.

From the moment I submitted my application for a PhD program, I embarked on a journey that would redefine my understanding of research, perseverance, and personal growth. The decision to pursue a PhD in Management was both daunting and exhilarating. It represented not just a step forward in my academic career, but a commitment to exploring the frontiers of knowledge in a field I am deeply passionate about.

Upon receiving the acceptance letter, a wave of excitement and responsibility washed over me. I knew that this was not just an opportunity to advance my career, but a chance to make a meaningful contribution to my discipline. As I began to delve into the literature and formulate my research questions, the enormity of the task ahead became apparent. Choosing a supervisor, refining my research scope, and navigating the complexities of academic rigour became my daily pursuits.

The proposal defence was a pivotal moment for me. Months of meticulous research and preparation culminated in a room filled with esteemed scholars probing the depths of my ideas. It was a test of not only my knowledge but also my resilience and confidence in the significance of my research. Presenting before the committee, I defended my ideas with conviction, bolstered by the support of my supervisor and peers who believed in the potential impact of my work.

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The journey was not without its challenges. There were moments of self-doubt, setbacks in data collection, and revisions that felt endless. However, each hurdle strengthened my resolve to see this journey through. The late nights spent poring over data, the collaborative discussions that sparked new insights, and the camaraderie with fellow researchers all shaped my growth as a scholar.

Today, as I am about to submit a completed thesis, I am filled with a profound sense of accomplishment and gratitude. This document represents more than just the culmination of years of research; it embodies the lessons learned, the friendships forged, and the intellectual transformation that has shaped me into a researcher capable of contributing meaningfully to the school of knowledge.

Looking back on this journey, I am struck by how far I've come; from the uncertainty of that initial application to the confidence with which I now present my findings. The PhD has been a journey of self-discovery, pushing me to explore the boundaries of knowledge and challenging me to think critically and creatively.

As I close this chapter and contemplate the road ahead, I am humbled by the support of my supervisor, the encouragement of my peers, and the unwavering belief of my loved ones. This journey has been both a solitary pursuit and a collaborative effort, reminding me of the power of community in academic pursuit.

While this thesis marks the end of one chapter, it also signals the beginning of new possibilities and contributions to academia. The PhD journey has been transformative, shaping not only my career but also my identity as a scholar dedicated to advancing knowledge and making a difference in the world. I look forward to applying the skills and insights gained during my PhD to future research endeavours, embracing the opportunity to contribute to the academic community and address pressing challenges. This journey has reinforced my passion for research and my commitment to lifelong learning; an enduring legacy of my time as a PhD candidate. Here I am, extremely proud of myself, my hard work and dedication to seeing it through. I made it, we made it!

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See you at graduation!!!

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**Appendix A: Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 - Chapter  
2: Bill of Rights (9. Equality):**

1. Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.
2. Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.
3. The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.
4. No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection  
(3). National legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination.
5. Discrimination on one or more of the grounds listed in subsection  
(3) is unfair unless it is established that the discrimination is fair.

## **Appendix B: Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998**

### **The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 intends:**

- to provide for employment equity; and
- to provide for matters incidental thereto.

### **Purpose of this Act**

2. The purpose of this Act is to achieve equity in the workplace by-

- c) promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and
- d) implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, in order to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce.

### **Interpretation of this Act**

3. This Act must be interpreted-

- a) in compliance with the Constitution;
- b) so as to give effect to its purpose;
- c) taking into account any relevant code of good practice issued in terms of this Act or any other employment law; and
- d) in compliance with the international law obligations of the Republic, in particular those contained in the International Labour Organisation Convention (No.111) concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation.

## **Chapter II: Prohibition of Unfair Discrimination**

### **Elimination of unfair discrimination**

5. Every employer must take steps to promote equal opportunity in the workplace by eliminating unfair discrimination in any employment policy or practice.

**Prohibition of unfair discrimination**

6. (1) No person may unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, against an employee. in any employment policy or practice, on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibility, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, HIV status, conscience, belief, political opinion, culture, language and birth.

(2) It is not unfair discrimination to-

(a) take affirmative action measures consistent with the purpose of this Act: or (b)distinguish. exclude or prefer any person on the basis of an inherent requirement of a job.

(3) Harassment of an employee is a form of unfair discrimination and is prohibited on anyone, or a combination of grounds of unfair discrimination listed in subsection (1).

## **Appendix C: Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997**

### **The Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 intends:**

- to give effect to the right to fair labour practices referred to in section 23(1) of the Constitution by establishing and making provision for the regulation of basic conditions of employment; and
- thereby to comply with the obligations of the Republic as a member state of the International Labour Organisation; and
- to provide for matters connected therewith.

### **Purpose of this Act**

2. The purpose of this Act is to advance economic development and social justice by fulfilling the primary objects of this Act which are—

- a) to give effect to and regulate the right to fair labour practices conferred by section 23(1) of the Constitution—
  - (i) by establishing and enforcing basic conditions of employment; and
  - (ii) by regulating the variation of basic conditions of employment;
- b) to give effect to obligations incurred by the Republic as a member state of the International Labour Organisation.

### **Application of this Act**

3. (1) This Act applies to all employees and employers except—

- a) members of the National Defence Force, the National Intelligence Agency and the South African Secret Service; and
- b) unpaid volunteers working for an organisation serving a charitable purpose.

(2) This Act applies to persons undergoing vocational training except to the extent that any term or condition of their employment is regulated by the provisions of any other law.

(3) This Act, except section 41, does not apply to persons employed on vessels at sea in respect of which the Merchant Shipping Act, 1951 (Act No. 57 of 1951), applies except to the extent provided for in a sectoral determination.

**Inclusion of provisions in contracts of employment**

4. A basic condition of employment constitutes a term of any contract of employment except to the extent that—

- a) any other law provides a term that is more favourable to the employee;
- b) the basic condition of employment has been replaced, varied, or excluded in accordance with the provisions of this Act; or
- c) term of the contract of employment is more favourable to the employee than the basic condition of employment.

**This Act not affected by agreements**

5. This Act or anything done under it takes precedence over any agreement, whether entered into before or after the commencement of this Act.

## **Appendix D: Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000**

The Equality Act, Act No. 4 of 2000

The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000  
intends:

- to give effect to section 9 read with item 23(1) of Schedule 6 to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, so as:
- to prevent and prohibit unfair discrimination and harassment;
- to promote equality and eliminate unfair discrimination;
- to prevent and prohibit hate speech; and
- to provide for matters connected therewith.

### **Chapter II: Prevention, Prohibition and Elimination of Unfair Discrimination, Hate Speech and Harassment**

#### **Prevention and general prohibition of unfair discrimination**

6. Neither the State nor any person may unfairly discriminate against any person.

#### **Prohibition of unfair discrimination on ground of gender**

8. Subject to Section 6, no person may unfairly discriminate against any person on the grounds of gender, including—
- a) gender-based violence;
  - b) female genital mutilation;
  - c) the system of preventing women from inheriting family property;
  - d) any practice, including traditional, customary or religious practice, which impairs the dignity of women and undermines equality between women and men, including the undermining of the dignity and well-being of the girl child;
  - e) any policy or conduct that unfairly limits access of women to land rights, finance, and other resources:



- f) discrimination on the ground of pregnancy;
- g) limiting women's access to social services or benefits, such as health. education and social security;
- h) the denial of access to opportunities, including access to services or contractual opportunities for rendering services for consideration, or failing to take steps to reasonably accommodate the needs of such persons;
- i) systemic inequality of access to opportunities by women as a result of the sexual division of labour.

### **Prohibition of harassment**

11. No person may subject any person to harassment.

## Appendix E: Participant's Consent Form



### Navigating diversity and inclusion in the South African telecommunications industry: an LGBT+ employee perspective

Xolile N. Sibande (2057505)

I, ....., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |     |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.                                                                                                                                   | YES | NO |
| I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study                                                                                                                                                      | YES | NO |
| I agree to participate in the diary journaling process for a month                                                                                                                                               | YES | NO |
| I agree that the interview may be audio recorded                                                                                                                                                                 | YES | NO |
| I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report/ manuscript/book chapter                                                                                 | YES | NO |
| I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report/manuscript/book chapter)                                                                | YES | NO |
| I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on | YES | NO |

..... (signature)  
..... (name of participant)  
..... (date)

..... (signature)  
..... (name of researcher/person seeking consent)  
..... (date)

## Appendix F: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

### Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

- What are your experiences as an LGBT+ employee within the telecommunication organisation that you work for?
  - Do you think that your workplace experiences differ from those who are non-LGBT+ employees, please explain.
  - In your opinion, should LGBT+ employees have a different workplace experience from non-LGBT+ employees, why would you say so?
  - In your view do you think that LGBT+ employees should or should not be reasonably accommodated in the workplace, please expand.
- How are diversity and inclusion used as tools or agents for the reasonable accommodation of LGBT+ employees within your organisation?
  - Are there diversity and inclusion policies that address LGBT+ in your organisation? Would you say that these are adequately implemented? Please explain.
  - How is your employer utilising diversity & inclusion as a tool to reasonably accommodate LGBT+ employees?
  - Do you think that your organisation is doing enough to reasonably accommodate the LGBT+? Please explain.
  - What is your view on how your organisation accommodates employees who identify as LGTB+?
- In your view, do you think organisational culture enables the seamless inclusion of LGBT+ employees?
  - In your opinion, do you think organisational culture plays a critical role in the inclusion of LGBT+ employees? Please elaborate.
  - Would you say that the current organisation's culture creates a favourable work environment for LBGT+ employees or not? Please explain.
  - In your opinion, do you think that the culture in an organisation influences how LGBT+ employees are managed? Please explain.

## Appendix G: Participant Information Sheet



### Participant Information Sheet

#### Navigating diversity and inclusion in the South African telecommunications industry: an LGBT+ employee perspective

Good day

My name is Xolile Sibande, I am a PhD in Management student at Wits Business School, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Jenika Gobind, I am conducting a research study about the workplace experiences of individuals who identify as LGBT+ to determine whether South African telecommunications organisations are reasonably accommodating to them and implementing diversity & inclusion policies.

I am inviting you to take part in a diary journaling activity for a month followed up by interview sessions until all the questions that may arise through the follow-ups have been answered. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last for about a month and a half. The diary journaling activity will be done at a time convenient to you daily for a month, journaling your daily work experiences as an employee who identifies as LGBT+, noting whether you are experiencing any privileges, benefits or discrimination due to your identity. Please detail how your colleagues, team or management treat you, is it the same or different from non-LGBT+ colleagues/employees? Please also detail how diversity and inclusion pan out for you as a member of the LGBT+ community as you navigate the workplace environment daily. The interview session(s) will be scheduled for 45 minutes and will take place at a place that is convenient to both the researcher and the participant, alternatively online.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in an encrypted hard drive for the duration of the study and deleted after 5 years. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

The diary and interview data will be confidential. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or any details that could identify you.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decided not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor at the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), by telephone at +27(0) 11 717 1408, email [hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za](mailto:hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za).

Yours sincerely,  
Xolile Sibande

## Appendix H: Ethics Clearance Certificate



Research Office

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**  
R14/49 Sibande

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H22/11/81**

**PROJECT TITLE**

Navigating diversity and inclusion in the South African  
telecommunications industry: an LGBT+ employee perspective

**INVESTIGATOR(S)**

Ms X Sibande

**SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT**

Wits Business School/

**DATE CONSIDERED**

25 November 2022

**DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE**

Approved  
Risk Level: Low

**EXPIRY DATE**

21 February 2026

**DATE** 22 February 2023

**CHAIRPERSON**

  
(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Dr J Gobind

**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)**

To be completed in duplicate and A SIGNED COPY returned to the Secretary electronically. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. I/we agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low Risk studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.

  
Signature

27 / 02 / 2023  
Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES