

[Excerpt translation from Japanese to English provided by Business & Human Rights Resource Centre.]

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## **“A happy workplace for minorities is a happy workplace for everyone”: Thinking about diversity and inclusion from the perspective of LGBTQ initiatives, 19 Dec 2019**

Many companies have been using the concept of “diversity and inclusion (D&I)” in their human resources strategy.

In October Huffington Post Japan sent a questionnaire to companies asking them about their D&I initiatives. In their responses, many human resources managers said they are struggling to embed D&I within their organizations.

They reported that D&I initiatives in their companies are left on the backburner...

What is the best way to communicate the concept of D&I among employers, executives, and employees?

...

### **What are the “benefits” of initiatives aimed at minorities to employees who do not identify as LGBTQ?**

“Do initiatives aimed at minorities really matter to employees who do not identify as LGBTQ?”

This belief held by employees of majority groups may explain why initiatives targeted at D&I and minorities are considered “secondary.”

In response, Maki Kimura, President of Nijihiro Diversity—a non-profit organization that offers research and consulting services on LGBTQ issues for companies and administrative bodies—says, “A happy workplace for minorities is a happy workplace for the majority.”

Kimura points to a “certain common factor” in workplaces with effective LGBTQ initiatives.

The common factor is active communication among employees...

A workplace that is inclusive of all minorities—not just LGBTQ employees—is an environment where diversity is accepted. This space allows employees to openly voice their concerns and opinions; it also allows employees to point out workplace harassment and

discrimination. As a result, employees are able to interact effectively with each other and to increase their motivation, which reduce corporate risks and contribute to productivity.

Addressing the needs of minorities is therefore tied to a better workplace for the majority and sustainable growth for companies.

Kimura says, “The objective of LGBTQ measures is to ensure that workers are happy. This is the same as creating a happy workplace for everyone.”

### **How can companies embed LGBTQ policies within their organization? We asked companies at the forefront of these initiatives.**

An urgent issue facing companies is how to effectively communicate D&I in a workplace where employees are preoccupied with their own day-to-day responsibilities and their company’s profitability.

Offering advice from their own companies’ experiences are human resources representatives from Japan Airlines Co., Ltd. [(JAL)] and Lush Retail Ltd. Japan [(Lush Japan)]— both of which are known for their progressive LGBTQ initiatives. While these two companies differ in terms of industry, scale, and corporate culture, they provide surprisingly similar suggestions on how to embed LGBTQ initiatives in a workplace.

- **JAL: Clearly communicate the company’s stance to employees**

In August 2019, JAL became the first Japanese companies to implement an “LGBT Ally Charter.”

An ally... is someone who empathizes and supports those who identify as LGBTQ.

Hiroshi Momota, who serves as the Director of JAL’s Human Resources Strategy Division, says, “We’re still in the process of making sure our entire company understands our LGBTQ measures.” He continues that to thoroughly embed this knowledge within an organization, it is important to “clearly communicate the company’s stance to employees.”

Offering charter flights to LGBTQ passengers and participating in national pride events are ways of demonstrating how the company is greater understanding of LGBTQ issues. At the same time, these activities serve as an important way to communicate the company’s stance on gender identity and sexual orientation internally.

Momota says, “By communicating our company’s stance that we are an LGBTQ ally’, we’re raising awareness about sexual orientation and gender identity among each and every employee. We’re also assuring our LGBTQ employees that they can continue working at our company. We’re trying to use community activities to increase employee awareness and confidence as well as workplace success. We want to use this cycle to continue implementing LGBTQ policies at the company level.”

- **Lush Japan: Communicate who we are as a business to society**

With the basic mission of “making all people happy,” Lush Japan has prioritized LGBTQ individuals’ human rights as a social issue and directly communicated its stance to customers at its retail stores. At its core, the company’s attitude is “as a business, we prioritize ethics over profitability.”

Lush Japan's LGBTQ policies include an internal system that recognizes employees' same-sex partners as spouses regardless of the sex listed on their family registry. The company has also established a progressive system that allows medical leave for employees who are recovering from gender reassignment surgery.

Masahiro Yasuda, Lush Japan's Vice President of Human Resources, voices his confidence about the company's commitment to D&I initiatives. He says, "We believe that nearly all employees are on the same page about LGBTQ issues."

Yasuda continues, "We've stressed to the public who we are as a company. That's why we are able to attract employees who accept our stance on LGBTQ issues and continue working for us."

### **Circle of allies expands through "experience and empathy"**

By clearly communicating their stance on D&I and minorities, companies can ensure each and every one of their employees understand that these issues should matter to them on a personal level. This approach increases not only awareness about gender identity and sexual orientation within an organization, but also the number of allies internally...

...How can companies expand the circle of LGBTQ allies?

The answer becomes apparent when looking at the issue from the perspective of "experience and empathy."

JAL has seen the gradual growth of its circle of allies by recruiting employee volunteers for rainbow pride events across Japan...

... "The participants who come to our booth are so happy... Volunteers are very happy to see that too. I think it's that positive feeling that creates the next link in the circle of allies. Ultimately it's interactions with members of the LGBTQ community that make non-LGBTQ people feel as if they have a personal stake in issues around gender identity and sexual orientation," Momota says.

Momota himself first attended the Tokyo Rainbow Pride event in April 2019, soon after he became the Human Resources Director. He says that participating in the event changed his mindset about D&I initiatives.

"...I was really stimulated by that energy [at Tokyo Rainbow Pride]. I found myself asking, "What will happen to this energy over the remaining 363 days of the year? I realized that we can't actively implement LGBTQ policies without creating a space where employees can regularly harness that energy. That awareness was the starting point for our company's current D&I efforts. I think it's important to create an opportunity where a switch is turned on each and every employee's heart."

Kimura also says that empathy can be developed by asking allies to talk about personal experiences about ...LGBTQ colleagues and subordinates as well as family members.

"We encourage people to meet with members of the LGBTQ community and listen to their stories. It's not just about awareness. It's about interacting with minorities as people and

experiencing how you feel when you are with them. That helps allies' voices to become more powerful and effective"...