Motives in creating an LGBTQ inclusive work environment: a case study

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this inquiry is to examine why companies create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments and how these firms advance LGBTQ-inclusiveness through CSR practices and address challenges presented by strategic duality.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a qualitative multiple case study design, data was collected and then triangulated from interviews and company documents. NVivo, a qualitative research program, was used to organize, sort, query and model the data.

Findings – Several themes were identified as reasons why Fortune 500 organizations sought to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments. Themes include a positive return on investment, advancing human rights issues within the framework of corporate social responsibility (CSR), internal organizational pressure and parity with other Minnesota companies. Findings are examined through the theoretical lens of strategic duality.

Research limitations/implications – Primary theoretical implications include contributions to our understanding of strategic duality by providing a first-hand account from people in organizations that encountered imperatives that to some degree are in conflict. By design, the multiple case study methodology does not allow generalizations to be drawn beyond the organizations included in this study.

Practical implications – Both managers and researchers will find this study provides valuable insight on how people and organizations experience and navigate strategic duality (pairs of competing imperatives) within the context of the motivation behind creating an LGBTQ-inclusive work environment.

Originality/value – This inquiry provides a unique and valuable account as to why organizations choose to invest resources in creating a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment, the return on investment (ROI) and examines competing imperatives (strategic dualities) faced by management. Similar multiple case studies of this qualitative nature are rare, possibly even non-existent and, therefore, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature.

Keywords Multiple case study, LGBTQ, Strategic dualities, Workplace equality, Diversity, Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Over the past decade significant progress has been made in moving toward equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) persons in the United States. On June 15, 2020 the US Supreme Court made a landmark decision ruling on three related cases that sexual orientation and gender identity are protected characteristics of the Civil Rights Act (Bibi, 2020) and this decision is likely to have broad consequences for employment protections (Moreau, 2020). Previous to this decision, 30 states lacked clear, fully inclusive non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people and three states specifically prohibited the passage of such laws (Webster et al., 2018). In this context, LGBTQ people were at risk of being fired, denied housing and denied services for who they are or whom they love. Before the Supreme Court’s decision, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and subsequent amendments did not protect LGBTQ persons from discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation (Martichuwski, 2006; Tannenwald, 2008). Important to note, the Civil Rights Act covers organizations with 15 or more employees (Moreau, 2020) – therefore, not all LGBTQ employees will be covered by the recent Supreme Court ruling. Prior to this
landmark decision, two pieces of legislation had been proposed to protect persons based on gender identity and sexual orientation. First, ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act 2013 (United States 2013) was proposed to prohibit discrimination in hiring and employment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity by employers who have 15 employees or more. Although ENDA was proposed in congress every year except one since 1994, it did not become law (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2019). Second, the Equality Act 2019 (United States, 2019) would grant definitive and consistent non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ persons by amending several laws including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Fair Housing Act and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected characteristics. Considering the novelty of the recent Supreme Court ruling the status of these two bills is unclear.

Although protections for many LGBTQ persons in the United States are now outlined by federal law, some Americans dispute the legitimacy of LGBTQ rights. In this context, organizations struggle to find a balance between creating equality in the workplace and maintaining the support of important stakeholders such as customers, investors and employees. Many organizations have responded by creating a dual state of equity for their LGBTQ employees while balancing the needs of sensitive stakeholders. In doing so, management creates a dilemma that must be resolved with limited resources and few models of best practice.

Despite criticism of efforts to support LGBTQ rights in work settings, a substantial increase in the number of corporations which implement LGBTQ-inclusive HR policies and practices has occurred. The year 2019 was record making for LGBTQ employees – 85% of the Fortune 500 firms provided gender identity protections in their nondiscrimination policy (HRC, 2019), the highest percentage since HRC began recording such data. In addition, a total of 93% of the Fortune 500 organizations now have protections based on sexual orientation (HRC, 2019). Companies took these actions well before the Supreme Court made the decision to include gender identity and sexual orientation under the Civil Rights Act.

The number of LGBTQ persons in the US population is a matter of debate and, as previously noted, little scholarly inquiry has been done on the number of people who identify as LGBTQ. That said, the Williams Institute (Gates, 2011) estimates there are 8 million people, or 3.5% of the adult population in the United States that identify as LGBTQ. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) there are 160 million people in the American civilian workforce. Applying the William Institute’s estimate of 3.5% to the 160 million strong US workforce, we can surmise that approximately 5.6 million people in the workforce identify as LGBTQ – a significant sized minority in the workforce.

Despite recent legal advancements including the Supreme Court interpreting the Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity, legalizing same-sex marriage and the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) being ruled unconstitutional, LGBTQ minorities remain stigmatized targets. Even in organizations that have established policy protecting LGBTQ employees, discrimination may still take place (Holman et al., 2019). A recent Gallup poll shows 28% of Americans think sexual relations between people of the same sex should be illegal, 37% of Americans believe lesbian and gay relations are morally wrong (Gallup, 2019) and 45% still believe being LGBTQ is a sin (Drake, 2013). Opinions toward gender nonconformity are even more objectionable (Norton and Herek, 2013). It is likely that these feelings manifest themselves in the workplace. Further, doing what is outlined by law does not guarantee, nor by itself create an inclusive work environment for LGBTQ persons.

Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that some members of the workforce do not want extension of equality granted to those who identify as LGBTQ out of prejudice. Within the literature there is a growing body of evidence that LGBTQ employees experience a hostile work environment (Holman et al., 2019). Research has found that negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians are normative and more socially acceptable compared to other forms of bigotry (Pichler et al., 2018) and one reason firms struggle with creating a LGBTQ inclusive
work environment. Employees who identify as LGBTQ have, “greater risk of unfair treatment, systematic oppression, and even violence (Webster et al., 2018, p. 193). Importantly, this hostile work environment leads to negative outcomes for LGBTQ employees, notably mental and physical health (Holman et al., 2019).

HRC workplace project and corporate quality index
Various organizations including small grassroots initiatives, state and national lobbying groups and large national organizations have led efforts to advance LGBTQ equality. One of the largest, and possibly the most influential, concerning workplace equality is the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRC). The HRC is the largest civil rights organization in the United States working to achieve gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equality (HRC, 2015). In support of employees, consumers and investors, the HRC provides annual reports related to LGBTQ equality, including the Corporate Equality Index (CEI), Buyers Guide and Best Places to Work. These resources are used in education, training and policy development across the country.

The HRC’s CEI has become the scoring system for LGBTQ equality in the workplace (similar to Fortune’s Best Places to Work index). The first CEI was published in 2002 and has continued to be released annually. Given the 18-years span, quality of the assessment and few related resources, the CEI has been of vital significance to the LGBTQ community and to this inquiry. The CEI includes companies listed in Fortune magazine’s 500 largest public firms and hundreds of public and private companies of various sizes (HRC, 2018). As described (HRC, 2018, p. 1), “the [CEI] is the national benchmarking tool on corporate policies and practices pertinent to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer employees.” The index is also used by some stakeholders to encourage change at companies in an effort to advance LGBTQ equality (Eunice, 2006). A perfect score of 100 (from a rank of 0–100) demonstrates that the organization has met all the criteria and is rated as one of the “Best Places to Work for LGBTQ Equality” (HRC, 2018). Criteria include: a nondiscrimination policy based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, consistency in same-sex partner benefits and respectful advertising to the LGBTQ community (HRC, 2018). Unlike other indexes, the CEI is not based solely on company-reported information; instead, it complements this information using independent research (HRC, 2019; Johnston and Malina, 2008).

Table 1 outlines the Fortune 500 organizations headquartered in Minnesota, including their CEI scores for 2015-2019.

Previous scholarly inquiry
Despite significant advances in LGBTQ equality and abundant news stories covering these advances scholarly research with regard to gender identity and sexual orientation in the workplace remains insufficient (HRC 2015; Pope et al., 2004; Ragins and Cornwell, 2001; Van Hoye and Lievens, 2003; Ward and Winstanley, 2006). A current review of the literature identified only a limited body of research that specifically examined the motivation behind corporate America’s move to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments. These studies have included the impact of LGBTQ equality on variables including firm performance (Pichler et al., 2018; Shan et al., 2017), value creation (Hossain et al., 2019; Johnston and Malina, 2008), investor support (Wang and Schwarz, 2010) and organizational climate (Holman et al., 2019). The lack of information available is regrettable as it might be of great benefit to managers seeking to create such work environments. In comparison, a larger number of studies have focused more broadly on equity and diversity in the workplace. As noted by van Dijk et al. (2012) the past two decades have seen a great deal of consideration given to managing diversity in the workplace.

Using multiple cases this study illustrates the motives behind why Fortune 500 organizations in the state of Minnesota have chosen to create LGBTQ-inclusive work
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>CEI Rank</th>
<th>Fortune 500 Rank</th>
<th>Fortune 500 State Rank</th>
<th>Revenues in Million 2019</th>
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Note(s): Adapted from: *Fortune (2019); HRC 2019, HRC 2018; Hoover’s, 2019*

*Medtronic moved corporate headquarters to Ireland in 2015 and St. Jude Medical was acquired by Abbott in 2017*
environments and the analysis relies on theories of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and strategic duality. Commonly, a socially responsible company is characterized by a broad set of ethical, social and environmental measures (Shan et al., 2017) and includes human rights, social inclusion and gender inequities (Andriof and McIntosh, 2001; Pedersen, 2015). Within the context of this inquiry, the LGBTQ-inclusion imperative is examined and rooted within the human rights function of CSR. In contrast, companies may have competing imperatives which are also important to firm performance resulting in what Birkinshaw et al. (2016) describe as strategic duality. As an example, the imperative to advance LGBTQ-inclusion may conflict with consumer support. To that end, examining why companies create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments is an exemplary case of how these firms advance LGBTQ-inclusiveness through CSR practices and address challenges presented by strategic duality.

Purpose

Taken together, these ideas give way to the following conclusions meaningful to this inquiry: (1) LGBTQ minorities in the US workforce are considerable in number, (2) federal non-discrimination protections are novel, there is little scholarly research and therefore resources for managers are limited and (3) sexual minorities remain stigmatized. Within this context, the purpose of this inquiry is to examine why companies create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments and how these firms advance LGBTQ-inclusiveness through CSR practices and address challenges presented by strategic duality.

This inquiry contributes to the literature in several ways. First, rather than broadly exploring the impact of various CSR criteria on the motivations of Fortune 500 organizations in Minnesota to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments, this study focuses on one specific element of this multifaceted concept and examines it from the narrower perspective of human rights as function of CSR. By narrowing the focus, the findings contribute to our understanding of CSR in a novel way. Second, this study extends our understanding of strategic duality by providing insight as to how some organizations approach conflicting goals of important stakeholders. Finally, and importantly, this study goes beyond general or broad theorizations as to why companies seek to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments and extends our understanding by providing the personal story of the phenomena as shared by people who lived it. Results of this study have meaningful implications for both practitioners and scholars.

Theoretical background

Strategic dualities

Birkinshaw et al. (2016) define strategic dualities as pairs of imperatives (e.g. integration vs responsiveness or exploitation vs exploration) which are equally valuable to the success of the organization but are to some degree in conflict with each other. In fact, as Birkinshaw and Gupta (2013) suggest, most meaningful things that occur within the firm involve people making choices that stress one objective ahead of another. Inquiry on strategic dualities is underdeveloped (Birkinshaw et al., 2016). The bulk of research that has occurred related to strategic dualities has used quantitative methods (Birkinshaw et al., 2016), which does not provide a rich description of the experience that a qualitative study can.

Strategic dualities can take a number of forms. In this study, several strategic dualities may exist. Possible examples include devoting resources to create equality in the workplace vs to improve the firm’s bottom line or providing LGBTQ-inclusiveness training to increase morale for some vs alienating those who believe it to be wrong. All are balanced with the risk of alienating stakeholders who do not support these efforts. For instance, it is likely that
creating a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment and receiving a high score on the CEI will attract some prospective applicants yet alienate others. As such, the decision to spend firm resources on creating equality in the workplace for LGBTQ employees is not a simple one. That said, some research has indicated a positive impact to the company’s bottom line as its CEI score increases, specifically the firm’s stock market value (Johnston and Malina, 2008; Wang and Schwarz, 2010).

Examples of strategic duality can be illustrated in recent media headlines. The Wall Street Journal ran, “In Three Days, the Hallmark Channel Managed to Upset Pretty Much Everyone” describing how the Hallmark Channel aired, then pulled, than re-aired with an apology a commercial from wedding planning firm Zola featuring a same-sex couple (Vranica, 2019). In a similar way, the One Million Moms boycott of Mattel for featuring two gay fathers in the American Girl magazine (Sieczkowski, 2015) demonstrates the difficulty of pleasing various stakeholders. In this way, firms working to advance LGBTQ equality face competing imperatives important to the success of the organization (e.g. strategic duality) due to expectations from various stakeholder groups (Pichler et al., 2018).

In some cases, strategic duality between imperatives has led companies to be strategically ambiguous. As defined by Long et al. (2015), strategic ambiguity recognizes the degree to which contrasting interpretations of organizational communication may be made. As an example, an organization may purposefully avoid sharing details in their communication efforts to allow stakeholders to make their own interpretation in support of the duality of their choice. Acknowledging the interplay between strategic duality and strategic ambiguity is important as this study includes an analysis of organizational artifacts which may reflect the way in which companies communicate to stakeholders that allow different, and sometimes unique, interpretations. Long et al. (2015) also note that ambiguous language allows for different interpretations within a larger diversity framework.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR)
It has been frequently suggested that for today’s firm to be competitive, it must be interested in more than simply profit; it must also do good. In the literature, good has many names: CSR, corporate citizenship, corporate philanthropy, corporate giving, community relations, community development, global citizenship, etc. (Kotler and Lee, 2005). In this inquiry we refer to good as CSR.

Over the past several decades, we have seen impressive shifts in the expectations and attitudes stakeholders hold over today’s firms, and research demonstrates the increasing importance of CSR for numerous stakeholders, including customers, employees, legislators and investors (Dawkins and Lewis, 2003). The increasing number of Fortune 500 firms that invest in creating equality in the workplace has followed a similar trajectory to that of the growing interest in CSR.

Although CSR has been widely investigated in the literature, a generally accepted theoretical framework has not yet emerged (Russo and Perrini, 2010). The literature has described CSR in several common ways. Chandler (2017, p. 4) defines CSR as, “A responsibility among firms to meet the needs of their stakeholders and a responsibility among stakeholders to hold firms accountable for their actions.” van Marrewijk (2003, p. 102) suggests CSR activities are those “company activities – voluntary by definition – demonstrating the inclusion of social and environmental concerns in business operations and in interactions with stakeholders.” In essence, CSR is the belief that the firm should find harmony between strategic actions focused on profitability and being a good corporate citizen.

Hill et al. (2003) outline five components of CSR: (1) actions to ensure the company operates honorably and ethically, (2) actions to support philanthropy, participate in community service and better the quality of life worldwide, (3) actions to protect and sustain the...
environment, (4) actions to enhance employee well-being and make the company a great place to work and (5) actions to promote workforce diversity. For many firms, as it relates to components 4 and 5, CSR has been an important element in recruiting and retaining employees. Savitz (2013) suggests that, for many organizations, CSR has become a critical function in the employer brand attributes that characterize their firm as a desirable place to work in the minds of current and potential employees. From a narrower perspective, many organizations have taken it upon themselves to see LGBTQ equality as a human rights issue within their broader CSR work. In light of this, are the components of employee well-being and workforce diversity important motivational factors for firms to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments? In support of this inquiry’s primary focus on motivation this question is also explored.

Within this inquiry, equality is defined as a state of being equal, particularly in regard to work status rights and opportunities. In comparison, the term equitable concerns dealing fairly and equally with all persons. From the organizational perspective, equality in the workplace allows LGBTQ employees to bring their whole selves to work, trusting their employer will provide them the same opportunities and stature compared to other non-LGBTQ employees. Equitable treatment requires providing the same benefits, in the same way, to LGBTQ persons when compared to their heterosexual peers. This study is focused on the equality perspective.

Study design
A collective (multiple) case study design is used to examine the motivational factors behind Minnesota’s Fortune 500 organizations’ commitment to create equitable workplaces for LGBTQ persons. The collective case study uses qualitative means, in this case interviews and a review of company documents, to study the phenomena in its natural setting. Although each case is treated independently, the use of multiple cases allows the researchers to illustrate comparisons across multiple cases.

A collective case study is an appropriate and fitting research method for several reasons. First, several authors (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014) have agreed that collective case study is most suitable to investigate a concept for which there has been little research within the context. Second, this research endeavor is seeking to understand the phenomenon within a group of organizations, not a single experience. As Stake (2010) wrote, “Ultimately, we may be interested in a general phenomenon of a population of cases more than in the individual case, and we cannot understand a given case without knowing about the other cases” (p. 445). Third, as Siggelkow (2007) describes, regardless of how cases are used, inquiry including case data can often get much closer to theoretical constructs and support a more compelling argument about causal forces than broad empirical research can. Fourth, using numerous cases provide a real and descriptive depth appropriate for the theoretical underpinnings of this inquiry and, importantly, findings from multiple-case studies are viewed as more influential compared to single-case studies (Yin, 2014). As Eisenhardt (1991) states, multiple cases facilitate comparisons that resolve whether an emergent finding is simply typical to a single case or routinely repeated by several cases.

Participants and data collection
Data was obtained from several sources: (1) interviews including senior management professionals and long-standing members of the organizations’ LGBTQ employee resource groups (ERGs) and (2) documents created and published by the organizations. Once an organization agreed to participate, in-depth interviews and a review of company information and literature began.
In 2019 a total of 17 Fortune 500 organizations were headquartered in Minnesota (see Table 1). Organizations included in this study were identified using the following criteria: First, having a CEI score of 85 or above (100 is the highest) or demonstrate an increase CEI score during the previous 4 years 2015–2019). A score of 85 or higher, or a significant increase in score on the CEI indicates the company has taken steps to create a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment. Second, having their company headquarters in Minnesota. The state of Minnesota has consistently held the second highest number of Fortune 500 companies per capita in the United States following Connecticut (StarTribune, 2017) making it a unique area to study this phenomenon. Using these criteria (see Table 1), 14 organizations were identified. Each of these organizations was invited to participate in the study.

Two rounds of face-to-face interviews were conducted across eight of these fourteen organizations resulting in a 57% participation rate. The first round of interviews included a senior organizational leader and a member of the LGBTQ ERG at each organization; participants were interviewed separately. The second round followed the same format with a few exceptions. Due to employee turnover or availability the same participant may not have been available for the second round. In these cases, an alternative person with a similar role in the organization was invited to participate. A total of 32 interviews were conducted split evenly between organizational leaders and members of the LGBTQ ERG. Due to a commitment of confidentiality, specific quotations are not directly linked to companies or individuals that participated in the interviews. In addition, a list of participating organizations is not provided. That said, participating companies were informed and agreed to being identified in a grouping described as “Minnesota’s Fortune 500.” Interview participants provided informed consent with the understanding that any language that identified them or their employer would be removed. As suggested by Arino et al. (2016), face-to-face semi-structured interviews allow researchers to hear directly from participants about their experience, enabling researchers to see into their world. In addition, this process of data collection allows us to dig deeper into interactions and meanings experienced by the participants and can result in the collection of a larger amount of information (Kourti, 2016).

Although the personal experiences of senior organizational leaders and LGBTQ ERG members are a vital to capture in data collection for this study, it should be acknowledged there is risk for participant bias in the data. Specifically, the persons identified are very close to the organizational phenomena being studied and may not be impartial. Two steps were taken to help reduce the risk of bias in this study. First, the interviews used open-ended questions followed up by probing questions that sought more detail and specific examples. Asking the participant to tie their response to specific examples focuses the discussion on the phenomena and not their opinion of the phenomena. Second, triangulation of multiple data sources was included to help understand the same phenomena from different perspectives.

Open-ended questions targeting strategic duality included: (1) At some point your organization made a decision to be LGBTQ-inclusive – what can you tell me about that process?, (2) Who led that process? Employee affinity group?, (3) Was the business decision to include LGBTQ diversity within the organization’s strategy a top-down decision or encouraged from others within the organization? and (4) What would you identify as the motivational factors behind your organization’s move to create a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment? Of these, which motivational factor do you feel was the strongest?

The document review included organizational mission, vision, diversity statement and Equal Employment and Opportunity (EEO) statement and was purposely chosen as representative of the organizations’ unique and enduring aspirations and practices. All documents are publicly available and taken from the companies’ websites. Mission and vision statements are written to express an organization’s values and objectives, to be consistent with those of their stakeholders and to distinguish the firm from competitors (Peyrefitte and David, 2006).
Triangulation was employed within the research design to corroborate findings and strengthen construct validity. Triangulation included a review and comparison across interviews and company documentation which together contributed to the research findings. As described by Yin (2018, p. 128), “Multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon.” Documentation included the company’s mission, vision and EEO statements. This triangulation method follows what Patton (2002) describes as data triangulation (e.g. a variety of data sources).

**Procedure**

Interviews were conducted with organization leaders instrumental in developing the LGBTQ-inclusive policies of the organization and employees who are long-standing members of the organization’s LGBTQ ERGs. Interviews are popular in the field of management and increase the reliability and credibility of qualitative data (Arino et al., 2016). Senior human resource leaders were selected as they are the most likely to provide reliable information regarding the motivational factors behind creating LGBTQ-equitable work environments. Additionally, employees who are members of the organization’s LGBTQ ERG are well suited to answer interview questions exploring the subquestion: from an employee’s perspective, what are the benefits to the company for creating an equitable work environment for LGBTQ persons? Each interview was anticipated to last 1–1½ hours. Open-ended, semi-structured interview questions were used to extract each participant’s insight.

As suggested by Bazeley and Jackson (2013), NVivo was used to support qualitative data analysis in five primary ways: (1) manage data, (2) manage ideas, (3) query data, (4) graphically model and (5) report from the data. All recorded interview data and textual data for the mission, EEO statement and diversity statements were transcribed and recorded in NVivo, then thematically examined several times. Similar qualitative processes have been used in analyzing diversity statements; notably Long et al.’s (2015) research on diversity communication. During multiple reviews, pre-determined categories (e.g. codes) were fixed on the raw data, and as themes developed, supplemental codes were created and fixed. After coding had been rendered, relationships and patterns among the codes were examined and clarified, ultimately generating overall themes. A source scheme was developed to cite the company and individual using colors for company (e.g. red, blue, green) and letters for the individual employee (A, B, C, etc.). As an example, Green A and Green B, reference two individual sources (individual A and individual B) who are from the same company (company Green). This scheme was chosen to protect confidentiality and avoid assumptions of order or ranking.

**Data analysis**

Interviews were recorded and then transcribed (a total of 225+ double-spaced pages). To convert this data into a valid structure for this inquiry (i.e. data reduction), an organized approach was implemented that involved preliminary sorting and coding during the transcription process. Based upon the literature review on CSR and strategic duality several established themes rooted in the literature were identified, including positive return on investment (ROI), human rights imperative and internal organizational pressure. Using these established themes a code key was developed which operationalized the coding process. Similar to other qualitative studies (Karatuna, 2015) transcripts were read repeatedly to gain a sense of completeness and codes were developed and refined through a deductive-inductive method (Evers and van Staa, 2010; Karatuna, 2015; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). During the coding process established themes were applied from the coding key while also allowing unexpected themes to emerge. To avoid inconsistencies and increase accuracy each reference
to a theme was attributed to one major or supporting theme. To increase reliability, identified themes, both established and emergent, were double-checked by an independent party familiar with the research methods. These methods follow established coding techniques (Miles et al., 2000; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2014). Established and emergent themes from the interviews are outlined in Table 2.

After a comprehensive analysis of the collected documents (consisting of mission statements, EEO statements and diversity statements,) was complete, several themes surfaced. This data was collected and analyzed for triangulation purposes.

After conducting an in-depth review of each individual case, including interviews and the document review, comparisons were made across the multiple organizations (cross case) included in the study. Using within-case and cross-case analysis provided a fuller, more robust interpretation and enhanced the overall extent of the analysis (Yin, 2014). By carrying out an established method of coding data, themes evolved that were examined and tied to the literature.

**Illustration of findings**

Four major themes and nine noteworthy supporting themes – see Table 3 – can be found in the review of cases. Eisenhardt and Graenbner (2007, p. 29) recommend presenting case study data using “better stories vs better theories.” To accomplish this, they suggest developing propositions which are supported by empirical evidence. Specifically, Eisenhardt and Graenbner (2007) advocate that findings should be organized by theory (or proposition) and each part of the theory is supported by evidence from the cases. Siggelkow (2007) suggests making a conceptual contribution by employing case study findings as illustration. Following these recommendations, this illustration of findings states key propositions followed by evidence in the form of quotes from the interviewees. Common with qualitative data from interviews, these quotations provide context and a rich description of the phenomena.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Major or supporting theme</th>
<th>Established Theme</th>
<th>Emergent Theme</th>
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<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate social responsibility (CSR)</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element of a broader diversity initiative</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation and/or gender identity included within diversity and inclusion initiatives</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company cites importance of supplier or customer diversity</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal organizational pressure</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass roots initiative</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee resource group (ERG)</td>
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<td>✗</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aspirational companies</td>
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<td>Competition for skilled employees</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

Table 2. Major themes, with number of participants that contributed to each

QROM 16,1
Positive return on investment (ROI)

In the opinions of those interviewed, firms discovered a ROI that positively impacted the organization’s bottom line. Two supporting subthemes were identified: (1) increased employee retention, job satisfaction and productivity and (2) the view that LGBTQ inclusiveness is positively tied to the companies’ CSR framework. Interview participants characterized ways in which the firm’s inclusive culture allowed employees to bring their whole selves to work, thereby improving productivity. Further, this inclusive culture worked to retain employees and create a more favorable recruiting environment. Described by one participant,

Diversity and inclusion [are] drivers of business. [They] drive innovation, . . . an inclusive work environment, it drives engagement, within our business. The more engagement you have, the more innovation you have, the better your business does. So I think the decision [to be LGBTQ-inclusive] is . . . better for business [Pink A].

And another participant stated,

You know we have seen greater retention. We have seen greater engagement. We have seen, you know, happier employees because they know we are offering the benefit [transgender health benefits] whether they are going to use it or not. You know we are being supportive whether they need that support or not. [Red A]

Increased employee retention, job satisfaction and productivity surfaced as a supporting theme and is illustrated by interviews or documents. Employee retention was a prevalent theme cited within the participant interviews. One participant expressed it well, “[Our company is] motivated number one, primarily by parity with other companies. We do not want to be losing people to other [Minnesota companies] in town. You do not need to lose them across town.” [Purple B].

Interviews revealed that a company’s score on the CEI can impact the likelihood that prospective employees seek employment with a particular firm. The emergence of this, then, should not be a surprise as the CEI was created, to a certain degree, as a tool in the job search to evaluate the work environment is for LGBTQ employees. In light of this, the theme is supported exceptionally well within the interviews. As participants stated,

[LGBTQ employees] said [they] use [the CEI score] as an index for consumer buying decisions and for whether they want to be an employee at that company. [Green A]

In the recession we had people that were laid off, of course. I’ve had people tell me that [they were] at the point in [their] life where [they] can afford to not work for a while and that [they] will only seek employment at companies that score 100%—that’s it, I had a couple people tell me that. He [and others] said that he would only look at 100% rated companies. [Pink A]
And, one participant was brief yet concise, “When job searching I only applied to companies that scored 100. I’m old and experienced and can be picky.” [Green B]

I think being a competitive employer absolutely [in reference to recruiting talent] . . . especially with the LGBTQ community I think about when I was looking for a job I immediately [sought] where do they rank on the index? [Purple B]

Building an inclusive company culture made a favorable impact on an organization’s productivity, especially considering the focus of most companies to increase efficiency while reducing staff. One interviewee cited the company’s CEO as saying,

Everyone needs to feel like they are included [and] they are important. We need everybody; we have so much work to get done. We need everybody to feel they can bring their full selves to work. We have to have it. We need it for growth, for innovation [Purple A].

The same participant further elaborated, “We need everybody because [this organization] runs so incredibly lean, we need everyone to come and be 100% and give 100%. We need that.” [Purple A]

Several interview participants credited creating a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment as critical to employee satisfaction. Notably, one participant described the relevance of employee satisfaction in terms of the company’s turnover rates. Specifically,

The first time I think [senior leadership] heard or felt that our culture may not be inclusive, which they had assumed it was because our turnover was 5%—no one ever leaves, but looking at [an] analysis of employee morale, who is really happy or not [when departing] we discovered disparity. Our LGBTQ employees were less satisfied with our culture [Brown B].

Another way in which creating LGBTQ-inclusive work environments provides a positive ROI is through CSR. A core value of CSR is that instead of being focused solely on profits or the bottom line, the focus should include a desire to be compassionate and have a value-based response to challenges facing society. A senior HR leader stated, “I think the one thing that my boss has always drilled in, and that we say all of the time, is that diversity and inclusion are the drivers of our business value [Purple A].” In this way, diversity itself is a core value that drives the company’s overall business.

**Human rights imperative**

The second theme describes the sentiment that creating a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment is an element of an organization’s broader diversity goals within CSR; in this case, a human rights imperative. Pointedly, creating a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment is part of a larger move to create an inclusive work environment for all employees. As one participant shared,

It just evolved. It wasn’t part of any specific area or dimension of diversity. It was just, well, why wouldn’t we kind of have this thing? Why wouldn’t we? Of course we are going to be inclusive. . . . LGBTQ—isn’t that inclusive? Yes it is. So, what about religion? Yes, it is. We need to be inclusive. So, it was not really called out as a decision specifically, it was just almost more all-inclusive [Blue B].

A different participant stated, We do our best to advance equality for women, minorities, gays and lesbians and it matters but doesn’t matter. I mean, we value people and want to be fair” [Brown B].

Focused on the intersection between creating a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment and the firm’s diversity initiative, one participant described the relationship in the following way,

In the past three years, they [the company] started a diversity and inclusion progression or mission program. Slowly in the past year, year and half especially, we’ve started to incorporate LGBTQ into that [Yellow B].
One interview participant shared the following in reference to CSR and their choice to find employment at that organization,

One of the reasons why I really like [this organization] as an employee, is that it tries to do the right thing. Like offering things like partner benefits way before [the competition], you know, like they must have started like 15 years ago when you know that was not a given that the larger organization would have partner benefits at that time and it was kind of unusual. [This organization] is or they were actually on the forefront because I think the leadership here thought it was the right thing to do. [Pink B]

Echoing this, a second participant quoted their CEO as saying,

[our CEO] was very clear we absolutely believe this. One, it’s the right thing to do, to make sure all employees are included and not excluded . . . micro-inequity, we can’t have that. [Purple A]

A firm’s broader diversity plan grows and evolves in a variety of ways within organizations. One of these ways is creating a diversity and inclusion plan supported by training and development (T&D) or other organizational development (OD) interventions to achieve plan objectives. One participant made the following statement in support of this premise,

I think that we really do have a need for a unified diversity progression plan for progression. We need to include LGBTQ because we need that leveling education piece about how should we act, how we should be included, and what that means for our organization [Orange A].

A second participant described training and development in the following terms,

Educational programming is what our [ERG] does. Sure there is some socializing and networking but [company name removed] pays attention to us because we provide a free training service that is good for the company and increases our score [Green B].

Internal organizational pressure

A prevalent theme running through the interviews is that motivation to create or move toward a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment often started within the company when employees requested it, potentially in conflict with other stakeholder wishes (e.g. consumers, shareholders or even other employee groups). This theme centered on internal organizational pressure to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments. Primarily: (1) a formal request from the LGBTQ employee resources group, (2) grass roots initiative and (3) a formal request from senior leadership of the organization. In this way, several participants recognized the potential conflict between the stakeholder group pushing the imperative and other important stakeholders – yet simultaneously recognized both imperatives had value for the success of the organization.

Request from LGBTQ employee resource group. Although concrete examples were not provided, several interviews included participants who had “heard” or come to “understand” that the LGBTQ ERG had made a formal request to senior management motivating the company to adopt a more LGBTQ-inclusive culture. Even with follow-up interview questions asking for examples, interview participants simply stated they could not provide these because the ERG had been formed, or changes had been made, before their own employment with the organization. As an example,

... it was certainly led by our affinity [ERG] group . . . the leader at that time was actively involved in the LGBTQ community and everyone here today gives her credit for starting the conversation and making specific requests to leaders and HR . . . [Yellow A]

Grass roots initiative. In several ways, across many interviews, participants noted that changes in HR policy, company culture and ways in which LGBTQ employees grew to be a valued voice at their organization started as a grass roots initiative. When asked if moving
the organizational culture to be LGBTQ-inclusive started at the top, with senior leadership, versus the changes being motivated by a grass roots initiative, one participant noted,

   It started with hallway conversations, the ones that happen at happy hours or in the breakroom. Mostly with people who identify as queer or questioning who made it a priority and brought it into the fold [Red B].

Another participant further elaborated that,

   No, the top, definitely not, no. I do not think anyone sought us out and said, hey how do we get to 100 [on the CEI]? I think it has been us [employees] pushing it [Yellow B].

Request from senior leadership. That said, in contrast to organizations being motivated by a grass roots initiative, a considerable number of participants cited several organizational changes had occurred due to the requests of senior leadership. In response to the question, “Was the business decision to include LGBTQ diversity within the organization’s strategy a ‘top down’ decision or encouraged from others within the organization?” The following insights were provided by participants.

   I think it started with [HR] senior leadership and senior leadership recognizing that, for the health of the organization, [creating an inclusive work environment] is what we need to focus on. We need the best people and [satisfied] employees too, you know [the organization needs to] think, who is here? And, who is going to be here? [Pink B].

In reflecting on a precious conversation with senior leadership, one participant shared the following story, illustrating the importance of public perception for the company,

   Look at this--this is terrible! This is not where we are at. And, by the way, they [the Human Rights Campaign] also have a buyers’ guide and look, Company B [our company] is terrible on the buyers’ guide because we were bad on this survey [CEI] [Purple A].

Parity with other Minnesota companies
A clear theme throughout the interviews was organizational concern to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments to find parity with other companies located in Minnesota. Several participants cited what other companies were doing as a motivating factor. Or, in a similar fashion, they spoke of aspirational peers, companies that had cultures they wanted to mirror. This theme was also supported by the number of interview participants that asked what this study had discovered at other companies. As an example,

   [Our] organization is motivated by parity with other companies. We do not want to be a leader, but we want to be in the pack. Okay. And you know what? I like where the pack is, so I can use that and I did. I do not know if it worked or not. But, if I can . . . say, well we’d like family medical leave benefits because General Mills and these six other companies around town have it and, by the way, here is a copy of General Mills’ –if that works, I am fine with that [Purple A].

Noteworthy, is the collaborative and organized initiative across several companies in Minnesota to find parity when making significant changes to HR policy in support of being LGBTQ inclusive,

   It was a lot of partnering with a lot of organizations around the Twin Cities, you know, what are you doing? The chair [of our LGBTQ ERG], her partner works at one company [name removed], so what is her affinity [ERG] group doing? We met with several other Fortune 500 firms including [names removed] because it was new for everyone . . . and we wanted to be moving together [Yellow A].

A different participant described the continued collaborative process to share costs and find parity with companies in the Twin Cities, “We are also really kind of branching out this year
asking how can we partner with [company name removed] and [company name removed] to consider sharing budgets and reach more people to share in promoting our scores on the CEI [Purple A].”

Benchmarking across and among Twin Cities Fortune 500 organizations was consistently referenced during interviews; especially related to transgender health benefits. As an example, one participant articulated the following,

None of the companies we spoke to [across the Twin Cities or nationally] said that either. All of the companies we spoke to when we made some of these changes and did our benchmarking said really the opposite. We have not seen any increase in cost in how healthcare is managed [Green A].

Aspirational companies. This theme is characterized by participants identifying by name companies they aspire to be like in creating LGBTQ-inclusive work environments. Names of the companies within these findings have been included as they do not reveal what companies participated in the research.

In describing the way in which one firm began exploring changing HR policies to create inclusive LGBTQ work environments, one interviewee shared the following aspirational narrative,

A year ago, she [director of Twin Cities Quorum] said, let’s get you to General Mills. They are hosting [an event] for the Twin Cities Pride. Let’s get you there and see what other companies are doing and just get you to start networking. She said, I can help you with where to be at so that, as a company, you can start this journey [to create a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment] [Purple B].

A second participant said,

We saw Land O’Lakes make the news for scoring 100 on the CEI. [The news story] included comments from senior leaders, employees . . . even a supplier. It was great! In that moment I knew we wanted to create a culture like that [Orange B].

Competition for skilled employees. Several interview participants identified competition for skilled employees and retention as a primary reason their organization endeavored to create an LGBTQ-inclusive work environment. In one example, a participant characterized it by saying,

So [the CEI score] matters. Maybe not to everybody, but it is a quick scorecard. I imagine for some people, and I have to think for the top talent out there in the workforce, if you’re gay, you’re gonna know about the CEI, and that is going to be key in your job search [Red A].

In a similar way, but different perspective,

We see the most competition in recruitment for top talent and they are the hardest to get. Our competitors work to keep them and [company name removed] and for some, umm, who this is important for we use our [LGBTQ focused ERG] to get their attention [Green B].

Discussion

Employing CSR and strategic duality theories this inquiry explores the motives behind large publicly traded companies in Minnesota to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments. Findings suggest that firms included in this case study are motivated to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments for several reasons (1) positive ROI, (2) a human rights imperative, (3) internal organizational pressure and (4) parity with other companies. These findings resonate with a number of related studies on LGBTQ persons in the workplace (Brenner et al., 2010; Giuffre et al., 2008; Githens and Aragon, 2009) and align with key theoretical concepts of strategic duality and CSR. The use of multiple theories to interpret complex phenomena such as the motives to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments should not be considered a weakness of this inquiry. As Webster et al. (2018, p. 204) asserts,
“An advantage of using multiple theories is that here is the potential for cross-fertilization across disciplinary boundaries that may advance science and practice.” The remaining discussion is dedicated to exploring the findings of this inquiry more deeply.

The primary question asked, what motivates large publicly traded firms in Minnesota to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments? Findings indicate there is a strong ROI for creating a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment and includes increased employee retention or recruitment, job satisfaction and productivity. These findings compliment and extend related studies within the literature. Employee retention and recruitment is vital for firm performance and from a job seeker perspective, inclusions matters. A recent McKinsey & Company survey found 40% of participants had either rejected a job offer or chose not to pursue a position because they felt the firm was not inclusive (Bailinson et al., 2020). Creating an inclusive work environment also increases job satisfaction. As several participants noted, employees are “happier” when they can bring their entire selves to work. In a recent study of corporate sexual equality and firm performance Shan et al. (2017) asserts inclusive labor practices increase productivity by strengthening morale. A similar study, albeit from a different perspective, found a culture of homophobia, opposite of an inclusive culture, negatively impacts performance; specifically, higher absenteeism and lower productivity (Bonaventura and Biondo, 2016).

A secondary, supporting question sought to identify the most influential motivational factor behind a firm’s move to create a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment. Although the study was not able to pull out which specific ROI function (retention, job satisfaction, productivity or tie to CSR) was the most influential, the inquiry did provide interesting insight concerning the relationship of a company’s CSR strategy to creating an LGBTQ-inclusive work environment that aligns with previous studies. Examples include Lee (2007) and O’Donnell (2007) whose research called for a broad sensitivity to societal issues in human resources practice that exceeds basic policies like diversity and labor laws. Hossain et al. (2019) assert equality initiatives are an important part of a company’s approach to diversity management. Several participants within this study made it clear a motivating factor for their organization to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments was the right thing to do; specifically doing good by their stigmatized employees was also doing good for their organizations. These experiences parallel a company’s CSR endeavors to go beyond profit and “do good” by advancing a human rights imperative.

This research confirms that many of Minnesota’s Fortune 500 organizations are motivated to include LGBTQ equality within the firm’s CSR strategy. Hill et al. (2003) assert enhanced employee wellbeing and actions to promote workplace diversity are key components of CSR. Although the research methods do not allow broad conclusions to be made outside the cases included in this study – other organizations, firms outside of Minnesota and companies of various size may glean insight to inform their own organizational CSR strategy. As an example, a motivating factor is how promoting LGBTQ inclusion and employee wellbeing positively impacts stakeholder’s view of the firm’s CSR work. In addition, findings align with prior research supporting the expectation that companies embrace a global and diverse perspective to continue being competitive (Long et al., 2015). In light of this, we believe there is a strong business case for LGBTQ inclusion in Minnesota’s Fortune 500 organizations.

**Noteworthy findings on strategic duality**

Supplementary questions of this study explored the organization’s decision to be LGBTQ-inclusive – focusing on the process and who spearheaded the work and whether decisions were top-down or encouraged from other stakeholders within the organization. Themes that emerged from our case study suggest various perspectives yet cite common struggles to
balance the needs of competing organizational goals. In this way, regardless of the process and who led it, significant time and energy in these firms has been spent balancing the multiple and often conflicting needs of various stakeholders revealing points of strategic duality.

Strategic dualities can apply to any pair of conflicting imperatives the organization faces (Evans and Doz, 1999). Four distinct instances of strategic duality emerged within this study, including:

1. Collaborating with rivals to advance LGBTQ equality in the larger community vs the need to compete for employees and customers.
2. Collaborating with rivals to reduce risk of public backlash vs need to compete for employees and customers.
3. Creating an LGBTQ-inclusive workplace culture to increase job satisfaction of LGBTQ employees vs resistance of satisfied employees who may not recognize equal rights of LGBTQ employees.
4. Spending organizational resources on LGBTQ employees vs what is best for shareholders and the bottom line.

These instances of strategic duality will now be explored further.

In the spirit of being a good corporate citizen, several of Minnesota’s Fortune 500 firms collaborated together in the larger community to increase awareness and advance LGBTQ equality. From that perspective, companies recognized the importance of pursuing common good in the larger community, LGBTQ equality as a human rights issue and that working together more could be accomplished. On the other hand, this involved collaborating with rival firms who compete for the same employees and customers. These firms recognized the importance of advancing equality but felt some conflict (e.g. strategic duality) by collaborating with rivals. Nevertheless, organizations that cited this strategic duality consistently expressed confidence that seeking to advance LGBTQ equality as part of their CSR strategy was the right decision; from both a business and moral perspective.

A second manner in which companies collaborated was moving to score 100 (or score significantly higher) on the HRC CEI during the same reporting year in an effort to share, and likely reduce the risk of public backlash. Specifically, several senior leaders felt that sharing potential news headlines of scoring 100 on the CEI with other Minnesota firms would mitigate public backlash. In contrast, being the only Minnesota firm to score 100 on the CEI would make the company a prime target for customer backlash and possible boycotts. Similar to collaborating to advance LGBTQ equality in the community these companies felt some amount of conflict by cooperating with rivals; notably in their firm’s efforts to compete for employees and customers providing another example of strategic duality. That said, some participants’ perspectives included the belief that bringing top talent to the geographic area, even if it wasn’t employment with their firm, was a benefit to the community.

In examining parity more closely, the strongest discord within this strategic duality concerned recruitment of employees, not competition for customers. This provides an interesting nuance and reinforces the literature concerning the recruitment of talent—i.e. the war for talent. As Morgan (2017) suggests, organizations that focus on the employee experience can help drive innovation, productivity and recruit top talent. In working collaboratively to create LGBTQ-inclusive work environments and to establish parity with each other, participants speaking to the motives of their organizations consistently acknowledged the competing imperative of endeavoring to be the employer of choice. In contrast, although some participants noted the conflicting imperatives of working collaboratively for parity versus competition for customers—it was notably fewer in number.
Strategic duality also emerged in the intrinsic conflict between advancing LGBTQ equality in the workplace vs offending customers or employees who don’t believe in extending rights to LGBTQ employees. As this study revealed, some companies discovered job satisfaction of LGBTQ employees was lower compared to overall job satisfaction of employees; LGBTQ employees were noticeably less satisfied. This presents a dilemma for management. Specifically, how does management allocate resources to support LGBTQ employees without alienating customers, or in some cases, other, more satisfied employees? The risk of adverse reactions from customers is real and current. As highlighted earlier, recent examples include the boycotts faced by the Hallmark Channel in 2019 for airing a same-sex wedding commercial from wedding planning firm Zola (Vranica, 2019) and Mattel in 2015 for promoting two gay dads in their American Doll magazine (Sieczkowski, 2015). To address this strategic duality many organizations shared the importance of employee training and professional development opportunities focused on diversity and LGBTQ topics in the workplace.

Finally, management’s desire to do what is best for shareholders while simultaneously doing what is best for employees can also create a strategic duality. As an example, within this study, the competing imperatives of maximizing profit for shareholders vs investing resources to create an inclusive work environment for a limited number of employees. As noted by Savitz (2013, p. 93) cynics of social responsibility argue, “...as long as ... Wall Street is the chief arbitrator of a company’s value, corporate leaders and managers will direct their every waking moment to increasing shareholder value, often at the expense of all other stakeholders.” In contrast, this inquiry does not find evidence that companies included in the study put shareholder profit before employees. Instead, there are abundant references to the positive organizational benefits in creating a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment.

Implications
The nature of this inquiry produces several practical and theoretical implications important to our understanding of the case for creating an LGBTQ-inclusive work environment. Practical implications include training and education, a focus on policy and growing the recruitment pipeline. Theoretical implications include contributions to our understanding management theory: specifically, CSR and strategic duality.

The findings of this study suggest that management and organizations make LGBTQ-focused diversity training and education a priority. Indeed, the HRC identifies diversity training programs as valuable vehicles through which a company can communicate expectations of equality to stakeholders (HRC, 2010). Bell et al. (2011) found that diversity and inclusion training should include sexual orientation because doing so increases awareness while decreasing misperceptions. Additional studies have found evidence that cultural diversity training increased employees’ perception of the importance of diversity for the organization and decreased their perceptions that minorities get too much attention.

Bell et al. (2011) framed it well,

Being forced to remain closeted, living with the fear of being terminated, and lack of partner benefits are just a few of the concerns unique to LGBTQ employees. Supporting ... management practices that encourage openness and reject discriminatory practices, however, can make the difference. (p. 133)

Establishing and supporting LGBTQ-inclusive policies advances a company’s effort in creating an inclusive workplace better for LGBTQ employees. These polices are the foundation that the organization builds upon to address discrimination based on sexual
orientation, gender identity and gender expression. This case study and related literature identify key policies which have become the standard in promoting inclusion. In particular, every company must write and actively enforce an antidiscrimination policy, including procedures for preventing and addressing discrimination (Bailinson et al., 2020; Van Den Bergh, 2003). In the absence of an enforced statement of nondiscrimination, LGBTQ persons face the prospect that they could be discriminated against. Health insurance that covers employees’ domestic-partners and surgery for employees seeking to transition is also important. Finally, systems and tools that collect personal data must be inclusive of all genders and pronouns.

Signaling a commitment to creating an LGBTQ-inclusive work environment increases the ability of the firm to recruit and retain employees. Numerous interview participants who identified as LGBTQ noted looking to a company’s score on the CEI in considering future employment. The higher the CEI score the more likely they would consider working for that particular company. From the firm’s perspective, multiple cases reveal that to be considered a competitive employer creating an LGBTQ-inclusive work environment is essential. Within several of the cases participants cited concern of losing employees to rival companies in town – especially of high concern was losing top performing employees. One aspect of the interviews revealed that some LGBTQ employees looked at how companies approached-competing imperatives related to inclusion. In one example, a member of the LGBTQ ERG stated the significant message the company sent them by looking to do what was right for inclusion long before rivals and at the exasperation of some stakeholders. This distinction is revealing and important as it provides a nuanced view related to strategic duality.

The beginning of this inquiry asserted that for today’s firm to be competitive, it must be interested in more than simply profit; it must also do good. The plethora of information obtained in this multiple case study advances that understanding, and importantly, the impact of creating a LGBTQ-inclusive work environment within the theoretical framework of CSR. In particular, this inquiry shares the voices and provides personal accounts concerning the relevance of framing LGBTQ inclusion as a human rights issue as part of a broader CSR framework. As noted within the literature one way a firm demonstrates being socially responsible is taking steps to enhance employee wellbeing and actions to promote diversity (Hill et al., 2003). Participant voices across the cases support this ideology by describing motivations such as creating a place where one can bring their whole self to work, where diversity and inclusion drives value and the “right” thing to do is a mainstay of the company culture.

Organizations are complex and managers often have to navigate competing imperatives (e.g. strategic dualities). Importantly, to compete effectively in today’s competitive environment it is crucial that firms manage strategic dualities effectively (Birkinshaw et al., 2016). In facing these competing imperatives managers sooner or later place one imperative over the other. Indeed, many meaningful actions that occur within the firm involve people making choices that stress one objective ahead of another (Birkinshaw and Gupta, 2013). The examples shared by people who faced or witnessed these decisions provide critical insight on how organizations manage strategic dualities; an undeveloped area of research (Birkinshaw et al., 2016). As an example, as the internal organizational pressure theme illustrates, the motivation to create a LGBTQ inclusive work environment began by employee request and in potential conflict with the wishes of competing stakeholders. Cases revealed the internal organizational pressure as a motivator for change originated from various sources, including LGBTQ ERGs, grass roots initiatives or formal request from senior leadership. The ways in which this theme manifested and revealed itself across cases highlights the complexity of how organizations approach strategic dualities.
Limitations and future inquiry

By design, the case study methodology does not allow generalizations to be drawn beyond the companies included in this study. Instead, case study methods are used solely to understand the phenomena being examined. Therefore, the findings are limited to understanding only the organizations found within the study. Second, included in the research design were sample size and framework, i.e., Fortune 500 organizations in Minnesota that score well on the HRC’s CEI. While these companies were selected specifically for the study, comparisons cannot be drawn with smaller organizations not ranked by the CEI or listed in the Fortune 500. Finally, conclusions are not intended to be read as the only feasible interpretation of the data, but instead are presented as interpretive understanding after careful analysis of interviews and company documents over several years.

This study raises additional questions that are worth exploring. Notably, the impact of physical environment and location on creating equality in the work environment is worth further inquiry. A takeaway from this study is that organizations are complex. Several participants recognized that at their large organization, the day-to-day experience for LGBTQ employees could vary greatly depending on location. In particular, environmental differences between working at corporate headquarters, often located in urban environments, vs at production facilities, often located in rural environments.

Conclusion

This inquiry has developed several contributions to the literature on CSR, SD and importantly – improves our understanding behind motivations to create equality in the workplace for LGBTQ people. Overall, the results of this study demonstrate significant rationales as to why organizations choose to make this a priority. The practical impact of this inquiry can inform organizations and managers as they endeavor to create an inclusive work environment and remove the myths from discussions on this topic.

In conclusion, this inquiry directs greater attention to the importance of LGBTQ equality in today’s workplace through the lens of strategic duality and CSR. This research complements our understanding of the rewards for creating an inclusive work environment demonstrated by other studies with different minority groups. It can serve as a steppingstone for additional study to advance our understanding of the intersection of management, LGBTQ employees and the work environment. As managers address critical and difficult components that relate to creating an LGBTQ-inclusive work environment, the information found within this inquiry can provide insight and benefit practice.

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