French Companies not yet all that Gay-Friendly!

L’Autre Cercle, a French organisation fighting sexual orientation and gender identity based discrimination at work, has released the results of a poll entitled “LIVING AS AN LGBT PERSON AT WORK” to which 930 participants responded. This study follows up on and complements another carried out in 2006 on the same subject and was open to all (including heterosexuals). It strongly suggests that very little progress has been made.

Conclusions of the Study

Nearly 20% of LGBT employees consider they face a hostile climate within their company or organisation. • 17% mention hostile colleagues and 19% their management structure as being hostile. • Cross-tabulation reveals that the workplace environment is more difficult in manufacturing industry and the education sector. It is also less favourable in large companies – surprising considering the numerous positive measures present in such companies – However, the underlying reason would appear to be not so much because small companies have more gay-friendly policies, but rather because employees in smaller companies are more likely to quit their jobs if they face a hostile situation. • Workplace environment is less favourable wherever the rights of registered partners are not recognized. 67% of those polled do not wish to be “out” at work because of their fear of negative consequences (74% in 2006) • Less visibility for graduates and employees of large organisations. • Lack of recognition of rights and absence of anti-harassment training do not favour visibility. • Higher visibility in the public sector except so far as education is concerned.

26% of respondents claim to have suffered from or to have witnessed homophobic behaviour (e.g. doubtful jokes, rumours, value judgments, exclusion, harassment or insults…) • …without any consequence for 92% of perpetrators.

Companies seldom get involved

• Only 13% of poll participants mention the existence, in their organisation, of a document making specific reference to sexual orientation.
• 33% of employees and civil servants (35% in 2006) work in organisations that offer no rights to registered partners (for example life or health insurance…) – or at least they are not aware of such rights if they exist.

Despite the results of the study that show there still is a long way to go before prejudices and taboos at work can be eliminated, it is only fair to highlight the following positive points:

• Companies and organisations that have a charter or other document making specific reference to sexual orientation are judged to have more favourable work environments.
• People are more visible or prepared to be more visible in companies where Best Practices are present.

Profile of Participants

Greater Paris is predominantly represented (43%) though still in a minority of total respondents

81% of respondents live in cities with over 100,000 inhabitants

54% are white collar employees

27% come from the public sector

(*)LGBT: Lesbian–Gay–Bi–Transgender
Deeply rooted homophobic behaviour in companies/organizations but no corrective action

“Have you experienced homophobic behaviour at your workplace during the past year?”

- Yes: 26%
- No: 47%
- Don’t know: 27%

“How did you become aware of such behaviour?”

- Happened in my presence: 51%
- I, personally, was a victim: 34%
- The victim told me: 12%
- I learned indirectly: 36%

“Of what did such behaviour consist?”

- Doubtful jokes: 200
- Lack of respect, value judgments: 143
- Denunciation, outing, idle gossip: 71
- Isolation: 58
- Harassment, psychological pressure: 41
- Inequalities of rights and benefits in the workplace: 39
- Violent language, insults…: 38
- Discrimination involving promotion: 22
- Job termination, relocation, pressure resulting in resignation: 13
- Physical assault: 3

“What were the consequences?”

- The company reacted in favour of the victim: 8%
- The company reacted against the victim: 7%
- Nothing whatsoever happened: 85%

Workers and salaried employees in the building industry and teachers are the most pessimistic.

26% of respondents are aware of homophobic behaviour.

Half of them because they were present and one third because they, personally were as victims.

In 85% of such cases there was no no follow-up whatsoever by the organisation.

“What is the general day-to-day climate at your place of work?”

- Hostile: 20%
- Neutral: 62
- Friendly: 150

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The visibility of homosexuals has barely progressed compared to 2006. Only 53% speak openly about their homosexuality, vs. 54.2% in 2006.

The more academically qualified or “over-qualified” LGBT individuals are, the less visible they are (only 43% vs. 53% in total). This can be explained by the fact that the career stakes for such individuals are much higher, and they seek to avoid the problem of the so-called “glass ceiling”

Homosexual people are more visible in the public sector (excluding education) than in the private sector. In this context it should be noted that only 43.2% speak openly about their sexual orientation in the private sector vs. 54% in the public sector or large government-owned companies (with more than 500 employees).

Non-visible individuals chose to be so because they anticipate a potential negative impact on their career and a worsening of their day to day life in the workplace.

A slight improvement can be observed between 2006 and 2010: in 2010, 67% were not visible because of their fear of potential negative consequences vs. 74% in 2006.

Why have some people have chosen to be visible?

Interestingly, 21% of participants reveal themselves through fear of being outed. This can be referred to as “preventive visibility”.

“Offensive visibility”, i.e. because of activism or as a way to mark one’s personal difference, has increased between 2006 and 2010. This highlights an increased level of self acceptance as opposed to negation and is symbolic of achieving greater personal fulfillment.

Rights offered to registered partners

In 2010, 33% of employees or civil servants worked in companies or organisations that did not offer any of the 8 most frequently mentioned rights (or were unaware of the existence of any of these rights) (38.4% in 2006).

“Could you tell us if the rights offered to married couples are also available offered to registered partners?”

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“Could you tell us if the rights offered to married couples are also available offered to registered partners?”

YES NO DON'T KNOW

Life insurance / Disability benefits 31% 12% 57%
Deceased spouse’s pension allowance 47% 9% 44%
Access to the company’s health insurance plan 31% 9% 60%
Geographical mobility allowances 25% 13% 62%
Housing allowances 37% 12% 51%
Access to activities or benefits offered by Employee Committees or Works Councils (known as “Comités d’Entreprise” in France) 33% 8% 59%
Rights relating to a registered partnership (or similar union) 29% 10% 61%
Spouse’s death benefits
CURRENT SITUATION ON BEST PRACTICE WITHIN COMPANIES/ORGANISATIONS

Awareness of charters or other documents of reference dealing with Diversity is slowly increasing. Harassment or discrimination training is still rare.

POLICY COMMUNICATION

Companies communicate very little on this subject. As opposed to 2006, more respondents mentioned the existence of a chart or document of reference concerning diversity–related internal policies (27% in 2010 vs. 23% in 2006).

In 2006, sexual orientation was specifically mentioned as a criterion in only 8.4% of documents of reference. In 2010, 13% of them mentioned it. Four years after the establishment in France of a charter, a seal of approval and a standard or norm for Diversity, not to mention the appearance of Diversity Managers in organization charts, the lack of visibility of such actions has to be underlined.

“ADoes your company or organisation have a charter (or any other form of document of reference) that specifically talks about the policy of the organisation concerning its respect of diversity?”

- 26% Don’t know
- 47% No charter
- 13% Charter mentions sexual orientation
- 1% Charter does not mention sexual orientation but HR has plans to include such a mention

“Is someone specifically responsible for diversity and harassment issues in your company?”

- 64% No
- 18% Yes
- 18% Don’t know

AWARENESS-RAISING AND TRAINING

8% of participants said they knew of an internal training programme on harassment including sexual orientation–based harassments. That number stood at 7% in 2006.

It should be noted that 70% of respondents have not been informed of anti–harassment laws and that 76% have not observed any internal action aimed at fighting sexual orientation based discrimination.

“Have you been informed of any legislation on harassment including sexual orientation based harassment?”

- 70% No
- 14.5% By employer
- 14.5% By trade unions, HR department or employees association
- 1% By employer and trade unions

“Does your company offer training on harassment including sexual orientation based harassment?”

- 72% No
- 8% Yes
- 21% Don’t know

This study was carried out by the research group of “l’Observatoire de l’Autre Cercle”. It is based on strict observance of the scientific and ethical principles of quantitative exploratory research. The conclusions and findings reflect the state of opinion at the moment the study was conducted and do not constitute a forecast. The responses come from an on-line self-administered questionnaire (on Google) over a 10 month period from January 1st 2010 to October 30th 2010.

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Official partner companies of the “Fédération de l’Autre Cercle”: