

diversITy: can being gay hold your career back?



Edit: Just a couple of grammatical tweaks.

This [series of entries](#), called **diversITy**, continues from the previous topic, all concerning the diversity of people within the IT industry. This time, I'd like to put forward: sexual orientation in the workplace, can it set you back?

I've been researching this for a good week now, trying to get to the heart of the matter. I'm not gay, but I have many friends and colleagues who are, so I've been asking them for their opinions and thoughts, and this topic is certainly not an easy one to cover. For a start, some people somewhere will disagree with everything; then of course because I'm not gay, "how can I know?", and ultimately I'll end up offending someone because when it comes to sensitive topics like this, *you're always going to*, regardless of how much you try not to.

50 years ago in both the UK and the US, homosexuality was illegal. In the back end of the 19th century, [Richard von Krafft-Ebing](#) claimed it was a disease. Nowadays, we've begun to start accepting this way of life, which is nothing short of a fantastic breakthrough. Without doubt, one of the most famous gay computer scientists was [Alan Turing OBE](#), the man [who essentially created the Enigma machine](#) that helped win World War II, [and the Turing test](#) which determines the level of a computers intelligence.

Yet in 1952, he was prosecuted under essentially an act which criminalised homosexuality, the same act which had prosecuted and jailed [Oscar Wilde](#) only 50 years previously. This ultimately led to Turing's suicide (although disputed) two years later.

During my research, there seems to be no definite figures on how many gay people per population. I spoke to the [HM Government Office of National Statistics](#), and they told me:

"Currently there's no demographic data for what you requested, as this isn't something the Government keeps tabs on. However there will be an optional request in the [2011 census](#)."

I tried the [US Census Bureau](#), but couldn't figure out how to get an international dialling tone on this [stupid bloody phone](#). Needless to say, with some added research

(and with the help of my good ol' friend Google), it's fair to say there's [roughly 1 in 10 people in the United States](#) and about the same over here in the UK. Don't have a go at me if that's slightly wrong, it's near enough.

Read on for more hard-hitting investigative journalism, as well as *absolute, irrefutable proof** that the Iranian president is himself gay.

* well, maybe...

For lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, "LGBT" or slight difference in combination of those letters for short, being openly expressive of their position can limit them in some ways. Most organisations nowadays work by many standards - the "diversity" code of conduct, not allowing discrimination against other employees or contractors, respect, equality against age, sex, etc., but this isn't always enough. If your boss has an discomfort or an issue with something, they can personally reduce your chances or gaining a higher place in the company, and throw some other reason in instead.



According to GCN's Gay Market Study, just over 78% of all gay people fear coming out at work as they worry it may harm promotion opportunities. Looking at the [Gay/Lesbian Consumer Online Census](#), most LGBT find "the concern about being out at work is obvious, because it is there that [LGBT] people can potentially be discriminated against." Considering 44% of those questioned on the census came out when they were between 18 and 24, this is certainly an issue for gay students wanting to make their way into the workplace.

The [IT industry is one of the most attractive roles to LGBT](#), considering 11% of all gay US citizens taking the survey are in computing and/or technology, whilst 4% of the same demographic are in media/communications, which is heavily supported by technology.

Scott Stockwell, diversity group leader at IBM UK, spoke to The Independent newspaper in their recent article, "[The number of gay people in senior positions is growing](#)":

"We have had a general employee diversity policy in place since 1953 and although we are not able to collect specific statistics on the sexuality of our

staff, we believe that IBM senior management not only understands the issues but is geared up to fully support any member of staff who does decide to come out."

I spoke to my good friend [Beau Giles](#), a student living in Australia; spoke to me about entering the IT industry and the choices he'd make:

"I guess I'd want to work for companies that wouldn't discriminate towards you in the first place. For example, on Apple's jobs page, they have 'We are committed to diversity. Apple is an [Equal Opportunity Employer](#)'. But, wouldn't work be just like the 'outside' world? You'd just come out to who you'd trust."

It seems over the vast majority of the "developed" world - the UK, the US, Australia, New Zealand, most of Europe and probably Russia - being LGBT isn't a problem. Nowadays we live in a world where (again, I'm keen to stress) the *vast majority* of people are accepting, understanding, tolerant and well informed about homosexuality. It doesn't strike a problem because we know being gay isn't a disease, you can't catch AIDS by going near someone who's gay, and you can't "catch" being gay. We see gay people as ordinary people, caring, understanding people, who are just the same as straight people with a difference in sexual orientation.



OK, so we may have a slight situation in places like Iran, where you even mention the word "gay" and you can get hanged... thankfully [some nations have stopped deporting gay people back to Iran](#), because in my opinion, a government which will send someone in extreme danger of capital punishment for being gay is repugnant and abhorrent.

In the workplace, [more and more LGBT people are getting to more senior positions](#) - probably not because they're gay, most likely due to the fact as individuals, they're good at their job. Amidst controversy from certain religions, [gay marriage and civil partnerships are more incredibly popular](#), where legalised of course. Being gay should not stop you in the workplace, but thankfully if problems do arise, this is what union's are for, not to mention the law.

⚠️ Comments: These posts may seem controversial to some, so in light of this I will not be accepting any derogatory, sexist, homophobic, racially motivated, extremist,

verbally violent, threatening, or anything like that. I'm all for openness, honesty and transparency, but I have zero tolerance over any of the above. If such comments are found, they'll be deleted straight away without warning or notification.