# Supporting Trans Colleagues in the Workplace through Allyship

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**Introduction**

This research seeks to assist in identifying the support that transgender employees within the hospitality industry in order to feel included in the workplace. Support for transgender people is important, as anti-trans sentiment has been growing within the UK, as evidenced from YouGov statistics which show an increase from 16% of people in 2021 stating they have a negative view of transgender people, to 25% in 2023 (Smith, 2023). In addition, transgender inclusion remains lacking in many workplaces (Fletcher and Marvell, 2022). This indicates a need to focus on how transgender people can be supported to create more inclusive atmosphere. Arguably, the best way to ensure that transgender employees are supported is to ask transgender employees what support and allyship they require in order to feel included, valued, and free to be their authentic selves in the workplace.

**Background Information**

Allyship is a tool that can be used to support others, and can be defined as an individual from a privileged or dominant group who seeks to support and end the oppression of marginalised people through intentional and conscious efforts (Arif *et al.*, 2022). However, self-proclaimed allies are not always aware of what actions they need to take to support marginalised people (Hanasono *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, recent research from a CIPD report on Inclusion at work demonstrates that cisgender employees are far more positive than transgender employees regarding their perception of allyship. In particular, only 65% of transgender respondents in the CIPD study agreed that allies would offer visible allyship in the workplace, compared to 80% for heterosexual and cisgender employees (Fletcher and Miller, 2021).The biggest discrepancy between transgender and cisgender employees however was concerned with their belief in allies’ intention to ‘stand up for trans workers’, with only 54% of transgender respondents agreeing, compared to 89% of heterosexual cisgender respondents agreeing (Fletcher and Miller, 2021).

In order for transgender – and other LGBTQ+ employees – to feel supported and included, active allyship is required (Jacobson, Williams and Wong, 2022).Active Allyship can be defined as the act of speaking out and actively taking action against injustices (Gonçalves, 2022). A key area that transgender employees require support and allyship for is their ability to behave in ways that are authentic to them (Hennekam and Ladge, 2022) – as authenticity is known to be associated with aspects of wellbeing (Sutton, 2020). Transgender employees who experience active allyship often have improved levels of self-esteem and wellbeing (Chen, Joel and Castro Lingl, 2023). However, there is little research to demonstrate the relationship between allyship and authenticity of transgender recipients. While active allyship is key to providing transgender employees with support, many ‘allies’ engage with what is referred to as performative allyship. Performative allyship refers to actions taken by self-proclaimed allies that do not provide meaningful or helpful support to its intended marginalised group (Kalina, 2020).

Overall, there are gaps in the literature relating to both transgender studies (Lefebvre, 2020) and research regarding allyship is still largely recent. This research seeks to explore these gaps in order to better understand the experiences of transgender employees in relation to allyship within the hospitality industry.

**Research Methods**

The research method utilised was an online survey, which is one component of a larger PhD project regarding allyship and transgender experiences. The hospitality industry was chosen as a focus due to its unique nature as a large source of entry-level and flexible work (GOV.UK, no date) and additionally its function as an industry that seeks to provide a welcoming atmosphere that is opposed to opposition (Derrida, 2000).The survey received a total of 163 responses between May and October 2023. Only 90 of these responses were valid for the PhD study due to a variety of issues with certain responses, including incomplete data and/or participants not fitting the participant criteria. Of these, 59 participants provided feedback on what they believed to be the three most important actions an ally can take in the workplace. The survey included questions on allyship, workplace conflict, and personal wellbeing.

**Findings and Discussion**

One key finding demonstrated that there was a strong link amongst transgender participants’ perception of inclusivity in their workplace, and the likelihood for them to be ‘out’ in the workplace. Additionally, findings showed differences what support transgender employees within the UK hospitality industry valued – active allyship actions. 13.3% of self-identified transgender participants indicated some form of active support or allyship as the most important action an ally could take, compared to only 6.7% of non-transgender participants. In particular, phrases such as ‘standing up’ and ‘advocating’ for transgender employees were very common from transgender participants. Non-transgender participants were less likely to highlight this aspect of support and appeared to be more concerned with correct pronoun and name usage as a form of allyship. This may indicate that the support and allyship offered by peers in the workplace may be performative, and not what the transgender employees require to be truly and equally included.

**Conclusion and Further Research**

Overall, the data collection demonstrates that transgender employees may require more active allyship from their peers, and that cisgender employees likely need education and training on what actions an ally should be taking. Further research on this topic will include a qualitative stage wherein survey participants will be able to provide further insight into the allyship that they feel they need to be supported in the workplace. This information will then be used both to create guidance for organisations to support inclusion strategies, and also to explore the theoretical relationships between allyship and authenticity.

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