The Significance of Awareness about Gender Diversity for the Future of Work: A Multi-Method Study of Organizational Structures and Policies Considering Trans and Gender Diversity

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Abstract—The future of work becomes less predictable which requires increasing adaptability of organizations to social and work changes. Society is transforming regarding gender identity in the sense that more people come forward to identify as trans and gender diverse (TGD). Organizations are ill-equipped to provide a safe and encouraging work environment by lacking inclusive organizational structures. The qualitative multi-method research about TGD inclusivity in the workplace explores the enablers and barriers for TGD individuals to satisfactorily engage in the work environment and organizational culture. Furthermore, these TGD insights are analyzed based on organizational implications and awareness from a leadership and management perspective. The semi-structured online interviews with TGD individuals and the photo-elicit open-ended questionnaire addressed to leadership and management in diversity, career development, and human resources have been analyzed with a critical grounded theory approach. Findings demonstrated the significance of TGD voices, the support of leadership and management, as well as the synergy between voices and leadership. Hence, it indicates practical implications such as the revision of exclusive language used in policies, data collection, or communication and reconsideration of organizational decisionmaking by leaders to include TGD voices.

Keywords—Future of work, occupational identity, organizational decision-making, trans and gender diverse identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE modifications in the present workforce towards globalization, technocracy, and inclusivity of diversity have been acknowledged by various scholars [1]. In addition, future work practices have become less predictable as a dividend of the current climate derived by the pandemic. Independent of this development, or precisely because of it, businesses ought to be prepared for a social change to determine the appropriate decisions [2] to be able to compete as an ethical, efficient, and innovative organization [3]. Besides the organizational change, the population transformation towards gender diversity requires consideration [4]. The proportion of TGD people has risen [5] contributing to an expanding participation of gender diversity in the workforce. Sociologists have predicted that the number of TGD people entering the workforce will increase with

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upcoming generations. Unfortunately, the voices of TGD employees are much less listened to [6] or included in the organizational decision making.

Leading literature on organizational and management studies lacks to examine the evolution of career development or work experiences from the position of TGD employers as well as organizations. Consequently, opportunities, outcomes, and responsibilities for TGD employees, and alternatively leadership, from an organizational perspective are narrowly explored [3]. Organization and management studies rather focus on the individual and their embeddedness in institutions which exempt employers from the responsibility of inclusivity of TGD voices to organizational decision-making and business development [7]. This research shall introduce the organizational perspective with the focus on the organizational side and their share of support to the living situation and employment of TGD individuals. This is undertaken in the manner of methodological and later finding triangulation of semi-structured interviews with TGD individuals in Australia and a photo-elicit open-ended questionnaire. Hence, a change of perspective starting with the analysis of the organizational and social standpoint including the influence on the bidirectional triangulation as well as the relationship between the individual and the organization is of interest [8]. However, organizational and management literature about gender diversity primarily stresses the individual's responsibility without accounting their narrative about work, career development, or success.

The following paper presents the qualitative multi-method research about work experiences and career development of TGD individuals concerning organizational structures and work culture. The first study persists of semi-structured interviews with TGD individuals exploring the enablers and barriers for these employees to participate in the Australian workforce as well as to perceive their aspired career development. TGD experiences about career and work have been translated into images that are included in a photo-elicit open-ended questionnaire to explore the awareness of gender diversity from an organizational perspective as the second study. The research has been framed within the critical theory [9] and the post-structural Butlerian paradigm of gender [10]. From these two studies, the specific focus for this paper should be on TGD voices and organizational leadership. The findings demonstrate that voicing gender identity and

expression, as well as the role of supportive leadership, are two significant insights concerning awareness about gender diversity for the future of work.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Reviewing the organizational and management literature concerning the work experiences and career development of TGD individuals about organizational structures and workplace culture have demonstrated limited research [11]. The majority of the research projects have culminated TGD experiences under the umbrella term of LGBT employees -Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender employees [12]. Hence, the distinctive influence between sexual orientation and gender identity is absent. If researchers evaluated the influence of gender identity on work experiences and career development, it has rather been from a gender binary perspective of women/men or trans women/trans men [13]. It shall be claimed that significant differences can be found between a binary trans experience and a gender diverse or non-binary experience. Additionally, most of the literature has analyzed the phenomenon from a primary individual perspective without considering the intersection between the individual and the organizational context [14]. The present research aims to contribute to the body of knowledge about work experiences and career development of TGD individuals by including a specific TGD perspective concerning the organizational perspective on the phenomenon of inclusivity of gender diversity in the workplace. This shall be achieved through a critical theory lens. The underlying constructivist ontology and interpretive epistemology with a critical theory lens lead to a qualitative multi-method approach analyzed by a critical grounded theory [15]. Critical research analyses power and hegemonic ideology to develop the inquiry of empowering the disadvantaged and marginalized individual [16]. The diverse integration of voices in the organizational structure, the workplace culture and managerial decisions are limited by the silencing mechanism of TGD individuals [17]. The speech acts as performative participation in organizational development has been introduced to critical management and organization studies as critical performativity. While critical performativity builds on the theoretical approach of performativity established by Austin and Butler [18]; critical or progressive performativity has consequently focused on the social dynamic and power of the speech act and linguistic discourse. This has crucial implications for the materiality of space and body at the workplace and the development of gender equity which is not just performed through speech acts as it should be argued here. Butler's [19]-[22] focus on materiality inclusion is limited in her concept of performativity.

Butler's concept of gender performativity [19] implies a repetition of acts that are shaped by dominant conventions of gender norms including the heterosexual matrix as 'a stable sex expressed through stable gender [...] that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the practice of heterosexuality' (p.151). Inspired by the phenomenological theory of acts - which has been established by Husserl,

Merleau-Ponty, and Mead - Butler claims that social agents constitute their social reality through gestures, language and other social symbolic signs [22]. Gender is instituted by the social agents' body which allows them to express their gendered self. According to Butler [22], a collective agreement on performed gender exists and the disagreement with such gender norms as well as an unconventional expression of gender identity will be socially punished [20]. The embodiment of cultural and historical norms does not imply that there are no individual ways of doing gender but the fact of doing it and doing it in accord with social norms is not an essential individual matter [21], [22]. Such social norms of how gender must be done and represented accordingly to the institutional norm exist in the context of the organization and work relations as well as in other institutions.

Performativity was introduced in critical management studies by Spicer et al. [18] as critical performativity to initiate active and subversive intervention into managerial practice and discourse. The following debate about critical performativity or progressive performativity is dominated by the significance of language for discourse and understood as a speech act that can do change [18], [23]-[29]. Most of the authors are relying on the conceptualization of Austin and Butler which defines the significance of discourse as describing, shaping, moulding, and determining reality in form of the speech act [26]. Gond et al. [28, p.441] expending the performativity concept by referring to the material turn in organization and management studies outlines the material turn is related to or 'aligned with performativity studies that aim to understand the material effects of discursive practice [...] and the socio-material nature of knowledge constitution'. Cabantous et al. [27] claim that the engagement with materiality in the context of performativity could have a significant impact on the development of critical management studies and the achievement of the aim to initiate active and subversive intervention into the managerial practice and discourse [18]. Schaefer and Wickert [24, p.219] underline that performativity is predominantly linked to language but 'it can under particular circumstances lead to transformative organizational practices that are inextricably tied to material artefacts'.

Leading authors of critical performativity in critical management studies are debating about correct application and engagement with the performativity concept of Butler, Austin, Lyotard [27], if author-itariansim - 'a dogmatic faith to the idea of a selected guru' [23] - is a danger for the development of critical management studies [18], or if it is best practice to stay on the shoulders of giants [29]. It should be questioned that leading authors of critical performativity invested more time to embrace their position in the debate than developing a critical engagement with critical performativity. Such critical engagement could be beyond the understanding of linguistic discourse and rather stronger including the material aspect of the performative act [30]. By using critical performativity as improvement of organization and resistance to oppressive institution practice within critical management and organizational studies it becomes a paradox in itself. By

recommending change on the managerial level to improve the general work culture, organizational structure, and gender equality at work is a top-down decision and implementation which in turn is a form of oppression. Micro-emancipation is not sufficient to establish real empowerment of employees. This is referring to the critiqued discussion about critical management studies is only implementing micro-emancipation instead of real empowerment of their employees. Management should give up some of their decision-making power and accelerate the influence of their employees to make a change in work culture and organizational structures which then have the chance to develop gender equity for all individuals at work independent of their gender identity.

III. RESEARCH AIM

The research objectives are aiming to understand the current lived reality of TGD people in the workforce as well as the status quo in Australian organizations including gender diversity. Furthermore, the researcher would like to contribute to the development of suitable strategies for positive decisionmaking in the areas of diversity management and human resources to adapt or sustain adjustments to the future of work. Thus, it is encouraging the achievement of inclusive and equitable conditions for all people in the workforce independently of their gender identity. The purpose of the research is the acknowledgment of existing awareness and equitable inclusion of TGD people in organizations as an important step for adopting requirements of the future of work. Including principles of gender diversity improves the overall organizational functionality as well as the individual well-being and satisfaction of participants in the workforce.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative multi-method research project includes two studies. The first study inclines explorative, in-depth, semistructured interviews [31] that have been conducted online. Overall, 22 interviews have been conducted of an average of 1.5 hours content about work, career development, gender identity, as well as the relation of gender and work. The interviews have been transcribed and underwent memberchecking [32] before being analyzed. From the interview analysis, six images have been developed which are representative of reoccurring patterns or processes of TGD work experiences. The images with an explanation have been sent out to the participants to evaluate the interpretation of the interviews. Following, the pictures have been included in a photo-elicit open-ended questionnaire which aimed at leadership and management such as human resources, diversity, or career development. Subjects of the questionnaire are about the personal and organizational evaluation of gender diversity, analyzing two randomized images, and asking the support of TGD employees as well as general demographic questions. Most of the questions allowed to respond via an open text field. Overall, 42 people have filled out the questionnaire with elaborate answers. Both studies have been analyzed with the critical grounded theory approach.

The critical grounded theory approach [15] has been applied to analyze the interview transcript as well as the responses to the open-ended questions of the questionnaire. The underlying process of critical grounded theory can be described in three phases: first coding cycle, second coding cycle, and theorization [33]. Parallel to the data collection and analysis, writing memos is a critical practice to develop an in-depth understanding and reflection on the phenomenon. Even the memos have been analyzed to identify patterns, processes, and structures supporting the theorization process. The first coding cycle has been conducted as line-by-line coding and assigned either an In-Vivo code (participants meaning of behavior, process, action, and view), process code (consequences of action and interaction), or initial code (possible theoretical direction) to the material [34]. After checking and redefining the codes a second coding cycle has been applied which categorizes the codes in barriers, enablers, and other insights as well as specializes the In-Vivo codes. Such categorization represents the focused coding [34]. Axial coding (cluster/reassembly of split or fractured data) has been applied by interview case-specific evaluation of main enablers, barriers, and insights [35]. The theoretical coding is influenced by the patterns, processes, and structures of the memos as well as the findings triangulation of the two studies. The main findings that should be presented in this paper are about voicing gender identity and the expression as well as the influence of supportive leadership.

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Voicing gender identity and expression has been a significant insight from the two studies - semi-structured interviews with TGD individuals and the photo-elicit openended questionnaire from an organizational perspective. Being able to voice and express a person's gender identity in the workplace can either be enabling or debilitating to experience positive work engagement and satisfaction as well as pursue their career aspiration [14], [36]. Voicing gender identity and expression includes the application of language in a workplace [6], as well as the actual physical expression such as the use of uniforms or application of dress codes. Only having gender binary options can rather be harmful to TGD employees: "Yeah, that forces you to decide one way or the other, and the decision you make for pragmatic reasons doesn't align with how you feel on the inside." Another TGD interview participant stated that they do not want to be part of a workplace where they cannot represent their whole self: "I feel like I kind of like I guess misgendering myself for being there. This is not a place for me and when I accept this is a place for me then that feels wrong." The use of language includes either a rather gender-neutral style where gender is unnecessary or gender inclusivity where a broader inclusion of gender identities is appropriate or even essential. Within the questionnaire that represented the organizational perspective on gender diversity, it has been suggested to improve the use of language in policies, documents, but also daily communication: "remove all gendered language, only collect required data, ensure always have non-binary gender options

on forms (if we need to collect gender)". This could be through the inclusion of pronouns, additional gender identity fields, or exclusion of gender binary terms within policies.

Regarding the pronouns, it becomes obvious the voices of cis-gendered people have significance too in the process of organizational change. The voices of cis-gender people within the organization are a vital instrument of allyship as one of the questionnaire participants outlines: "I also admire people for calling out their preferred pronouns in the signature block. I think this establishes that respecting personal identity is totally normal, carries no shame. This should become an instinctive consideration in everyday language." TGD individuals mentioned in the interviews how important it is to see their gender identity represented in policies or documents. One of the interview participants mentioned: "perhaps a bit more performative but performative is not bad, performative is 'I see you' and look I made a space for you, I changed the signs for you, and it is not that hard, it is that fact that they don't do it kinds of shows that they didn't kind of try to understand things." If policies or documents lacking the awareness of gender diversity, TGD employees want to be able to raise their concerns which may lead to a change to a more inclusive workplace; when TGD individuals suggesting change, improvement, or action and they are shut down by leadership or organizational decision-making, it is experienced as disheartening and discouraging.

The second outstanding finding that should be raised is about leadership. Changing the work culture and increasing awareness about TGD employees must be likewise the responsibility of leadership and management. Leadership should visibly support TGD individuals and demonstrate that gender identity is not influential for the assessment of a task or performance at work. "VERY important, especially in higher levels and positions of leadership, because without that there is no sense that you're welcome or have a potential for career progression," is a statement of one questionnaire participant. To provide such visible support further education and increasing knowledge about TGD individual's lived reality is needed.

Leadership plays a significant role as a role model for others in the company. TGD interview participants of study one mentioned that there are not enough queer people visible out within the higher management and leadership of an organization. Such visibility of leadership diversity is a highly empowering representation [10] as one of the TGD interview participants describes: "I think that probably helped to have someone in the position of authority who is queer themselves because it means that they are, they are not supportive or awkward they can be generally legit and enthusiastic, which I think that helps a lot." A person can only be what they can see and in the case of one TGD interview participant that resentment of queer management led to the hiding of their queerness: "They are pushing their own agenda, yeah so, they don't get to, so seeing that [hiding their queerness] from them makes me really aware of being just introvert about or my really queer experiences."

Leadership and management, in general, can support TGD

people by trusting their employees and giving them more flexibility in regard to their task management. A significant amount of TGD people would benefit from the increased flexibility of task management, time management, and presentism. One of the TGD interview participants suggested that more flexibility and trust from the leadership would be beneficial for all: "So, it is that sort of workplace and that sort of flexibility - trusting employees is fantastic, because when you give people that trust and you show them that you respect them and that you believe in them to make appropriate choices, then more often than not, they are going to respond very positively and they will live up to your expectations." Trust from the leadership of their employees seems to be an important indicator of a healthy work environment.

These two findings of TGD voices and leadership are interrelated. A TGD voice might be not included or heard in the workplace because leadership is generating an environment that is ignorant, inflexible, or even hostile. Leadership depends on the input of TGD voices to increase positive organizational change and provide a safe as well as a flourishing environment for all their employees. Such an environment of belonging can be achieved by going beyond diversity that is present differences or individuality, and inclusion that might hear the voices but does not value them or act on the behalf of TGD people. Such suggestions have practical implications for organizational recommendations discussed in the following section.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The questionnaire findings predict that the awareness of gender diversity refers predominantly to the gender binary [37] and primarily consider the equality and inclusion of women. However, less attention might be paid to TGD people in the workforce [13]. In contrast, industry leaders and larger companies have invested enormous effort in the improvement of diversity [38] and equity for the LGBTIAQ+ community. It is questionable if these developments are suitable for TGD people. The findings of the qualitative multi-method research show that leadership and higher management need to be knowledgeable, visibly supportive, and open to adequate change management. Gender stereotypes are harmful to all participants of the workforce and need to be addressed in the form of an inclusive and creative diversity approach [39] that leads to a strong sense of belonging. Such development could be guided along with the awareness and understanding of the lived reality for TGD individuals in the workforce.

The research findings stimulated some suggestions of practical recommendations. To encourage diverse voices in the organizational dialogue to speak out, policies, documents, and organizational communication could be reviewed based on gender neutrality where unnecessary, or gender inclusivity where gender diverse terminology is a vital representation of all employees. The work arrangements such as presence time and requirements for instance uniform or dress codes could be eased. By defining flexible work arrangements, the workplace provides inclusionary opportunities for TGD individuals in times of change. Alternative communication options could be

accepted with the same value to encourage voices that otherwise would not come forwards or be heard off. Educational proposals for leadership as well as the staff could build a solid foundation for confident allyship. Visibility of support could be increased by adding symbols such as pronoun pins, rainbow lanyards or ally stickers to the inclusive work environment. Such visible clues might be also one method of how leadership can be presented as an inspiring role model for the support of TGD individuals in the workplace.

VII. CONCLUSION

The research is limited by the western concept of gender identity and expression as the studies have been conducted in Australia. A further limitation of the project could be the conduction of the studies as part of a PhD which had a different primary focus. Qualitative methods are the preferred approaches within a critical theory framework. Consequently, the findings do not provide generalization as the participation cohort has been too specific. The findings allow a first glimpse of the phenomenon of inclusivity of TGD voices in the workplace. Thus, there is scope for more in-depth or quantitative research about TGD work experiences and career development about organizational structure and workplace culture. Future research could explore the distinct experiences of binary trans as well as gender diverse or non-binary individuals in the workplace. The enablers and barriers for binary transgender individuals and gender diverse or nonbinary people could show tremendous differences regarding work engagement, job satisfaction, and career trajectory. Additionally, the influence of TGD leaders as role models has not been explored due to the missing example of such a person.

TGD individuals do not always have a voice in the organizational context, neither do they in organizational and management literature. The TGD work experience and career development are concerning organizational structures and workplace culture is a narrow research phenomenon. This paper would like to contribute to the knowledge of inclusivity for TGD voices in the workplace. The findings of the multimethod research show that leadership plays a significant role in empowering TGD voices in the workplace through increased flexibility, change of language, and visibility of diversity values.

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