

## Best Inclusion Practices

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# Best Inclusion Practices

## LGBT Diversity

Margarita Alonso

*IE University, Spain*

Translated by Lawrence Schimel

palgrave  
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Foreword © Jesús Encinar 2013

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*A Alberto, que entiende que no hay que entender para entender*

*To Alvaro, Carmen, Claudia, Cristóbal, Iñigo, Jaime,  
Margarita, Matías and Pedro, and also Palomita – because  
they are the future*

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Translator's note: Play on words: *Entender* (to understand) in Spanish LGBT jargon means 'to be gay'

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# Foreword

I remember that first event with the ieOut network. There were around 30 registrations and we ended up bringing in the benches from the patio and placing them in the classroom to accommodate everyone, as we were more than 70 in the end.

Everything started with that interview in which I encouraged Spanish business schools to catch up with their equivalents in the USA, where even the most conservative schools have LGBT networks for students and alumni, as well as recruiters who value diversity. It was a nice surprise to find that ieOut & Friends was already active.

Although we were a crowd, it was a very pleasant chat in which we shared experiences. I explained the challenges and opportunities presented by being both out of the closet and an entrepreneur. We also discussed the best practice at [idealista.com](http://idealista.com) in terms of balancing business and inclusion, at a time when the term 'LGBT' was unknown in the Spanish professional environment.

Since then, I have remained involved with ieOut and attended many of its events, during which we have increased awareness about LGBT inclusion. This is how I met Margarita and became interested in the research that has culminated in the publication of this book. It is important to have a text that puts in context the LGBT reality at school, in the family, and in the workplace. Lack of knowledge is very often the primary cause of homophobia. It was important to talk openly from both academic and business perspectives. We have to keep in mind that homophobia affects professionals as well as adolescents and children.

Further to my different academic and professional experiences in the USA, I had the opportunity to appreciate the differences in inclusion practices with Spain. Both countries are referents because they are the most advanced in terms of workplace conquests and legal recognition, respectively. I agree with Margarita about the appropriateness of the comparison and that it is not possible simply to import the achievements of another country – it is necessary to adapt them to one's own reality. From this comparison will arise very relevant conclusions to develop the LGBT inclusion practices that, unfortunately, are still required in many other countries.



This book is full of specialized references, but I want to underline the multiple literary and cinematographic quotes that make this work closer to the everyday life that we all know. It is a very practical book that can be applied immediately in the family, at school, and at work.

Jesús Encinar  
CEO, [idealista.com](http://idealista.com)

# Preface

In June 2006, when a group of students and alumni decided to create an LGBT network at the IE Business School, I happened to be in charge of the student clubs. I was their representative in the executive committee. It was therefore my responsibility to manage this initiative internally and to present it to the top management of the school.

The everyday activities of students were not usual topics for the committee's agenda. However, marriage between same-sex couples as well as adoption had been approved one year before and the debate remained a very hot topic. We felt we had to set out to obtain maximum consensus.

Before taking this proposal to the committee we did a lot of research and checked many similar initiatives undertaken in Europe and the USA. Most leading European business schools had LGBT networks. Some were active, but many simply had home pages on their website, sometimes with broken links and sometimes out of date.

Very soon we discovered that the USA schools were referents with active clubs or centers that involved visibility and awareness. Many also counted on corporation sponsorship for on-campus recruiting events for their LGBT graduates. Some, like Georgetown, offered alumni-supported scholarship programs to help young LGBTs with difficulties in continuing their studies following rejection by their family. Others sponsored students attending the Out & Equal Summit or Reaching Out MBA Conference to foster their networking and job opportunities.

The initiative was fully backed by the top management. With their first question 'What are going to be the contents of the initiative?', the evidence was on the table; Spanish corporations and multinationals based in our country were not ready for such a challenge. We could not simply copy and paste US best practices.

We started visiting some of our closest corporate partners, and very soon we found in IBM's historical commitment to diversity (as a fundamental means of creating the most thriving, inclusive, and innovative work environment) a strong responsiveness to our idea. Their support, knowledge, and experience were critical to shaping our project.

The following autumn, Jesús Encinar, CEO of *idealista.com*, who is one of the Spanish referent online entrepreneurs, was interviewed. In a

wide-ranging discussion in which he mainly talked about the internet, he shared personal testimony about his 'coming out' in Harvard while pursuing his MBA. He strongly criticized Spanish business schools that did not explicitly support their LGBT students. We contacted him through his blog to let him know about our brand new initiative; he committed to ieOut and agreed to be our kickoff event speaker.

The first event was an unexpected success: attendance by students, alumni, and other IE stakeholders far surpassed registrations. The media took interest. *El Confidencial*, a very popular and uninhibited online newspaper, covered the initiative with a very opportunistic headline, 'IE comes out of the closet'. There is no need to mention that the anonymity that the internet provides fostered the enthusiastic and supportive messages, but we also received the most biased and undeserved criticism. There were also homophobic insults.

Nowadays it is hard to believe that at that moment, in Admissions, we received letters from prospective students saying that because of ieOut they had decided not to pursue their applications. Some alumni gave up their membership with very angry emails and letters. They all required personalized responses, reminding them of the values of the school, its commitment to diversity, and of the fact that this was the request of our students and alumni. References to other LGBT networks in other reputable business schools and the sponsorship of IBM and Google were also powerful arguments.

At that stage some dissenting voices started to be heard among school faculty and administration. Some executives and professors were afraid that ieOut could negatively affect applications, while others let themselves be carried away by their prejudices.

After a while things started to return to normal, and finally the newspaper *El Economista* reported on the event, comparing our school with Harvard and Wharton. That was really helpful in countering apprehension, and since then no one has showed open disagreement with ieOut. Nowadays the acronym LGBT is completely accepted at IE; even students coming from countries where homosexuality is stigmatized or criminalized accept it with spontaneity.

IeOut is open to all LGBT professionals and their allies. It is a student initiative and, therefore, we do not measure the extent to which it is efficient in attracting candidates. In informal conversations with LGBT students and professors we have learnt that knowing IE is a safe place to work or study was crucial in their decision-making process. For many alumni it is evidence of IE's firm commitment to diversity and a reason to develop a sense of belonging and pride.

The story of ieOut is a successful case of best LGBT inclusion practices implementation, in a difficult country at a difficult moment in its history. It required the commitment and determination of top management, excellence and transparency on the part of the communication team, and coherence with our values and stakeholders. The support of our allies and other referents was crucial to reach normalization.

When I took on the challenge of ieOut I already had very wide experience in managing cultural diversity, as I had always been in contact with international students. I was very focused on women's leadership and the balancing of personal and professional lives, further to my doctoral studies. However, I had never deepened my involvement in LGBT diversity and the difficulties it entails. This is how I decided to embark on this venture. I had to reflect and research a lot to adapt successful cases to our own reality, and I thought that my experience could be valuable to other professionals.

This book is the result of extensive informal reading as well as formal research for my PhD, as after a while I realized that I could not separate gender from LGBT diversity. It is also a compendium of the fabulous experiences I was privileged to have while interacting with ieOut and working to increase awareness and spread best inclusion practices for LGBT.

The book sets out to put in context the elementary concepts of LGBT diversity. It explains the evolution of homosexuality during history and reasons why it has been considered a sin, an illness, and a crime. It explains the nature of modern homophobia and how it is expressed in both the private (family and friends) and public (school and workplace) domain.

This work aims to objectively approach the interaction between this heterogeneous group and society. It is designed to provide a practical guide for individuals, institutions, and corporations that need to understand this reality in order to better develop and apply the best inclusion practices. It develops a comparison between the Spanish and the US models as they are both world referents, the first in terms of legal inclusion and the second because it is one of the most advanced in corporate inclusion. Finally, it provides recommendations for those companies that want to include LGBT diversity in their agendas in different corporate areas, such as top management, marketing and communication, talent management, or corporate responsibility. The final chapter provides a practical case study focused on the tourism industry, and reviews and summarizes the topics discussed in the book.

# Acknowledgments

Thanks to my mother for everything, above all because she has demonstrated to me that the sky is the limit, and to my father, who instilled in me very particular but precious values. I owe much to Rosa, who checks, double checks, compiles, corrects, puts in order, and imposes on me a strict discipline. I am the author of this book, but if it has reached your hands it is thanks to her.

Thanks also to Diego del Alcázar, who believed in me. His obsession with excellence and the hyperbolic curiosity that makes him question everything have made me reinvent myself several times. I am indebted to the faculty and staff at IE and to Santiago Iñiguez, its dean. They have taught me their values and a deep respect for diversity, entrepreneurship, and excellence, demonstrating that innovation goes beyond cutting-edge technology. The school has always allowed me to combine my work with my inclination for study of the humanities. The professors at IE taught me everything I know about management – my thanks to all of them, particularly Gonzalo Garland, Javier Solano, Isabel Armada, and Fernando Sanchez Suarez. Thanks also to Rafael Puyol, with whom I had the privilege to work and who very generously monitored the hazards of my thesis along with José Ignacio Pichardo Galán, Celia de Anca, and Amada Marcos.

I am also indebted to those students and alumni who decided to launch ieOut and made us rise to the occasion, and to Fernando and Jesús Encinar for their support. I should also mention here the people from IBM, with whom it is always a pleasure to work.

My grateful thanks also to Celia de Anca, my unexpected friend, colleague, professor, and mentor, my aunt Camino, who always taught me to love difference, and to all the people who have worked with me, at home and at work, who have accepted me as I am and have allowed me to taste the sweet ambrosia of achievement and pride.

Finally, thanks to Chelo and Segundo, who have supported us so much to be where we are today; to my sisters, incarnation of a happy childhood and my particular balm of Fierabras; to my friends, whose ability to make me laugh has saved me millions in psychoanalysis – and to Bermejo, who is the best.

# Introduction

As recently as the 1970s the gender model that predetermined different roles for men and women was still hegemonic in Spain and fully endorsed by all relevant social, legal, and cultural agents. The advent of democracy ushered in an abrupt evolution, and feminism, the sexual revolution, birth control, divorce, civil marriage, adoption, and assisted reproduction techniques<sup>1</sup> burst onto the scene and dramatically transformed the landscape of families and couples in this country in record time.

The most significant change has been the massive incorporation of women in the workforce. Women in Spain already comprise a higher percentage of university graduates, with higher grades and qualifications in complementary studies such as languages. While much remains to be done to establish their presence in the decision-making hierarchy, women who have reached top management are in a better position to negotiate; they are breaking the rules and reshaping roles and leadership.<sup>2</sup>

We can say that Spain has caught up and done its homework in record time, but social change requires time to settle and consolidate, and this is why social advances in our country are always full of contrasts and gaps.

This is the case for one of the most recent social changes in Spain. In 2005 the government passed the most inclusive law for LGBTs in the world, and put marriage between same-sex couples on the same level as that between heterosexuals. This has been complemented by legislation addressing adoption rights for LGBTs and gender identity. There are, however, multiple gaps in society and culture that have to cope with the challenges of such an advanced law. The negative consequences include homophobia, which unfortunately affects men and women both in the workplace and in their social and family environment, as well as children and young people at school.

Historically, the greater part of diversity advances and efforts in most corporations have been made in the field of leadership, as women currently comprise around 50 per cent of the workforce. When the political efforts began, the focus was on making it possible for women to break the glass ceiling, to reach decision-making positions, and to facilitate

their consolidation in top management. Innovative diversity experts now focus on how diversity can provide a competitive advantage to corporations rather than on how they can accommodate difference in their workforce. 'It is time now to discuss what women can do for the corporation and to go beyond the discourse regarding what companies can do for women.'<sup>3</sup>

This is the focus I have chosen in this book, which is a compilation of experience and research aimed at deepening LGBT diversity and demonstrating how it can be a competitive advantage for corporations in terms of new markets, efficiency, innovation, and responsibility.