

Introduce the problem by first providing some general background information.

LETTER OF INTENT (QUALITATIVE SAMPLE)

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem statement should tell a story from beginning to end. The reader should be able to understand **the problem with no prior knowledge** of the subject and without having read any other sections of the dissertation.

Federal law prohibits workplace discrimination in the United States. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin when hiring, firing, promoting or demoting employees in the workplace, but sexual orientation and gender identity are not covered as protected classes under Title VII. Laws regulating employment discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) employees varies by state and local area. Some, but not all states, prohibit companies from discriminating against LGBTQ employees. President Barack Obama made history in 2014 when he signed an executive order which extended workplace protection to LGBTQ employees who are currently employed or are seeking employment among federal agencies in the United States (Gates & Saunders, 2016). In the last 40 years, however, the Employment Non Discrimination Act (ENDA) has been the only comprehensive bill that has been proposed to Congress but has yet to be passed (Gates & Saunders, 2016). ENDA would extend workplace protection rights based on sexual orientation and gender identity to all private and public sector employees (Gates & Saunders, 2016). The general problem is there are no federal regulations addressing employment discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace, resulting in a lack of protection for LGBTQ employees (Warbelow & Xavier, 2016). Martinez, Ruggs, Sabat, Hebl, and Binggeli (2013) hypothesized that a lack of federal protection rights leaves LGBTQ employees facing increased levels of discrimination and puts employees at risk for stress and anxiety, mental health issues, and a decline in job performance.

After sharing background information, draft the **general problem** using this formula:
*The general problem is ____ resulting in ____ (in the second blank include the **negative consequences** of the problem).*

Next, **support the problem** by adding one (or two) sentence that addresses the impact or adversity of the stated general problem.

After adding a supporting sentence(s) that addresses the impact of the adversity, state the **specific problem** using this formula: *The specific problem is _____resulting in____(in this second blank include the **negative consequences** of the problem).*

The specific problem is that even though pro-LGBTQ workplace policies are becoming more common in the United States, a lack of acceptance and support is resulting in continued reports of workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Everly & Schwarz, 2015). According to Sears, Sumberg, and Fagnoli (2013), 41% of employees belonging to a sexual minority group remain closeted. Scholars have identified some of the difficulties in developing LGBTQ-inclusive policies in the workplace (Rumens, 2016). Research has suggested that external political and cultural pressures force some companies to inherit policies that are inclusive, meaning the authenticity of LGBTQ-inclusive policies are challenged as some companies may view inclusion as a profit margin rather than a social justice (Rumens, 2016). Gaining consensus on strategies for LGBTQ employees to manage their sexual identities at work and outlining specific workplace policies and practices that provide support, could narrow the gap between policy rhetoric and employee experiences, thereby providing a framework for effective policy interventions that foster authentic workplace relationships and culturally rich work environments.

Include 1-3 sentences that address the impact or adversity of the specific problem, and conclude with a sentence that summarizes the importance of addressing the problem as a whole.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

In your **statement of purpose**, clearly (but briefly) articulate the focus, methodology, population, and geographic location of the study. Begin this section with *"The purpose of this [insert type of study] study is to..."*

The purpose of the modified Delphi study will be to gain consensus of opinion from a nationwide panel of management, diversity, and civil right experts on strategies for supporting LGBTQ employees in managing their sexual identities at work, including specific workplace practices and policies that would provide such support. A growing body of literature highlights that in conjunction with pro-LGBTQ policies, an organizational culture with a strong presence of LGBTQ leaders, allies, and support networks positively correlates to higher degrees of job satisfaction and well-being in the workplace (Rumens, 2016). Furthermore, there is a need for inclusive policies to protect LGBTQ employees from discrimination in the workplace based on sexual orientation and gender identity

(Rumens, 2016). This study will gather consensus to help build a framework around policy development and implementation that could be used in organizations that operate in states that do not currently provide employment protection for LGBTQ individuals. Furthermore, employment practices and strategies will be identified that could be used in strengthening the authenticity of practices and policies within organizations while positively impact the leadership and peer relationship.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

Although research has suggested that workplace policies can influence employees' sexual identity practices, there is a gap between the adoption of inclusive workplace policies for LGBTQ employees and the experiences these employees have within the workplace managing their sexual identity (Rumens, 2016). A lack of federal protection for the rights of sexual minority groups leaves employees vulnerable to potentially discriminatory treatment in the workplace. Although some established corporations have shown support of sexual minority protective policies, there is still a large group of LGBTQ employees who are fearful to disclose their sexual identity in the workplace. Eighty-five percent of Fortune 500 companies recognize sexual orientation in protective workplace policies, but 48% of the estimated 7 million LGBTQ employees in the United States remain closeted at work (Hewlett & Sumberg, 2011). This study represents a unique approach, as no researchers have examined the experience of these employees using a Delphi study. The proposed study will provide information that, if adopted, may cause organizations to rethink or strengthen their protective policies. Furthermore, promulgating policies and practices by using experts that have familiarity with LGBTQ employees' workplace experiences, could taper the gap between comprehensive workplace policies and the experiences of LGBTQ employees.

Identify a gap in knowledge.

State how your study represents a unique approach to the problem.

Explain how the results may impact theory and/or practice.

Describe the research method and design, as well as the population and sample.

PROPOSED RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of the proposed modified Delphi study will be to gain consensus of opinion from a nationwide panel of management, diversity, and civil rights experts on strategies for supporting LGBTQ employees in managing their sexual identities at work, including specific workplace practices and policies that would provide such support. Twenty management, diversity, and civil rights experts with at least three years of experience in management, diversity, or civil rights will be recruited to build a panel of experts. The Corporate Equality Index (CEI) is a benchmarking tool developed by the Human Rights Campaign that evaluates and promotes organizations who have policies and practices for LGBTQ employees; the CEI public directory of the Human Rights Campaign will be used to reach out to management and diversity experts at a variety of organizations to solicit participation in the study. Additional organizations that will be used in identifying management and diversity experts for the panel include the network directories for the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Society for Human Resource Management, and the National Diversity Council. Civil rights experts will be recruited from a variety of nationally and state recognized non-profit organizations specializing in LGBTQ civil rights including the network directories of the Human Rights Campaign and One Colorado.

Describe how you will recruit participants.

Experts will participate in a four-round Delphi process. In Round One participants will complete an open-ended questionnaire that asks experts about types of strategies, workplace practices, and policies that could be used to support LGBTQ employees manage their sexual identities at work. In Round Two participants will complete a Likert scale survey and rank, in order of importance, items that surfaced in the previous round of questioning. In the third round, participants will provide both open-ended and Likert scale survey responses to specify changes in judgment. Skulmoski et al. (2007) highlighted that the use of open-ended and

Describe how you will collect and analyze data.

Likert scale questions could help triangulate consensus among participants. Reduction analysis will be used to assess data and determine consensus. Round Four will be used to send out for final comments from the expert panelist on the consensus that was drawn through the previous three rounds of questioning.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS (AND HYPOTHESES)

The purpose of the proposed modified Delphi study will be to gain consensus of opinion from a nationwide panel of management, diversity, and civil rights experts on strategies for supporting LGBTQ employees in managing their sexual identities at work, including specific workplace practices and policies that would provide such support. The following research questions will guide the study:

RQ1: What is the consensus of opinion among a nationwide panel of management, diversity, and civil rights experts on strategies for supporting LGBTQ employees in managing their sexual identities at work?

RQ2: What is the consensus of opinion among a nationwide panel of management, diversity, and civil rights experts on employment practices and policies that could be implemented in the workplace to help support LGBTQ employees manage their sexual identities at work?

Include the specific research question(s) for the study.

If your study is quantitative, include hypotheses.