



# InterEngineering

Connecting, Informing and Empowering LGBT+ Engineers and Supporters

## Supporting Bisexual Employees in the Workplace

A springboard resource to assist with why and how to get started  
with supporting bisexual employees.



## Foreword

Caroline Gorski

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At Rolls-Royce, as is increasingly the case across the entire Engineering sector, we recognise the benefits of creating a diverse and inclusive place to work. Not only is this simply the right thing to do, but it is also necessary for the sustainment of our business. After all, diversity leads to a more innovative way of working – critical for any Engineering company – and not to embrace difference will only set limitations on our capabilities. For this reason, I was delighted when I was invited to speak at the InterEngineering Midlands workshop on Bi Visibility in the Workplace.

I'm not one for labels, but as someone who could from the outside be labelled as bi, I see Bi Visibility as about having an identity and not being hidden in plain sight. It is entirely possible for those in the bi community to not need to surface themselves – simply put, we're often categorised as gay, lesbian or straight based purely on the type of relationship we may be in. Sometimes being visible can lead to being judged, including by the gay and lesbian community, as someone who either can't make up their mind or who continues to be in an adolescent phase of indecision. Outside of the gay community, bisexuality often generates a notion that bi people are greedy or want everything, which can lead to antagonism with an underlying element of sexism, particularly for bi women. I don't see it that way at all – I just want to be free to not limit my life to the binaries – but sadly it does impact many bi people, as you will see from the mental health data of those in that community.

I haven't really ever thought about my career through the lens of who I'm attracted to. But now that I've been asked to, I realise that bisexuality to me means fluidity, open-mindedness, range, opportunity, and the appreciation and understanding of difference. These are all traits that I've brought to every role I've had, from running my own small business to leading IoT strategy in a major communications company to my current role, where I'm seeking agility, boldness, collaboration and simplicity in everything we do. I'm proud of the diversity of those in my team, although I'm far more interested in them as human beings above anything else.

I want to thank all of those who attended this workshop, who have given their time to identifying ways of better supporting our bi colleagues. It is fantastic to see the Engineering sector come together for the greater good, tackling issues which are very often ignored. I hope everyone who reads this report can identify what more they can do to support their own employees and to make Engineering a more attractive place to work for everyone.

Finally, I want to say that I revel in the breadth of human experiences, in the humans around me, in the range of possibilities we have. If being bi underpins this, then that allows for a very powerful and very positive contribution to the world we live in – and that's a great place to be, whatever label you want to put on it.

Caroline

## Key Terminology

Term	Meaning
Bi	Bisexual.
BVD	Bisexual Visibility Day, more commonly known as Bi Visibility Day (or even Bi Vis Day). May also be known as CBD or Bisexual Pride.
Bisexual	Romantic, sexual attraction or sexual behaviour towards more than one sex or gender. It is sometimes used as an umbrella term.
CBD	Celebrate Bisexual Day (US).
ONS	Office of National Statistics.
Pansexual	A more inclusive term for bisexual acknowledging that sex and gender are not binary.

## Dates in the Bisexual Calendar

Date	Explanation
March	Bisexual Health Awareness Month.
23 <sup>rd</sup> September	Bisexual Visibility Day. The Bisexual Awareness Week is also the week surrounding the 23 <sup>rd</sup> September.
8 <sup>th</sup> December	Pansexual Pride Day.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the delegates that attended this workshop, and to your companies for allowing you to attend. This report was only possible due to the wealth of experience, perspective and knowledge that you brought along. At the time of the workshop, little attention had been given to bisexuality from the engineering industry, so being a part of this specifically bisexual workshop should really help to identify how to better support bisexual employees in the workplace. We hope that the day allowed for some good networking and look forward to seeing how understanding and support within the industry develops in the future.

## Compiled and Edited By

- Rose Taylor (Midlands Co-Chair, InterEngineering; Rail Systems Engineer at ARUP; Founder of the Jaguar Land Rover LGBT+ Network).
- Greg Turner-Smart (Business Improvement Manager, Rolls-Royce; Chair of Prism, the Rolls-Royce UK LGBT+ Employee Resource Group).

With special thanks for contributing to the event to Jules Parkinson (The Inclusion Initiative), Jo Eva (Strategy Executive, Rolls-Royce Control Systems), Stuart Baker (Operations Executive, Rolls-Royce Control Systems), and Caroline Gorski (Group Director, R<sup>2</sup> Data Labs at Rolls-Royce).

Additional final thanks in reviewing the report to Dr Mark McBride-Wright (Managing Director, Equal Engineers; Co-founder and Chair, InterEngineering) and John Bradbury (Continuous Improvement Manager, Amcor; Vice Chair & Director, InterEngineering).

## Introduction

The bisexual population is often overlooked, despite their own challenges that include mental health issues, identity and visibility. A responsible business should be able to recognise the issues that their bi employees may face and take steps to support their bi employees to be at their best. People are an asset to any business, and it is simply the right thing to do.

An InterEngineering workshop was hosted by Rolls-Royce on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2019 to consider how to support bisexual employees in the workplace. The workshop was attended by representatives of several companies including ARUP, Jaguar Land Rover, the Environment Agency, HS2 and the Royal Air Force.

The workshop kicked off with introductions from Prism, InterEngineering and Jo Eva, the Rolls-Royce senior sponsor for this workshop. The recurring themes across the introductions was the need for businesses to support all of their employees, and the power of collaboration in achieving results. It was commendable to see representation from across the Engineering sector at this workshop.

Caroline Gorski, a senior bisexual role model from within Rolls-Royce, then spoke in a pre-recorded but very frank and open conversation around her career journey, the challenges of being bisexual, and how she understands her bisexual identity. Caroline also shared some of the common stereotypes made about the bi community, which will be discussed later in this report.

Finally, Jules Parkinson-Thake of the Inclusion Initiative discussed Bi Identities and Mental Health. Some of the statistics relating to mental health issues within the bi community were particularly shocking (such as 50% of bi women felt life was not worth living in the last year). It was also noted the challenges faced with having a bi identity. Such as visibility, erasure and harmful stereotyping (such as being indecisive). The workshop is to address these challenges and improve the workplace experience and health of bisexual people.

The bulk of the workshop consisted of the group tackling five questions:

- 1) How do you provide bi visibility in the workplace?
- 2) How does a company build trust, so employees share bisexual orientation on monitoring activities?
- 3) How do we challenge biphobic comments by everyone?
- 4) What changes might be needed to better support bisexual employees?
- 5) How do we improve people's understanding of bisexuality?

The questions were discussed in groups to brainstorm suggestions for each question. Each group had some bi representation, and the groups moved across all questions to ensure everyone was able to contribute to each. The output of the workshop is summarised in this report.

This report is not intended to be a fully comprehensive bisexual resource. It covers some resources, links, and dates that came up during the course of this piece of work.

## Bisexual Challenges

To understand how to support bisexual people, it is helpful to provide a summary of some of the challenges that being bisexual may bring.

The following are some common examples:

- **Bi Invisibility.** Where bisexual people cannot be seen, predominantly because their sexual orientation is incorrectly assumed based on who they are dating.
- **Bi Erasure.** This is the tendency for society to sometimes deny bisexuality exists, falsify or re-explain evidence of bisexuality.
- **Harmful Stereotyping about the Bi Community**, such as:
  - **They want everything.** Such as wanting to date everyone.
  - **They're indecisive.** Such as incapable of deciding who to date or making decisions.
  - **They're scared to come out.** Accused of not having the courage to accept being gay.
  - **The perspective (and lack of education) of someone can affect one's interpretation of a bisexual.** For example, a straight person may assume that a bi person is experimenting.
  - **Bisexuality is over sexualised.** Bisexuality does not mean threesomes.
  - **Bisexuality includes 50:50 sexual attraction.** The amount of attraction and the type of attraction can be different.
  - **It is temporary** i.e. a phase.

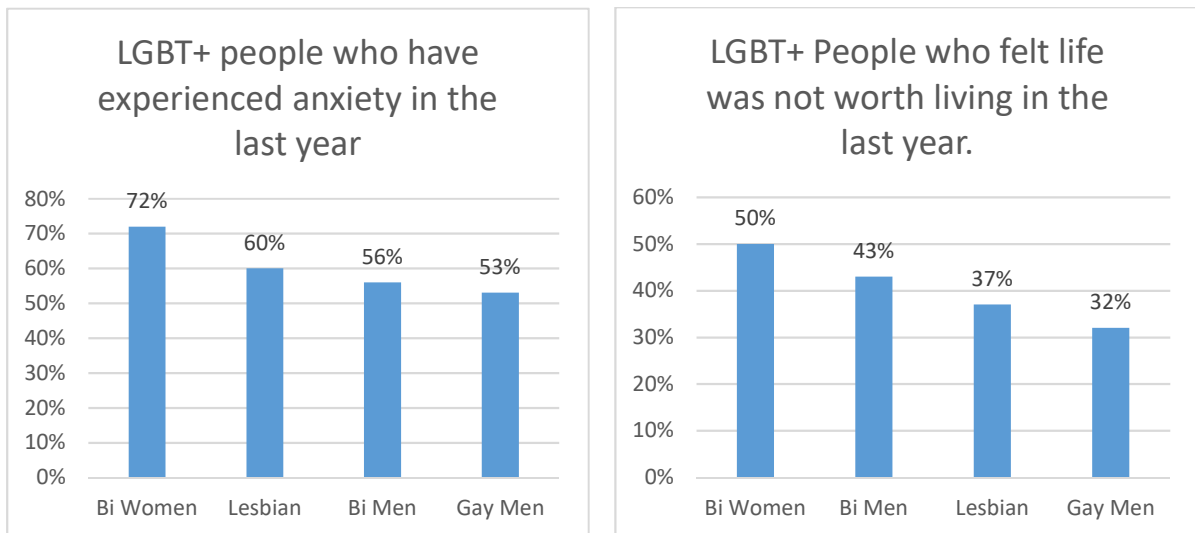
## Bisexual Identities and Health

In 2018 [1], EuroClinix surveyed 2,000 people in the UK and 13% specified something other than heterosexual. That rises to 24% in the 18-24 age group and the ONS has also seen a steady rise in people identifying as LGBT+.

A recent Mental Health at Work Report [2] shows 81% of the LGBT+ community have experienced a mental health condition. 72% of LGBT+ people have experienced mental ill health due to work. 26% have hidden that they are LGBT+ due to fear of discrimination. This rises to 29% for bi people.

The Stonewall Top 100 Employers 2019 report [3] identified that within the workplace, 72% of bi people feel able to be themselves yet only 25% of bi men, and 24% of bi women feel they have a bi role model. And only 28% of bi employees feel able to share their sexual orientation with their manager.

The 2018 Stonewall LGBT in Britain Health Report [4] demonstrated some comparisons of note from within the community.



**Figure 1:** Graphs from the Stonewall LGBT in Britain Health Report [4]

Advice was provided by Jules Parkinson-Thake on how to support bi colleagues. Examples included:

- Making Bi-inclusion a priority
- Empowering and giving visibility to your bi employees
- Profiling and encouraging bi role models
- Appointing a “bi rep” for your LGBT+ network group
- Ensuring that LGBT+ events are bi inclusive
- Challenging biphobia and bi erasure
- Taking an integrated approach

Additionally, organisational considerations were suggested, and these included the following:

- Taking part in national/local campaigns
- Wellbeing check-ins/1-2-1s
- Encouraging activities for wellbeing in the workplace
- Creating a network of Mental Health Champions
- Growing a Mental Health and Wellbeing committee
- Ensuring there is the right support in place
- Training a team of Mental Health First Aiders
- Delivering Bi Awareness training
- Avoiding working in silo’s

Jules explained: “With the prevalence of bi erasure and the fetishisation of the bi community, it is important that employers and colleagues ensure specific steps are taken to enable bi people to be themselves in the workplace without fear of prejudice, harassment, bullying and/or discrimination. In fact, this would allow bi employees to thrive because a bi-inclusive environment and the provision of mental health support would significantly reduce the likelihood of bi employees experiencing mental ill health. There are many organisations that can help employers with this, including the Inclusion Initiative, Mind Out, Stonewall, the LGBT+ Foundation and the LGBT+ Switchboard.”

## Workshop Output

This workshop was an opportunity to put some thought into how to support bisexual employees in the workplace. It brought together a number of people with a variety of backgrounds, identities and knowledge. The workshop helped people to interact in a way that helped them to learn from each other as well as creating something new. The following table shows the questions that were tackled and the key themes for each, and it is followed by some of the pertinent points that were identified in reviewing the answers collected.

	Questions	Key Themes
1	How do you provide Bi Visibility in the workplace?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Resources</li> <li>• Company Framework</li> <li>• Employee Networks</li> <li>• Individual Empowerment</li> </ul>
2	How does a company build trust, so employees share bisexual orientation on monitoring activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systems</li> <li>• Processes</li> <li>• Understanding</li> <li>• Privacy</li> </ul>
3	How do we challenge biphobic comments by everyone?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>
4	What changes might be needed to better support bisexual employees?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representation</li> <li>• Communications</li> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>
5	How do we improve people's understanding of bisexuality?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge Sharing</li> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>

**Figure 2:** Themes that came out from the questions in the workshop

### **How do you provide Bi Visibility in the workplace?**

The response to this question made it clear that everyone in a business has a role to play in providing Bi Visibility – leaders, employee networks, the bi community and allies. Strategy is important, both for the employee network and within the company Inclusion framework. There are also many simple opportunities to increase visibility, such as bi-specific lanyards or promoting bi-focused dates on the calendar. But perhaps most importantly, bi role models are necessary to really raise awareness of the challenges they face. Personal stories are incredibly powerful and having those from the bi community share their own experiences may be crucial to providing this visibility.

### **How does a company build trust, so employees share bisexual orientation on monitoring activities?**

It became apparent that for individuals to share their personal circumstances with an organisation, they need to feel confident that the organisation can be trusted. An organisation should be able to

demonstrate to employees the value of collecting such data and give reassurance that the privacy of an individual will be guaranteed. Confidence is also generated through actions and not just words, so organisations should take steps to ensure that their systems and processes are up to date. If a bi employee sees modern, respectful and inclusive terminology used in monitoring activities, including the option to self-describe, then they are likely to feel the organisation is more trustworthy.

### **How do we challenge biphobic comments by everyone?**

Tools and resources are available to support both individuals and organisations in challenging biphobia, but allies play an important role. It is far more powerful to see or hear an ally challenge inappropriate behaviour than it is for a bi person to do it – allies show that there is wider support for the community and provide alternative viewpoints for consideration. Leadership must also step up as allies to the bi community, setting goals to create an inclusive culture and enabling employee networks to assist in delivering them. One such goal may be to educate employees on bi issues and raise awareness of what everyone can do to challenge biphobia.

### **What changes might be needed to better support bisexual employees?**

Again, tools and resources are available to support both individuals and organisations in supporting biphobia, but this workshop identified the employee networks as having a critical role. Employee networks should ensure equal focus on the different strands within the LGBT+ community and link this to the way in which budget is spent. The employee network should also ensure it has bi representation and considers the bi voice in all of its activities. This includes having bi-themed events and perhaps even a bi directory, providing contact details of those that can support such activities.

### **How do we improve people's understanding of bisexuality?**

Although it doesn't specifically answer the question, the workshop recognised that creating an inclusive culture is a crucial enabler to improving people's understanding of bisexuality. Learning and knowledge sharing are also important, and these can take many guises from online resources, through to awareness sessions, through to a formalised or mandatory set of training courses. Data and statistics may help but promoting the answers to FAQs and busting myths about the bi community may be just as powerful too.

The responses to each question were collated and captured in mind maps. These contain more detail and are in the appendix of this report.



## Bisexual Visibility

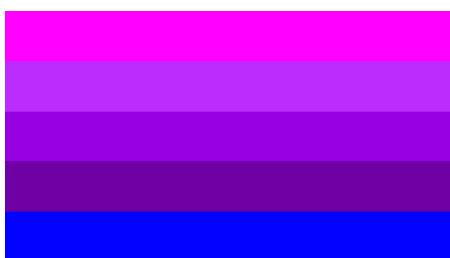
Sexual orientations cannot be seen, which often leads to assumptions being made. Visibility is important to help show that bisexual people exist, and visibility is important to ensure that appropriate representation is given. For example, regarding the healthcare of LGBT+ people, do bisexual people receive the appropriate funding considering the issues that they face?

The use of flags is important to the LGBT+ community in giving visibility, and for the bi community, this is no different. It is common for organisations to provide LGBT+ visibility through the use of the rainbow flag, but many do not even consider using the bi flag for bi-specific dates in the calendar.



**Flag 1:** Bisexual Flag, by Michael Page in 1998.

Recently, the transgender flag was redesigned using similar colours as used on the bisexual flag, leading to some confusion around what each flag represents. It should be noted that gender and sexuality are not linked. However, even within this bisexual workshop, a picture was unintentionally taken with the incorrect flag. The intention here is not to say how to manage this per se but to highlight this as a potential conflict that employee networks should consider. How should bisexual people show visibility considering how other identities may also want to show visibility? Consideration should be given to all potential flags that could conflict.



**Flag 2:** Transgender Flag by Jennifer Pellinen in 2002.

## Summary and Further Work

Each group within the LGBT+ community has different issues and have made differing amounts of progress over time. The lack of progress for those that are bi is obvious when simple things are a challenge – buying a plain bisexual lanyard or recognising the bi flag, for example. This workshop may be seen as a first step in considering bisexual people within Engineering, but the work is far from done.

This report is about supporting bisexual employees. It has started to look at the reasons why they should be supported, and it looks at typical issues for someone who is bisexual. It recognises that bi visibility, erasure, and harmful stereotyping impact on a person's mental health, with 50% of bi women and 43% of bi men having considered that life was not worth living in the last year [4].

The questions for the group were created to see what common themes emerged and a number of key points came out of each. Some of the output from this workshop is at quite a high level and time constraints did not allow for further exploration into many of the points raised. It is recommended that a future workshop is devised to look at how companies have developed and implemented the points raised in this report and to further share the resources that may have been created. Brainstorming potential bisexual events would also be worthwhile to understand future opportunities.

However, many of the points captured in this workshop are also self-explanatory or relatively easy to implement, and it is hoped that they are quickly adopted in order to help create bi-inclusive workplaces within the Engineering sector and beyond.

## References

1. EuroClinix Survey, "Between the Sheets", September 2018.
2. Mercer and Business in the Community's Mental Health at Work Report, 2018.
3. Stonewall Top 100 Employers Report, 2019. Pg 26, 27, 29.
4. Stonewall LGBT in Britain Report, 2018. Pg7, 9.

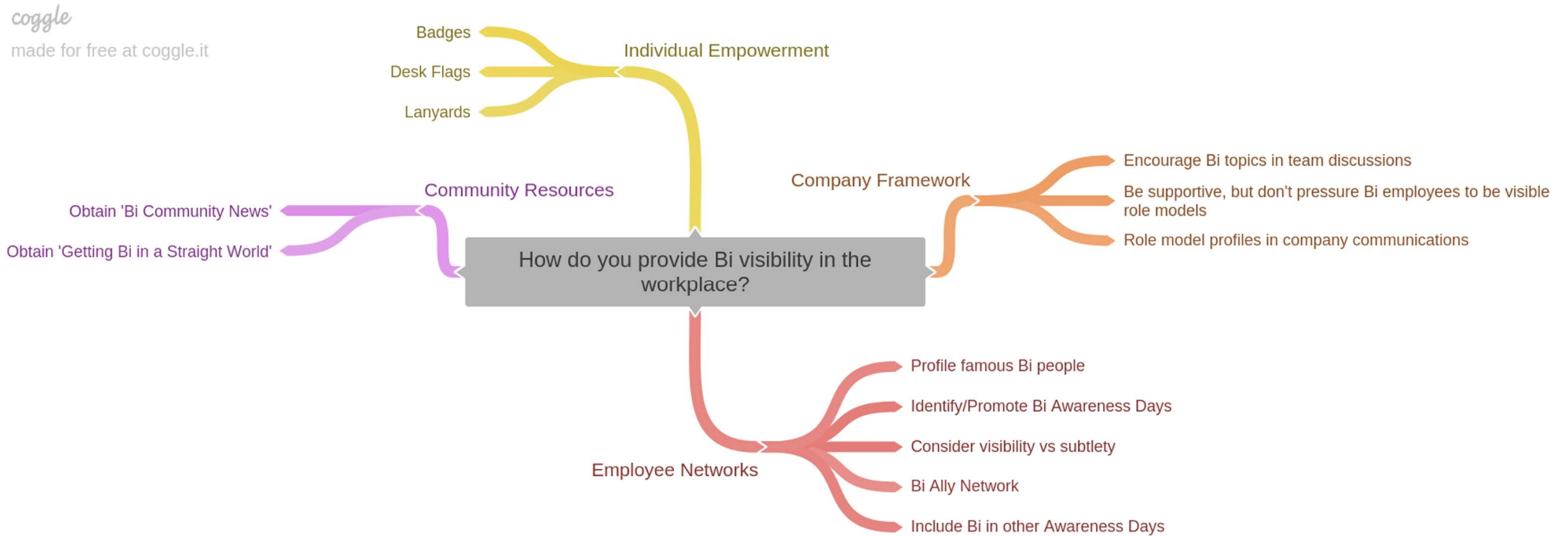
## Appendix 1 - Resources

This section is to help signpost some bisexual resources that may assist.

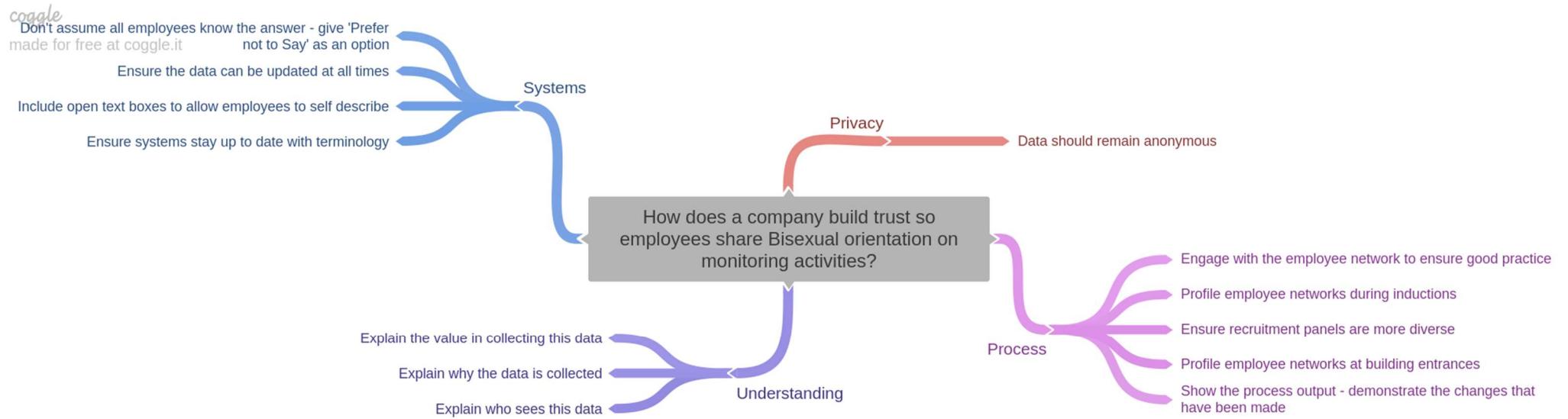
Name	Description	Link
Bi Community News	Manchester bimonthly bisexual magazine.	<a href="http://www.bicommunitynews.co.uk/">http://www.bicommunitynews.co.uk/</a>
Getting Bi in a straight world	Leaflet about coming out and staying out by Biphoria.	<a href="https://www.biphoria.org.uk/gettingbi/">https://www.biphoria.org.uk/gettingbi/</a>
Stonewall	Bisexual people in the workplace.	<a href="https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/bisexual_people_workplace.pdf">https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/bisexual_people_workplace.pdf</a>
Stonewall	Bisexuality Health Briefing.	<a href="https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/Bisexuality%20Stonewall%20Health%20Briefing%202012.pdf">https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/Bisexuality Stonewall Health Briefing 2012 .pdf</a>
Mental Health at Report 2018	Mercer and Business in the Community's Mental Health at Work 2018 Report.	<a href="https://www.uk.mercer.com/our-thinking/health/raising-the-spotlight-on-lgbt-mental-health.html">https://www.uk.mercer.com/our-thinking/health/raising-the-spotlight-on-lgbt-mental-health.html</a>

## Appendix 2 – Workshop Feedback

### Question 1 Mind Map



## Question 2 Mind Map



### Question 3 Mind Map

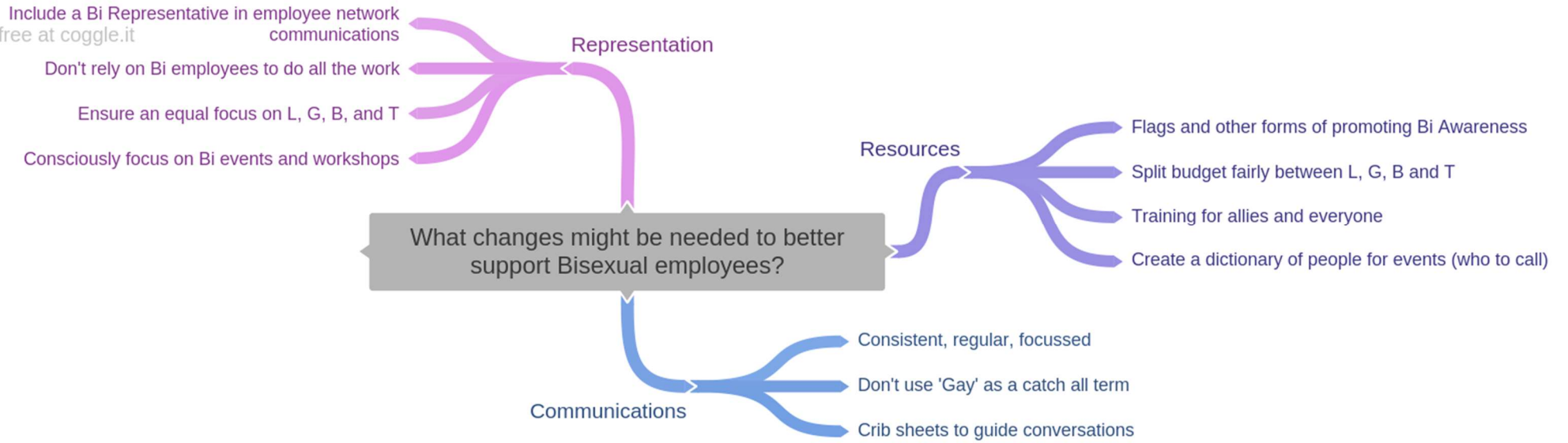
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made for free at coggle.it



## Question 4 Mind Map

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## Question 5 Mind Map

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