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## EDITION 7: Impact of Visible Role Models

### INSIGHTS FROM THE 2023 AWEI EMPLOYEE SURVEY

The annual Australian Workplace Equality Index Employee Survey has been running for the past 12 years as part of the suite of offerings from Pride in Diversity.

In 2023, 178 organisations and 41,157 individuals took part in the survey. Of these, 40,331 respondents are Australian-based, and 826 work in overseas locations for Australian employers. All organisations participating in the survey are working to increase and support LGBTQ+-inclusive practices within their organisations<sup>1</sup>.

This Practice Point looks closely at the impact that visible roles models in the workplace can make to LGBTQ+ employees.

“YOU CAN’T BE WHAT YOU CAN’T SEE.”

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

#### Who are the Role models?

In previous years, we have asked LGBTQ+ women or those perceived as women in the workplace *“There are women or non-binary people of similar, or the same identity as me who are visible out and/or open role models within my workplace”*. Respondents in this cohort with role models are more likely to be out or open in the workplace. Within this data we have seen significant impact on the availability of role models influencing all areas and in fact the presence of visible role models is more valuable than just having allies in an organisation.

For our purposes, an active ally can be someone who is or is not LGBTQ+ but who supports LGBTQ+ inclusion in either in a visible way within the organisation.

An LGBTQ+ Role model -is someone who is part of the LGBTQ+ community, is open or out about their identity, and visible within their organisation.

In 2023 this question was duplicated and asked to all respondents who were ‘out’ or ‘open’ to everyone or most in their organisations.

We separately ask respondents to consider the following depending on demographic details provided:

- Respondents of diverse sexuality -  
*There are visible out role models within the organisation that have the same, or similar, sexuality as me.*
- Trans and gender diverse respondents:  
*There are visible open role models within the organisation that have the same, or similar, gender diversity as me.*

Same or similar is a subjective term and may be interpreted in different ways by respondents. For some it will mean someone of the same sexuality as them, for instance another lesbian woman. For others same or similar may just be another gay person (male or female), or another person who identified as non-binary etc. For others it may be as broad as just another LGBTQ+ person.

For this reason, this question was asked in two areas, to ensure that we were able to identify differences between those who were able to identify role models of similar diverse sexuality or diverse gender. This also allows us to look at the instances of respondents who have both a diverse sexuality and gender, and which role model they are more likely to be able to see.

We intend to ask this question to all LGBTQ+ respondents in 2025 as we see significant data differences and believe that the presence of visible role models within organisations may have significant impact on respondents' comfort levels regarding being out or open in the workplace.

### Who sees Role models?

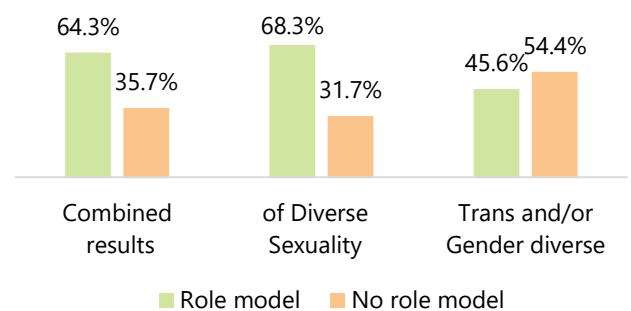
In 2023, out of 5620 unique respondents, overall, 3611 (63.4%) feel they have visible role models in their organisation.

Trans and gender diverse respondents are 33.3% less likely to agree that there are visible roles models of a same of similar gender identity as themselves. 3533 respondents of diverse sexuality (68.3%) and 205 trans and gender diverse respondents (45.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had visible out/open roles models within their organisation.

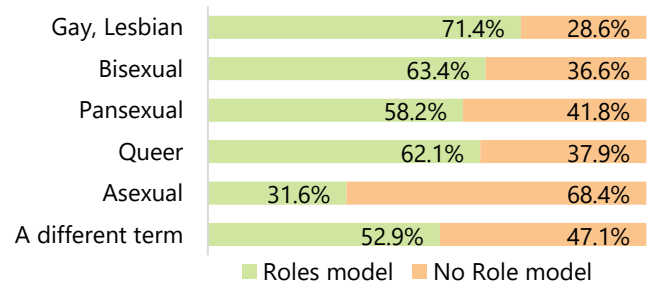
There are 32 possible combinations of LGBTQ+ diversity from this year's survey responses, but due to current small respondent numbers it is not possible to provide a detailed analysis of each variable.

Considering the presence of similar role models separately, it is most likely that respondents who identify as gay or lesbian have role models available to them. Those who identify as asexual are the least likely to recognise similar role models as themselves in their workplace.

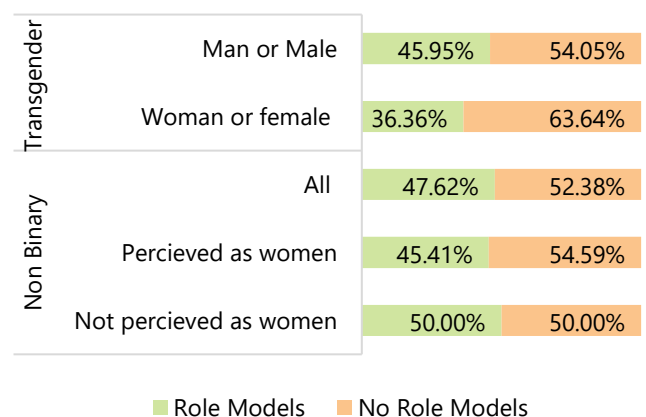
When looking at the presence of visible role models to trans and gender diverse respondents, transgender women and non-binary respondents who are perceived as women in the workforce are least likely to have similar role models to themselves.



### Visible Role models ... by sexual orientation



### Visible Role models ... by gender experience

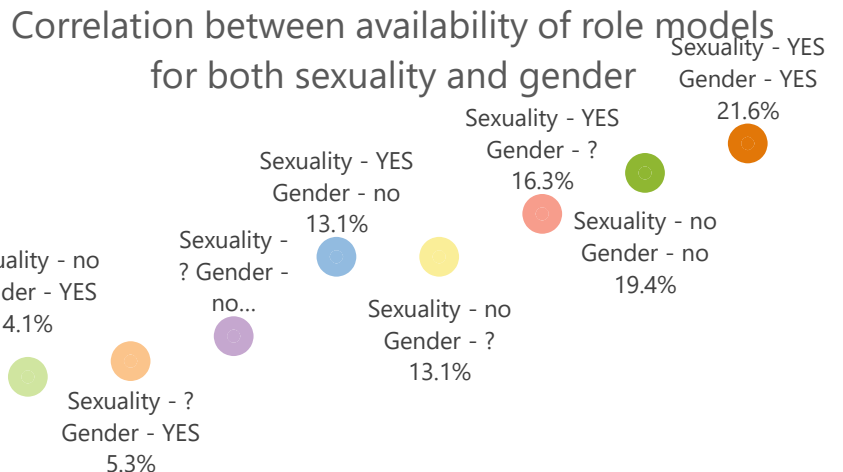


Of the 1006 respondents who are both trans and/or gender diverse and of diverse sexuality, just over half have responded to one or both statements regarding visible role models.

Of the 588 respondents, 21.6% said that they could identify role models of both diverse sexuality and gender. The least likely combination are respondents who can identify only a role model for the gender diversity, and not their sexual orientation.

One third responded to both statements about visible role models.

Of these 342 respondents, it is most likely (37.1%) for respondents to be able to identify role models of a similar diverse sexuality and gender as themselves (this may or may not be the same person). One third are unable to identify a role model for either their gender or sexuality.



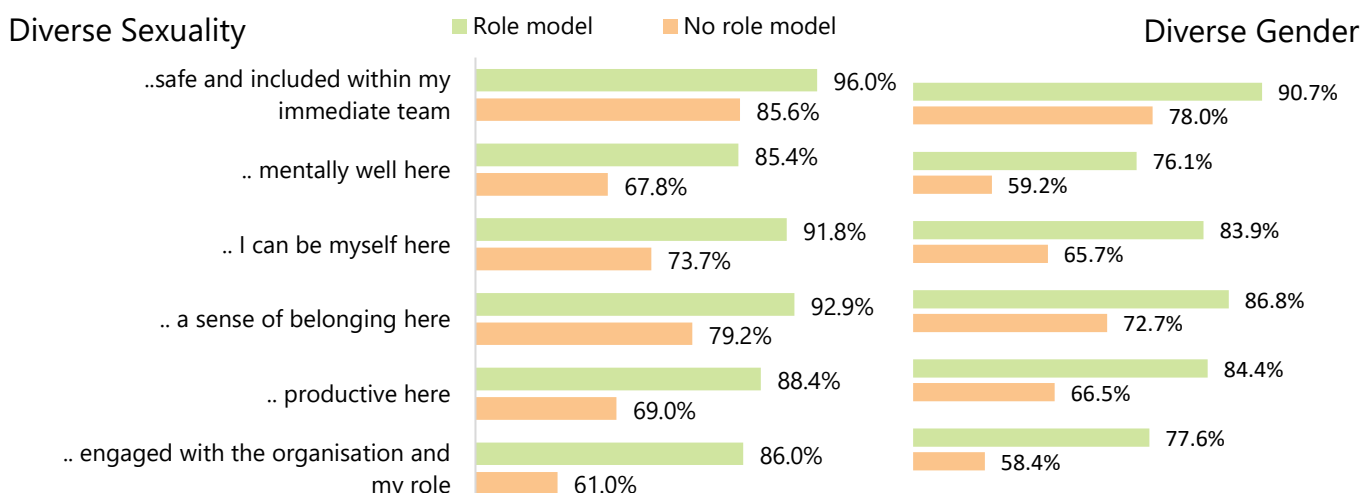
*NOTE: "?" shows where there was no response to that statement.*

Specifically in relation to the statement "There are women or non-binary people of similar, or the same, identity as me who are visible out and/or open role models within my workplace" given to LGBTQ+ women and those perceived as women in the workplace, just over half (52.0%) agreed to this statement.

For the remainder of this practice point we will be discussing the experiences of LGBTQ+ respondents who have role models vs those who do not based only on responses to the questions within the diverse sexuality and diverse gender sections of the survey.

### Health and Wellbeing

Acknowledging that there are many different potential influences on respondents' workplace wellbeing and performance, some of which have been explored in earlier practice points, we can also see correlations between the ability for LGBTQ+ employees that have visible role models who they feel connected to and increased beneficial experiences.

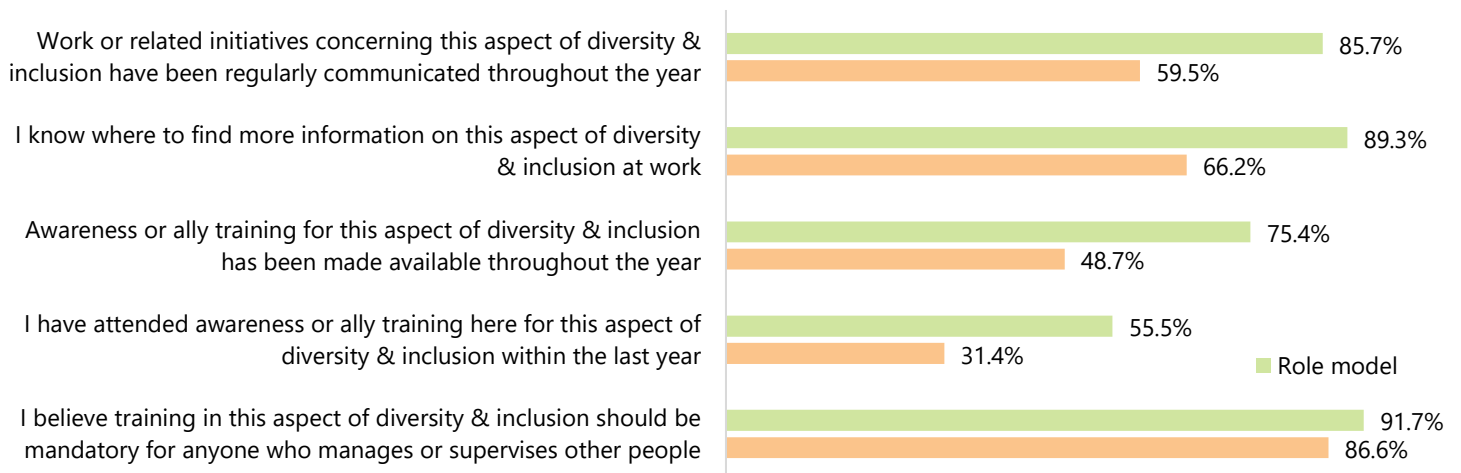


All respondents who have role models agree to feeling of safety, health and belonging as well as engagement and productivity at a higher rate than those who are unable to see role models. A difference of up to 41.0% for those of diverse sexuality, and 32.9% for trans and gender diverse respondents.

*LGBTQ+ Awareness and Visibility*

Organisation actions about visibility, promotion and training are more likely to be recognised by those who have visible role models by:

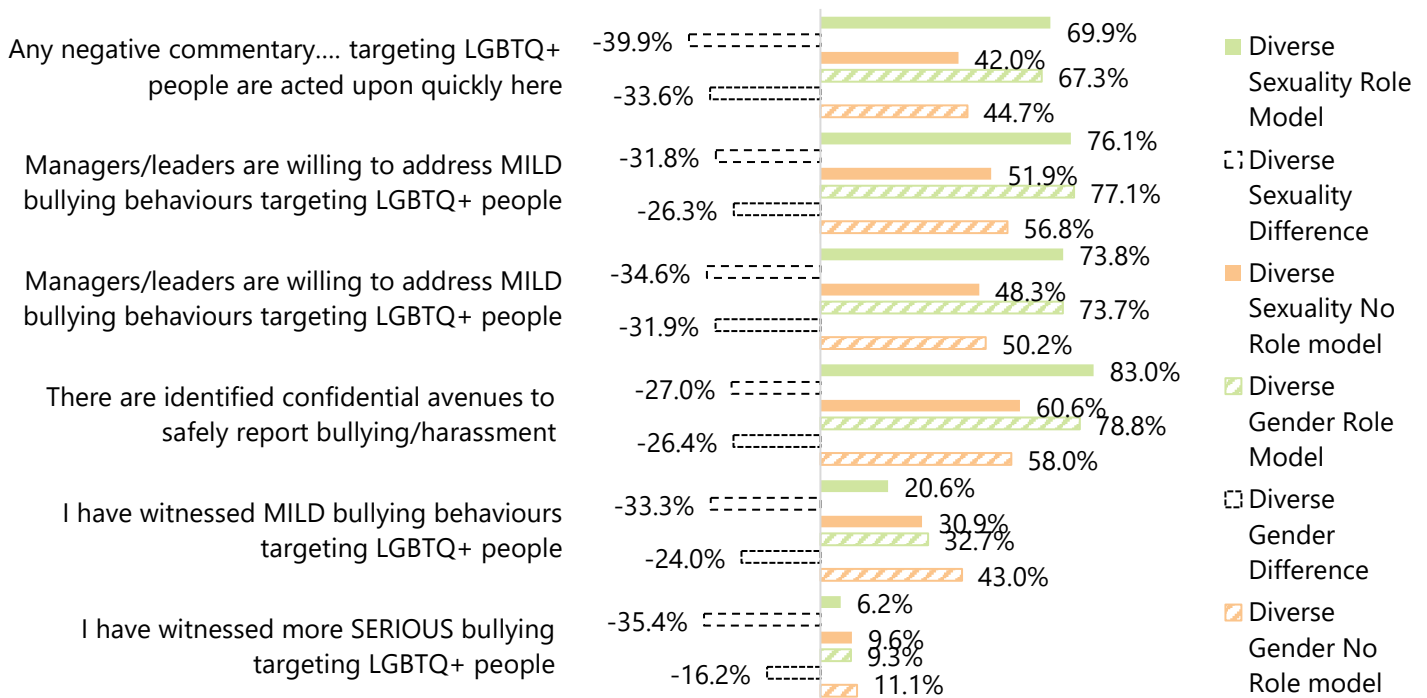
- 44.2% - Work or related initiatives concerning this aspect of diversity & inclusion have been regularly communicated throughout the year.
- 34.9% - I know where to find more information on this aspect of diversity & inclusion at work.
- 54.9% - Awareness or ally training for this aspect of diversity & inclusion has been made available throughout the year.
- 77.1% - I have attended awareness or ally training here for this aspect of diversity & inclusion within the last year.
- 5.9% - I believe training in this aspect of diversity & inclusion should be mandatory for anyone who manages or supervises other people.



The incidents of negative behaviours, also reduces where there are visible role models regardless of whether the respondent was of diverse gender, diverse sexuality, or both.

In the most part similar responses are gained from people of diverse sexuality and people of diverse gender.

There is a 39.9% difference in the belief that negative commentary is addressed quickly within respondents of diverse sexuality, and between 26.3% and 33.6% difference to bullying and harassment statements from those of diverse gender.



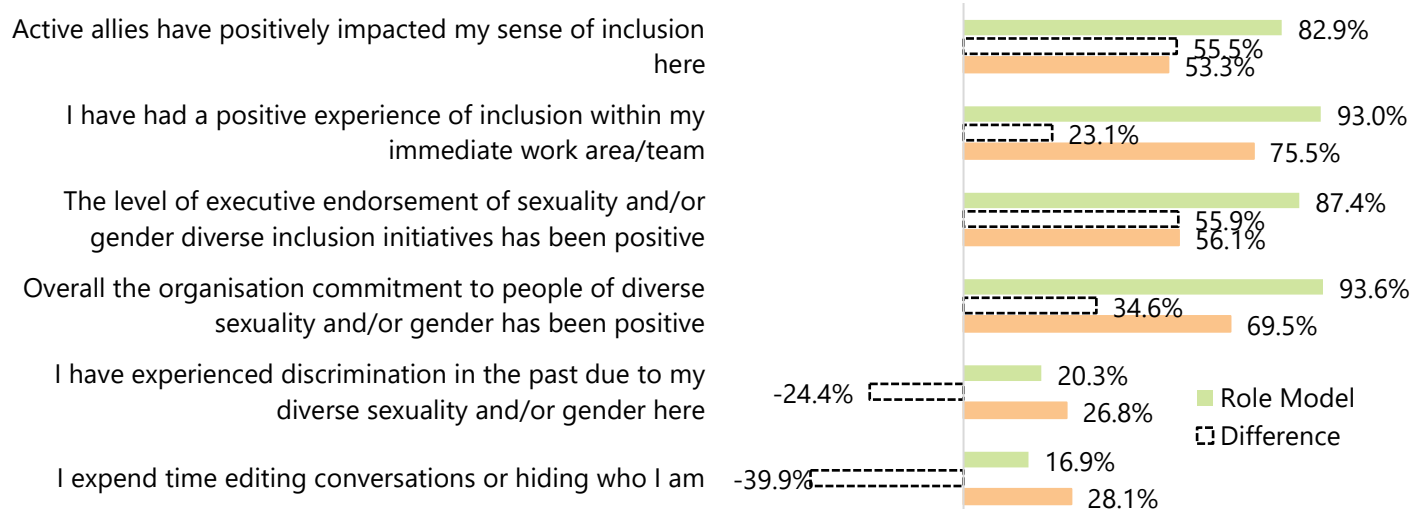
Witnessing bullying behaviours is also higher in those without role models. 30.9% of diverse sexuality, and 43.0% of diverse gender respondents have witnessed mild bullying, and for more serious behaviours witnessing sits at 9.6% of those of diverse sexuality, and 11.1% of those of diverse gender.

*Being an ally*

83.2% of respondents of diverse sexuality with role models are also active allies within their organisation, compared to 72.3% of those without. Interestingly for respondents of diverse gender this trend does not continue. Those without role models are more likely to be allies (92.7% vs role model: 88.8%) this could be due to those of diverse gender wanting to become to role models to others that they do not have.

*Experiences of organisation inclusion*

The overall experiences for LGBTQ+ respondents with role models show they are more likely to have had positive impacts and experiences, and less likely to have experienced discrimination or spend time editing conversations within the workplace.



### *Role model impact on employees of diverse sexuality*

Respondents of diverse sexuality were asked specific questions around their experiences in the workplace. Those who have role models are more likely by:

- 80.7% to feel their performance is positively impacted by being out (role model: 71.9% vs no role model: 39.8%)
- 75.6% to feel inclusion initiatives here for people of diverse sexuality have had a positive impact on how they feel about their own sexuality (role model: 82.9% vs no role model 47.2%)
- 52.5% to feel more inclined to stay at their organisation (role model: 83.3% vs no role model 54.7%)
- 32.3% to feel comfortable and safe discussing workplace issues related to their diverse sexuality with their manager (role model: 82.9% vs no role model 67.4%)
- 30.2% to feel fully supported by their team in terms of their diverse sexuality (role model: 93.1% vs no role model 71.5%)
- 29.5% to feel their diverse sexuality would **not** have any impact on career progression (role model: 85.6% vs no role model 66.1%)
- 26.8% to have **not** encountered any exclusion based on my sexuality here (role model: 89.1% vs no role model 70.3%)

Direct targeting of bullying and harassment is also reduced by 56.1% for those with role models regarding mild behaviours (role model: 8.5% vs no role model 19.4%) and a 71.3% reduction for serious behaviours. (role model: 1.3% vs no role model 4.5%).

### *Role model impact on trans and gender diverse employees*

Data relating to employees with a trans and/or gender diverse experience, show between 24.3% and 72.5% difference when comparing those with and without role models. Those with role models are more likely to agree by:

- 72.5% that inclusion initiatives for people of diverse gender have had a positive impact on how they feel about my own gender diversity (role model: 83.7% vs no role model: 48.5%)
- 53.0% to feel their performance is positively impacted by being open (role model: 78.7% vs no role model: 51.5%)
- 48.9% to feel that their gender identity would have any impact on their career progression (role model: 71.4% vs no role model: 48.0%)
- 36.2% to feel more inclined to stay here (role model: 80.7% vs no role model: 59.3%)
- 25.4% to believing that people make an effort to use their personal pronouns (role model: 70.9% vs no role model 56.6%)
- 30.6% to feel fully supported in their team in terms of their gender diversity (role model: 82.1% vs no role model: 62.9%)
- 29.8% to advise they have not experienced any exclusion based on their gender diversity here (role model: 75.6% vs no role model: 58.3%)
- 26.9% to feeling their LGBTQ Employee Network is fully inclusive of employees of diverse gender and/or trans experience (role model: 89.3% vs No role model: 70.4%)
- 24.3% to feeling comfortable and safe discussing workplace issues related to my gender diversity with my manager (role model: 81.2% vs no role model: 65.3%)

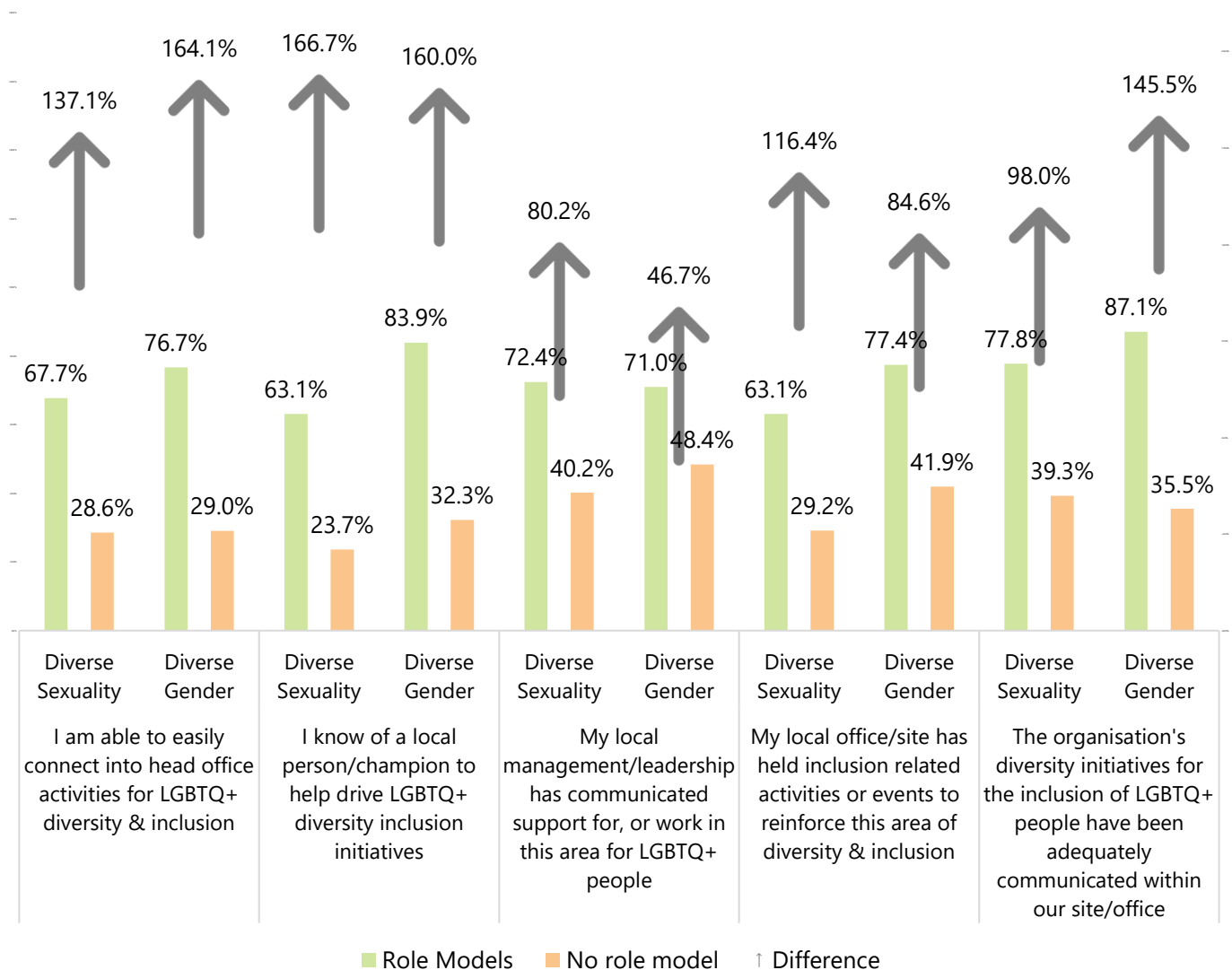
And 13.0% less likely to feel they have been deliberately misgendered within the last year (role model: 20.4% vs no role model: 23.5%)

Direct targeting of bullying and harassment is also reduced by 31.0% for those with role models regarding mild behaviours (role model: 20.0% vs no role model 29.0%) and a 52.1% reduction for serious behaviours. (role model: 2.9% vs no role model 6.1%).

For those who have undertaken an affirmation process within their current organisation, they are 64.9% more likely to be happy with the process when role models are present (role model: 76.3% vs no role model: 46.2%).

*Role model impact on regional employees*

Role models being available for employees sitting outside of capital city locations show a significant impact for both employees of diverse sexuality and/or diverse gender. In most cases those with role models agree to statements at more than double the rate of those who are not able to identify role models.



## Conclusion

The presence of LGBTQ+ role models can create a greater impact than allies creating feeling of comfort and the ability to bring one whole self to the workplace.

The adage of ‘You can’t be what you can’t see’ is important to remember. When organisations are analysing their own data, it is important to look not only at the data that is available, but the demographics information for who might be missing from your organisations results. Consider why you may not have any employees who identify in this way, or perhaps you do, and they are not comfortable or engaged enough to complete the survey.

Make sure your employment practices are inclusive to ensure a wide representation of people are visible throughout your organisation.

If you know there is a gap in representation, see other way to ensure employees are aware of external role models and supports they can access.

Seek way to ensure representation of as many diversities as possible and look at opportunities to increase the visibility of role models.

## Actions

1. Think about platforms, panels, recording of sessions and how you can mix up the representation across the year.
2. Encourage the sharing of stories and ensure they are accessible by all employees.
3. Diversity of representation is key – you can’t be what you can’t see.

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<sup>i</sup> Results reflect the attitudes and knowledge of respondents from organisations working in inclusive practices.