



LGBTQIAPN+ Leadership: barriers and challenges in organizational work relations¹

Liderança LGBTQIAPN+: barreiras e desafios nas relações organizacionais de trabalho

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Abstract

Purpose: To identify the main barriers and challenges faced by LGBTQIAPN+ leaders in the workplace and examine their relationships with leadership self-efficacy. **Methodology:** Data collection involved LGBTQIAPN+ individuals in leadership positions, resulting in responses from 1,156 participants. To test the proposed theoretical model, Structural Equation Modeling analysis was performed. **Main results:** The findings highlighted issues related to group composition and diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity as the main barriers and challenges. The validation of the hypotheses supported the notion that the difficulties experienced by LGBTQIAPN+ individuals at work can provide them with valuable skills that lead to leadership, making professionals more proactive. **Academic contributions:** Demonstrates how group composition and diversity of sexual orientation and/or gender identity directly impact the barriers faced by LGBTQIAPN+ leaders in the workplace. **Practical contributions:** Highlights the importance of public policies that address discrimination and promote education on LGBTQIAPN+ issues, aiming to improve the work environment and professional performance of these leaders.

Keywords: LGBTQIAPN+ leadership; leadership barriers; leadership self-efficacy.

Resumo

Objetivo: Identificar as principais barreiras e desafios enfrentados por líderes LGBTQIAPN+ no local de trabalho e examinar suas relações com a autoeficácia de liderança. **Metodologia:** A coleta de dados envolveu indivíduos LGBTQIAPN+ em cargos de liderança, resultando em respostas de 1.156 participantes. Para testar o modelo teórico proposto, foi realizada análise de Modelagem de Equações Estruturais. **Principais resultados:** As conclusões destacaram questões relacionadas com a composição do grupo e a diversidade na orientação sexual e identidade de gênero como as principais barreiras e desafios. A validação das hipóteses sustentou a noção de que as dificuldades vivenciadas pelos indivíduos LGBTQIAPN+ no trabalho podem dotá-los de competências valiosas que conduzam à liderança, tornando os profissionais mais proativos. **Contribuições acadêmicas:** Demonstra como a composição do grupo e a diversidade de orientação sexual e/ou identidade de gênero impactam diretamente as barreiras enfrentadas pelos líderes LGBTQIAPN+ no ambiente de trabalho. **Contribuições práticas:** Destaca a importância de políticas públicas que abordem a discriminação e promovam a educação sobre questões LGBTQIAPN+, visando melhorar o ambiente de trabalho e o desempenho profissional desses líderes.

Palavras-chave: liderança LGBTQIAPN+; barreiras de liderança; autoeficácia de liderança.

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1. Introduction

The topic of diversity and inclusion is a pertinent discussion in organizational settings (Rizzi & Coleti, 2020). Companies are increasingly making critical business decisions seeking practices that embrace the inclusion of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, queers, intersexuals, asexual, pansexuals, non-binary, and others (LGBTQIAPN+) rights for their employees (Ellsworth et al., 2020). Despite anti-discrimination legislation in many countries, the adoption of diversity appreciation and inclusion perspectives, discrimination, exclusion, and inequality persist in many organizations (Bryant-Lees & Kite, 2021; Mara et al., 2021).

From an organizational perspective, despite incentives to discourage discrimination, sexual and gender minorities face serious limitations and barriers in the labor market (Cook & Glass, 2016; Drydakis, 2015). LGBTQIAPN+ workers are also faced with exclusion, ridicule from colleagues and unequal career opportunities. These inequalities do not arise as a result of individual choices themselves, but through interactions with organizational norms culturally embedded in codes and practices that only tolerate the cisheteronormative order (Kamasak et al., 2020).

Workplace cisheterosexism has implications for the desires and opportunities of LGBTQIAPN+ people to achieve leadership roles (Barrantes & Eaton, 2018). Negative work environments increase feelings of stigmatization and encourage stress, anxiety, fear, and the constant exercise of self-protection, such as identity concealment. Sexual and gender minority individuals may be reluctant to take on leadership roles for fear of being scrutinized more publicly, especially if they do not have their identity exposed (Goldberg, 2016).

However, due to the growth in the promotion of LGBTQIAPN+ in leadership positions, added by the importance and visibility of sexual and gender minorities in organizations, it is necessary to determine and discover evidence of LGBTQIAPN+ in leadership roles (Morton, 2017). It is noteworthy that in the literature there is little evidence on the exercise of LGBTQIAPN+ leadership (Cook & Gals, 2016; Roberts, 2020; Silva et al., 2024, 2025; Wang et al., 2022) and the dilemmas and concerns these leaders may face in the exercise of leadership (Kamasak et al., 2020; Roberts, 2020), especially when compared to other marginalized groups (Ng & Rumens, 2017) or studies on cisheteronormative contexts (Morton, 2017).

Since the problems faced by LGBTQIAPN+ individuals in the workplace require academic attention (Ng & Rumens, 2017), it is imperative to carry out research on prejudices and challenges faced by sexual and gender minority groups in the workplace, so that knowledge about this reality contributes to a broader understanding of this phenomenon (Barrantes & Eaton, 2018; Bryant-Lees & Kite, 2021; Dray et al., 2020; Mara et al., 2021) and bring about solutions. In this sense, this paper aimed to identify the main barriers and challenges of LGBTQIAPN+ leaders in organizational work relations and how these facets impact their self-efficacy as leaders, which results in their perceived ability to get promoted as leaders.

This study will adopt the acronym LGBTQIAPN+ as an umbrella term to represent sexual orientation and gender identity, recognizing that each letter of the acronym reflects a distinct population, which can be used to refer to the community as a whole (Pelletier & Tschurtz, 2012; Reid & Ritholtz, 2020). Rather than focusing exclusively on sexuality or gender, the study seeks to encompass the diversity of gender identities and expressions, considering the intersection between gender, sexuality, and the multiple experiences lived by individuals within the community. In this way, a holistic approach is intended, which does not subsume identities under a single marker, but recognizes the complexity of the LGBTQIAPN+ community

2. Theoretical framework

Changes in social, cultural, and legislative aspects have brought greater emphasis on the diversity of organizations (Bowring, 2017; Cook & Glass, 2016), leading many companies to integrate an increasingly diverse workforce with the inclusion of LGBTQIAPN+ workers (Ng & Rumens, 2017). Although companies are implementing practices favorable to these workers (Barrantes & Eaton, 2018), some barriers and challenges may still limit the employment prospects and professional mobility of LGBTQIAPN+ people (Cook & Glass, 2016).

It is critical that organizations support leaders and implement mechanisms that allow LGBTQIAPN+ individuals to be heard and feel comfortable and safe in their work environment (Bryant-Lees & Kite, 2021). In this sense, self-efficacy allows the person to assess themselves and their capability to perform tasks and roles. Bandura (1977) determines it as an estimate of an individual's ability to

successfully perform the behavior necessary to generate the desired results. Thus, leadership self-efficacy expresses a person's confidence in their ability to lead others, positively influencing the leader's effectiveness in a variety of criteria, such as their potential, performance, and behaviors (Dwyer, 2019). Leadership self-efficacy can therefore be a determining factor in assessing whether LGBTQIAPN+ workers can become leaders through their own development and leadership capabilities.

Activism for Diversity and Inclusivity. Although some LGBTQIAPN+ leadership is unintentional and arises from local activism, many individuals engage in formal and professional leadership roles with gender and sexual minority issues and concerns that may or may not be relevant to their leadership role (Fassinger et al., 2010). Pryor (2021, p. 70) defined LGBTQIAPN+ leadership as “the intentional process to advance equity for sexual and gender minoritized communities through grassroots leadership strategies; specifically championing social change through institutional policy and practice”.

Research findings by Renn (2007) report leadership or activism as insurmountable constructs of LGBTQIAPN+ identity. Being an LGBTQIAPN+ activist is about taking a more transformational leadership approach, located in positional roles as facilitators of the work of a group, involving working for social change rather than just socializing. In addition, Pryor (2021) demonstrated in your study that through LGBTQIAPN+ activism, leaders were able to overcome challenges and succeed in LGBTQIAPN+ equity, leading to significant changes in institutional policies and practices. The study also highlights that activism was responsible for allowing these leaders to remain persistent and find success.

Thus, we believe that activism can have an impact on leadership self-efficacy, as a LGBTQIAPN+ leader who participates in activism activities and advocates for the community's rights may feel more confident and empowered in their ability to lead and influence people, which can lead to more effective leadership performance. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H1. Activism for diversity and inclusivity has a positive effect on leadership self-efficacy.

LGBTQIAPN+ Identity Exposure. Fassinger et al. (2010) have developed a model that suggests three intersecting dimensions as relevant to LGBTQIAPN+ identity status in a leadership role: a) sexual orientation, in relation to the disclosure of identity; b) gender orientation, including the gender of the leader; and c) the situation, related to the composition of your group. Some LGBTQIAPN+ leaders have their gender and sexual minority status openly known, while others have their identity remain hidden or undisclosed (Fassinger et al., 2010; Mara et al., 2021).

Most LGBTQIAPN+ individuals engage in an internal decision-making process about disclosing their identity to each new person or group they encounter. This disclosure becomes a small test of your perception of legitimacy as a leader, which may be less likely to happen in unsupported and unsafe work environments (Goldberg, 2016). However, organizations that adopt LGBT supportive policies contribute to shaping LGBT employee experiences, reducing discrimination and increasing overall well-being at work (Lloren & Parini, 2017).

In a study of gay police officers, outreach played a vital role, not only in providing examples to other police officers that gay men can succeed as effective police officers, but also in developing informal relationships that can (re)build places that receive and support non-cisheterosexual police officers, that is, creating a culture of LGBTQIAPN+ visibility in the police (Rumens & Broomfield, 2012). Papadaki and Giannou (2021) explored the management of visibility for Greek lesbian, gay, and bisexual social workers in the workplace, demonstrating how it resulted in the satisfaction of authenticity needs, facilitated workplace inclusion, and created a sense of influencing organizational change and promoting the development of a more LGBTQIAPN+-friendly work environment.

In this way, we believe that the exposure of LGBTQIAPN+ identity can have an impact on a person's self-efficacy in leadership. When a leader comes out publicly as an LGBTQIAPN+, they can be seen by other LGBTQIAPN+ individuals as a role model of authentic leadership and inspire them to express themselves and assume leadership positions. Based on these arguments, we hypothesized that:

H2. Exposing LGBTQIAPN+ identity has a positive effect on leadership self-efficacy.

Marginalization. Marginalization is defined as the effort to push individuals or groups to the side or even to their limit, being consistent with terms like subordination, oppression, and exclusion (Causadias & Umaña-Taylor, 2018). The negative impact of marginalization on non-cisheterosexual leaders is likely to work at all stages or levels of leadership development (Fassinger et al., 2010), since

LGBTQIAPN+ workers are affected by marginalization because they are contradictory to the traditional norms and ideas of leadership present in society, which may, therefore, result in negative impacts (Fassinger et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2022).

It is important to emphasize that the LGBTQIAPN+ community is diverse and cannot be treated as a homogeneous group. Each identity represented by the acronym faces specific challenges, and even among people who share the same sexual orientation, experiences, opportunities, and obstacles can differ regarding their leadership backgrounds and trajectories (Silva et al., 2025). Carvalho's (2023) research demonstrated that most LGBTQIAPN+ leaders are cisgender, white, college-educated men between 30 and 40 years old, while lesbian women and trans people are much less present in leadership positions, revealing that inclusion policies remain fragile. The author introduces the concept of "high hetero passability" to describe gay men who fit the masculine standards established by society and, therefore, have a greater chance of professional advancement, which highlights an internal hierarchy within the community itself regarding access to leadership.

Transgender people face significant professional challenges around the world (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016) and may be marginalized by organizational managers, which makes it even more difficult to obtain formal employment (Souza & Carrieri, 2015). Adams and Webster (2017) demonstrated that disclosure of a leader's transgender identity led to lower ratings of friendliness and effectiveness. Having a transgender identity violates the general prototypes people have about someone being a leader, resulting in inferior assessments. Dray et al. (2020) highlight the importance of discovering interpersonal barriers related to work that transsexual and non-binary individuals face in trying to be their true selves. The study demonstrated that transgender employees are seen as less pleasant compared to their cisgender coworkers.

We believe that the absence of marginalization can impact leadership self-efficacy, as when someone is not excluded due to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation in the workplace, it can have positive consequences for their leadership self-efficacy, such as psychological well-being, self-esteem, self-acceptance, and personal development. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H3. The absence of marginalization has a positive effect on leadership self-efficacy.

Group Composition. LGBTQIAPN+ people are seen differently in different contexts, and the composition of the group they belong to is likely to exert considerable influence in shaping the behavior of leaders and the results of the leadership process. In cisheterosexual or mixed groups, the expectations of an LGBTQIAPN+ leader can be strongly influenced by prejudice on the part of their followers. Thus, group composition is an important component in the leadership role. People from gender and sexual minorities behave and perceive themselves differently in similar groups, affecting leaders and followers (Fassinger et al., 2010).

In some contexts, non-cisheterosexual individuals are invisible and difficult to reach in work organizations, as existing institutional codes, regulations, and structures are generally in favor of the "ideal" type of workers, which are not LGBTQIAPN+ (Kamasak et al., 2020). Cisheteronormativity draws attention to the privileged status of cisheterosexuality in organizational settings, a regulatory practice that restricts and limits expression in non-LGBTQIAPN+ forms. Unlike homophobia, it works more subtly and manifests through social expectations, peer pressure, and as a norm of behavior (Roberts, 2020).

We argue that group composition can affect leadership self-efficacy, as it can make LGBTQIAPN+ individuals find support and understanding from colleagues, leading to a sense of value and respect. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4. Diversity in group composition has a positive effect on leadership self-efficacy.

Discrimination and Organizational Conflicts. Discrimination refers to social acts or processes with harmful and adverse consequences for members of certain social groups (Duncan, 2011). LGBTQIAPN+ leaders bring views of the world based on their previous experiences, mainly related to their identities (such as sexual orientation and gender), these views have an impact on their preferences and selection of their behaviors. These leaders are then confronted by a particular configuration of people, a work environment, or an organization, which in turn further affects the subset of behaviors they choose to exhibit (Fassinger et al., 2010).

Disclosure decisions are related to personal issues and organizational factors (Rumens & Broomfield, 2012). Employment discrimination against LGBTQIAPN+ people persists (Bryant-Lees & Kite, 2021), having negative consequences not only on the professional life, but also on the health and personal life of LGBTQIAPN+ workers (Mara et al., 2021). Some forms of harassment are also perceived by LGBTQIAPN+ workers, such as micro-aggression and ostracism. Microaggressions are comments that can pass as harmless, while ostracism involves ignoring and excluding someone (Ng & Rumens, 2017).

Thus, we believe that discrimination and organizational conflicts affect leadership self-efficacy, as they can create a hostile and stressful work environment, which can lead to a feeling of isolation and disconnection from the group. On the other hand, when LGBT people are treated fairly and equally, when their skills and contributions are valued, it can strengthen their leadership self-efficacy. Following this logic, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5. The absence of discrimination and organizational conflicts have a positive effect on leadership self-efficacy.

Professional Career. LGBTQIAPN+ leaders may experience low self-efficacy in relation to assuming some leadership roles, may be prevented from emerging as leaders in certain occupational opportunities, may find their effectiveness and success compromised, and may be considered ineffective, even if they are successful (Fassinger et al., 2010). Fine (2017) points out that one of the barriers that can prevent gender and sexual minorities from putting leadership principles into practice is the fact that norms of cisheteronormativity prevail in society. The effectiveness and suitability of a LGBTQIAPN+ worker as a leader can be questioned due to the denial of sexual and gender stereotypes of non-cisheterosexual people (Ng & Rumens, 2017). Additionally, women may face fewer opportunities for career advancement (Ferreira & Bueno, 2023).

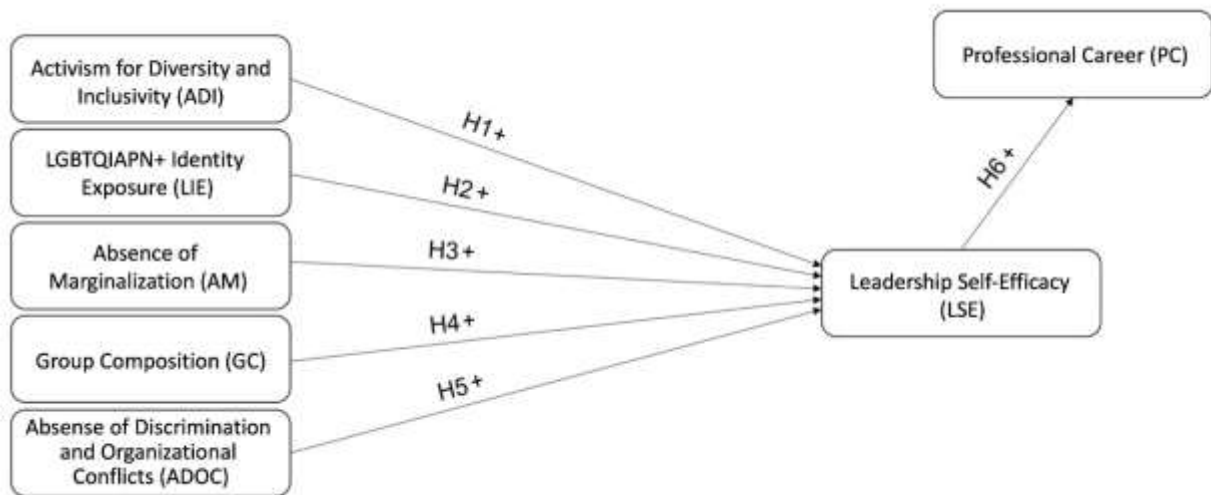
De Cristofaro et al. (2020) highlight that gays can be considered inadequate for leadership positions due to the incompatibility of the male gender role and the characteristics that a successful leader must possess. Salvati et al. (2021) revealed that gay men can perceive themselves as ineffective leaders compared to cisheterosexuals and apply for fewer leadership positions. Drydakis (2015) states that cisheteronormative discourse continues to reproduce and negatively affect the prospects of the LGBTQIAPN+ labor market. The study found that gays and lesbians received job interview invitations that paid salaries 1.9% lower than those paid by companies that invited cisheterosexual candidates for interviews.

We argue that leadership self-efficacy can affect the professional career of LGBTQIAPN+ individuals, as a person with high leadership self-efficacy tends to be more confident in their leadership skills and can lead to more advanced career opportunities. They may feel more comfortable expressing their ideas, perspectives and identities in the workplace, which can lead to greater engagement and performance. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H6. One's leadership self-efficacy has a positive effect on professional career.

Thereby, through Figure 1, we present the model suggested and tested in this study.

Figure 1 – Suggested model



Source: Prepared by the authors

*H = Hypothesis

3. Method

This research is exploratory in nature, utilizing a quantitative approach and data collection through a survey. The initial version of the questionnaire, in English, was developed by the authors using seven theoretical dimensions, based on the theoretical framework, represented by 23 items. The theoretical analysis of the items was carried out by three PhD professors who are specialists in the area who act as evaluators in the agreement between theoretical dimensions versus items, as well as in the exclusion or suggestion of new items for better representation of the dimension. At the end of this analysis, the questionnaire consisted of seven dimensions and 34 items. Then, we did a pre-test of the questionnaire to verify whether the items were understandable to members of the population for which the instrument is intended. The pre-test sample consisted of 34 LGBTQIAPN+ people who occupied leadership positions, randomly selected, and who were not part of the final sample.

We applied the pre-test questionnaire online through Google Forms, organized in a six-point Likert scale. In this step, we carried out the factor analysis and measurement of the reliability of the factors through Cronbach's alpha index, in which we used the Stata software. Based on the results produced by the methods mentioned, we excluded one factor that presented a low Cronbach's alpha (0.57). Finally, the final version of the questionnaire in English resulted in six factors and 30 items that presented Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.60, considered adequate by Hair Jr. et al. (2016).

We translated the final questionnaire into a Brazilian Portuguese version based on the protocol proposed by Guillemín et al. (1993): initial translation, reverse translation, and review by an expert committee. We considered the target population of this study, LGBTQIAPN+ individuals who considered themselves organizational leaders and who belonged to a leadership position, regardless of the level of professional activity. We collected data in the months of March, April, May, and June 2021, through the online questionnaire on Google Forms, with questions like the six-point Likert Scale, in the English and Brazilian Portuguese versions, which we sent to the participants via email, WhatsApp, and social networks.

This study observed the ethical principles outlined in Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council. All participants were fully informed of the research objectives and voluntarily consented to participate by signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF). Participation was voluntary, without any inducement, and respondents were free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Data were collected anonymously, without any element that could allow for individual identification of participants, ensuring the confidentiality of the information. Therefore, the principles of informed consent, privacy, and data integrity were respected in accordance with international best practices in scientific research.

We used a coexistence sampling, characterized as non-probabilistic, and obtained a return of 1,156 respondents in the questionnaire. According to Malhotra et al. (2006), the number of participants

for an exploratory study should be at least 4-5 times the total number of items in the study. Since our study contained 30 items, its sample size of 1,156 respondents met this criterion.

As for data analysis, in the preliminary study and contextualization of the results, we performed a descriptive analysis of the data. Afterwards, we performed an exploratory factor analysis of the data in the Stata software, in which we excluded the variables Q23, Q27, and Q28 for presenting factor loadings below 0.50, which is considered a minimum value for the factor loading to be relevant. In addition to these, we also excluded variable Q26 for presenting similar loads in two factors simultaneously.

In addition, we identified variables Q11, Q12, Q29, and Q30 as search result variables. Breaking it down further, we observe that variables Q11 and Q12 are statements of self-efficacy perception of leadership, while variables Q29 and Q30 are statements that reflect the professional career. Thus, two dimensions of results were created, also considered as dependent factors. Therefore, the model resulted in 26 variables that are grouped into 7 factors as shown in Table 2.

To test the theoretical model (Figure 1), we used the Smart PLS 3.0 software to perform the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis. SEM is used to explain several relationships between variables, as is the case in this study, and can examine relationships of dependence and/or independence simultaneously (Hair Jr. et al., 2016). We imported the data into the software and processed it, which resulted in the measurement model that analyzes the construct validity. Next, we processed the data again and obtained the study's structural model, which presents the interrelationships of variables and constructs.

4. Results

Table 1 shows that data were analyzed from a final sample of 1,156 LGBTQIAPN+ leaders working in different world regions.

Table 1 - Sample (n = 1,156)

Age	%	Race	%	Gender identity	%
20 years and below	01	Asian	07	Agender	01
21 - 30 years	29	Black or African American	11	Bigender	03
31 - 40 years	41	Indian	04	Cisgender	79
41 - 50 years	18	Mixed	09	Gender Fluid	04
51 - 60 years	09	White	65	Genderqueer	02
61 years or more	03	Pacific Islander	0,3	Gender Variant	02
Working time	%	Others	04	Transgender	06
Less than 1 year	17	Field of work	%	Others	03
1 - 5 years	48	Architecture/Engineering	03	Education	%
6 - 10 years	17	Arts/Culture/Entertainment	03	High School diploma	10
11 - 15 years	09	Business/Management	31	Bachelor's degree	33
16 - 20 years	03	Communications	06	Specialization degree	17
20 years or more	06	Community/Social services	06	Master's degree	34
Sexual orientation	%	Education	07	Doctorate degree	05
Asexual	0,3	Science/Technology	07	Work located	%
Bicurious	01	Installation/Maintenance	01	Africa	10
Bisexual	07	Farming/Fishing/Forestry	01	Antarctica	-
Fluid	02	Government	05	Asia	11
Gay	70	Health/Medicine	07	Europe	24
Heterosexual	04	Law/Public policy	06	North America	19
Lesbian	10	Sales	05	Oceania	10
Pansexual	03	Others	13	South America	27
Sapiosexual	01	Sexual orient. disclosed	%	Gender disclosed	%
Skoliosexual	0,1	Yes	81	Yes	92
Others	01	No	19	No	08

Source: Prepared by the authors

In Table 1, some predominant characteristics of the LGBTQIAPN+ leaders who were part of our sample can be highlighted. Most leaders identified themselves as gay sexually oriented (n = 809), white (n = 751), cisgender (n = 913), and working in the Business and Management field (n = 358).

First, we analyzed the main barriers and challenges of LGBTQIAPN+ leaders in organizational work relations, through the means of the variables presented in the questionnaire in Table 2, with their respective factors: Activism for Diversity and Inclusivity (ADI), LGBTQIAPN+ Identity Exposure (LIE), Absence of Marginalization (AM), Group Composition (GC), Absence of Discrimination and Organizational Conflicts (ADOC), Leadership Self-Efficacy (LSE), and Professional Career (PC).

Table 2 – Adapted version of the questionnaire

Factors	Variables	Factor Loading	Mean	Standard Deviation
ADI	Q1: I get involved in actions and/or initiates related to LGBTQIAPN+ advocacies	0.478	4.757	1.512
	Q2: I can act on my LGBTQIAPN+ advocacies while in my work	0.736	4.779	1.537
	Q3: I receive support from my organization when it comes to my LGBTQIAPN+ advocacies	0.872	4.429	1.693
	Q4: The people in my workplace accept my LGBTQIAPN+ advocacies	0.828	4.773	1.416
	Q5: My organization is open to the idea of LGBTQIAPN+ advocacies	0.870	4.815	1.499
	Q21: My organization has LGBTQIA + diversity and inclusion policies and practices	0.811	4.403	1.843
	Q22: The policies and practices existing in my organization make it possible to deal with LGBTQIAPN+ related conflict	0.839	4.228	1.733
	Q24: My organization promotes a culture of respect and equality	0.790	4.948	1.362
	Q25: My organization has policies that protect gender diversity	0.810	4.423	1.693
LIE	Q6: My sexual orientation has not become a negative issue in my leadership role	0.769	4.922	1.605
	Q7: My gender identity was not a negative factor for my leadership	0.684	4.725	1.535
	Q8: My gender expression (femininity or masculinity) has not had a negative impact in my leadership role	0.784	4.339	1.647
	Q9: I think my gender identity or/and sexual orientation do not affect my relation with my co-workers	0.759	4.673	1.584
	Q10: I think my leadership is not limited because of my gender identity or/and sexual orientation	0.856	4.922	1.605
AM	Q13: I don't feel excluded in my work environment	0.786	4.898	1.449
	Q14: My co-workers treat me with respect in the same way as my cisheterosexual colleagues	0.687	4.898	1.449
	Q18: I am accepted by my workgroup	0.880	5.272	1.090
GC	Q20: I feel supported by my co-workers	0.879	4.929	1.245
	Q16: My workgroup is diverse in terms of sexual orientation	0.917	3.701	1.805
ADOC	Q17: My workgroup is diverse in terms of gender	0.829	4.040	1.734
	Q15: I have not been discriminated (verbally and non-verbally) at work due to my sexual orientation and/or gender identity	0.913	4.397	1.774
LSE	Q19: I have experienced conflict at work due to my sexual orientation and/or gender identity	0.902	4.607	1.649
	Q11: I feel unable to assume higher leadership positions because of my sexual orientation and/or gender identity	0.922	4.807	1.558
PC	Q12: I do not feel inferior to my non-LGBTQIAPN+ colleagues	0.796	5.251	1.347
	Q29: My gender identity and/or sexual orientation has not become an issue in my promotion as a leader	0.939	4.871	1.508
	Q30: My gender identity and/or sexual orientation has not become an issue in my career development	0.935	4.601	1.621

Source: Prepared by the authors

According to Table 2, the lowest mean presented in the questionnaire was for variable Q16 related to the diversity of sexual orientation in the workgroup (3.701). Then by the variables: Q17 related to gender diversity in the workgroup (4.004) and Q22, which addresses organizational policies and practices to deal with LGBTQIAPN+ conflicts (4.228). The highest averages in the questionnaire were for the variables: Q18 feeling supported by workgroup (5.272), Q12 not feeling inferior to non-LGBTQIAPN+ colleagues (5.251), and Q24 promotion of a culture of respect and equality for the organization (4.948).

Another aspect that we analyzed were the factor loadings (FL) of the variables that make up each construct of the model. According to Hair Jr. et al. (2005), factor loadings are considered relevant for the statistical model when they present a value greater than 0.50. As shown in Table 2, it can be seen that the seven constructs of the model present a load higher than the one considered by the study, except for

variable Q1 (0.478).

Although item Q1 presents a factor loading of 0.478, slightly below the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair Jr. et al., 2005), it was retained due to its theoretical relevance to the construct ADI, as it addresses the behavioral and proactive dimension of engagement in LGBTQIAPN+ advocacies, which is not fully captured by the other items. Excluding this item would reduce the content validity of the construct, as emphasized by Fassinger et al. (2010) and Pryor (2021), who highlight active engagement as a central element in the development of leadership self-efficacy among LGBTQIAPN+ leaders. Moreover, the construct's reliability and validity remain adequate ($\alpha = 0.925$; CR = 0.936; AVE = 0.624), thus not compromising the robustness of the model.

The first aspect of the measurement models that we observed was the convergent validity, obtained through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). AVE values must be greater than 0.50 (AVE > 0.50), as indicated by the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion (Henseler et al., 2009). Table 3 shows that all model constructs have an AVE of 0.50, so the model results tend to be satisfactory for exploratory research (Ringle et al., 2014).

Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha (CA) are elements of the second criterion that we analyze in the model, which are used to assess whether the answers are reliable, together. For CA, higher values of 0.60 and 0.70 are considered adequate, and for CR, values of 0.70 and 0.90 are satisfactory (Hair Jr et al., 2016). In the model presented in this study, both CR and CA criteria present adequate results, according to the values presented in Table 3.

Table 3 – Internal Consistency and Convergent Validity of Constructs

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
1. ADI	0.925	0.936	0.624
2. ADOC	0.786	0.903	0.824
3. GC	0.698	0.866	0.764
4. LIE	0.867	0.900	0.600
5. LSE	0.666	0.851	0.742
6. AM	0.755	0.859	0.673
7. PC	0.862	0.935	0.879

Source: Prepared by the authors

The assessment of discriminant validity was the third criterion we observed, where we analyzed the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion and the factor loadings of the model's variables. In this criterion, the square roots of the AVE values of each construct were compared with the correlations between the constructs, as shown in Table 4, and the values of the roots must be greater than the correlations (Ringle et al., 2014). Analyzing the values, we verified that the square roots of the AVE are greater than the correlations in the studied model.

Table 4 – Correlation matrix between latent variables (n = 1,156)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. ADI	0.790						
2. ADOC	0.197	0.908					
3. GC	0.510	0.112	0.874				
4. LIE	0.412	0.580	0.280	0.775			
5. LSE	0.276	0.443	0.226	0.732	0.861		

6. AM	0.591	0.372	0.426	0.575	0.473	0.820	
7. PC	0.286	0.596	0.206	0.700	0.614	0.456	0.937
Cronbach's alpha	0.925	0.786	0.698	0.867	0.666	0.755	0.862
Composite Reliability	0.936	0.903	0.866	0.900	0.851	0.859	0.935
Average Variance Extracted	0.624	0.824	0.764	0.600	0.742	0.673	0.879

Source: Prepared by the authors

Continuing, we proceed to the analysis of the structural model, which will first be evaluated by Pearson's coefficient of determination (R^2), which indicates the quality of the adjusted model. Cohen (1988) indicates that for the area of applied social sciences, values from 0.02 (2%) indicate a small effect, 0.13 (13%) a medium effect, and 0.26 (26%) an effect size large in relation to the variance of the construct. Thus, for PC and LSE constructs the R^2 are both large (respectively 0.377 and 0.546).

Table 5 – Values of the structural model indicators

	R^2	Q^2	f^2
ADI	-	0.534	0.011
ADOC	-	0.408	0.000
GC	-	0.283	0.001
LIE	-	0.442	0.521
LSE	0.546	0.244	0.604
AM	-	0.363	0.015
PC	0.377	0.527	-
Reference values	$R^2 = 2\% = \text{small}$ $R^2 = 13\% = \text{medium}$ $R^2 = 26\% = \text{large}$	$Q^2 > 0$	0.02, 0.15 e 0.35 are considered small, medium and large.

Source: Prepared by the authors

Note. The ADI, DOC, GC, LIE, and M dimensions have no R^2 value, as they are independent or those that precede others in the Structural Equation Modeling.

Caption: Q^2 = Stone-Geisser predictive or indicated validity; f^2 = size of the Cohen effect (1988).

Predictive validity (Q^2) and Cohen's indicator (f^2) are indicators used to assess the goodness of fit of the model. Predictive validity (Q^2) assesses the quality of accuracy of the adjusted model (Hair Jr et al., 2016). As an evaluation criterion, values greater than zero must be obtained, and the value of $Q^2 = 1$ would indicate a perfect model. Cohen's indicator (f^2) evaluates the effect of each construct as to its usefulness for this model. Values comprising 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are considered small, medium and large, respectively (Hair Jr et al., 2016). When observing the results presented in Table 5 regarding the values of Q^2 and f^2 , it is noted that the model is accurate and that the constructs are relevant for the general adjustment of the model.

Then, in the last step, we validated the tested hypotheses of the structural model, presented in Table 5. To verify the significance of the proposed relationships, the t-test values and p-values are analyzed. As validation criteria, values above 1.96 must be obtained for the t-test and values less than 0.05 for the p-value.

Table 6 – Results of the structural model (n = 1,156)

Structural relations	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	Test-t	P-value	Status
ADI \Rightarrow LSE	H1 (+)	-0.094	3.262**	0.001*	Supported
LIE \Rightarrow LSE	H2 (+)	0.686	22.544**	0.000*	Supported
AM \Rightarrow LSE	H3 (+)	0.115	3.677**	0.000*	Supported
GC \Rightarrow LSE	H4 (+)	0.031	1.272	0.203	Rejected
ADOC \Rightarrow LSE	H5 (+)	0.018	0.661	0.509	Rejected
LSE \Rightarrow PC	H6 (+)	0.614	26.562**	0.000*	Supported

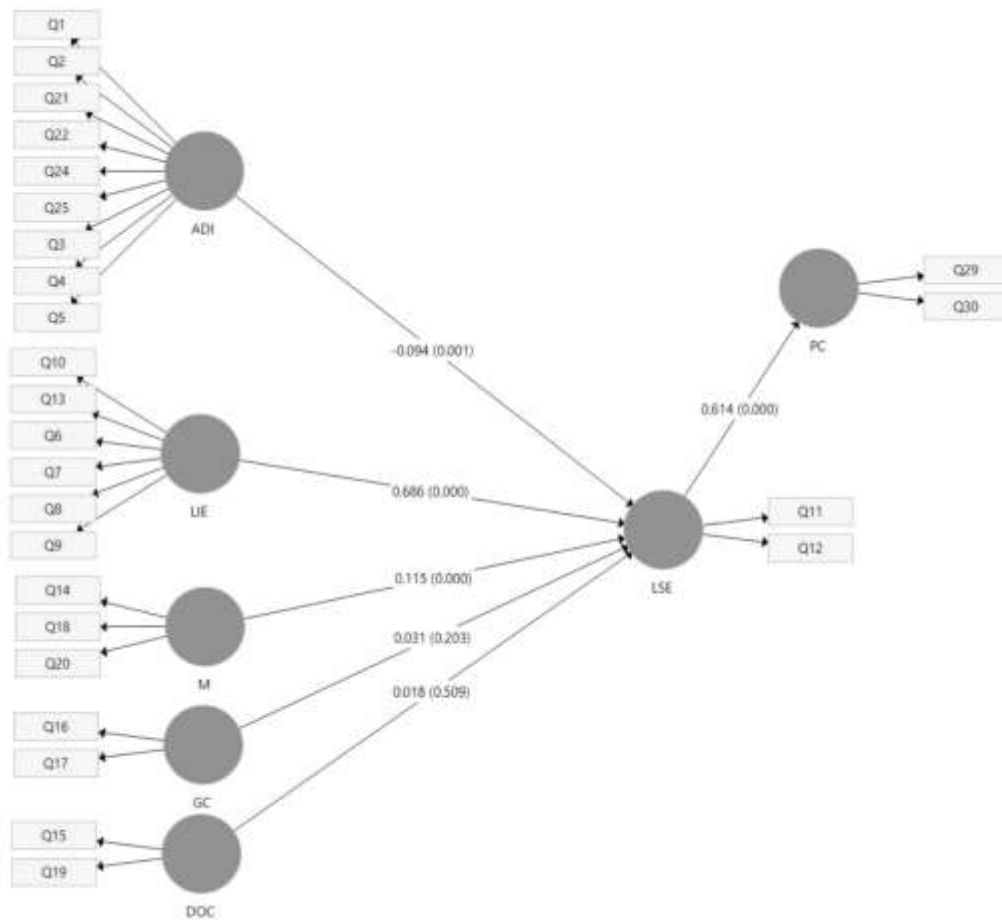
Source: Prepared by the authors

*P values < 0.05 (significant). **Test-T > 1.96.

The results in Table 6 shows that four of the six hypotheses were confirmed, both by the t- test and the p-value. It is also observed that the hypotheses that were rejected by the study present low t- test values. Thus, the model proposed in the study has most of its hypotheses supported.

Finally, Figure 2 shows the Structural Equation Modeling performed according to the theoretical model proposed in this research.

Figure 2 – Research measurement model



Source: Prepared by the authors
 Note. Model with path coefficient and p-value.

5. Discussion

Our findings highlight issues of group composition, their diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity as the main barriers and challenges. This demonstrates that work groups in which the leaders are included do not present diversity in the composition of their members. Since LGBTQIAPN+ people who rise in leadership positions may be seen differently in different contexts (Fassinger et al., 2010), we draw attention to the composition of the group, as gender and sexual minority leaders may try to mold themselves to their group and face challenges in trying to be their true self in the workplace, as noted, for example in the research by Fine (2017).

The lack of policies and practices to deal with LGBTQIAPN+ conflicts is another of these organizational barriers and challenges. Ozturk and Tatli (2016) pointed out that the test of true organizational inclusion is the degree to which most marginalized groups are considered, valued, and protected. LGBTQIAPN+ policies are seen as central to organizational management to contribute to workers' commitment (Cook & Glass, 2016) and to create a diverse, inclusive, and safe work environment (Mara et al., 2021).

Regarding the proposed theoretical model, through a thorough and accurate analysis of the results previously achieved through SEM, we found ADOC and GC were not perceived predictors of LSE, that is, Hypotheses 4 and 5 were rejected. Although the hypothesis predicts a positive effect of GC on LSE, the results may have been influenced by the lack of a true climate of inclusion in the groups analyzed. Nishii

(2013) argues that diversity alone is not enough to generate positive results; a perception of inclusion is necessary, that is, feeling valued and fully accepted in the group. Shore et al. (2011) also emphasize that inclusion depends on subjective experiences of belonging and authenticity, not just the demographic composition of the group. In the LGBTQIAPN+ context, this is even more critical, since many individuals remain invisible in organizations due to cisheteronormative institutional codes (Roberts, 2020; Kamasak et al., 2020). Therefore, even in diverse groups, the lack of a psychologically safe environment may prevent diversity from translating into greater self-efficacy for LGBTQIAPN+ leaders, which may explain the failure to confirm the hypothesis.

Contrary to the expectation that ADOC favors LSE, the results may indicate that the experience of discrimination is more structural and persistent than isolated, and that individual coping strategies developed over time can neutralize some of these effects. Fassinger et al. (2010) point out that LGBTQIAPN+ leaders face an organizational setting that limits the expression of authentic behaviors, which can impact their self-efficacy even in seemingly neutral environments. Furthermore, Mara et al. (2021) indicate that many of these professionals develop coping mechanisms in the face of adversity, which can maintain levels of self-efficacy even in the face of subtle discrimination, such as microaggressions (Ng & Rumens, 2017). Thus, the perceived absence of conflict or discrimination may not reflect an environment of true inclusion, which could explain the rejection of the hypothesis.

On the other hand, Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were supported, revealing that ADI, LIE, and AM were perceived as LSE predictors. These dimensions are directly experienced by LGBTQIAPN+ leaders, that is, they directly experience the absence of marginalization, acceptance of who they are by their group, and activism to seek diversity and inclusion.

ADI had a small negative predictive effect on LSE, that is, the influence of one variable over another is small. This means that though LGBTQIAPN+ leaders may have their own personal advocacies that promote organizational inclusivity and diversity in their respective organizations, members of the organization may perceive it negatively because of the non-cisheteronormativity the advocacy is promoting. However, it only has a small predictive power because the leaders' advocacies have no direct impact on their organizational performance: whatever they hold important is insubstantial when it comes to considering them for leadership promotions. This echoes what Siqueira and Zauli-Fellows (2006) emphasized that LGBTQIAPN+ studies are markedly influenced by the struggle for rights and the exercise of citizenship, an aspect that can be read by institutions not as competence, but as militancy, generating resistance to its full incorporation into leadership criteria.

Furthermore, although LGBTQIAPN+ activism and advocacy are recognized as relevant elements in strengthening leadership by providing empowerment, skill development, and creating inclusive environments, these same elements can be perceived negatively within organizations dominated by cisheteronormative norms. This occurs because, as pointed out by Chang and Bowring (2017), many LGBTQIAPN+ leaders avoid addressing diversity policies for fear of being perceived as interested only in personal causes, which can result in stigmatization and devaluation of their leadership. This perception stems from the fact that LGBTQIAPN+ activism represents a break with the organizational status quo, which implies risks and resistance, including institutional ones.

We also found that LIE positively influenced LSE. This finding contributes to the debate raised by Goldberg (2016), who showed that the disclosure of LGBTQIAPN+ identity in the workplace is generally associated with positive results, such as greater organizational commitment and job satisfaction, greater performance and career success, better relationships with colleagues, and less stress. Bowring (2017) suggests that when leaders choose to assume or claim their LGBTQIAPN+ identity, instead of minimizing it, it leads to trust between leader and follower, which influences positive results.

The results also showed that AM had a positive effect on LSE. This finding is consistent with the literature, as some studies point to the presence of marginalization as having negative impacts for LGBTQIAPN+ individuals (Adams & Webster, 2017; Dray et al., 2020; Fassinger et al., 2010; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; Souza & Carrieri, 2015; Wang et al., 2022), which can hinder their leadership self-efficacy and prevent them from reaching leadership positions (Fassinger et al., 2010). Workspaces free of marginalization can lead to the creation of a more welcoming organizational climate for LGBTQIAPN+ workers (Fine, 2017), with a more inclusive and participatory organizational culture (Lee, 2021; Courtney, 2014). DeLeon and Brunner (2013) demonstrated that in order to minimize experiences of marginalization, LGBTQIAPN+ leaders need to be able to create safer work spaces, engaging in activities to defend LGBTQIAPN+ rights.

Finally, we found that LSE has a positive influence on PC. Kolbe (2009) emphasized that believing in one's own abilities can be vital in measuring cognitive strength, leading to determination and perseverance, helping one overcome obstacles that would interfere with utilizing those innate abilities to achieve goals. Bandura and Locke (2003) found as well that self-efficacy is a powerful determinant of job performance: employees with high self-efficacy are confident that they can learn and perform a specific task and are likely to persist in their efforts even when problems surface. Coon (2001), in a survey of prominent gays and lesbians, found that the LGBTQIAPN+ identity had a positive impact on their professional lives. Zunker (2008) further suggests that self-efficacy can help LGBTQIAPN+ individuals feel more empowered and improve their career adaptability.

These findings make sense, as LGBTQIAPN+ leaders can benefit from their own developmental experiences of learning to deal with barriers and challenges (Goldberg, 2016). The difficulties faced by LGBTQIAPN+ people at work equip them with useful skills that can be directed towards leadership (Fassinger et al., 2010), leading these professionals to be more willing to take action (O'Brien, 2021). Thus, superior performance is a strategy used by LGBTQIAPN+ employees to deal with the barriers and challenges faced in the work environment (Mara et al., 2021).

6. Conclusion

Though the experiences of gender and sexual minorities in the workplace have shown progress in recent decades, there remains limited evidence on the exercise of LGBTQIAPN+ leadership within corporate environments. Furthermore, these previous studies mainly focused on the experiences of LGBTQIAPN+ workers in general, rather than specifically addressing the challenges faced by LGBTQIAPN+ leaders. It is this gap that we aimed to fill with our study by demonstrating the barriers and challenges that hinder the effective exercise of LGBTQIAPN+ leadership.

This paper makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by offering empirical evidence concerning the gap in the exercise of LGBTQIAPN+ leadership. The findings emphasize that the main barriers and challenges revolve around the group composition and its lack of diversity regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. This indicates that the working groups where leaders are situated often lack diversity in terms of their members' identities. As a result, LGBTQIAPN+ leaders may encounter difficulties in being authentic within their workplace. They might feel compelled to conform to the norms of the group and consequently face challenges in expressing their true essence while at work.

Another noteworthy contribution that deserves emphasis is the significance of embracing one's LGBTQIAPN+ identity for leadership self-efficacy. It is presumed that being open about one's identity as a leader can foster a stronger sense of trust with followers, leading to improved relationships, professional fulfillment, and enhanced performance in work-related activities. The study highlights that leadership self-efficacy plays a crucial role in the professional careers of LGBTQIAPN+ leaders. This self-efficacy helps gender and sexual minority leaders overcome challenges in the workplace, instills confidence in them, and motivates them to persevere in their efforts to pursue better career opportunities.

As practical contributions to organizations, our findings can be highly useful in shedding light on the barriers and challenges faced by LGBTQIAPN+ leaders in the workplace. The results reported in this study hold significant social implications, our findings underscore the importance of implementing public policies that not only prohibit discrimination but also raise awareness and provide education on LGBTQIAPN+ issues. Such policies can help educate non-minority individuals on how to address and support the challenges faced by sexual and gender minority groups.

As a limitation of this study, it is important to acknowledge that there may be other factors influencing barriers and challenges in labor relations that were not observed in the existing literature. Additionally, despite the significant number of participants, the sample is representatively biased, with a predominance of men, white, cisgender, and gay individuals. This homogeneity limits the generalizability of the results and reveals a structural phenomenon: even within the LGBTQIAPN+ community, access to organizational leadership tends to benefit individuals closer to normative standards of institutional acceptability. More than a methodological limitation, this cross-section highlights the mechanisms of exclusion operating within diversity policies themselves, especially considering that LGBTQIAPN+ leadership is permeated by multiple layers of oppression related to race, class, age, and the pressure to conform to cisheteronormative norms. Intersectionality, in this context,

reveals how different social markers complexly shape leadership experiences and the possibilities for authentic expression of these identities.

Therefore, future research must be guided by intersectional and transformational perspectives in order to broaden the perspective to other expressions of gender and sexual diversity in the workplace. Future research could consider qualitative analyses to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers and challenges identified in this study. Another suggestion concerns understanding the factors that facilitate and hinder the development of leadership roles. We also acknowledge that our sample was primarily composed of cisgender and gay individuals of white ethnicity. This could be attributed to the reluctance of LGBTQIAPN+ community members to openly disclose their leadership experiences, which, in turn, poses challenges in recruiting participants from other subgroups for research purposes.

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