

Why LGBTQ Workplace Inclusion Fails: Prioritizing Barriers for Effective Organizational Intervention

Shivangi Singh¹, Dr. Pradeep Chauhan², Dr. Kaustav Padmapati³

¹Research Scholar, UPES, School of Business

²Associate Professor, UPES, School of Business

³Assistant Professor, UPES, School of Liberal Studies and Media

Abstract:

Workplace inclusion of the LGBTQ community has always been a subjugated area, earlier due to the rigid societal belief system and now due to the legal backlash. But the studies show that the organizations for moral responsibility and competitive advantage are rebranding their DEI strategies. So, for such organizations it is necessary to have a detailed understanding of barriers that obstruct the intent and efforts towards meaningful inclusion. A lot of studies have identified barriers, but there remains a gap in the barriers that needs immediate attention. Addressing this gap, this study systematically prioritizes and models the interrelationships among barriers to LGBTQ workplace inclusion using an integrated multi-criteria decision-making framework combining the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchy Process (FAHP), and Decision-Making Trial and Evaluation Laboratory (DEMATEL). Based on an extensive review of 55 studies, the study discusses three major categories: legal and cultural barriers, structural barriers, and leadership & stakeholder barriers. Expert judgments were obtained from twenty scholars and practitioners in human resource management, DEI, and organizational behavior to evaluate barrier salience under conditions of uncertainty and subjectivity. By combining prioritizing and causation analysis, this study views LGBTQ workplace exclusion as a systemic and interdependent phenomenon, providing theoretically informed and practically actionable recommendations for organizations and governments pursuing long-term inclusion outcomes.

Keywords: “LGBTQ”, “Workplace Inclusion”, “Barriers”, “AHP”, “FAHP”, “DEMATEL”

1) Introduction

Workplace inclusion of LGBTQ individuals has been a significant area of inquiry in human resource management and organizational behavior research. Over the decades, pioneering organizations have formalized their anti-discrimination and inclusion framework to address workplace inequities (McKinsey, 2020). However, the recent development, the 2023 US Supreme Court decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, indicated a noticeable shift in organizational discourse and practices, making some organizations roll back from their DEI initiatives (Pollack et al., 2025). On the other hand, research shows that there are organizations that have shown their interest in rebranding or strategically reframing their DEI systems (Pollack et al., 2025). These organizations for defensive inclusion are either modifying their language or framing ways to respond to reputational and regulatory risk. The approach reflects organizational social responsiveness as well as continued awareness to attain benefits DEI yields (Lourenco et al., 2021).

Despite the extensive implementation of formal policies, lived realities of queer people remain uneven (Maji et al., 2024). Research shows that even in companies that publicly signal inclusion, queer people face unequal access to opportunities, limited managerial support, and discomfort with identity disclosure (CAP, 2023). These disparities are theoretically grounded in social identity and social dominance theory, which suggest that the heteronormative identities are often dominant and in-groups. The dominance subordinates' queer people, fostering the environment of out-groups or exclusion (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023). The non-inclusivity and instances of discrimination are highly driven by rigid cultural belief and lack of legal framework to safeguard the queer community (Vongvisitsin & Wong, 2021; Corlett et al., 2023). When broader social norms remain restrictive and legal protections are limited, formal policies often fail to penetrate the deep structure of daily organizational routines. This misalignment gives rise to internal tension operating across interpersonal and structural levels.

While existing literature has extensively documented the existence of barriers (Rezai et al., 2023), there remains a gap in understanding their hierarchy and interdependence. Creating inclusive and equitable workplaces requires moving beyond mere formation of inclusive systems towards systematically prioritizing factors that most significantly impede policy translation. To acknowledge this gap, the current study deploys an integrated AHP-FAHP-DEMATEL framework. By applying these multi-criteria decision-making tools, the author evaluates the barriers operating at multiple levels under the conditions of subjectivity, ambiguity, and interdependence. AHP and FAHP are used to systematically prioritize barriers while explicitly accounting for uncertainty in expert assessment, whereas DEMATEL broadens the study by revealing cause-and-effect relationships between main barrier categories.

So, the study contributes to literature in two strategic ways. Firstly, by shifting focus from descriptive accounts of inclusion to systematic prioritization and causal explanation of these barriers. Secondly, it offers empirical clarity for practitioners and policymakers, particularly in contexts characterized

by social, legal, and organizational ambiguity, with a view to having more tailored and effective inclusion actions.

2) Literature Review

This study has identified relevant literature from the Scopus database. The study to capture appropriate keywords used 3 sets of keywords.

- “LGBTQ” OR “LGBT” OR “Queer” OR “Sexual minorities” OR “Gender minorities” OR “SOGIE”
- “Workplace Inclusion” OR “DEI” OR “Diversity Equity and Inclusion” OR “Workplace Visibility” OR “Representation” OR “Employment”
- “Barriers” OR “Challenges” OR “Limitations” OR “Constraints”

Articles published under social sciences, business and administration, psychology, economics and finance, and the wellbeing domain were considered. The filters of inclusion and exclusion were applied, and a total of 50 articles and 5 reports were finally reviewed. Thereafter, barriers were divided into 3 major categories with 16 subcategories.

Table 1: List of Barriers Obstructing LGBTQ Workplace Inclusion.

S.NO	BARRIERS	SUB-BARRIERS	SOURCES
1.	Legal and Cultural Barriers	Limited legal recognition of diverse Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation.	(OHCHR, 2012), (de abreu et al., 2024)
		Religious fundamentalism	(Huffaker & Kwon, 2016)
		False Stereotype (Cultural stigma)	(Drydakis, 2025)
2.	Structural barriers	Lack of awareness relating to Diverse sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	(Neumeier and Brown, 2021)
		Lack of protocols to manage sexual prejudice	(Priola et al., 2014)
		Symbolic inclusion (Tokenism)	(Bogicevic et al., 2023)
		Heteronormative discourse	(Resnick & Galupo, 2019)
		Gendered perception of leadership (rainbow ceiling)	(Shamloo et al., 2022)
		Traditional, rigid, task-oriented work culture	(Melton & Cunningham, 2014)
3.	Leadership and Stakeholder barriers	Biased management	(Saunderson, 2004)
		Insufficient commitment	(Pulcher et al., 2022)
		Generational Differences	(Achyldurdyeva & Datova, 2023)
		Higher social dominance	(Fletcher & Marvell, 2023)
		Neglecting attitude towards diversity	(Perry et al., 2021)
		Leaders enforced silence (discouraging victims from reporting misconduct)	(Di Marco et al., 2018)
		Resistance from Stakeholders because treating LGBTQ as less competent, inappropriate or when LGBTQ policies doesn't benefit stakeholders	(Kim & Bhalla, 2022)



2.1) Legal And Cultural Barriers

Existing research identifies inadequacy in the legal framework as one of the major barriers. Political conservatism among government officials is one of the reasons behind political parties rolling back the rights of LGBTQ people (de Abreu et al., 2024). Despite the presence of legal provisions like the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003) and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules (2020), the current scenario indicates a void in the legal framework concerning the interest, protection, and equality of the LGBTQ community (ICJ, 2023; Krishna, 2023). This limited or absent legal protection further creates a vacuum, leaving organizations (workplaces) vulnerable wherein they fail to adopt inclusive policies and make the workplace fair and just for LGBTQ employees (Vongvisitsin & Wong, 2021; Nair & Lakshmi, 2022).

Cultural barriers also play a critical role in shaping the social standing of LGBTQ people (Adeniyi et al., 2024). The existing literature broadly categorizes cultural barriers into two major forms, i.e., religious fundamentalism (Huffaker & Kwon, 2016) and false stereotypes (Drydakis, 2025). Religious fundamentalism refers to the belief in a unique and valuable truth within a specific set of religious teachings. This adherence to fixed doctrines makes people less open to evolving outlooks on diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (de Abreu et al., 2024). False stereotypes, on the other hand, represent the incorrect and exaggerated beliefs that revolve around heterosexuality. Such stereotypes give rise to the unconscious biases, homophobia (Gedro, 2010; Cech & Rothwell, 2020), and transphobia (Worthen, 2016), thereby increasing the vulnerability of LGBTQ people.

2.2) Structural Barriers

Structural barriers refer to the institutional, systemic, and policy-driven constraints embedded in organizational structure. These barriers further have sub-barriers. One of the significant barriers is the *lack of pervasive awareness* (Vongvisitsin & Wong, 2021). A preliminary survey by Mingle (2016) has also highlighted lack of awareness regarding sexual orientation as a key barrier in Indian workplaces. Despite the existence of inclusion policies in many organizations, the absence of comprehensive

awareness related to LGBTQ experiences, health issues, and broader identity-related concerns continues to hold back meaningful inclusion (Sooknanan, 2023; Aishwarya & Sharma, 2024). *Tokenism, or superficial inclusion*, also emerges as a crucial barrier (García Johnson & Otto, 2019). Organizations for their branding, social responsibility, or symbolic diversity purpose (Bogicevic et al., 2023; Levandowski et al., 2025) often hire LGBTQ people for subordinate roles or positions with lesser pay. This practice acts as a barrier and is found to affect the mental health of people by making them subjected to discrimination and exclusion (Gate, 2011). Additionally, when organizational boards or leadership hold conservative attitudes or disapprove of homosexual lifestyles, workplaces are less likely to have formal and active protocols (Priola et al., 2014), resulting in an ineffective mechanism to address sexual prejudice.

The heteronormativity embedded in workplaces also obstructs LGBTQ inclusion (Robertson, 2017). Heteronormativity refers to the belief system that positions heterosexuality as the 'normal,' 'default,' and 'morally superior' orientation (Ingraham, 1994). According to this ideological framework, only two genders, 'male' and 'female,' are legitimate (Reskin et al., 1999). So, the workplace policies, practices, structures, infrastructure, and relationships are designed around heterosexual norms (Gedro & Mizzi, 2014; Resnick & Galupo, 2019; Worst & O'Shea, 2020). In the workplaces, this heteronormativity exerts a significant influence by reinforcing binary gender norms (Leap, 2007) and silencing conversation around diverse gender and sexuality (Mattheis et al., 2020). Furthermore, beliefs associated with hegemonic masculinity (Speice, 2020) give rise to the barrier of gendered perception of leadership. It happens where leadership qualities are implicitly associated with masculinity, limiting access to leadership or decision-making roles for women and queer employees (Gedro, 2010; Kumar & Singh, 2020). Traditional, rigid, task-oriented work culture priorities work over individuals and frequently avoid risks and conflict (Melton & Cunningham, 2014) and also contribute to hindering inclusion efforts.

2.3 Leadership and Stakeholders Barriers

Leadership is a foundational determinant of organizational effectiveness and serves as a crucial influence in shaping workplace culture. But the inadequacy in these aspects of organization leads to hindrance in meaningful LGBTQ inclusion. Some lacunas are reflected at the individual level or in the form of an individual approach, like biased management (Saunderson, 2004), insufficient commitment towards queer inclusion (Pulcher et al., 2022), neglecting attitude towards diversity (Neumeier & Brown, 2021), and higher social dominance (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023). Leaders with such an approach often discourage LGBTQ people from reporting discrimination or putting forth their inclusion needs (Di Marco et al., 2018).

Generational differences have also been reported as a barrier, as older leaders often demonstrate slow adaptation, often clashing with expectations of younger LGBTQ employees seeking inclusive and responsive workplaces (Achyldurdyyeva & Datova, 2023). Sometimes the resistance from stakeholders in hiring LGBTQ employees and creating equitable policies creates hurdles right at the initial phase. This happens when stakeholders perceive queer people as less competent and inappropriate (Morgenroth et al., 2024) or when LGBTQ policies don't provide desired benefits to stakeholders (Pulcher et al., 2022; Kim & Bhalla, 2022.).

3) Methodology

The study adopts a multi-method decision-making approach. It involves the integration of the Analytical Hierarchy Process, the Fuzzy Analytical Hierarchy Process, and Decision-Making Trial and Evaluation to examine the barriers that obstruct the workplace inclusion of the LGBTQ community. The approach is because of the co-existence of expert judgment, uncertainty, and causal relationships.

After extensive literature review, legal barriers, cultural barriers, structural barriers, and leadership/stakeholder barriers with their sub-barriers were identified. As per the requirement of methodology, the legal barriers and cultural barriers are clubbed to make one major category of the barriers. To ensure the content validity, **data was collected from 20 experts from human resources, diversity equity and inclusion, and organizational behavior. A 7-point Likert scale**

ranging from "equally important" to "extremely important" was used to capture expert judgment, which was later converted into triangular fuzzy numbers to address the subjectivity in qualitative assessment.

The **Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)** is used in this study because of its ability to break complex decision problems into a structured hierarchy and derive priority weights via systematic pairwise comparisons. AHP is especially useful when numerous qualitative and quantitative criteria must be reviewed concurrently, since it promotes logical consistency and transparency in expert-driven decisions (Saaty, 1990). Recent applications demonstrate AHP's continued importance in social science, sustainability, and human resource research, particularly where abstract constructs such as social obstacles and institutional constraints must be prioritized (Saaty, 1980; Ishizaka & Labib, 2019). In the context of this research, AHP is used to create a clear hierarchical ranking of LGBTQ workplace inclusion barriers, determining which categories have the highest relative significance and giving a first evidence-based prioritization strategy.

The **Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchy Process (FAHP)** addresses the constraints of standard AHP in dealing with the vagueness, ambiguity, and subjectivity inherent in human judgment. In socially sensitive sectors, such as attitudes regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, experts frequently express preferences linguistically rather than numerically. FAHP incorporates fuzzy set theory to model this uncertainty by letting judgments to be expressed as ranges, resulting in more realistic and cognitively aligned evaluations (Chang, 1996; Kahraman et al., 2021). Recent studies have emphasized the superiority of FAHP over crisp techniques in capturing nuanced expert perspectives and improving the robustness of results in social and organizational research (Buckley, 1985; Govindan et al., 2015). As a result, this article uses FAHP to validate and reinforce the AHP findings, guaranteeing that the priority of LGBTQ inclusion barriers remains consistent even when ambiguity and reluctance in expert assessments are explicitly accounted for.

The **Decision-Making Trial and Evaluation Laboratory (DEMATEL)** method is used to go beyond ranking and discover the causal structure of

barriers by distinguishing between cause-and-effect elements. Unlike AHP and FAHP, which assume relative independence among criteria, DEMATEL explicitly models interdependence and directional influences, making it ideal for analyzing complex social systems with feedback loops and systemic interactions (Gabus & Fontela, 1972; Tzeng et al., 2007). Recent study has increasingly used DEMATEL in organizational and policy studies to identify leverage points for effective intervention (Si

4) Result And Discussion

4.1) Analytical Hierarchy Process

Table 2: Importance level for AHP/FAHP

Preference rating	Linguistic Code	TFNs
Equal Importance	1	(1,1,1)
Not at all important	2	(1,2,3)
Slightly Imp	3	(2,3,4)
Moderately Important	4	(3,4,5)
Moderately Highly Important	5	(4,5,6)
Highly Important	6	(5,6,7)
Extremely Important	7	(6,7,7)

Table 1 shows the linguistic scale and corresponding triangular fuzzy numbers used AHP and FAHP analysis. The structured conversion of qualitative judgments to TFNs ensures that the expert's

et al., 2018; Taherdoost & Madanchian, 2023). In this research, DEMATEL is utilized to illustrate how cultural-legal and leadership-related barriers act as root causes, while structural barriers emerge as results, allowing the study to deliver strategically actionable insights rather than simply descriptive rankings.

intuition is systematically integrated while avoiding artificial accuracy. This scale provides the methodological framework for both crisp and fuzzy judgments.

Table 3: Normalized Weights of the main criteria (AHP)

Main Category of Criteria/Barriers	Cultural and Legal Barriers	Structural Barriers	Leadership and Stakeholders Barriers
Cultural and Legal Barriers	0.7636	0.8065	0.4545
Structural Barriers	0.1091	0.1613	0.4545
Leadership and Stakeholders Barriers	0.1273	0.0323	0.0909

Source: Self Composition

The normalized weights show that Cultural and Legal Barriers are the highest priority, followed by Structural Barriers and Leadership and Stakeholder Barriers. This indicates that macro-level socio-legal limitations have a greater impact on LGBTQ

employment exclusion than organizational or interpersonal factors alone. The dominance of cultural and legal barriers indicates enduring normative prejudices and policy gaps, which impact organizational climates indirectly but forcefully.

Table 4: Normalized Weights of Cultural and Legal Barriers

Cultural and Legal Barriers	False stereotype	Religious fundamentalism	Lack of legal framework addressing LGBTQ people or Political conservatism
False stereotype	0.7317	0.8064	0.4444
Religious fundamentalism	0.1219	0.1612	0.4444
Lack of legal framework addressing LGBTQ people or Political conservatism	0.1463	0.0322	0.1111

Source: Self Composition

Within the cultural and legal domain, False stereotypes are found to be the most powerful sub-barrier. This research demonstrates how socially constructed myths still serve as justification for discriminatory actions. The fact that religious fundamentalism comes in second shows how deeply

ingrained belief systems contribute to heteronormativity. While legal gaps are important, informal culture views may have a more immediate and widespread effect on workplace inclusion, according to the relatively lesser weight given to political conservatism or the absence of legal frameworks.

Table 5: Normalized Weights of Structural Barriers

Structural Barriers	Lack of awareness relating to Diverse sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	Symbolic inclusion (Tokenism)	Lack of protocols to manage sexual prejudice	Heteronormative discourse	Gendered perception of leadership (rainbow ceiling)	Traditional, rigid, task oriented work culture
Lack of awareness relating to Diverse sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	0.3417	0.5422	0.1040	0.3243	0.2362	0.2188
Symbolic inclusion (Tokenism)	0.1139	0.1807	0.7279	0.3243	0.2835	0.1875
Lack of protocols to manage sexual prejudice	0.3417	0.1807	0.1040	0.2595	0.2362	0.1875
Heteronormative discourse	0.0854	0.0361	0.0260	0.0649	0.1890	0.1875
Gendered perception of leadership (rainbow ceiling)	0.0683	0.0301	0.0208	0.0162	0.0472	0.1875
Traditional, rigid, task oriented work culture	0.0488	0.0301	0.0173	0.0108	0.0079	0.0313

Source: Self Composition

The most important barrier under structural barrier analysis, is symbolic inclusion (tokenism), highlighting the fact that surface-level diversity measures frequently fall short of real inclusion. Lack of knowledge about various gender identities and sexual orientations follows closely, denoting

informational gaps in organizations. Even while they are less prevalent, lower-ranked elements like heteronormative discourse and gendered views of leadership (rainbow ceiling) are nevertheless structurally established and collectively support exclusionary norms.

Table 6: Normalized Weights of Leadership and Stakeholder's barriers.

Leadership and Stakeholder's barriers.	Biased management	Insufficient commitment	Generational divides	Higher social dominance	Neglecting attitude toward s diversity	Leaders enforced silence (discouraging victims from	Resistance or backlash from stakeholders because of the perception of LGBTQ as less competent ,

						reporting misconduct)	inappropriate or when LGBTQ policies doesn't benefit stakeholders)
Biased management	0.2547	0.2569	0.5106	0.2350	0.2278	0.0667	0.2222
Insufficient commitment	0.2547	0.2569	0.2553	0.3525	0.0759	0.2667	0.1667
Generational divides	0.0637	0.0642	0.1277	0.2350	0.3038	0.2000	0.1667
Higher social dominance	0.0849	0.0856	0.0426	0.1175	0.2278	0.2667	0.1667
Neglecting attitude towards diversity	0.0509	0.2569	0.0213	0.0196	0.0759	0.0667	0.1667
Leaders enforced silence (discouraging victims from reporting misconduct)	0.2547	0.0428	0.0213	0.0235	0.0759	0.0667	0.0556
Resistance or backlash from stakeholders because of the perception of LGBTQ as less competent , inappropriate or when LGBTQ policies doesn't benefit stakeholders.	0.0364	0.0367	0.0213	0.0168	0.0127	0.0667	0.0556

Source: Self Composition

Generational divisions and biased management practices appeared as the most significant leadership impediments. This suggests that generational socialization and power hierarchies shape leadership

attitudes, which in turn influence inclusion outcomes. Lower-ranked impediments, such as stakeholder resistance, continue to demand study since they reflect external influences that can hinder robust diversity efforts.

Table 7: Criteria Weights and Corresponding Ranks

Main Criteria	Criteria/Sub-criteria Weight	Rank
Cultural and Legal Barriers	3.4087	1
Structural Barriers	3.1263	2
Leaders and Stakeholders Barriers	2.9263	3
Cultural and Legal Barriers		
False stereotype	3.4196	1
Religious fundamentalism	3.0465	2
Lack of legal framework addressing LGBTQ people or Political conservatism	2.8710	3
Structural Barriers		
Lack of awareness relating to Diverse sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	8.1199	2
Symbolic inclusion (Tokenism)	9.6915	1

Lack of protocols to manage sexual prejudice	7.6194	3
Heteronormative discourse	6.9276	5
Gendered perception of leadership (rainbow ceiling)	6.2476	6
Traditional, rigid, task-oriented work culture	7.3851	4
Leadership and Stakeholders Barriers		
Biased management	7.6262	2
Insufficient commitment	7.5261	3
Generational divides	7.7400	1
Higher social dominance	7.4481	4
Neglecting attitude towards diversity	6.5031	7
Leaders enforced silence (discouraging victims from reporting misconduct)	7.1822	5
Resistance or backlash from stakeholders because of the perception of LGBTQ as less competent, inappropriate or when LGBTQ policies doesn't benefit stakeholders)	6.9806	6

Source: Self Composition

From the above table 6, it is observed that the sequence of final ranks with an application of the AHP method is Cultural and Legal Barriers > Structural Barriers > Leadership and Stakeholders Barriers. This hierarchy highlights that organizational inclusion measures cannot be effective unless larger cultural narratives and legal protections are addressed concurrently.

4.2) Fuzzy Analytical Hierarchy Process

Table 8: Fuzzy Weights of Geometric Means - w_l , w_m , and w_u

Criteria	w_l	w_m	w_u	M_i	N_i	Rank
Cultural and Legal Barriers	0.5395	0.7063	0.9078	0.7179	0.7032	1
Structural Barriers	0.1777	0.2159	0.2749	0.2228	0.2183	2
Leaders and Stakeholders Barriers	0.0616	0.0777	0.1013	0.0802	0.0786	3
Cultural and Legal Barriers						
False stereotype	0.5083	0.6907	0.9286	0.7092	0.6888	1
Religious fundamentalism	0.1674	0.2223	0.2988	0.2295	0.2229	2
Lack of legal framework addressing LGBTQ people or Political conservatism	0.0672	0.0870	0.1186	0.0910	0.0883	3
Structural Barriers						
Lack of awareness relating to Diverse sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	0.2269	0.3054	0.3977	0.3100	0.3018	1
Symbolic inclusion (Tokenism)	0.2178	0.2943	0.3991	0.3037	0.2956	2
Lack of protocols to manage sexual prejudice	0.1869	0.2388	0.3062	0.2440	0.2375	3
Heteronormative discourse	0.0644	0.0880	0.1250	0.0924	0.0900	4
Gendered perception of leadership (rainbow ceiling)	0.0376	0.0499	0.0697	0.0524	0.0510	5
Traditional, rigid, task-oriented work culture	0.0187	0.0235	0.0319	0.0247	0.0240	6
Leadership and Stakeholders Barriers						
Biased management	0.1702	0.2616	0.3888	0.2735	0.2578	1
Insufficient commitment	0.1606	0.2510	0.3766	0.2628	0.2477	2
Generational divides	0.1014	0.1689	0.2752	0.1818	0.1714	3
Higher social dominance	0.0886	0.1420	0.2392	0.1566	0.1476	4
Neglecting attitude towards diversity	0.0552	0.0759	0.1087	0.0799	0.0753	5

To overcome the ambiguity and subjectivity inherent in expert opinions, FAHP is used with Triangular Fuzzy Numbers (TFNs). Linguistic assessments were converted to fuzzy scales, and fuzzy geometric means were calculated. Defuzzification is done to produce crisp weights and rankings, which improved the resilience and reproducibility of the results.

Leaders enforced silence (discouraging victims from reporting misconduct)	0.0500	0.0649	0.0891	0.0680	0.0641	6
Resistance or backlash from stakeholders because of the perception of LGBTQ as less competent, inappropriate or when LGBTQ policies doesn't benefit stakeholders)	0.0280	0.0354	0.0504	0.0379	0.0358	7

Source: Self Composition

With the help of expert consultation, triangular fuzzy numbers were used to determine pair-wise comparisons for the barriers and their sub-criteria. Thereafter, the weighted score of the barriers and their sub-criteria were estimated for the barriers along with their sub-criteria and the fuzzy weights along with their rankings as presented in Table 7.

The FAHP analysis supports the AHP findings, with equal rankings across all significant categories. The consistency of AHP and FAHP outcomes illustrates the robustness of the results while also verifying the dependability of expert judgments under uncertain settings. Minor weight redistributions at the sub-criteria level show sensitivity to uncertainty but do not change the overall priority structure.

4.3) Comparative Analysis of Analytical Hierarchy Process and Fuzzy Analytical Hierarchy Process

Table 9: Criteria Weight Ranks for AHP and FAHP (comparison)

Criteria	For AHP Method	For FAHP Method
Cultural and Legal Barriers	1	1
Structural Barriers	2	2
Leaders and Stakeholders Barriers	3	3
Cultural and Legal Barriers		
False stereotype	1	1
Religious fundamentalism	2	2
Lack of legal framework addressing LGBTQ people or Political conservatism	3	3
Structural Barriers		
Lack of awareness relating to Diverse sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	2	1
Symbolic inclusion (Tokenism)	1	2
Lack of protocols to manage sexual prejudice	3	3
Heteronormative discourse	5	4
Gendered perception of leadership (rainbow ceiling)	6	5
Traditional, rigid, task-oriented work culture	4	6
Leadership and Stakeholders Barriers		
Biased management	2	1
Insufficient commitment	3	2
Generational divides	1	3
Higher social dominance	4	4
Neglecting attitude towards diversity	7	5
Leaders enforced silence (discouraging victims from reporting misconduct)	5	6
Resistance or backlash from stakeholders because of the perception of LGBTQ as less competent, inappropriate or when LGBTQ policies doesn't benefit stakeholders)	6	7

Source: Self Composition

Table 10: The Potential Criteria in Sequence

RANKS	CRITERIA
1	Cultural and Legal Barriers
2	Structural Barriers
3	Leaders and Stakeholders Barriers
Cultural and Legal Barriers	
1	False stereotype
2	Religious fundamentalism
3	Lack of legal framework addressing LGBTQ people or Political conservatism
Structural Barriers	
2, 1	Lack of awareness relating to Diverse sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
1, 2	Symbolic inclusion (Tokenism)
3	Lack of protocols to manage sexual prejudice
5, 4	Heteronormative discourse
6, 5	Gendered perception of leadership (rainbow ceiling)
4, 6	Traditional, rigid, task-oriented work culture
Leadership and Stakeholders Barriers	
2, 1	Biased management
3, 2	Insufficient commitment
1, 3	Generational divides
4	Higher social dominance
7, 5	Neglecting attitude towards diversity
5, 6	Leaders enforced silence (discouraging victims from reporting misconduct)
6, 7	Resistance or backlash from stakeholders because of the perception of LGBTQ as less competent, inappropriate or when LGBTQ policies doesn't benefit stakeholders)

The comparison of the ranking suggests minor changes in sub-barrier positions, particularly in the structural and leadership sectors. These differences indicate that, even though crisp approaches capture relative importance, fuzzy methods provide nuanced insights by accounting for ambiguity. Convergence of rankings strengthens confidence in the identified priority barriers.

4.4) DEMATEL method (Decision-making Trial and Evaluation) The DEMATEL approach is applied in this section to analyse the complex

relations among the barriers. The comparison scale was used to rate the influence of one barrier over the others (See Table 10). After following the steps, the total relation matrix (T) is estimated as presented in Table 11. The row sum is depicted as R_i and the column sum is depicted as C_i . Once R_i and C_i are computed, the value of $R_i - C_i$ helps decide whether the barrier is a cause barrier or an effect barrier. With a positive value of $R_i - C_i$, the barrier is said to be Cause barrier, and with a negative value of $R_i - C_i$, the barrier is said to be Effect barrier.

Table 11: Comparison Scale of Dematel Method

COMPARISON SCALE OF DEMATEL METHOD	
0	NO INFLUENCE
1	LOW INFLUENCE
2	MEDIUM INFLUENCE
3	HIGH INFLUENCE
4	VERY HIGH INFLUENCE

Table 12: Total relation matrix

Barriers	Cultural and Legal Barriers	Structural Barriers	Leadership and Stakeholders Barriers	Ri
Cultural and Legal Barriers	1.2549	1.8627	1.2745	4.3921
Structural Barriers	1.1764	1.0588	0.8823	3.1176
Leadership and Stakeholders Barriers	1.3725	1.5686	0.8627	3.8039
Ci	3.8039	4.4901	3.0196	

Source: Self Composition

Table 13: Cause-and-effect relationship of three major categories of barriers

Barriers	Ri	Ci	Ri+Ci	Ri-Ci	Identify	Rank
Cultural and Legal Barriers	4.3921	3.8039	8.1960	0.5882	Cause	1
Structural Barriers	3.1176	4.4901	7.6078	-1.3725	Effect	2
Leadership and Stakeholders Barriers	3.8039	3.0196	6.8235	0.7843	Cause	3

Source: Self Composition

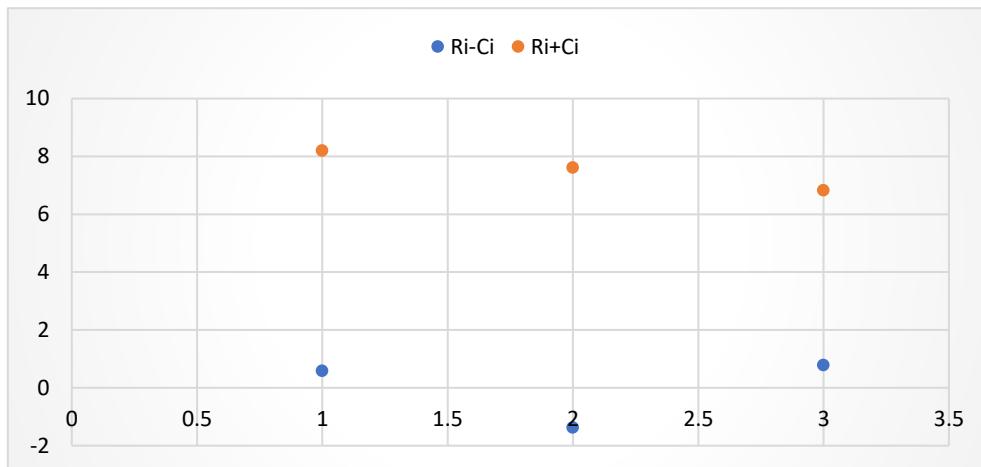


Figure 1: Cause and effect - Dematel analysis

The DEMATEL result shows that cultural and legal barriers and leadership & stakeholder barriers act as causal factors, giving rise to structural barriers directly. In contrast, structural barriers act as effect factors, shaped by upstream cultural norms and leadership behaviors. This causal structure implies that interventions targeting legal reform and leadership accountability are less likely to create cascading positive impacts across organizational systems.

The findings constantly show that cultural and legal barriers are the most significant hurdles, followed by structural barriers and leader and stakeholder barriers. While AHP and FAHP construct a strong hierarchy of obstacles, DEMATEL demonstrates that cultural-legal and leadership-related barriers

serve as underlying causes of structural exclusion within organizations. The convergence of findings across approaches increases the credibility and trustworthiness of the results, which provide both theoretical insight and practical assistance. Overall, the study emphasizes that genuine LGBTQ inclusion necessitates systemic change that addresses cultural narratives, legal legitimacy, leadership accountability, and organizational policy reform.

5) Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature by empirically proving that the barriers to LGBTQ workplace inclusion are hierarchical, interrelated, and causally structured, rather than discrete or equally significant. By combining AHP, FAHP, and DEMATEL, the study extends diversity and

inclusion research by moving beyond descriptive lists of barriers to a system-level explanation of how exclusion occurs and persists. The identification of cultural-legal and leadership barriers as causal elements is consistent with and expands on findings from social dominance theory and institutional perspectives, which emphasize the role of power, norms, and legitimacy in determining organizational behavior. Furthermore, the methodological triangulation used in this work supports theoretical arguments by demonstrating that prioritization patterns persist even when uncertainty and ambiguity in expert opinion are explicitly replicated. This supports the concept that LGBTQ exclusion is more than just an organizational issue; it is ingrained in larger socio-cultural and institutional frameworks that determine workplace realities.

6) Practical Implications

The study's findings have substantial practical implications for companies, legislators, and diversity practitioners looking to improve LGBTQ workplace inclusion. First, the constant prioritizing of cultural and legal barriers across AHP, FAHP, and DEMATEL analyses indicates that organizational inclusion programs cannot be effective in isolation from larger socio-cultural and legal settings. Policymakers should consequently concentrate on improving legal recognition, anti-discrimination enforcement, and public narratives that refute misleading perceptions, as these develop as root factors impacting organizational structures and behaviors. Second, the identification of tokenism as a major structural barrier emphasizes the need for organizations to shift beyond performative diversity initiatives to substantive inclusion mechanisms such as accountability-driven DEI metrics, inclusive leadership development, and continuous sensitization programs. Third, the Dematel findings show that the leadership and stakeholder-related barriers act as causal drivers, implying that interventions addressing leadership bias, generational divisions, and commitment gaps are likely to have a cascading positive impact across organizational systems. Collectively these findings allow practitioners to carefully prioritize interventions, with a focus on causal impediments rather than symptomatic outcomes.

7) Limitations and Future research Direction

Despite its merits, the study has drawbacks. First, the study is based on expert assessment, which, while collected systematically using AHP and FAHP, may nevertheless reflect subjective perspectives impacted by contextual or experiential biases. Second, the study focuses on a predetermined set of barriers derived from current literature; other or context-specific barriers may exist but were not captured by the analytical approach. Third, the conclusions are based on a cross-sectional expert review, which limits their ability to account for temporal changes in organizational practices or socio-legal contexts. Finally, while DEMATEL suggests causal links between barrier categories, it does not experimentally assess them with longitudinal or behavioral data.

Therefore, future research has the potential to significantly expand on this work. First, empirical validation with large-scale survey data or longitudinal designs could improve causal conclusions and investigate how barrier dynamics change over time. Second, future studies may apply the suggested framework to various cultural, national, or sectoral contexts to test the findings' generalizability. Third, using other methodologies such as structural equation modeling (SEM), fsQCA, or other MCDM techniques could supplement the decision-making procedures utilized here by quantitatively testing causal pathways. Finally, future study might look into intersectional dimensions—such as the interaction of sexual orientation with gender, caste, race, or disability—to gain a more comprehensive understanding of workplace exclusion and inclusion processes.

8) References

- 1) Achyldurdyeva, J., Wu, L. F., & Datova, N. (2023). Understanding LGBT individuals' employment environment in Taiwan: a relational framework perspective. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 42(5), 656-684.
- 2) Adeniyi, A. O., Akpuokwe, C. U., Bakare, S. S., & Eneh, N. E. (2024). Gender equality in the workplace: A comparative review of USA and African Practices. *International Journal of Management & Entrepreneurship Research*, 6(3), 526-539.

- 3) Aishwarya, K., & Sharma, P. (2024). Understanding Binary Employees' Awareness Toward LGBTQ Inclusion at Workplaces. In *Finance and Law in the Metaverse World* (pp. 89-99). Springer, Cham.
- 4) Bogicevic, V., Li, Y., & Salvato, E. D. (2023). Tokenism in the workplace: does brand activism benefit LGBTQ+ employees in the hospitality industry?. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 35(11), 3922-3949.
- 5) Buckley, J. J. (1985). Fuzzy hierarchical analysis. *Fuzzy sets and systems*, 17(3), 233-247.
- 6) Cech, E. A., & Rothwell, W. R. (2020). LGBT workplace inequality in the federal workforce: Intersectional processes, organizational contexts, and turnover considerations. *Ilr Review*, 73(1), 25-60.
- 7) Chang, D. Y. (1996). Applications of the extent analysis method on fuzzy AHP. *European journal of operational research*, 95(3), 649-655.
- 8) Corlett, S., Di Marco, D., Munduate, L., & Arenas, A. (2023). Manifestations and reinforcement of heteronormativity in the workplace: a systematic scoping review. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 70(12), 2714-2740.
- 9) de Abreu, M. S., António, R., & Moleiro, C. (2024). Mind the Gap! LGBTQ+ Population's Perceptions of Discrimination and of Legal Innovation. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 1-15.
- 10) Di Marco, D., Hoel, H., Arenas, A., & Munduate, L. (2018). Workplace incivility as modern sexual prejudice. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 33(12), 1978-2004.
- 11) Drydakis, N. (2025). Employment discrimination against transgender women in England. *International Journal of Manpower*, 46(1), 58-74.
- 12) Fletcher, L., & Marvell, R. (2023). Furthering transgender inclusion in the workplace: Advancing a new model of allyship intentions and perceptions. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 34(9), 1726-1756.
- 13) Gabus, A., & Fontela, E. (1972). World problems: An invitation to further thought within the framework of DEMATEL. Geneva Research Centre.
- 14) Gates, T. G. (2011). Why employment discrimination matters: Well-being and the queer employee. *Journal of Workplace Rights*, 16(1).
- 15) Gedro, J. (2010). The lavender ceiling atop the global closet: Human resource development and lesbian expatriates. *Human Resource Development Review*, 9(4), 385-404.
- 16) Govindan, K., Rajendran, S., Sarkis, J., & Murugesan, P. (2015). Multi criteria decision making approaches for green supplier evaluation and selection: a literature review. *Journal of cleaner production*, 98, 66-83.
- 17) Huffaker, L., & Kwon, P. (2016). A comprehensive approach to sexual and transgender prejudice. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 28(3), 195-213.
- 18) Ingraham, C. (1994). The heterosexual imaginary: Feminist sociology and theories of gender. *Sociological theory*, 203-219.
- 19) International Commission of Jurists. (2023). Silenced but not silent: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and the law. International Commission of Jurists. Retrieved from <https://www.icj.org/silenced-but-not-silent/>
- 20) Ishizaka, A., & Labib, A. (2009). Analytic hierarchy process and expert choice: Benefits and limitations. *OR insight*, 22(4), 201-220.
- 21) Kahraman, C., Cebeci, U., & Ruan, D. (2004). Multi-attribute comparison of catering service companies using fuzzy AHP. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 87(2), 171-184.
- 22) Kim, Y., & Bhalla, N. (2022). A two-path model of the impact of LGBTQ+ diversity CSR levels on public response. *Public Relations Review*, 48(3), 102203.
- 23) Krishna, R. A. (2023). LGBTQ Rights and Legislation in India: The Status Quo. *Indian J. Integrated Rsch. L.*, 3, 1.
- 24) Kumar, P., & Singh, G. (2020). Literature Review and Study Method. *Gender Equity in the Boardroom: The Case of India*, 1-33.
- 25) Leap, W. (1999). Language, socialization, and silence in gay adolescence. *Reinventing identities: The gendered self in discourse*, 259-272.
- 26) Levandowski, B. A., Rietberg-Miller, S., & Walton, B. (2025). Why Won't Anyone Talk? Challenges Naming and Addressing Tokenism Within Health and Human Service Agencies Serving the LGBTQ+ Community. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, 31(2), E112-E116.
- 27) Lourenço, I. C., Marco, D. Di, Castelo Branco, M., Lopes, A. I., Sarquis, R. W., Soliman, M.T., Gherghina, C., & Malliaris, A. G. (2021). Risk and Financial Management The Relationship



between LGBT Executives and Firms' Value and Financial Performance.

28) Maji, S., Yadav, N., & Gupta, P. (2024). LGBTQ+ in workplace: a systematic review and reconsideration. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 43(2), 313-360.

29) Mattheis, A., De Arellano, D. C. R., & Yoder, J. B. (2020). A model of queer STEM identity in the workplace. *Journal of homosexuality*.

30) McKinsey & Company. (2020). Diversity wins: How inclusion matters. <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/diversity%20and%20inclusion/diversity%20wins%20how%20inclusion%20matters/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters-vf.pdf> (report)

31) Melton, E. N., & Cunningham, G. B. (2014). Who are the champions? Using a multilevel model to examine perceptions of employee support for LGBT inclusion in sport organizations. *Journal of Sport Management*, 28(2), 189-206.

32) MINGLE. (2016). The Indian LGBT workplace climate survey 2016 https://mingle.org.in/pdf/Indian_LGBT_Workplace_Climate_Survey_2016.pdf

33) Morgenroth, T., Kirby, T. A., & van der Toorn, J. (2024). Heteroprosfessionalism: The power of the gender/sex binary in the workplace. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 101908.

34) Nair, M. L., & Lakshmi, P. (2022). LGBTQ CHALLENGES AND LEGAL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO THEM.

35) Neumeier, S. A., & Brown, L. X. (2021). Beyond diversity and inclusion: Understanding and addressing ableism, heterosexism, and transmisia in the legal profession: Comment on Blanck, Hyseni, and Altunkol Wise's national study of the legal profession. *American Journal of Law & Medicine*, 47(1), 76-87.

36) Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2012). Born free and equal: Sexual orientation and gender identity in international human rights law. United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/BornFreeAndEqualLowRes.pdf>

37) Perry, E. L., Block, C. J., & Noumair, D. A. (2021). Leading in: inclusive leadership, inclusive climates and sexual harassment. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 40(4), 430-447.

38) Pollack, A., Glasgow, D., Bommel, T., Joseph, C., and Yoshino, K. (2025). Risks of retreat: The enduring inclusion imperative. Retrieved from <https://www.catalyst.org/insights/2025/risks-of-retreat-report>

39) Priola, V., Lazio, D., De Simone, S., & Serri, F. (2014). The sound of silence. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender discrimination in 'inclusive' organizations. *British Journal of Management*, 25(3), 488-502.

40) Pulcher, S., Guerci, M., & Kollen, T. (2022). When stakeholders claim differently for diversity management: Adopting lesbian, gay and bisexual-inclusive practices in Italy. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 60(4), 815-840.

41) Reskin, B. F., McBrier, D. B., & Kmec, J. A. (1999). The determinants and consequences of workplace sex and race composition. *Annual review of sociology*, 25(1), 335-361.

42) Resnick, C. A., & Galupo, M. P. (2019). Assessing experiences with LGBT microaggressions in the workplace: Development and validation of the microaggression experiences at work scale. *Journal of homosexuality*, 66(10), 1380-1403.

43) Rezai, M., Lindsay, S., Ahmed, H., & Vijayakumar, A. (2023). Workplace inclusion: A scoping review of the qualitative literature. *Work*, 75(1), 59-73.

44) Robertson, W. J. (2017). The irrelevance narrative: Queer (in) visibility in medical education and practice. *Medical anthropology quarterly*, 31(2), 159-176.

45) Saaty, T. L. (1990). How to make a decision: the analytic hierarchy process. *European journal of operational research*, 48(1), 9-26

46) Saunderson, R. (2004). Survey findings of the effectiveness of employee recognition in the public sector. *Public Personnel Management*, 33(3), 255-275.

47) Shamloo, S. E., De Cristofaro, V., Pellegrini, V., & Salvati, M. (2022). Masculinity and leadership effectiveness (self-) perceptions: the case of lesbian leaders. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(24), 17026.

48) Si, S. L., You, X. Y., Liu, H. C., & Zhang, P. (2018). DEMATEL technique: a systematic review of the state-of-the-art literature on methodologies and applications. *Mathematical problems in Engineering*, 2018(1), 3696457.

49) Speice, T. (2020). The "okay" gay guys: Developing hegemonic sexuality as a tool to understand men's workplace identities. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 67(13), 1864-1880.

50) Taherdoost, H., & Madanchian, M. (2023). Understanding Applications and Best Practices

of DEMATEL: A Method for Prioritizing Key Factors in Multi-Criteria Decision-Making. Taherdoost, H., Madanchian, M, 17-23.

- 51) The Center for American Progress. (2023). Discrimination and Barriers to Well-Being: The State of the LGBTQI+ Community in 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/discrimination-and-barriers-to-well-being-the-state-of-the-lgbtqi-community-in-2022/> (report)
- 52) Tzeng, G. H., Chiang, C. H., & Li, C. W. (2007). Evaluating intertwined effects in e-learning programs: A novel hybrid MCDM model based on DEMATEL and ANP. *Expert Systems with Applications*, 32(4), 1028–1044.
- 53) Vongvisitsin, T. B., & Wong, A. K. F. (2021). Organisational change towards LGBTQ+ inclusion in hospitality and tourism: Managerial perspectives. *Tourism Management*, 86, 104331. (paper)
- 54) Worst, S., & O'Shea, S. C. (2020). From Chess to Queergaming: 'Play'ing with and disrupting heteronormative assumptions in the performance of gender and sexual orientation. *Human Resource Development International*, 23(5), 519-541.
- 55) Worthen, M. G. (2016). Hetero-cis-normativity and the gendering of transphobia. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 17(1), 31-57.