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Leading the way to real inclusion: A study on the perception of leaders with disabilities

by

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Leading the way to real inclusion: A study on the perception of leaders with disabilities

Abstract

Inclusion and equality are very hot topics in todays' society, especially when talking about high rank positions. This study attempts to shine a light on an often-overlooked minority by addressing the lack of disabled leaders within the working environment. The aim is to analyze and contrast the perception that both, the leaders and the followers, have towards people with disabilities in leadership roles. With a mixed methodology approach, three interviews with disabled leaders and an online survey for potential followers are conducted in search of a better understanding of the current situation. Findings show that people with disabilities are just as capable of leading both disabled and non-disabled followers and share the same skills and values as any able-bodied leader. Another finding of interest is the seemingly positive perception that non-disabled people have towards disabled leaders, making their disabilities irrelevant when they take on high rank positions.

Keywords: disability, leadership, inclusion

Liderando el camino hacia una inclusión real: un estudio sobre la percepción de líderes con discapacidades

Resumen

Inclusión e igualdad son dos temas muy de moda en la sociedad actual, especialmente cuando se habla de puestos directivos. Abordando la escasez de líderes con discapacidad dentro del entorno laboral, este estudio intenta llevar la atención hacia un grupo minoritario que suele ser pasado por alto muy a menudo. El objetivo es analizar y contrastar la percepción que ambos, líderes y seguidores, tienen de las personas con discapacidades en puestos de liderazgo. Con un enfoque metodológico mixto, tres entrevistas con líderes con discapacidades y una encuesta online para los seguidores en potencia fueron llevadas a cabo con el fin de obtener un mejor entendimiento de la situación. Los resultados muestran que las personas con discapacidades son igual de capaces de liderar seguidores con y sin discapacidad, y comparten las mismas habilidades y valores que cualquier líder sin discapacidad. Otro resultado de interés es la percepción aparentemente positiva que las personas sin discapacidad tienen sobre los líderes discapacitados, haciendo que la discapacidad resulte irrelevante cuando toman un cargo de liderazgo.

Palabras clave: discapacidad, liderazgo, inclusión

Liderant el camí cap a una inclusió real: un estudi sobre la percepció de líders amb discapacitats

Resum

Inclusió i igualtat són dos temes molt de moda en la societat actual, especialment quan es parla de llocs directius. Abordant la manca de líders amb discapacitat dins de l'entorn laboral, aquest estudi tracta de portar l'atenció cap a un grup minoritari que, normalment, sol ser passat per alt. L'objectiu és analitzar i contrastar la percepció que tots dos, líders i seguidors, tenen de les persones amb discapacitats en llocs de lideratge. Amb un enfocament metodològic mixt, tres entrevistes amb líders amb discapacitats i una enquesta online per als seguidors en potència van ser portades a terme amb la finalitat d'obtenir un millor enteniment de la situació. Els resultats mostren que les persones amb discapacitats són igual de capaces de liderar seguidors amb i sense discapacitat, i comparteixen les mateixes habilitats i valors que qualsevol líder sense discapacitat. Un altre resultat d'interès és la percepció aparentment positiva que les persones sense discapacitat tenen sobre els líders discapacitats, fent que la discapacitat resulti irrellevant quan ocupen un càrrec de lideratge.

Paraules clau: discapacitat, lideratge, inclusió

Presentation

I would like to start by saying that this was not my initial idea at all. In fact, I had planned a different project in my head months prior to getting my research field assigned. But during the first meeting with my supervisor, she suggested I tried to shift my idea towards a section in the research world that had yet to be fully explored: the disability inclusion – or lack of – in leadership roles. What then started as an attempt of being innovative, it quickly became a much more personal and meaningful project.

I had never paid much attention to whether things were accessible for people with disabilities, as it did not affect me directly. However, in the last few years, I have become more aware of such things due to having people close to me dealing with the unfairness of a poorly designed world in terms of accessibility. And I am almost ashamed by the fact that I had never even considered the possibility of having a person with a disability as my leader whether formal or informally, let alone study their leadership style.

Initially, I felt very hopeless, as it became a struggle finding information on the topic and specially finding leaders with disabilities that I could possibly talk to. But through this research I learned that it is not that there are no leaders with such conditions, it is just that we do not see or hear about them. And I believe it to be extremely important to bring more awareness both in the business world and in society. We all could become disabled at any moment, and inclusion should not be something solely for those who possess a disability to discuss or fight for.

This study has made me get out of my comfort zone and learn how to face uncomfortable situations for what I believe to be the greater good. The topic of my research was especially sensitive and hard to approach, but I felt that it was my duty as a future member of the business world to leave my own feelings aside and invest myself in something that could hopefully help someone someday.

I have also improved my research skills that I have been developing for the past few years, especially last year while I was doing my Erasmus in Sweden. I have put into practice everything I have learned from courses like Business Organization, when we were first introduced to leadership; Human Resources, that somehow awakened in me an interest towards the care of the human capital within an organization; or even something like Marketing Research, that despite the fact that this is not a marketing related topic, any research experience is helpful when conducting another study.

I know I could have easily picked something more goal or task oriented and maybe it would have been relatively easier for me. But personally, I feel as though this was the

real challenge for myself, a student who seems to have way too much empathy and feel it all too deeply. And no matter how hard it has been, I have remained very passionate about it.

I do not think I am all that important, nor do I think I can fix society, or the world for that matter. But if I am meant to be part of the business environment, I might as well do so while simultaneously advocating for what I believe to be right. I have heard people in my classes talk so cold-heartedly about topics related to the injustice in our field that it ignites my desire for change even more.

This study may not change anything big, but at least I know I have started a conversation, even if only around me. Hopefully it starts a chain reaction and more people hear about it and start questioning the way things are. And hopefully some of them decide to join the fight.

I am here, I can see the injustice, and I am not looking away.

1. Introduction

One of the popular topics in the business world related to being socially responsible is the lack of diversity in high rank positions. Regardless of the little progress that is being made day by day, the management workforce is still mainly white, non-disabled, middle-class and male (Blue Alumni, 2010). Diversity is believed to be an important component in the creation of a healthy and satisfactory working environment (Newell & Newell, 2002), and the idea that it matters for both, organizations and society, has been extensively discussed in all fields (Ferdman & Deane, 2014). While this is no news, the media and even the academic world mostly tend to focus on gender related issues, such as the wage gap between male and female workers, or the few existing female directors in comparison with the immensely high number of men in directing positions.

Inclusion is considered a fundamental approach for an organization who wants to benefit from the many layers of diversity of today's society (Ferdman & Deane, 2014). But, is a company being truly inclusive if they leave out of consideration qualified candidates because of their disabilities? An often-overlooked issue is the underemployment of people with some sort of disability, which is heavily reflected in the scarce number of disabled directors, managers, or other type of formal leaders. In Spain, previous researchers have studied the perception of disabled workers and shown that they believe they are being discriminated against. Among the results found, we learned that disabled people within the Spanish labor market who believed to be discriminated, felt as though they were being underestimated and therefore assigned jobs and tasks way below their true capabilities (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2017).

As suggested by Barnes (2000), regardless of the attempt on studying disabilities within the labor market, and despite how important working is for those with a disability, the organization of work still remains widely unequal. Furthermore, previous academic researchers have addressed the existence of a gap when it comes to the inclusion of people with disabilities when theorizing and conceptualizing within the organizational research field (Harlan & Robert, 1998; Williams & Mavin, 2012).

It is important to pull the disability topic into the spotlight and to bring some awareness to the business research world. The lack of diversity has been in everyone's mouth as of lately, especially in terms of gender and race, but other marginalized groups are still waiting for a change that will benefit them as well.

Also, the opportunity cost for every person with a disability who is either unemployed or underemployed, falls upon society as well (Bainbridge & Fujimoto, 2018). In 2017, there were a total of 1.860.600 disabled people of working age in Spain alone, yet only 35%

of them were employed (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2018). This indicates how the labor force is not reaching their full potential, therefore preventing the country from being efficient and maximizing the gains. Even from an economic point of view, some could argue that by preventing disabled workers from having the same opportunity to reach high rank positions as other non-disabled people who are equally or sometimes less qualified, society is wasting labor capacity.

With the above in mind, the core of this final degree project falls upon the following two questions:

RQ1: How do people with disabilities lead other people?

RQ2: How do others perceive these potential leaders?

By answering the first, this study aims to understand the ways in which people with a disability manage to lead other people, despite the potential limitations and barriers that their disabilities force on them. No less important, this research also aims to identify if they perceive themselves as superior to non-disabled leaders, or if they even take their impairment as a factor that influences their leadership style.

The second question is directly related to the first, as the perspective of the (potential) followers will give a better insight on whether there is a discrepancy of perception from each side of the coin. It is important to figure out if the perception that others have of potential leaders with disabilities may be an issue that becomes a barrier for them to take on such roles.

This paper will first present a review of the literature related to the object to study, in hopes to prepare the reader with the necessary background to understand the rest of the work. It will then explain the methodology used in the process of finding answers to the research questions above, presenting the results afterwards. In the end, a discussion on the relevant topics and the conclusions drawn from the study will be submitted. In addition to the last, a series of suggestions will be proposed.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Disabled People in the Labor Market

Some of the barriers that people with disabilities have to face throughout their lives are inaccessible education systems, working environments, inaccessible transport, house and public buildings and amenities, etc. (Oliver, 2009, p47). Now, focusing on the labor market, disabled people are less likely to obtain a job despite having the required qualities such as job-relevant education/training (Hall & Parker, 2010), which ultimately forces them to face higher levels of unemployment as well as underemployment.

In Spain, for instance, the estimate of unemployment for disabled people in 2017 reached the 26,2 % of the population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2018), descending 2,4 points from the previous year. But unemployment is not the only issue raising concern. A big part of the world population with disabilities who actually manages to find a job, ends up being underemployed. In these cases, the quality of said job is much lower and it is also a lot less rewarding. (Villanueva-Flores, Valle and Bornay-Barrachina, 2017).

Before getting a job

When it comes to disability and the labor market, some academics have addressed the barriers that people with disabilities face when entering and trying to be active parts in the working scene. Bainbridge and Fujimoto's study (2018) highlight the importance of establishing a conversation around the job search topic, so as to help people identify career paths and setting goals that fit well with their abilities or lack of.

People with disabilities who aim towards finding a job face both, external and internal, barriers when it comes to employment (Hall & Parker, 2010). The external obstacles refer to factors such as physical limitations or need for accommodations, while the internal ones allude to factors like low self-esteem or lack of self-confidence (Hall & Parker, 2010).

An often-found barrier is the over-protection from those around people with disabilities and themselves when it comes to even considering the possibility of searching for a job. While family members may mean well, they often discourage people with disabilities to reduce their desire to even search for a job, which creates a serious barrier based upon the lack of positive attitudes towards job seeking. People are concerned about potential disappointment or emotional harm that people with disabilities may face if the go on a job hunt. This is why those closest to people with disabilities are an important factor for a successful employment search, as they can either facilitate or prevent it (Bainbridge & Fujimoto, 2018).

Another issue found in Bainbridge and Fujimoto's research is the lack of experience that potential employers have when it comes to interviewing a job seeker with a disability. This unfamiliarity is a key factor on how well the interview may go and the actual chances the candidate with a disability may have to opt to the position at stake.

However, many companies who provide help for job seeking people are not prepared to deliver on their linking task between potential employers and potential employees who have disabilities. As suggested by Hall and Parker (2010), there is a need for better training so that people feel more comfortable when communicating with someone who has a disability about said disability. Many people working as job seeking help providers do not quite understand the obstacles that people with disabilities have to face (Hall & Parker).

This lack of training prevents them from providing the help needed, as they often may come across as inconsiderate when, in reality, they are just nervous or afraid of doing or saying something wrong (Hall & Parker). This creates an uncomfortable relation between the service provider and the person with a disability who is seeking help to find employment. Hall and Parker (2010) suggest that there is a loop where both, customers with disabilities and the staff from whatever service provider organization, put in doubt their self-efficacy as neither can fully adjust to the other.

That's why the job of organizations like the DETA (Disability Employment and Training Agency) is so important. Not only they are fully trained to help and understand those with a disability who are searching for employment, but they also provide training for these people. The key is the preparation and education of both, people with disabilities searching - or considering searching for a job - and those in charge of recruiting and hiring new employees. It is important to encourage the acts of self-evaluation, reflection and social comparisons so as to improve the confidence level of the people with disabilities (Bainbridge & Fujimoto, 2018)

After getting a job

Once employed, researchers have found that people with disabilities can become an advantage for the company. All companies ultimately care about productivity and its increase, which depends a lot on employee commitment, job satisfaction, skills and motivation (Alshallah, 2004). It is known that companies can increase their benefits up to 30% if they implement practices that somehow increase the commitment and abilities of their workers (Pfeffer, 1998). And organizations that have survived more than a century share the same characteristic of having employees who are fully committed to the company and its mission (De Geus, 1997).

Employees who happen to have a disability often gain a bigger sense of accomplishment and satisfaction from their jobs (Martin, 2017), which directly relates to their commitment with the company and can, in the end, boost the company's productivity. That being said, when the conditions do not meet the expectations, it can become a problem. In previous studies conducted in the South of Spain, it was revealed that workers with physical disabilities who felt were discriminated against at work, subsequently felt dissatisfied with both their jobs and organizations (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2017). This is considered to be of important concern, as it can lead to lowering the workers' efforts put into their jobs, which can have an important and negative effect on productivity.

Reducing discrimination, whether conscious or subconscious, would increase the level of loyalty and performance of disabled workers, as they would face their daily tasks with a much more positive mental attitude (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2017). Now, this would positively affect the productivity and overall functioning of any organization, which should be something for companies to strive for.

In terms of "barriers and frustrations", an annoyance frequently expressed by people with visible impairments is the fact that people around them will make assumptions based on what they can see, which subsequently reduces their identity to first impression and stereotyping (Martin, 2017). While people surrounding someone with an impairment may be bothered by it, the person who actually possess such impairment may already be fully comfortable with it and have little to no problem carrying out tasks that non-disabled people do. For example, people with certain chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, explain how they actually do not consider themselves as *"disabled"* as they can easily manage on their own (Martin, 2017).

2.2.   Understanding Leadership

There are two types of activities being run within a company: those known as *"programmed"*, and those known as "*directive*" (Álvarez de Mon Pan, 2001). This last category can also be divided as it follows:

- Strategic activities.
- Executive activities.
- Leadership activities.

In his book "Paradigms of Leadership: Keys of the direction of People" – in Spanish: *"Paradigmas del liderazgo: claves de la dirección de personas"* – (2001), professor

Santiago Álvarez de Mon Pan explains that the latest are those related to the motivation of workers, which is key in the effective development of their activities at work. Leaders not only care about making sure that people follow through with their job and do it well, but they also aim towards maximizing the potential of their employees, while simultaneously watching over the internalization of the company's mission, unity and commitment.

He also suggests that leaders are not born but made thanks to their personal efforts in a very long process in which they progressively gain/develop the hard ability to move for others, transcending from their ego. Any director, head of department or any other high rank position has a certain level of formal power and personal power (authority). Now, the authority is a type of power that can be gained by giving a good example and, also, showing that their formal power is used correctly. This allows people to trust their leader and along with their demands, as they know that they're moved by good intentions that will benefit them all. Something important to highlight is that while the gain of authority is slowly built throughout a long process, it can still be lost in a second by the wrong use of formal power. And once it is lost, it is very hard to regain (Álvarez de Mon Pan, 2001).

Nevertheless, as Mats Alvesson suggests in his book *Understanding Organizational Culture* (2002), a universal definition of leadership would fall short into its complexity, as there is a vast diversity of relations and their contexts when it comes to the leader-follower interaction. He also believes that, in order to understand leadership, it is important to take into consideration the social context in which such phenomenon takes place. The reason behind it, is that leadership is not as simple as "someone leads, the other follows", but it is in fact *"a complex social process in which the meanings and interpretations of what is said and done are crucial"* (Alvesson, 2002, p. 94). He also goes on to explaining that leadership is closely tied to culture, as it is the latter that puts the meanings and values behind the first. This is why the importance of understanding the meanings and interpretations of the followers is highlighted when it comes to truly comprehend leadership.

Furthermore, in the academic world, leadership is often linked to communication and motivation primarily (Bass & Bass, 2009). The first is a key ingredient to any relation and, as it has been previously stated, leadership can be partially summed up as the relationship with at least two people where one leads and the other agrees to follow. Motivation is also of great importance for the leadership to be effective as a whole, as it affects directly the ability to influence the follower. Now, in his book *Leadership Styles*, Tony Kippenberger (2002), suggests a series of "steps" for any leader to follow in order

to be successful in their role. Among the total of ten steps we find knowing and being oneself, listening and learning, communicating, caring for people and making sure they reach their full potential.

2.3. Leadership and Disabilities

Previous studies (Procknow, et al., 2017) show that it is unlikely to find people with disabilities in leadership positions. However, gathering reliable data on how many disabled leaders are out there seems to be an almost impossible quest, researchers suggest (Martin, 2017). While we could ask to every organization how many disabled leaders are within their personnel, the number gathered in the end would be limited to disabled leaders who have actually disclosed their disability.

Researchers Roulstone and Williams (2014) have previously presented their findings regarding disabled managers' concerns on the potential risks that can surface due to disclosing their disabilities. People seem to debate on whether or not disclosing would be beneficial or cause a negative impact on others' perceptions of their capabilities and competencies. Also, there seems to be a negative perception on the idea of "disclosure", as it can be offensive when people see it as sharing an "awful secret" (Nash, 2014).

In relation to disability and leadership theory, it has been pointed out that the dominant construction of leadership connotes a leader who is not disabled, with disabled leaders seen as a contradiction in term (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007). This view is manifested in data collected by the DRC (Disability Rights Commission, 2006) that found disabled people were less likely to be working as managers and senior officials in the general workforce than their non-disabled counterparts. That being said, one of the most shocking findings of the DRC briefing was that people with disabilities were a small minority in senior positions even in disability-related organizations.

In contrast to the previously explained, people with disabilities have consistently proved to be more than able to carry out their tasks as leaders. Reports have shown that people with disabilities can hold strong entrepreneurial and problem-solving skills thanks to their impairments. Disabled people "*are often by necessity creative entrepreneurial problem solvers with the ability to see the bigger picture*" (Martin, 2017, p. 6). The problem-solving skills seems to be rooted to the daily obstacles that disabled people have to face every day by living in an environment that was mainly, and almost exclusively, created for the non-disabled population (Martin, 2017).

It has also been said that being a strong leader involves battling stereotypes and prejudices so that all employees can maximize their potential and talent (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2017). This is something that could be considered to be a given for a disabled leader, since by inserting themselves in higher positions, they already are challenging the potential misconception and prejudice people may have due to social stereotypes. Even more so, studies have shown that they do, in fact, show an interest and often focus on addressing issues of inequality, diversity and inclusion (Martin, 2017). Now, regarding the development of their employees/followers, disabled leaders have admitted to gaining personal reward from helping others achieve their goals. A participant from a study shared the following: *"I ensure that people have opportunities to develop and feel confident about sharing ideas. I never take credit for other people's work"* (Martin, 2017, p. 19)

In terms of values, strengths and leadership style, in Martin's report (2017), findings of a general agreement were presented. Empathy and encouragement towards their colleagues were highlighted by the leaders, as well as placing great value in teamwork and their effective development. Some of the strengths emphasized were *"the ability to hold a clear overview, to plan strategically and to act with integrity"* (Martin, 2017, p. 18).

Other studies touch upon the importance of environmental support and positive relationships for an effective development of leadership skills in those who have disabilities (Caldwell, 2010). This is consistent with what Bainbridge and Fujimoto (2018) have also explained later on, regarding the key role that is played by those surrounding a disabled person when it comes to their career development.

In terms of the barriers, disabled leaders – like any person with a disability – encounter various general obstacles that can still be directly linked to their roles. Managers with disabilities have referred to the "glass partition effect", which is a phenomenon negatively affecting their opportunities for professional growth due to virtual barriers (Roulstone & Williams, 2014). These mainly refer to disabled managers being reluctant to move jobs and start from zero again due to the different difficulties found alongside such opportunities, which prevents them from gaining experience (Martin, 2017). Many qualified disabled workers have also expressed they feel as though they are not being encouraged to progress career-wise (Nash, 2014). Organizations seem to fail at addressing their potential to become leaders or take any sort of senior role into a company/organization (Martin, 2017). The lack of representation in high rank positions becomes the root of more concern for them as many will not even consider it a possibility

because they may go through their lives without the idea being planted directly or indirectly in their brains.

Others have suggested that there is a significant lack of consideration when designing leadership programs (Martin, 2017). Those in charge of the organization seem to forget that disabled people may be among the audience, and in forgetting this they exclude them by not choosing an accessible venue or using insensitive and/or offensive examples or anecdotes.

The absence of consistency from an organization/business to another, when it comes to accessibility standards is another important issue (Martin, 2017). This can easily force disabled people to return to square one while also putting them in a very exhausting position where they must negotiate in order to be provided the adjustments needed. And it prevents them from fully focusing on settling in their official role at work as a senior employee.

Perception of disabled leaders

There have been previous studies on how "followers" perceive the competence of a disabled leader due to its disability. One particular case is the series of research carried out by Bryant and Curtner-Smith (2008, 2009 and 2010) where they analyzed how students from different levels perceived the competence of a Physical Education teacher who imparted swimming lessons from a wheelchair compared to an able-bodied teacher who taught the very same lesson. Among their findings, there was one that opposed to the results from previous researchers (Dean, et al., 2005; Melville & Maddalozzo, 1988) in which the students seemingly had a negative perception of their PE teachers when their physical conditions did not match the expected.

In the first two cases, the results were positive for the disabled teachers as the students either learned more from them or just as much as they would with an able-bodied teacher. However, when it came down to the high school audience, research showed that the learning success of the students followed a declining. This could indicate that, as they grow old, students may correlate the physical appearance and condition of the teachers to their competence. It was also suggested that the older the person, the more likely to be biased by societal influences that make us believe that having a whole and perfectly functional body is the norm and that anything else should be considered less competent (Bryant & Curtner-Smith, 2009).

3. Methodology

With this project aiming to study a mostly social and behavioral phenomenon within the labor market, the first methodology considered was strictly qualitative. The initial idea was using one-on-one semi-structured interviews with leaders who had some sort of disability, to learn about their experiences and opinions, and to potentially discover patterns from their analysis.

However, considering that one of the research questions involves the perception of the potential followers, it did not seem appropriate to only conduct interviews with the leaders. That's why, in hopes of obtaining better insight and being able to generate a more general conclusion that could answer RQ1 and RQ2, a mixed methodology (Creswell, 2013), combining qualitative and quantitative data, was ultimately chosen.

The final methodology can be considered a triangulation of data (Bryman, 2004), which is the use of more than a single approach in hopes of enhancing the findings of the research. The plan was not only to follow through with the interviews with the disabled leaders, but also to conduct a web survey that would cover the part of the study that involves the perception of others towards leaders with disabilities. As any other mixed methodology research, it was designed so that it could provide a more complete understanding of the object of study (Creswell, 2013).

This study could easily be replicated by other researchers. While replication does not seem to be all that common in business research, it is known to be highly valued when taken into account (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The way in which everything was carried out, as well as the general demographics and details of each method will be presented in the following subsections.

3.1. Data Collection: Interviews

The data collection initiated with *"the most widely employed method in qualitative research"* (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 465), the interview. A total of three interviews were carried out in order to obtain the perception of the matter from leaders with different disabilities. The identity of the interviewees will be kept anonymous so as to protect and respect their privacy. They will be addressed as Leader 1, Leader 2 and Leader 3. The transcripts of all three interviews can be found in the Annex chapter of this research.

The first interview was unstructured, guided by a set of topics that the interviewer meant to bring up when necessary. This was useful as a first contact with a disabled leader, contributing to a better understanding of the sensibility of the topic, and acting as a

foundation for the design of the question set that would later on be used for the other two interviewees in this project. The last two interviews were semi-structured, using the aforementioned question set so as to provide freedom to answer while still giving a framework to properly guide those being interviewed. Given the interviewer was fluent in both English and Spanish, the language posed no obstacle for the research.

The unstructured interview was with Leader 1, a female vice-president of an important Spanish organization for people with blindness or lack of vision. She herself is blind and has been part of the organization for many years now, ever since she was first introduced to it. The interview was conducted in Spanish as a one-on-one conversation at the interviewee's office in Tarragona, Spain. It was recorded by a voice recorder and later on transcribed by the researcher of this project.

The second interview was with Leader 2, a female State Program Coordinator for the Hispanic Federation in Rhode Island, USA. She is also the founder of a non-profit organization that aims to invest in, encourage and empower the youth with disabilities so that they have the tools and resources to become leaders. She was born with a severe and rare version of scoliosis and needs to use a cane in order to walk. The interview was conducted in English over Skype, recorded with a tool provided by the same software, and later on transcribed like the first interview.

The third interview was with Leader 3, a male leader, Co-Founder of several IT startups and currently working as COO in one of them. He broke his neck when he was only a teenager and has been in a wheelchair ever since. The interview was first conducted in English over Skype and recorded with a tool from the same software. However, the audio file was corrupted, and the interviewer had to reach out to the interviewee once again, who so kindly recorded the answers to the questions one more time, for them to be transcribed later on as the other two. This can be considered more as a "self-completion questionnaire", rather than a semi-structured interview. But it is important to highlight the fact that the analysis will still use partially the understanding from the interview that was initially conducted but could not be transcribed.

3.2. Data Collection: Web Survey

For the online survey that aimed to gather the perception of people towards leaders with disabilities, this research worked in collaboration with researcher Artem Berman whose Ph.D. thesis topic is the integration of disabled workforce into the labor market. The initial connection was made through Rosalia Cascón Pereira, who just so happens to be the supervisor of this project and also Berman's.

For his research, Berman created an online survey where participants are asked about their perception of disabilities, people with disabilities as workforce, leaders with disabilities, and other topics that involve inclusion and diversity in the labor market. Some questions were multiple-choice, and some were open questions, but all of them had the option to write in length any sort of explanation, context or simply an answer that wasn't given as an alternative. The complete questionnaire can be found in the Annex chapter of this project.

Now, not all the questions within the survey were relevant to this research. So, in order to adjust it to this project's needs, a new question was added. In this specific question, participants were asked to choose the top five skills or factors that mattered most – according to them – to be a good leader and to order them from more to less important.

Another adjustment made was making it mandatory for people to explain the reasoning behind some specific answers that on their own could be considered vague or inconclusive. This allowed to get a better insight of why people may say yes or not to something like whether they would mind having a disabled leader.

The online survey was also translated into Spanish so as to cover a different demographic that was Berman initially had, as his was in English. And it was re-created with the Google Forms web-based app that allows you to create online surveys for free. The link to the online questionnaire was then initially shared through the social media platform Facebook, where the very same participants who got interested in the topic of the research decided to share it on their own walls for their peers to see.

3.3. Analysis of the data

In terms of analyzing the data, for the interviews a thematic analysis was attempted as it is suggested by scholars (Boyatzis, 1998). The transcripts of each interview were read and reread multiple times to identify possible patterns of meaning in relation with the object of study. Once the patterns were identified, the results were divided in such a way that could be easily contrasted with the literature review and the data gathered from the survey.

The data collected by the online survey was analyzed with the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), an IBM software use to perform statistical analysis. Since the data was exported from Google Forms in an excel file, it needed to be coded before being entered into the software. Prior to this, questions 8, 9, 15-17, 19, and 28-30 had been discarded as they were either concerned with a more general perception of disabled

people within the labor market or the results showed confusion from the participants which made the answers unreliable.

Once the previous steps were done and all data was entered into the software, using tools such a *descriptive statistics*, *tables*, *multiple-choice sets* and *cross-tables,* the data collected was analyzed. The cross-table tool was especially helpful for this as it allowed to see further into the answers given by participants, crossing the results and providing depth and important points to be discussed.

4. Results

4.1. Interviews

As it has been previously stated, not one interview had the exact same format as it was preferred to allow the interviewees to have freedom to explain their current responsibilities and daily tasks. A thematical analysis was attempted by reading over and over the transcripts of the interviews in search of patterns of meaning within the data obtained that relates to the research question. It is crucial to point out that Leader 1 has a visual disability, while Leader 2 and 3 have a physical disability.

4.1.1. Perception of a Good Leader

Leader 1 expressed that a good leader is a fighter, someone who works hard for the project or cause. She highlighted the need to "believe in the project" because if you do not, then there is no way that you can be a good leader. The followers need to see that you believe in what you do. She explains her own situation, where she was elected by the affiliates of the organization that she would later on lead in her job. The people who would be under her authority and leadership were the ones who saw in her that she was someone who believed in the organization and what it does, and that she truly cared about the people in it, trying to solve any problem that came her way. She proved to be resourceful and to be a good team player.

"You have to be devoted to people, care about them, find solutions, work with the team…" - Leader 1

Among other abilities linked to a good leader, she also suggested that it is important to be able to identify the talents from each member in the group. This would subsequently help her manage the team in a more efficient and effective way, as she would know what tasks to assign to each person.

For Leader 2, being a good leader is all communication. She believes communication is key, because if you don't communicate effectively, then those you are in charge of will be confused and will not be able to perform accordingly or as expected. The second factor mentioned by Leader 2, is multiculturalism. She explains that in order to be a good leader, one should know how to understand different groups, religions, etc. This multicultural awareness will then allow the leader to adjust the management style so that it is effective for everyone.

She also suggests it is important to give people the space to create and develop their own ideas, instead of just saying "do this, do that". Hovering over people only creates frustration for the leader and the follower at the same time.

In the case of Leader 3, the abilities highlighted are being able to listen, taking lead, and making decisions fairly. He believes it is important not to act on emotions and to be persistent. However, he also explains that while being persistent is important, a good leader should also be able to identify when it is time to change an initial idea.

4.1.2. Self-perception of a Disabled Leader

Leader 1 described herself as a leader who cares a lot about those that she is responsible for. She believes in the mission of the organization she is part of and thanks to this she is able to make everyone else believe in it. That is in fact why she believes people chose her as a leader, because she works hard for what she believes in and she truly cares.

Some leadership skills of Leader 1 can be found in her early years, like being resourceful and solving problems she encountered. When talking about her younger self as a visually impaired kid in school, she explained how she was basically forced to figure out ways to get closer to the board so she could actually read what was in it. She'd either volunteer to write on the board, or she would become friends with people that were willing to write things down for her when she could not see due to being too far. She believes these things do leave a mark as life goes on.

Leader 1 also explained that she was the one who taught her own mother how to read. She says her mother loved songs, and she took the role of a teacher to teach her mother so the latter could read the song books they would buy. When only 9 or 10 years old, Leader 1 was already showing leadership tendencies.

In the case of Leader 2, she specifically stated that even if she can call herself a leader, she is not they type as in "I lead, you follow". She sees herself as someone that guides her "followers" and walks with them, not in front of them, providing help if and when they need it. She encourages her followers by telling them that they are leaders themselves. She provides them with the resources, the skills and the guidance, and allows them to do things on their own, giving them space to be creative and independent. For her, it is important to build their confidence so that they know they can do anything if they work hard for it.

When asked about whether she thought her disability had any influence on her as a leader, she explained that she believes it is a combination of both her disability and her personality. She said that she became stronger in the way in which she developed herself as a leader thanks to her disability. She had to go through so much from a young age, that she became tough enough to navigate the spaces where she knew she would

be discriminated against. However, she did highlight that her personality had a very important role. That she has always had a strong personality and is also very stubborn, which ultimately has helped her persist and insert herself in places that she may have not reached otherwise.

Leader 3 expressed that he does not consider himself a good leader. He suggests that the reason behind this is that he may need to stop being too democratic and start being a little tougher when needed. He often tries to make everyone involved happy, but ultimately is aware that you have to sometimes make a decision that will make somebody unhappy.

He also mentions that he thinks that due to his situation and all the pain he has had to endure, he can fail at being empathetic of others' problems as they do not compare to what he has been through. This can make him more demanding than he would be otherwise. However, he did say that he tries to be fair, and whatever he demands from others, he does himself too. For instance, if he asks people to stay later, he will also stay late. Now despite the previously stated, he does not think that his disability influenced him to become the leader he is today. He did mention how he had been very business oriented even before he had the accident that made him become disabled.

4.1.3. Disclosing a Disability

In the case of Leader 1, and speaking again of her early years, she explains how her mother did not disclose that her daughter had, in fact, a visual disability. This lack of disclosure made things a lot harder for Leader 1 as a child who, at the time, did not know how to stand for herself. The nuns from her school assumed that she was just lying about not seeing, because her disability was not visible to them. And due to this, they ruled it out as a case of a kid who was just seeking attention, when in reality she was unable to see things from afar.

Regarding disclosure of disabilities, we also find the case of Leader 2, who after obtaining her bachelor's degree was having a hard time finding a job. She explained how she would do really well on paper and on the phone or Skype interviews, but as soon as she would meet the employers in person and they could see she was disabled, the situation would shift 180^0. The problem was that she was not disclosing her disability prior to meeting them in person, which created a surprise factor that was not in her favor.

"…it was hard for me to see that I was good on paper, and I was good on this kind of interviews… but when it came to like sitting down, even if I was a good interviewee, my disability overshadowed it." – Leader 2

She also explained how someone had directly told her that they couldn't hire her because she was disabled. It was not until this one interview where, once again, she saw the face of the employer change as he walked in and saw she was disabled, that all the emotions she had been bottling up made her snap at him. She told him:

"Listen, look at me through what you have in paper, I'm done trying to excuse myself because I have a disability, forget my cane, forget my height, forget all that and just talk to me as the person you interviewed on the phone, and if you like me then you hire me, and if you're just not gonna hire me because of my disability, then I think this organization is not what I want" – Leader 2

She then got the job but not the way she wanted to, because she basically had to yell at this person for him to see that she was valuable. She worked there for a few years and eventually decided to go back to college to get a master's degree.

Now, when the time to start searching for a job came around once again, she still would not disclose her disability. This went on for some time up until she reached out to one someone that helps disabled people get jobs. She explained her entire situation and her past experience, and this person told her right then and there that she needed to start disclosing it. When Leader 1 finally started being upfront about her disability, she actually started getting more interviews. She then realized that by disclosing it from the beginning, her resume and all her work seemed to be more valuable than her disclosing it when she just appeared there.

4.1.4. Assumptions

Regarding assumptions, the interviewees mentioned not only those made by non-disabled, but also those by the disabled community itself. The first appears during the interview with Leader 2, who explains multiple cases where people would make wrong assumptions about those with disabilities.

One of the cases she explained was that people in political campaigns who will not reach out to the disabled community to join then because they just assume that people with disabilities will struggle to get things done, worrying about their learning or mobility impairment. In reality, as Leader 2 explains, most disabled people have already learned to work around their disabilities. They may do things differently, but they can still get things done just like anybody else.

Another example given was the caretakers or assistants for disabled kids in school. Leader 2 explained how the person supposed to help them when she was a kid, would go and do absolutely everything for them, assuming they needed help to do anything. Same thing with people on the streets who almost impose their help instead of asking first. These assumptions can be offensive as not all disabled people need constant help

with everything; Leader 2, for instance, can still do most things herself. She insists that people are all about acting, when in reality they should ask and learn from the disabled people themselves whether they need help and how they need it.

Leader 2 also mentioned how disingenuous and even hurtful it can be when non-disabled people label those with disabilities who are leaders, as motivational or inspiring. She believes it is still problematic because it is as though they were saying that "nobody else in that community can be as good as the next", setting them apart from any other non-disabled person.

Now, for the assumption made by the very same disabled people we encountered two cases. One is the case of disabled people assuming that the organization that have been creating to help them, can only help them obtain low-skilled jobs. Leader 1 herself explained that she thought blind people going to this organization could only work as coupon sellers. The other case being that of disabled people who just because they have not heard from it, assume that certain programs simply do not exist. Leader 2 insisted on the importance of going out of our way to look into what exists and what does not.

4.1.5. Other Concerns and Suggestions

Throughout the interviews, the leaders shared some concerns regarding different issues that directly affect the disabled community. One of these concerns was the lack of awareness when it comes to the surroundings being accessible for other than able-bodied citizens. People don't seem to be aware of the lack of accessibility until they suffer from it themselves, or someone relatively close to them does. Leader 1 explained the example of a mayor in Spain, who had a car accident and ended up in a wheelchair. He had explained to her that it was not until then that he realized how bad the city really was in terms of being accessible for people in wheelchairs.

Participants suggested that society as a whole needs to become more accessible. People can become disabled within seconds, which makes it ironic that is such a marginalized community when it is also the fastest growing group in the world. If a city does not care about being accessible, it is very likely that the companies and organizations within, also will not care about becoming accessible. As Leader 2 says "*it starts from the small spots*".

The leaders interviewed were also aware of the lack of representation for disabled people in high rank positions. At least two of the leaders interviewed expressed concerned regarding the lack of disabled leaders, especially female. Leader 1 expressed that even in organizations that are for the disabled specifically she rarely finds leaders who are

simultaneously female and disabled. Leader 2 herself explained that even though she is starting to notice more people getting involved, the majority of disabled people who have college degrees are still unemployed because companies and organizations do not want to put themselves through the process of becoming accessible. However, one of the leaders explained that there are organizations that will literally offer companies the possibility to adapt whatever needed to create accessible spaces without a cost so that a disabled person can work there. The lack of representation is something important that needs to be improved. Leader 2 suggests that if disabled people start seeing more disabled leaders, then they will start believing they can also get a high position.

In terms of integration and inclusion, the leaders believe there is a lack of discussion, a lack of understanding and a lack of attention towards the disabled community. People do not talk as much about disability empowerment as they talk about fighting racism and empowering women. If disabled people are not included in the conversation then, as Leader 2 said, *"we're not actually reaching any type of inclusion in a diverse pool of work force".*

However, at least two of the leaders mentioned how they are seeing more integration within education. Both explained that more disabled students are getting college degrees, making sure they are qualified for high-skilled jobs. They also expressed that they work with providing the resources so that disabled people can study alongside non-disabled. There is even work being done on a more general level when it comes to employment, but it is going very slowly as changes often do.

The leaders were asked if they had any suggestion to improve the current situation of inequality between disabled and non-disabled leaders. When answering, it was mentioned the case of the USA, where they are starting to implement policies that require boards of directors to have a quota of "people of color" otherwise they do not get any type of money from the government to alleviate their needs. Leader 2 then suggested that a similar policy should be implemented but regarding disabled directors, and that she had, in fact, suggested it personally to someone within her local government.

The same leader expressed the idea that even if there is a lot of work that needs to be done, people questioning things are already helpful as they bring more "thinkers" to the table and make people consider the possibility of having a disabled manager. And that it is important to start and/or participate in such conversations.

It was also suggested, that potential employers should *"make people leaders if they deserve to be leaders, if they have that capacity",* regardless of having a disability or not.

4.2. Online Survey

As previously stated, a total of 104 participants answered this study's web survey. However, when analyzing the data, two set of answers had to be discarded, one because the age did not reach the minimum of 18 years old and the other because it was a duplicate. This left the sample in a total of 102 respondents. The age range covered within the sample goes from 18 to 60 years old. In order to provide a better understanding, age intervals were created to organize the data.

Respondents country of origin varies, with the two biggest groups being from Argentina and Spain with approximately 26% and 20% respectively (see Table 1). In terms of age, Table 2 shows that the majority of the participants are in the "young adult" interval (from 21 to 30 years old), while only 3 respondents can still be considered "teenagers", and the rest can fall under the categories of adults or senior adults.

Table 1. COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Argentina	26	25,5	25,5
Austria	1	1,0	26,5
Belgium	1	1,0	27,5
Canada	2	2,0	29,4
Colombia	1	1,0	30,4
Denmark	3	2,9	33,3
Ecuador	2	2,0	35,3
France	2	2,0	37,3
Germany	5	4,9	42,2
Israel	1	1,0	43,1
Italy	2	2,0	45,1
Luxembourg	1	1,0	46,1
Mexico	1	1,0	47,1
Netherlands	6	5,9	52,9
Poland	2	2,0	54,9
Portugal	2	2,0	56,9
Russia	1	1,0	57,8
Singapore	3	2,9	60,8
Spain	20	19,6	80,4
Sweden	2	2,0	82,4
Thailand	2	2,0	84,3
UK	13	12,7	97,1
USA	3	2,9	100,0
Total	102	100,0	

Table 2. AGE

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
18 to 20	3	2,9	2,9
21 to 30	77	75,5	78,4
31 to 40	9	8,8	87,3
41 to 51	6	5,9	93,1
51 to 60	7	6,9	100
Total	102	100	

Table 3. GENDER

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Male	27	26,5	26,5
Female	73	71,6	98
Rather not say	2	2	100
Total	102	100	

Table 4. OCCUPATION

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Student	41	40,2	40,2
Student+PartTime	8	7,8	48,0
Employed - LE	22	21,6	69,6
Employed - HE	29	28,4	98,0
Unemployed	2	2,0	100,0
Total	102	100,0	

Now, when it comes to gender, Table 3 shows that approximately 72% were female and 26% were male, with only 2 participants who chose to keep their gender private. For what concerns the occupation of participants, a total of 48% were students (some

working part time jobs), while 50% were employed (both in low education and high education jobs); only 2 participants claimed to be unemployed.

Questions 2, 3, and 4 are concerned with the closeness of the respondents with disabilities, by asking whether they know someone with a disability, have a disability themselves, or have ever had some sort of temporary disability. As it can be observed in Figure 1, only less than 3% of the respondents had a permanent disability – with it being some sort of intellectual disability like dyslexia. However, almost 19% of the participants admit to having had some type of temporary physical disability at some point in their lives, most of them being caused by an accident where a bone was broken or they had a surgery that left them temporarily unable to move their body as they normally would.

Figure 1.
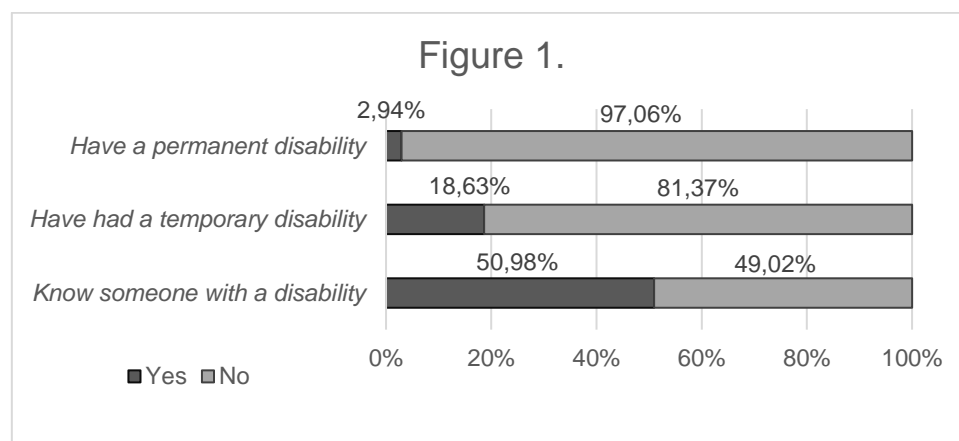
Now, while the previous two numbers show a relatively low personal knowledge of what having a disability feels like among the sample for this study, the third number shows that at least half the participants know someone close to them who has a visible disability. Figure 2 shows the different types of disabilities that were mentioned in relation to the previous statement. The two main types of impairments that people identified were within the following categories: mobility/physical disabilities, with a 40,3%, and intellectual disabilities, with a 29%.

Among the mobility impairments, the most repetitive ones where people in wheelchairs due to degenerative diseases like Multiple Sclerosis, or physical development delays. For the intellectual category, the ones that were mentioned the most were Trisomy 21 – also known as Down Syndrome – and development delay. This information will be useful for the analysis, to try and see if having a connection with disabilities affect the way in which people perceive those who have disabilities and are in leadership positions.

Figure 2. TYPES OF DISABILITIES
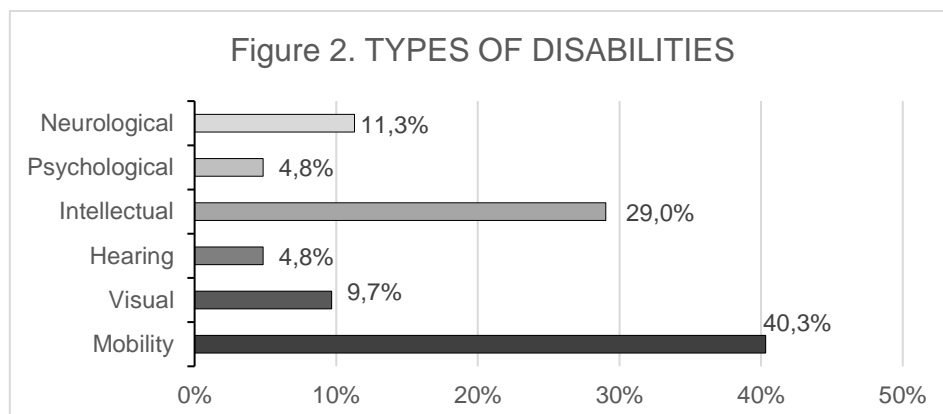
Questions 5, 6 and 7 refer to the general perception people have towards people with disabilities, followed by how they perceive the competency and the competitivity of disabled people within the working environment. By using the Cross-Table tool in SPSS, two different tables (see Tables 5 and 6) were created crossing the answers about the general perception with those specific to competency and competitivity. Thanks to this, it is possible to notice that out of 72,55% who claimed to perceive disabled people as equally competent, only 60,08% had previously stated to see them as equals in general. Now, the surprising part comes from the 27% who despite identifying disabled people as "someone that needs to be cared for", still believed them to be equally competent. On the same line, a 2 people who have said to perceive disabled people as equals in general, ended up claiming that they are less competent in the working environment.

Once again, only 2 participants believed that disabled people were more competent. And surprisingly enough, one of them had previously claimed to consider disabled people as someone who needs to be cared for. Now, for the 19,61% of participants whose answers regarding the competency ended up within the "other" category explained how they believed that it depended on the person and/or the type/degree of disability.

Concerning the competitivity of disabled people in the working environment (see Table 6), almost 67% of the participants believed them to be equally competitive, following the same perception trend regarding competency. Here as well we find that most (57,4%) had previously stated they perceived disabled people as equals – as can be expected – but, once again, we find that almost 28% of the people who also saw them as equally competitive, had previously said they also saw them as someone that needs to be cared for.

Unlike with competency, the second biggest group of people were those who believe them to be less competitive, with a 15,69%. Yet again, 43,8% of these people had previously claimed to perceive them as equals. Now, the 11,76% of those who gave a different answer than equally, less or more competitive, also said that it depends like with competency. Nevertheless, this time people said that it mostly depended on the person, as they did not believe that disability and competitivity had any relation.

Table 5. COMPENTENCY IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

		Equal		Less		More		Other	
		N	Column %	N	Column %	N	Column %	N	Column %
	Equal	45	60,8%	2	33,3%	0	0,0%	6	30,0%
	Someone that needs to be cared for	20	27,0%	3	50,0%	1	50,0%	7	35,0%
General Perception	Depends on the disability	5	6,8%	1	16,7%	1	50,0%	4	20,0%
	Other	4	5,4%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	3	15,0%
	Total	74	100,0%	6	100,0%	2	100,0%	20	100,0%
		72,55%		5,88%		1,96%		19,61%	

Table 6. COMPETITIVITY IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

		Equal		Less		More		Other	
		N	Column %	N	Column %	N	Column %	N	Column %
	Equal	39	57,4%	7	43,8%	5	83,3%	2	16,7%
	Someone that needs to be cared for	19	27,9%	8	50,0%	0	0,0%	4	33,3%
General Perception	Depends on the disability	6	8,8%	0	0,0%	1	16,7%	4	33,3%
	Other	4	5,9%	1	6,3%	0	0,0%	2	16,7%
	Total	68	100,0%	16	100,0%	6	100,0%	12	100,0%
		66,67%		15,69%		5,88%		11,76%	

Questions 10 asked the participants if they had ever had a disabled manager or superior. In the results, 99% of the participants said they had never had the opportunity. Only one of the respondents answered "yes" and explained that this manager had a limp.

The answers for questions 11, 12 and 13 can be found aggregated in Table 7. All three questions were concerned with whether the respondents would find it difficult in the case that they were to have a manager with a disability, of a different gender and of a different race. In all of them, the majority of participants (92%, 97% and 99% respectively) expressed they would not, in fact, have any difficulty with either situation. Those who chose the "other" option explained that they thought it would depend on the disability of the manager and the kind of work. Some seemed to believe that if the disability was

physical it would not be a problem, but if it were to be some sort of mental disability then they would find it difficult. One of them wrote:

"Generally, no. But again, depends on the disability. Would be difficult to work for someone who had trouble speaking; it would simply be difficult to understand them. But on the whole, most disabilities have workarounds, so generally it would not be difficult."

For this question, people were asked to justify their answers, and among the many explanations given, the most interesting one is of those who answer "No". Despite saying they would not find it difficult to have a disabled manager, in around 7% of their justifications they actually expressed that they did, in fact, think that it depends on the type of disability. Which goes in line with what the few who chose "Other" explained. Nonetheless, the other 93% expressed a similar idea. Most of them stated that if the person had reached a managerial level, regardless of their disability, they would assume they must have shown that they have what it takes to be in such position. In terms of the 4% who answered "Yes", the reasons why are not clear. One of them also believes it would depend on the disability. Another is concerned about the disability influencing the way she would unintentionally behave towards the manager. The other two are inconclusive.

When it came down to gender, those who said they would not find it difficult to have a manager of a different gender gave similar reasons to their answers. Among the most repeated we find that either gender should not matter, that gender makes no difference and is irrelevant, and also some explained that they have been under the direction of all genders and have never had an issue in their experience. Now, the 2% who answered "yes" to this question were females, and the reason behind it that they simply believe it is easier to relate to someone of their same gender. Now, the other participant who answered "other" was also female and expressed that it would really depend on the matters addressed during the sessions because she's much happier to report to other women on some things. However, no further explanation is given about these "things".

In terms of having a manager of a different race, everyone who answered that they would not find it difficult expressed similar ideas to the ones for the question regarding gender. The participants believed all races to be equal and simply did not care whatever race their manager could potentially be. For the one person who said "yes", the explanation behind it was a mere concern regarding the potential difficulty that she could have understanding this manager if they did not speak the same language or the manage did not fully control her language.

In the Tables 8 and 9 we crossed the answers given in the question regarding a manager with a disability with the answers about gender and race respectively. We can then observe that those who said they would find it difficult to have a disabled manager, have no issue with having somebody of a different gender or race. However, those who claimed it would be difficult to have a manager of a different gender or race, had previously stated that they had no problem having a disabled manager.

Table 7. WOULD YOU FIND IT DIFFICULT TO HAVE A MANAGER…

	Yes		No		Other	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
...with a Disability?	4	4%	94	92%	4	4%
...of a Different Gender?	2	2%	99	97%	1	1%
...of a Different Race?	1	1%	101	99%	0	0%

Table 8. DIFFICULT TO HAVE A MANAGER OF A DIFFERENT GENDER

		No		Yes		Other	
		f	Row %	f	Row %	f	Row %
	No	91	96,8%	2	2,1%	1	1,1%
Difficult to have a Disabled Manager	Yes	4	100,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
	Other	4	100,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%

Table 9. DIFFICULT TO HAVE A MANAGER OF A DIFFERENT RACE

		No		Yes		Other	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
	No	93	98,9%	1	1,1%	0	0,0%
Difficult to have a Disabled Manager	Yes	4	100,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
	Other	4	100,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%

When the participants were asked in questions 14 about the whether they thought that a disability could be an obstacle to get promoted, the results – which can be seen in Table 10 – were as follows: 46,1% answered that they thought it would depend on the organization, the person and the job all at once. Now, almost 78% in total gave an answer that believe it to depend on other factors and not the disability in itself. Only 7,8% and 14,7% gave a definite "yes" or "no" respectively.

Table 10. DISABILITY AN OBSTACLE TO GET PROMOTED?

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
No	15	14,7	14,7
Yes	8	7,8	22,5
Depends on Organization	13	12,7	35,3
Depends on Person	3	2,9	38,2
Depends on job	13	12,7	51,0
Depends on all the above	47	46,1	97,1
Other (*)	3	2,9	100,0
Total	102	100,0	

(*) Other:

- "Depends on the job and the organization"

- "Depends on the organization and the employer / manager / boss"

- "Depends on whether that disability means a real limitation to take on the responsibilities that said position requires and the prejudice of the authority that will grant the promotion."

Questions 18 and 20 refer to the possible effect that a disability could have in a disabled manager's daily tasks. The first wonders if the participants believe the disability would make it difficult for the manager to carry out his responsibilities. And as we observe in Table 11, a good portion of the participant (41,2%) believes it depends on the job, while the second biggest portion (34,3%) believes a disability would not make it difficult to carry out the tasks of manager on an everyday basis.

Now, for the other question, people were asked about whether they thought that having a disability would somehow influence the business-related decisions of the manager. If we look at Table 12, we can see that the majority (68,6%) of the participants do not consider that a disability could influence such decisions. Meanwhile, 23,5% think the opposite, and 7,8% had a different opinion and chose "other" explaining that either they were not sure or did not know, or that it depended on other factors aside from the disability.

Table 11. DIFFICULT TO CARRY OUT TASKS AS A DISABLED MANAGER?

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
No	35	34,3	34,3
Yes	3	2,9	37,3
Other	8	7,8	45,1
Depends on job	42	41,2	86,3
Depends on followers	14	13,7	100,0
Total	102	100,0	

Table 12. DOES A DISABILITY INFLUENCE THE DECISION MAKING OF A DISABLED MANAGER?

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
No	70	68,6	68,6
Yes	24	23,5	92,2
Other	8	7,8	100,0
Total	102	100,0	

In question 21, participants were asked if the physical appearance played any role in their perception of the "ideal leader". As can be seen in Table 13, a total of 69,6% of the respondents claimed that the physical appearance did not matter in their idea of the perfect leader, while 27,5% positioned themselves on the opposite side of the spectrum. Out of the 3 participants who answered "other", 2 of them agreed on the fact that it depends – one giving the example that if it were the military, a person in a wheelchair would make a "poor leading figure". The other respondent simply said that the person should appear "neat", without any relation to a disability.

Table 13. DOES THE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE MATTER IN THE IDEAL LEADER?

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
No	71	69,6	69,6
Yes	28	27,5	97,1
Other	3	2,9	100,0
Total	102	100,0	

As a second part of question 21, people were asked to select the top 5 factors/skills that they considered a good leader would have. The options given were charisma, communication, motivation, problem solving, good physical condition/capacity, empathy, passion, decision making, and responsibility. And they needed to rank them from more to less important, with the first factor being the most important.

In the results (see Table 14), we find that as a first factor, the one with the highest percentage (35,3%) was communication. For the second factor, we find that motivation has been chosen more than any other (23,5%). In the third and fourth place, we see problem solving (23,5%) and empathy (19,6%) respectively. Now, for the fifth factor, we observe that motivation comes out as the winner yet again with 18,6, followed by problem solving (16,7%) and passion (10,8%). Since both motivation and problem solving had already claimed higher ranks, the fifth place will be given to passion, leaving the top five (starting with the most important) as follows: communication, motivation, problem solving, empathy and passion.

Table 14. TOP 5 FACTORS

	1º		2º		3º		4º		5º	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Charisma	8	7,8	4	3,9	5	4,9	8	7,8	10	9,8
Communication	36	35,3	21	20,6	12	11,8	14	13,7	9	8,8
Motivation	8	7,8	24	23,5	17	16,7	17	16,7	19	18,6
Problem Solving	4	3,9	22	21,6	24	23,5	15	14,7	17	16,7
Good Physical Condition/Capacity	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	1	1,0	8	7,8
Empathy	6	5,9	4	3,9	21	20,6	20	19,6	10	9,8
Passion	4	3,9	6	5,9	4	3,9	9	8,8	11	10,8
Decision Making	12	11,8	13	12,7	14	13,7	7	6,9	9	8,8
Responsibility	24	23,5	8	7,8	5	4,9	11	10,8	9	8,8
Total	102	100,0	102	100,0	102	100,0	102	100,0	102	100,0

Thanks to Table 15, we can observe the crossing of the answers from the first and the second part of question 21. This allows us to notice that out of those 28 participants who claimed that the physical appearance had a role in their perception of the ideal leader, only 2 of them actually picked it for the top five factors. And, in fact, it was only for the fifth place. Furthermore, from those who said that the physical appearance did not matter, 6 people still picked the physical condition as their fifth factor, and 1 picked it in fourth place. Now, physical appearance and physical condition are not necessarily the exact same, but they still definitely share similar meanings.

The next two questions to look into are number 22 and 23. Both of them are concerned with the comparison between a disabled and a non-disabled manager. Is it fairer? Is it more effective? Participants in their majority – with an 86,3% and 87,3% in each question respectively (see Table 16) – seemed to believe that being disabled was not a factor to take into consideration when talking about a manager being fair nor effective. Nevertheless, around 11% of people answered that they thought a disabled manager would in fact be fairer than a non-disabled. With small numbers, we find that only 4% of the participants considered that a manager with a disability would be less effective, while only one person seemed to think a disabled leader would actually be less fair. Sadly, there are no explanations for the reasoning behind these answers, so without context there is not much we can say about the answers given.

For question 24 people were ask if they would rather have a manager with or without a disability. In table 17, we can observe that 96,1% of the participant did not care whether their manager had a disability or not. Only 1 participant said she would rather have a manager without a disability. Not surprising, this same person had previously stated she

		No Count	Yes Count	Other Count
	Charisma	5	2	1
	Communication	27	8	1
	Motivation	5	3	0
	Problem Solving	3	1	0
1º	Good Physical State	0	0	0
	Empathy	3	3	0
	Passion	3	1	0
	Decision Making	6	5	1
	Responsibility	19	5	0
	Charisma	3	1	0
	Communication	16	5	0
	Motivation	16	8	0
	Problem Solving	16	5	1
2º	Good Physical State	0	0	0
	Empathy	3	1	0
	Passion	5	1	0
	Decision Making	9	3	1
	Responsibility	3	4	1
	Charisma	5	0	0
	Communication	7	5	0
	Motivation	11	4	2
	Problem Solving	15	8	1
3º	Good Physical State	0	0	0
	Empathy	15	6	0
	Passion	2	2	0
	Decision Making	12	2	0
	Responsibility	4	1	0
	Charisma	7	1	0
	Communication	10	3	1
	Motivation	8	8	1
	Problem Solving	13	2	0
4º	Good Physical State	1	0	0
	Empathy	13	7	0
	Passion	6	3	0
	Decision Making	6	1	0
	Responsibility	7	3	1
	Charisma	8	2	0
	Communication	5	3	1
	Motivation	17	2	0
	Problem Solving	10	6	1
5º	Good Physical State	6	2	0
	Empathy	6	4	0
	Passion	8	2	1
	Decision Making	5	4	0
	Responsibility	6	3	0

Table 15.

believed disabled people were less competent and less competitive, that a disabled manager would be less effective, and that the physical appearance mattered to her ideal of a leader. However, she did say that she would not find it difficult to have a disabled manager, because if a disabled person were to reach a management position, he/she would have proven his/her competencies.

Table 16.

	Fairer?			More effective?		
	Frequency	*%*	*Cumulative %*	*Frequency*	*Percent*	*Cumulative %*
More	11	10,8	10,8	4	3,9	3,9
Less	1	1,0	11,8	4	3,9	7,8
Not a factor	88	86,3	98,0	89	87,3	95,1
Other	2	2,0	100,0	5	4,9	100,0
Total	102	100,0		102	100,0	

Once again, only 1 respondent said she would rather have a disabled manager. This participant had previously mentioned she believed a disabled manager would be more effective and fairer, that they would have more empathy and discriminate less, and that disabled people can be equally and even more competent and competitive than those who are non-disabled. Now, for the 2 participants who chose "other" said that it either depended on the job or on the disability.

In question 25, participants answered whether they would be willing to go the "extra mile" because their manager was disabled or not. There is no major winner for this case as 45% and 40% of the sample answered "no" and "yes" respectively (see table 18). Some people expressed how they would normally go the extra mile regardless of whether the manager had a disability or not. Others explained that it did not depend on the disability but on the personality of the manager and the type of leader this was.

Table 17. Manager With Or Without Disability

	Frequency	*%*	*Cumulative %*
With	1	1,0	1,0
Without	1	1,0	2,0
Don't Care	98	96,1	98,0
Other	2	2,0	100,0
Total	102	100,0	

Table 18. Go the Extra Mile for a Disabled Manager

	Frequency	*%*	*Cumulative %*
No	46	45,1	45,1
Yes	41	40,2	85,3
Other	15	14,7	100,0
Total	102	100,0	

Question 27 is concerned with whether people believe that having a manager with a disability is a motivating thing or not. The majority with 63,7% (see table 19) seemed to

believe that it is, indeed, something that can motivate the followers. However, a good 25,5% believed that having a disabled manager was not a motivating thing. Among those who chose the "other" option, we find that most thought it could be motivating to some, but it would depend on other factors. For instance, one suggested that it could be motivating for someone who also had a disability, as having a disabled manager could send the message that he/she could also get that far in the company. Others suggested it simply should not matter or that they believed that having a disability would not be a factor to affect motivation.

The last two questions of interest for this study are 31 and 32, that almost go hand in hand with one another. The first wonders if people think of disability as yet another type of diversity, while the second is concerned about whether people truly think that more diversity is better for the working environment.

In question 31, a majority of participants with a 60,8% (see table 20) considered disability as a type of diversity. Meanwhile, the 38,2% left did not believe it to be another form of diversity. And lastly, the 1% who chose "other" simply said that she was not sure as she had never considered it.

Now, for question 32 (see table 21), we find a bigger portion (92,2%) of the participants who think that more diversity equals a better working environment. Nevertheless, an almost 5% does not agree with the aforementioned idea. The 3% of the respondents who answered "other", gave very different answers from one another. One suggested that diversity is "decadence" and only cared about effectiveness. Another said that more diversity can sometimes be better, but no always. And the last person simply expressed that she did not know.

In table 22, we observe the crossing of the results for each question. Here we see that the majority of people who believe that disability is another type of diversity, also think that more diversity is better. Now, for what concerns those who do not considered disability as a part of diversity, a lot of them (84,6%) do seem to think that, despite the previous idea, more diversity is actually better. No further context was given, so there is not much more to be said regarding this topic.

Table 19. Is it motivating to have a disabled manager?

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
No	26	25,5	25,5
Yes	65	63,7	89,2
Other (*)	11	10,8	100,0
Total	102	100,0	

(*) Other:

- "Perhaps for other people with a similar disability but not for me personally."
- "Indifferent"
- "I don't think about it"
- "Yes, In a way, but again it seems objectifying"
- "Yes, but not for me. But i am sure it will motivate other disables people to see someone achieve this. "
- "It shouldn't matter"
- "Neutral - I don't see any difference"
- "I don't know"
- "I don't think is a factor that would affect the motivation"
- "It would depend on the person, not sure it would make a difference to me"
- "Depends"

Table 20. Disability a type of Diversity?

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
No	39	38,2	38,2
Yes	62	60,8	99,0
Other	1	1,0	100,0
Total	102	100,0	

Table 21. Is more Diversity Better?

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
No	5	4,9	4,9
Yes	94	92,2	97,1
Other	3	2,9	100,0
Total	102	100,0	

Table 22. Disability a type of Diversity?

		No		Yes		Other	
		Count	Column %	Count	Column %	Count	Column %
Is more diversity better?	No	3	7,7%	2	3,2%	0	0,0%
	Yes	33	84,6%	60	96,8%	1	100,0%
	Other	3	7,7%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. The skills of an ideal leader

When talking about the ideal leader, both the disabled leaders as well as the participants of the online survey made a point on how important communication is, which reinforces what has been said by many academics before (Kippenberger, 2002; Alvesson, 2002; Barret, 2008). In fact, communication was chosen as the most important skill of a leader, even if it was closely followed by responsibility. The disabled leaders also highlighted the importance of communicating effectively so as to avoid confusion and miscommunication with the followers, something that has also been suggested previously (Gilley, et al., 2009; Men, 2014).

It would then make sense that some people are concerned about having a manager whose disability falls within the intellectual impairment category which could difficult the communication part. Then again, it is also key to remember that no one had previously experienced being under a disabled person's authority, except for one manager with a limp. This could imply that the concerns are fueled by assumptions which, as leaders suggested, are very problematic. Many people with speech or intellectual impairment can actually learn to work around their disabilities (Luria, et al., 2014).

Motivation is yet another factor that has been extensively studied and linked to leadership in the academic world (Bass & Bass, 2009). Leadership has been said to be directly related to the motivation of workers (Álvarez de Mon Pan, 2001), which subsequently affects the effective development of the daily activities within an organization (Alshallah, 2004). Our findings are consistent with the previous, since motivation it just so happens to be the second most important factor according to the survey participants.

Now, over 60% of the participants believed that having a disabled leader is a motivating thing for those under their lead. However, the disabled leaders described this as disingenuous and hurtful. Thinking they are motivational *just* because they have a disability does not help their cause. It would seem to be counterproductive, just like it has been previously suggested (Procknow, et al., 2017). These assumptions, regardless of their good intentions, keep setting them apart instead of integrating them as equal to their non-disabled peers.

That being said, some survey respondents suggested that it could be motivational for other disabled people who could look up to them. And this is something that the leaders interviewed also agreed upon. Seeing themselves represented in higher positions can motivate them to work even harder so that they can also reach the management level.

The third most important skill chosen by the participants of the online survey was problem solving. Interestingly enough, one of the leaders actually mentioned how important it is for participants to see that their leader can actually identify problems and find the resources to solve it.

This is in fact a skill that not only has been referred to as an important part of leadership (Kippenberger, 2002), but it has also been reported to be exercised by a lot of disabled people (Martin, 2017) on an everyday basis as they navigate a world created for the able-bodied. Even the disabled leaders from this research mentioned how their disabilities basically forced them to become resourceful and stronger, making them find ways to work around their impairment.

The fourth most important ability of a leader, according to our participants, is empathy. If we consider previous research, there has been a noticeable shift towards emotional intelligence when it comes to leadership (Skinner & Spurgeon, 2005), which is why empathy is believed to be essential for an effective leadership and should not be ignored (Holt & Marques, 2012). Some people seemed to believe that a leader with disability would equal a more empathetic leader and understanding leader. It seems as though they think that because they are often discriminated against and have been through so much, they automatically have more empathy towards others. Now, it is not possible to completely debunk this, although we can say that at least one of the leaders interviewed for this study mentioned how he was less empathetic towards most people.

This basically proves yet again the big issue with people assuming things about how disabled people are or act. We cannot just assume that because someone has been through something difficult, they will have more empathy towards everyone. They may be more empathetic of someone who is currently going through what they went through, but this does not mean it will apply for everyone else too. Not every person without a disability is empathetic, just like not every disabled person has to overflow empathy either.

The last skill in the top five created with the results of the survey is passion. Even the disabled leaders spoke a little about this. They suggested that your followers look at how passionate you are about your projects and your work, and this may motivate them to believe in them as well. When leaders are passionate about what they do, they tend to work hard and are very persistent, which is something another leader mentioned.

All the disabled leaders within this research showed they were passionate about something. One of them was passionate about his work and everything he had created. The other two shared a similar passion in advocating and lifting the disabled community

as well as every other marginalized group. They both seemed to agree on the importance of fighting for inclusion and equality as whole group including the disabled, people of color, females, etc.

But what about the importance of the physical appearance of a leader? This is often affected by visible disabilities, becoming a source for concerns from all parties. From the survey we gathered that most people ultimately do not care about the physical state of the leader. And out of the 28 participants who said it did matter, only 7 put it in their top five factors for a good leader. This could be seen as a way of saying that even if they claimed it plays a role in their perception of the ideal leader, it is not a very important role, which is consistent with the findings of previous researchers on the topic (Bryant & Curtner-Smith, 2009) where the perception of competency of a leader was not affected by their disability according to their followers.

Some factors did not make it to the top five but should still be highlighted, as the leaders themselves pointed them out and they are also consistent with the literature reviewed (Kippenberger, 2002; Bass & Bass, 2009; Álvarez de Mon Pan, 2001). These are: the ability to make decisions even if they are tough to make and will not make everyone happy, the ability to identify the talents of the followers so that they can help them maximize each and every talent, and also the no less important multicultural awareness. This last one is directly linked to diversity and is key to maintain a cohesive, healthy and satisfactory working environment (Ferdman & Deane, 2014).

5.2. Perception of people towards disabled leaders

Generally speaking, the majority of participants believed disabled people to be equally competent and equally competitive within the working environment. Even the majority of those who identified the disabled as people who needed to be cared for, still believe them to be equally competent when talking about work. This could imply that needing assistance does not prevent a person to be competent for their job. However, there is a possibility that people may have provided what would be considered "socially appropriate" answers, also known as the "problem of social desirability bias (DeMaio, 1984) where people answer what they think they should answer, instead of giving a truthful response.

As explained by the leaders interviewed, more and more disabled people are getting their college degrees and have been doing so for a while. Their lack of representation in high positions is certainly not due to lack of qualification. Even when they are getting the education required, they are not being seen in these management spaces (Procknow, et al., 2017). Just by looking at our participants experience, out of the 102 who answered

the survey only one had previously had a manager with a visible disability. That being said, despite not having had the opportunity to be under the authority of a disabled leader, most people agreed that they would not find it difficult. They explained that they would assume that if this person was a manager, then it must have already proven to have the skills and the capacity to be in that position.

When asked about the influence of the disability upon the decision-making process of a disabled manager, most people agreed that there would not be any influence. This is not right nor wrong. One leader expressed his disagreement with the idea of his disability influencing the way he leads. However, he also implied that due to his disability, he was less empathetic and possibly more demanding of people. This does not mean that every disabled person is less empathetic of others, but it goes to show that personality is not completely shaped by one's disability or lack of. Personality is considered to be a combination of biology and culture (Matsumoto & Juang, 2013), and it is not solely based on a person's life experience or struggles.

If we recall the questions about a disabled leader being fairer and more effective, most people also thought that the disability of the manager did not matter in this case. Previous research on the effect of learning disabilities on leadership effectivity also show that there is no difference between abled and disabled leaders (Luria, et al., 2014). Nevertheless, around 10% did seem to think that they would be fairer, possibly linked to the same assumption that a disabled person must be more empathetic and less discriminative.

5.3. So why are we not seeing more disabled leaders?

Could it be because of the external barriers that Hall & Parker (2010) had already suggested? Do they all fall victim to physical limitations and the need for accommodations? Probably not all of them, but a great part of the community may find themselves being restricted. Leaders explained that companies and organization often assume that accommodating the workplace for those with disabilities would be too much of a hassle and a big cost. However, one of them specifically works with an organization that will provide these accommodations without a cost, so that companies will not have to worry about the expenses of hiring a person with a disability.

Furthermore, previous reports show that disabled employees often have a bigger sense of accomplishment and satisfaction (Martin, 2017), as long as they are not being discriminated against in the workplace (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2017). With happier employees, the productivity of a company is bound to increase, subsequently causing a positive effect on their general profit. This should easily make the potential costs of hiring a qualified disabled person more worth it.

There are also the internal obstacles such as having low self-esteem or self-confidence (Hall & Parker, 2010), which prevent disabled people from being ambitious and aiming towards higher positions. Other internal barriers could be the assumptions made by disabled people themselves. As one of the leaders explained, sometimes they also assume something does not exist or is not possible, simply because they have not heard from it yet. Just like another leader mentioned that she did not want to reach out for help because she thought that people with her disability could only get low-skilled jobs. In these cases, the support and guidance from those surrounding people with disabilities is key to encourage them and help them develop their professional careers, as has been previously suggested (Bainbridge & Fujimoto, 2018; Caldwell, 2010)

Not disclosing their disabilities could also become a type of internal obstacle. Some people may assume that if they disclose their disability, they will automatically be seen or defined by said disability. However, in a previous research (Emira, et al., 2018), it was suggested that the real problem was the attitude that people have towards the disabled once they have disclosed their disability, and not the people disclosing it themselves. We could then consider the need to work on both sides of the coin, as everyone seems to have misconceptions from the opposite party. Hiding their disabilities will most likely make the situation unnecessarily difficult for the disabled employees, and the attitude that the non-disabled may have in front of the first is something that could easily be fixed by having a much needed conversation on the topic, as has been suggested multiple times by the leaders who participated in this study.

5.4.   Final Reflection

In conclusion, what can we say about the disabled leaders in relation to RQ1? From this study we have gathered that leaders who have a disability are no less capable, no less effective, and overall not worse than any potential leader who does not have a disability. But just like they are not worse, they also do not seem to show that they are better, at least not because of their disabilities.

People who are in leadership positions, whether they have a disability or not, share common values and skills that can also be found in theory. The disabled leaders interviewed for this project identified the many traits that help them be the best leaders they possibly can, and none of them was directly linked to their disability, but their personality. So, as long as person has a set of some of the skills and values that are required, such as ability to motivate, to care for people, to solve problems and make decision, etc., a disability should not pose an obstacle for them to carry out the tasks as

a non-disabled leader would. It is important to understand that they don't lead *because* of their disabilities; they lead regardless of them.

Regarding RQ2, what can be said about the perception of those who would have to follow these leaders? According to the findings in this research, in general, people do not seem to perceive disabled leaders as less capable or competent. In fact, most agreed that they were equals and their disability was not a factor to take into consideration for things like their effectiveness or their leadership style.

However, some people did seem to fall within the group that often assumes the wrong things about disabled people, even if the assumptions were seemingly positive. Assuming a person with a disability will be "more this" or "better than" just because they are disabled has been said to be hurtful for the disabled community. As stated in a previous study (Procknow, et al., 2017), the labelling of those who are disabled, regardless of whether the label has a positive or negative connotation, is always counterproductive.

The assumptions seem to be the root of it all. As one leader suggested, there is a lack of discussion that subsequently creates a lack of understanding. People need to invest time and energy in the disabled community. Companies need to show interest in hiring the best qualified people, regardless of whether they have a disability or not. And for these organizations to do so, they need to reevaluate their hiring process, because they might be excluding an equally capable and important group within the work force.

Of course, everything would ultimately depend on the disability of the person who is supposed to become a leader, like most participants suggested. But since this study was very broad due to lack of resources, it would be interesting to conduct a similar research focusing on specific types of disabilities to see if they are affected differently or any patterns and meanings can be found.

Now, whether it's someone with an impairment since they were kids, someone who suffered an accident or the appearance of a degenerative disease of sorts later in their lives, everyone should be given the same job opportunities based on their talent and not their so-called "limitations". Society as a whole needs to become more accessible, and companies need to start being more proactive when it comes to accessibility. They should not wait until someone needs the accommodation, they should invest in disability programs and making their workspaces accessible, not only for their own workers, but also out of consideration for other people who may have to pass by their offices or establishment.

The government needs to find ways to promote the employment of people with disabled in leadership roles, and to prevent their underemployment as well. They could start by demanding quotas of leaders with disabilities in boards of directors, as one participant in this study suggested; they could provide subsidies for the companies to become more accessible regardless of the amount of employees with disabilities; or they could even invest in organization that are actively working in favor of the community of disabled people. There are multiple ways to help this case.

From an educational point of view, it would also be important to discuss more about inclusion and equality. And when it comes to higher education, when shaping leaders, the importance of being inclusive and embracing diversity should be even more underlined. Universities and all educational institutions need to promote the awareness and create a safe environment for all kind of people to develop their leadership skills. If we really want to move towards a truly inclusive society and business world, we need to start considering all marginalized groups. And we definitely need to understand that *"leadership and disability should not be seen as mutually exclusive"* (Martin, 2017, p. 26)*.*

Taking into account what was gathered in this study, we can say that things are slowly getting better. As one of our leaders mentioned, everything starts from the smallest actions and any progress, no matter how small, is still progress. But there is still a long way ahead for the disabled to keep claiming their rightful place when deserved, and for the non-disabled to keep questioning things, to show interest in the disabled community. It is time for all individuals to encourage one another to discuss these topics and start a conversation that is long overdue.

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