



The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a vital component of effective leadership, enabling leaders to manage their own emotions and those of their team members to foster productive and positive workplace relationships. This paper explores the significance of EI in leadership, defining its key components and discussing how they contribute to crucial leadership outcomes such as decision-making, relationship-building, stress management, and motivation. The five core components of EI - self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills - are interrelated competencies that empower leaders to function effectively in complex social environments. Leaders with high EI tend to have better interpersonal relationships, more effective teams, and improved organizational performance. Empirical studies highlight the positive correlation between leaders' EI levels and employee job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement. Developing EI in leaders requires intentional training, coaching, and supportive organizational cultures. Organizations that invest in cultivating EI competencies within their leadership cadre are more likely to benefit from enhanced employee engagement, job satisfaction, and performance. In today's dynamic and complex environments, emotional intelligence is not just a desirable trait but a critical leadership capability that organizations must prioritize to thrive.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, Organizational Performance, Employee Engagement, Job Satisfaction.*

1.0 Introduction

Leadership is widely recognized as a critical determinant of organizational success, influencing not only operational outcomes but also the psychological well-being and motivation of employees. The evolving complexities of modern organizations, characterized by diverse teams and rapid changes, have heightened the need for leaders to possess more than just technical skills or intellectual intelligence. Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a vital component in effective leadership, capturing the leader's ability to manage emotions—their own and others'—to foster productive and positive workplace relationships (Goleman & Cherniss, 2024). The concept of emotional intelligence gained prominence in the 1990s, largely due to the work of Salovey and Mayer (1990) and later popularized by Daniel Goleman (1995). Emotional intelligence involves a

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set of emotional and social skills that collectively influence how individuals perceive and express themselves, develop and maintain social relationships, cope with challenges, and use emotional information in an effective way. In the context of leadership, EI has been shown to enhance critical leadership functions such as communication, conflict resolution, and motivation (Harahap et al., 2023).

Recent empirical studies highlight that leaders with high emotional intelligence tend to have better interpersonal relationships, more effective teams, and improved organizational performance (Zhang & Adegbola, 2022). For instance, research by Lee et al. (2023) found a positive correlation between leaders' EI levels and employee job satisfaction and commitment. Given these findings, it is clear that understanding and cultivating emotional intelligence in leadership roles is essential for organizational sustainability and success. This paper explores the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership by first defining its key components, then discussing how these components contribute to crucial leadership outcomes such as decision-making, relationship-building, stress management, and motivation. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of why emotional intelligence is indispensable for modern leaders.

2.0 Understanding Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

2.1 Definition and Components of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is broadly defined as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions effectively in oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In the context of leadership, this ability is critical because leadership fundamentally involves influencing people, and emotions significantly shape human interactions. Goleman (1995) popularized the concept by emphasizing that EI encompasses more than intellectual ability (IQ); it involves emotional and social competencies that determine effective leadership.

The five core components of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—are interrelated competencies that together empower leaders to function effectively in complex social environments (Goleman & Cherniss, 2024; Ahsan, 2023).

- a) **Self-awareness** enables leaders to understand their emotional states and how these emotions impact their thoughts and behaviors. Leaders who are self-aware tend to recognize their strengths and limitations honestly, which facilitates authentic leadership and fosters trust among followers (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). For example, a leader aware of their frustration during a crisis can consciously choose to communicate calmly rather than react impulsively.
- b) **Self-regulation** refers to the capacity to manage disruptive emotions and impulses, maintaining control and adaptability. Leaders adept at self-regulation create stable, predictable environments where employees feel secure, which supports better performance and reduced turnover (Harahap et al., 2023). This competency includes stress management and the ability to stay composed under pressure, essential traits in high-stakes decision-making.
- c) **Motivation** within EI transcends mere goal attainment; it embodies passion for work, optimism despite setbacks, and a commitment to continuous improvement (Ahsan, 2023). Emotionally intelligent leaders inspire this intrinsic motivation in themselves and their teams, fostering a culture of resilience and sustained performance.
- d) **Empathy** is the ability to sense others' feelings and perspectives and respond appropriately. Empathy is particularly crucial in leadership for managing relationships,

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resolving conflicts, and supporting employees' emotional needs (Goleman & Cherniss, 2024). Research shows empathetic leaders build stronger, more trusting teams, which directly contributes to higher employee satisfaction and organizational loyalty (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022).

- e) **Social skills** comprise communication, influence, conflict resolution, and collaboration. Leaders with well-developed social skills can navigate complex social dynamics, align diverse stakeholders, and foster a sense of belonging among team members (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). These skills enable leaders to cultivate positive organizational cultures that encourage innovation and cooperation.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence as a Leadership Competency

Emotional intelligence is increasingly regarded as a non-negotiable competency for effective leadership (Saha et al., 2023). Unlike technical or cognitive skills, EI focuses on managing oneself and others in social contexts, which is at the heart of leadership. Leaders who exhibit high EI are better equipped to interpret verbal and non-verbal cues, anticipate emotional reactions, and adjust their behaviors accordingly (Harahap et al., 2023).

This competency enhances leaders' ability to establish rapport and credibility, which are fundamental to inspiring trust and commitment from employees. In dynamic and often ambiguous environments, leaders with strong EI demonstrate greater adaptability, managing uncertainty and complexity with emotional resilience (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2022). For instance, during organizational change, EI enables leaders to recognize employee anxieties and communicate effectively to alleviate fears.

Empirical evidence links emotional intelligence in leadership with numerous positive outcomes including increased employee engagement, reduced workplace conflict, and enhanced team performance (Zhang & Adegbola, 2022). Importantly, EI facilitates the development of a positive emotional climate within organizations, which acts as a catalyst for creativity, collaboration, and employee well-being (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023).

2.3 Emotional Intelligence and Decision-Making

Leadership decisions significantly impact organizational success and employee morale. Emotional intelligence plays a vital role in augmenting leaders' decision-making capabilities by integrating emotional and rational inputs (Harahap et al., 2023). Leaders who are emotionally intelligent tend to engage in reflective thinking, assessing how emotions may influence their judgment and actively mitigating emotional biases. Self-awareness and self-regulation are particularly important, as these competencies allow leaders to maintain emotional equilibrium, preventing stress or frustration from clouding judgment (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). Leaders with these skills exhibit better impulse control and patience, which leads to more deliberate and thoughtful decisions.

Moreover, empathy broadens the decision-making lens by encouraging leaders to consider the feelings and perspectives of various stakeholders. This emotional insight fosters decisions that are perceived as fairer and more inclusive, which increases acceptance and commitment among employees (Ahsan, 2023). Leaders who fail to consider emotional impacts risk resistance, low morale, or decreased trust. Studies have found that emotionally intelligent leaders foster greater trust and collaboration during decision-making processes, which contributes to improved organizational performance and smoother implementation of strategies (Lee et al., 2023). Thus, EI

not only influences the quality of decisions but also enhances the relational dynamics surrounding leadership choices.

3. The Importance of Emotional Intelligence In Leadership

3.1 Enhancing Leader-Follower Relationships

One of the fundamental reasons emotional intelligence is crucial in leadership is its positive impact on leader-follower relationships. Leaders with high EI build strong interpersonal connections characterized by trust, respect, and mutual understanding (Goleman & Cherniss, 2024). These leaders are sensitive to followers' emotions and needs, allowing them to respond empathetically and authentically. This emotional attunement fosters an environment where employees feel valued and heard, which enhances job satisfaction and loyalty (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). According to research, followers of emotionally intelligent leaders report higher levels of psychological safety, which encourages open communication and risk-taking without fear of negative consequences (Saha et al., 2023). This dynamic is critical in fostering innovation and adaptability within teams.

Furthermore, emotionally intelligent leaders are better at resolving conflicts constructively. By understanding the emotional undercurrents and perspectives of all parties, these leaders mediate disputes with fairness and tact, preventing escalation and promoting collaboration (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). Thus, EI strengthens the social fabric of the organization by nurturing positive and productive relationships.

3.2 Promoting Effective Communication

Effective communication is central to leadership, and emotional intelligence significantly enhances this skill. Leaders with strong EI can accurately interpret both verbal and non-verbal emotional cues from their team members, which enables them to tailor their messages for clarity and emotional impact (Harahap et al., 2023). Such leaders also communicate with empathy and authenticity, which builds trust and reduces misunderstandings. For example, an emotionally intelligent leader might recognize when an employee is overwhelmed and adapt their communication style by offering support rather than criticism (Ahsan, 2023). This responsiveness improves employee engagement and motivation. Moreover, EI facilitates active listening, where leaders fully attend to their followers' concerns and feelings. Active listening fosters a two-way dialogue that empowers employees and creates a sense of inclusion (Zhang & Adegbola, 2022). This inclusive communication style improves team cohesion and aligns efforts toward common goals.

3.3 Fostering a Positive Organizational Culture

Leaders set the emotional tone of their organizations, and emotional intelligence is key to creating and sustaining a positive organizational culture. Leaders with high EI model constructive emotional behaviors such as optimism, resilience, and respect, which cascade through the organization (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2022). By managing their own emotions and encouraging openness, these leaders cultivate a workplace environment where employees feel psychologically safe and motivated to contribute their best (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). A positive culture nurtured by emotionally intelligent leadership has been linked to lower turnover rates, higher job satisfaction, and greater organizational commitment.

Furthermore, such a culture supports diversity and inclusion because emotionally intelligent leaders are attuned to the varied emotional experiences of a diverse workforce (Goleman & Cherniss, 2024). They are better equipped to address biases, reduce discrimination, and foster equitable opportunities, contributing to an inclusive and respectful work environment.

3.4 Enhancing Stress Management and Resilience

In today's fast-paced and often high-pressure work environments, emotional intelligence plays a vital role in helping leaders manage stress and build resilience. Leaders with high EI can regulate their own stress responses and maintain composure, which prevents emotional contagion and panic within teams (Harahap et al., 2023). This emotional stability allows leaders to approach challenges strategically rather than reactively, maintaining focus on solutions instead of problems. Their resilience serves as a model for employees, encouraging a collective mindset of perseverance and adaptability (Lee et al., 2023).

Moreover, emotionally intelligent leaders are better at recognizing stress and burnout signals in others and can intervene with appropriate support and resources. This proactive approach not only safeguards employee well-being but also sustains productivity and morale during times of change or crisis (Saha et al., 2023).

3.5 Driving Performance and Organizational Success

Emotional intelligence in leadership translates into tangible performance benefits for organizations. Leaders who master EI foster engaged, motivated, and collaborative teams, which are essential drivers of high performance (Zhang & Adegbola, 2022). Such leaders create environments that stimulate creativity, encourage innovation, and enable agile responses to market demands. Their ability to inspire and influence employees positively impacts retention rates and reduces costly turnover (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). Empirical studies consistently show that organizations led by emotionally intelligent leaders outperform their peers in various metrics, including financial performance, customer satisfaction, and employee engagement (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). This evidence underscores the strategic importance of EI as a leadership capability that contributes directly to sustainable organizational success.

4.0 Developing Emotional Intelligence in Leaders

4.1 Self-Awareness Development

Self-awareness is the foundation of emotional intelligence and a crucial starting point for leadership development. Leaders must cultivate an accurate understanding of their emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and the impact they have on others (Goleman & Cherniss, 2024). Techniques such as reflective journaling, mindfulness meditation, and soliciting honest feedback from peers can help leaders increase their self-awareness (Harahap et al., 2023). Awareness allows leaders to identify emotional triggers and habitual responses, providing opportunities to consciously choose more effective behaviors. Research indicates that leaders who regularly engage in self-reflection are better able to regulate their emotions, avoid impulsive reactions, and maintain consistent leadership presence (Zhang & Adegbola, 2022). Therefore, self-awareness is essential for cultivating emotional control and authenticity in leadership.

4.2 Enhancing Self-Regulation Skills

Building on self-awareness, self-regulation enables leaders to manage their emotions constructively, especially in challenging situations. Emotional self-regulation involves strategies

to reduce stress, delay gratification, and avoid negative behaviors such as anger or defensiveness (Lee et al., 2023). Training in techniques such as deep breathing, cognitive reframing, and emotional detachment from stressors can enhance leaders' ability to stay calm and focused under pressure (Saha et al., 2023). For example, cognitive-behavioral approaches help leaders reinterpret stressful events more positively, preventing emotional hijacking. Effective self-regulation contributes to better decision-making, improved interpersonal interactions, and greater resilience, which are vital leadership attributes in dynamic organizational environments (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022).

4.3 Cultivating Empathy and Social Skills

Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others—is a core component of emotional intelligence and critical for effective leadership. Leaders can develop empathy by actively practicing perspective-taking and attentive listening (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). Workshops and coaching focused on interpersonal skills, such as recognizing non-verbal cues and responding with emotional validation, can enhance leaders' empathic abilities (Goleman & Cherniss, 2024). Social skills like conflict resolution, influencing others, and team building also improve through experiential learning and feedback. Leaders who demonstrate genuine empathy build trust and rapport with followers, which in turn fosters collaboration and engagement (Zhang & Adegbola, 2022). These social competencies are essential for navigating complex organizational dynamics.

4.4 Creating Supportive Organizational Systems

Developing emotional intelligence in leaders is not solely an individual effort but also requires supportive organizational environments. Companies can embed EI development into leadership training programs, performance management, and succession planning (Harahap et al., 2023). Mentorship programs that pair emerging leaders with emotionally intelligent role models provide valuable experiential learning opportunities. Additionally, organizations can promote cultures that value emotional awareness through policies encouraging work-life balance, psychological safety, and open communication (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2022). By institutionalizing emotional intelligence development, organizations ensure sustained leadership effectiveness and alignment with strategic goals (Saha et al., 2023).

4.5 Leveraging Technology and Tools

Modern technology offers innovative tools to support EI development. Digital platforms with emotional intelligence assessments, virtual coaching, and real-time feedback mechanisms provide personalized learning experiences for leaders (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). Apps designed to enhance mindfulness, emotional regulation, and stress management can be integrated into daily routines, promoting continuous EI growth (Lee et al., 2023). Virtual reality simulations also allow leaders to practice emotional and social skills in immersive, risk-free environments. The strategic use of these technologies complements traditional development approaches and accelerates leaders' emotional intelligence competencies (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023).

5. Benefits of Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

5.1 Enhanced Decision-Making

Emotional intelligence significantly improves leaders' decision-making abilities. Leaders with high EI can recognize their emotional states and those of others, allowing them to avoid impulsive

or emotionally driven choices (Harahap et al., 2023). They integrate rational analysis with emotional insight, which leads to more balanced and effective decisions. Studies show that emotionally intelligent leaders are better at managing stress and pressure, enabling clearer thinking in complex or crisis situations (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2022). This capability is crucial in today's fast-paced and uncertain organizational environments.

5.2 Improved Interpersonal Relationships

EI enables leaders to build strong, trusting relationships with employees, peers, and stakeholders. Through empathy and social skills, emotionally intelligent leaders foster open communication, active listening, and genuine concern for others (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). Trust and rapport developed through emotional intelligence enhance collaboration and reduce workplace conflicts (Lee et al., 2023). This results in healthier team dynamics and a more positive organizational climate.

5.3 Increased Employee Engagement and Job Satisfaction

Leaders who demonstrate emotional intelligence create supportive work environments that motivate and inspire employees. Such leaders are skilled at recognizing employee needs, providing appropriate encouragement, and responding to concerns with sensitivity (Munir et al., 2023). Empirical evidence confirms that emotionally intelligent leadership correlates positively with higher employee commitment, job satisfaction, and perceived supervisor support (Görgens-Ekermans & Roux, 2021). This engagement drives productivity and reduces turnover.

5.4 Enhanced Conflict Management and Resolution

Conflict is inevitable in organizations, but emotionally intelligent leaders manage it effectively by understanding differing perspectives and regulating their own emotional responses (Harahap et al., 2023). They approach disputes with empathy and openness, aiming for solutions that respect all parties.

Research indicates that such leaders reduce workplace tension and foster a culture of constructive feedback, which supports continuous improvement and cohesion (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023).

5.5 Better Adaptability and Resilience

Leaders with high emotional intelligence are more adaptable to change and resilient in the face of challenges. They manage stress proactively and maintain emotional stability, which enables them to guide their teams through uncertainty and crises (Bayighomog & Arasli, 2022). This emotional resilience supports sustained performance and innovation, especially in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments (Saha et al., 2023).

5.6 Positive Impact on Organizational Performance

Ultimately, the cumulative benefits of emotional intelligence in leadership translate into improved organizational performance. Emotionally intelligent leaders inspire greater employee engagement, enhance teamwork, and promote a culture of trust and accountability (El Khatib et al., 2021). Studies also link EI to higher project success rates and better customer satisfaction, demonstrating its strategic value across diverse sectors (Fareed et al., 2021). Organizations that invest in EI development for their leaders often see measurable improvements in business outcomes.

6. Developing Emotional Intelligence in Leaders

6.1 Emotional Intelligence Training and Education

One of the most effective ways to cultivate emotional intelligence in leaders is through targeted training programs. These programs focus on enhancing core EI competencies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills (Saha et al., 2023). Training often includes activities like role-playing, mindfulness exercises, and reflective practices that help leaders recognize and manage their emotions more effectively. Empirical studies support the positive impact of such interventions, demonstrating improvements in leaders' ability to handle interpersonal situations, make balanced decisions, and motivate employees (Görgens-Ekermans & Roux, 2021). Organizations are increasingly incorporating EI training into leadership development curricula to build a sustainable leadership pipeline.

6.2 Coaching and Feedback Mechanisms

Personalized coaching and continuous feedback are critical in developing a leader's emotional intelligence. Coaches can help leaders gain insights into their emotional patterns and interpersonal styles, offering tailored strategies to enhance EI competencies (Goleman & Cherniss, 2024). Regular 360-degree feedback tools, where leaders receive input from peers, subordinates, and supervisors, also provide valuable data on emotional and social effectiveness. This feedback helps leaders identify blind spots and track their progress over time (Harahap et al., 2023).

6.3 Creating Supportive Organizational Cultures

Developing emotional intelligence is not only an individual endeavor but also an organizational responsibility. Cultures that value open communication, psychological safety, and emotional expression encourage leaders to practice and model emotional intelligence (Ahsan, 2023). HRM initiatives that prioritize EI competencies in recruitment, performance appraisals, and succession planning reinforce this culture. For example, organizations that embed EI in their leadership competency frameworks signal its importance and foster consistent development across all leadership levels (Saha et al., 2023).

6.4 Leveraging Technology and Digital Tools

In the era of remote work and virtual teams, technology plays an increasing role in developing and assessing emotional intelligence. Digital platforms can deliver EI training through interactive modules, virtual simulations, and AI-driven coaching (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2022). Moreover, data analytics can provide real-time insights into leaders' communication styles and emotional responses, facilitating timely interventions to boost EI (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023).

6.5 Encouraging Self-Reflection and Mindfulness

Self-reflection and mindfulness practices are essential techniques for deepening emotional intelligence. Leaders who engage regularly in reflection develop heightened self-awareness and emotional regulation skills, which are foundational to EI (Bayighomog & Arasli, 2022). Mindfulness helps leaders stay present, reduce reactive behaviors, and enhance empathy in interactions. Organizations that encourage such practices create leaders who are more emotionally balanced and attuned to their teams (Goleman & Cherniss, 2024).

7.0 Conclusion

Emotional intelligence is an indispensable component of effective leadership. The ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others enables leaders to build stronger relationships, foster trust, and motivate their teams toward achieving organizational goals. As explored, emotional intelligence significantly enhances leadership effectiveness by improving communication, decision-making, conflict resolution, and overall workplace climate (Harahap et al., 2023; Saha et al., 2023).

The development of emotional intelligence in leaders is equally vital, requiring intentional training, coaching, supportive organizational cultures, and practices such as mindfulness. Organizations that invest in cultivating EI competencies within their leadership cadre are more likely to benefit from enhanced employee engagement, job satisfaction, and performance (Görgens-Ekermans & Roux, 2021; Ahsan, 2023).

In summary, emotional intelligence is not just a desirable trait but a critical leadership capability that organizations must prioritize to thrive in today's dynamic and complex environments. By fostering emotional intelligence, leaders can navigate challenges more effectively, inspire their workforce, and drive sustained organizational success.

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