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Why Emotional Intelligence is the Secret to Leadership Success

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Abstract

The article examines the significance of emotional intelligence (EI) in leadership success, drawing on theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, case studies, and practical implications. It explores various models of EI, such as Goleman's, Mayer and Salovey's, and Bar-On's, highlighting their implications for leadership effectiveness. The empirical evidence, including research studies and meta-analyses, consistently supports the positive relationship between EI and leadership outcomes. Case studies of Steve Jobs and Mary Barra exemplify how EI can drive innovation, promote employee engagement, and lead to organizational success. The article discusses the benefits of EI, such as stronger relationships and improved decision-making, as well as the challenges, including subjective assessment and cultural influences. Practical implications for leadership development and organizational practices are outlined, emphasizing the importance of investing in EI training, cultivating a supportive work culture, and incorporating EI into performance evaluations. Overall, the article underscores that EI is not just a soft skill but a critical competency that empowers leaders to manage challenges and achieve lasting success in today's complex world.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Leadership Success, Organizational Culture

Introduction

In the annals of history, countless leaders have risen to prominence, leaving their names imprinted in the historical timeline. However, intellectual strength, technological competence, and the ability to negotiate the complex landscape of human emotions frequently divide the genuinely great from the competent. Nelson Mandela, a global icon of reconciliation, exemplified emotional intelligence in leadership (Provitiera & Sayyadi, 2023). His remarkable capacity to understand and connect with diverse perspectives facilitated revolutionary decision-making. Mandela's empathy and resilience played an important role in uniting a deeply divided nation and inspiring positive change worldwide (Blefari, 2024). His ability to empathize with his oppressors and maintain a commitment to nonviolence demonstrated his exceptional emotional intelligence. This capacity to understand and connect with diverse perspectives enabled him to facilitate revolutionary decision-making, ultimately leading to the end of apartheid and the establishment of a democratic South Africa. (Rethink Report, 2024). This ability, often called emotional intelligence, is not just a soft skill but the transformative foundation that can turn a leader into a visionary. Emotional intelligence empowers leaders to build strong relationships, foster trust, and inspire others to follow their vision.

Emotional intelligence is a desirable and necessary trait for effective leadership. It empowers leaders to understand, manage, and harness emotions to foster strong connections, make informed decisions, and inspire others. As Thompkins (2023) suggests, connecting with others on an emotional level is paramount for leadership success. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are more likely to cultivate deep bonds with their followers, leading to increased trust, loyalty, and job satisfaction. This sense of security and commitment directly results from emotional intelligence in leadership, reassuring leaders and their followers that decisions are made carefully (EHL Graduate School, 2024).

By developing emotional intelligence, leaders can create a positive and supportive organizational culture where employees feel valued, motivated, and engaged (Business Leadership Today, 2024). Ultimately, emotional intelligence is not merely a soft skill but a

critical competency that empowers leaders to navigate complex challenges and achieve lasting success.

Theoretical Framework

a. Definition of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a multifaceted construct defined and conceptualized in various ways. Several prominent models have surfaced, each offering unique perspectives on its components and implications for leadership.

b. Comparing and Contrasting Models of Emotional Intelligence

Model	Focus	Implications for Leadership
Goleman's Model	Practical aspects: self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship management, motivation	Builds relationships, inspires others, manages emotions effectively
Mayer and Salovey's Model	Cognitive ability: perceiving, understanding, and regulating emotions	Makes informed decisions, motivates others, navigates complex situations
Bar-On's Model	Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, adaptability, stress management	Builds relationships, manages stress, adapts to change

While these models differ in their specific components, they converge in their understanding of EI as a complex set of abilities that enable individuals to manage their emotions and interact with others effectively. Goleman's model focuses on the practical application of EI, while Mayer and Salovey's model emphasizes the cognitive aspects. Bar-On's model highlights the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills involved in EI.

The three models suggest that emotional intelligence (EI) is crucial for effective leadership. Leaders can build stronger relationships, inspire others, make informed decisions, and navigate complex challenges by understanding and managing emotions. The specific

components emphasized in each model may vary, but the overall importance of EI for leadership success remains consistent.

Understanding the different models of EI and their implications for leadership, individuals, and organizations can develop targeted strategies for enhancing EI and achieving positive outcomes.

c. Leadership Theories

Various leadership theories have occurred, each offering unique perspectives on effective leadership. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring and motivating followers to exceed expectations (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Emotional intelligence is indispensable in this approach, enabling leaders to create a positive organizational culture and cultivate a shared purpose. In contrast, transactional leadership focuses on exchanging relationships between leaders and followers. Emotional intelligence is also essential in transactional leadership, as it helps build trust and rapport with followers (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Authentic leadership emphasizes being genuine, trustworthy, and ethical (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Emotional intelligence is instrumental in developing authenticity and building strong relationships with followers. Finally, servant leadership prioritizes the needs of followers and serves them. Emotional intelligence is essential for understanding and empathizing with followers' needs (Greenleaf, 1977).

Empirical Evidence

a. Research Studies

A recent study by Sembiring et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence, organizational justice, job satisfaction, and the performance of Criminal Investigation officers at Polda Metro Jaya. The study found a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction and performance, suggesting that emotionally intelligent leaders can create a more supportive and effective work environment. Additionally, the study revealed that emotional intelligence directly and indirectly affects performance, with job satisfaction and the caring climate as mediating factors. These findings

emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence in enhancing organizational effectiveness and employee well-being.

In addition to the research on law enforcement officers, a study by Sanchez-Gomez and Bresó (2020) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI), burnout, and work performance among Spanish professionals. The study found that higher levels of emotional intelligence are positively associated with better work performance, suggesting that emotionally intelligent leaders are more adept at understanding and managing their emotions and those of their team members. Moreover, the research indicated that EI can act as a protective factor against burnout, reducing its negative impact on work performance. These findings further support that emotional intelligence is critical to effective leadership in law enforcement and other professional contexts.

Moreover, a study by Edward and Purba (2020) investigated the impact of emotional intelligence and work environment on employee performance at PT. Berkat Bima Sentana. The study found that emotional intelligence and work environment positively influence organizational commitment, significantly affecting employee performance. These factors combined explained a significant portion of the variance in employee performance, highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence and a supportive work environment for employee success. This research reinforces that emotionally intelligent leaders can create a positive and productive workplace culture that benefits employees and the organization.

b. Meta-Analyses

A meta-analysis by Gorgens-Ekermans and Roux (2021) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and transformational leadership (TFL). The study analyzed data from multiple studies and found a strong positive correlation between EI and TFL, suggesting that leaders with higher EI are more effective in inspiring and motivating their followers. These findings highlight the importance of EI competencies, such as self-awareness and social awareness, in fostering quality leader-follower relationships. Overall, the research underscores that EI is a critical predictor of successful leadership, enhancing our understanding of how emotional processes impact leadership effectiveness.

Moreover, Jaroslaw Grobelny, Patrycja Radke, and Daria Paniotova-Maczka (2021) meta-analysis investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and job performance. The study found a significant positive correlation between EI and leadership effectiveness, particularly emphasizing the importance of self-reported ability-based EI. These findings suggest that EI validly predicts leadership success, providing ethical justification for its application in personnel selection. Overall, the research underscores the importance of EI in enhancing leadership capabilities and organizational outcomes.

In addition, Wu et al. (2021) meta-analysis examined the relationship between the General Factor of Personality (GFP) and leadership outcomes. The study found a significant positive correlation between GFP and leadership effectiveness, suggesting that social effectiveness is crucial in leadership emergence and effectiveness. Emotional intelligence, a key component of social effectiveness, enhances leaders' ability to connect with followers, thereby improving leadership effectiveness and reducing abusive supervision. These findings underscore the importance of emotional and social skills in effective leadership, highlighting that leaders with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to achieve positive outcomes.

Implications of Meta-Analyses on EI in Leadership

Gorgens-Ekermans and Roux (2021)

- Support for Transformational Leadership - The strong positive correlation between EI and transformational leadership found in this meta-analysis supports the notion that EI is an important component of effective leadership. Leaders who can inspire and motivate their followers are likely to possess high levels of EI.
- Key EI Competencies - The study highlights the importance of self-awareness and social awareness as key EI competencies for effective leadership. These skills enable leaders to understand their own emotions and the emotions of others, fostering stronger relationships and inspiring trust.

Jaroslaw Grobelny, Patrycja Radke, and Daria Paniotova-Maczka (2021)

- EI as a Predictor of Leadership Success - This meta-analysis found a significant positive correlation between EI and leadership effectiveness, particularly emphasizing

the importance of self-reported ability-based EI. This suggests that EI is a valid predictor of leadership success, providing ethical justification for its application in personnel selection and development.

- Social Effectiveness - The study's findings also highlight the importance of social effectiveness, a key component of EI. Leaders who can effectively connect with their followers and build relationships are more likely to be successful.

Wu et al. (2021)

- General Factor of Personality - While this meta-analysis focused on the General Factor of Personality (GFP), the findings still support the importance of emotional and social skills in leadership. EI is a key component of social effectiveness, and leaders who can effectively connect with their followers are more likely to be successful.

Overall Implications

These meta-analyses collectively provide strong evidence for the importance of EI in leadership effectiveness. They support the theoretical frameworks discussed above, suggesting that EI is crucial to transformational, authentic, and servant leadership. Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of specific EI competencies, such as self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management. In addition, these meta-analyses provide compelling evidence for the role of EI in leadership. These findings challenge existing theories that may have downplayed their importance, reinforcing that EI is critical for leadership success.

c. Case Studies

Steve Jobs

A case study by Finkle and Mallin (2010) highlights Steve Jobs as a prime example of how emotional intelligence can be applied in real-world leadership situations. Jobs' ability to understand himself, regulate his emotions, empathize with others, and build strong relationships contributed significantly to his success. His empathy allowed him to anticipate market trends and develop products that resonated with customers. Jobs' vision for the iPod was driven by his understanding of consumer needs and desires. Despite his demanding nature

and tendency to micromanage, Jobs demonstrated exceptional self-regulation, controlling his temper and channeling his perfectionism into creating innovative products. This ability to manage his emotions helped him handle challenging situations and maintain focus on his goals. Despite criticisms, Jobs' emotional intelligence was key to his leadership effectiveness. His ability to understand himself, regulate his emotions, empathize with others, and build strong relationships enabled him to drive innovation, nurture a successful company culture, and revolutionize the technology industry.

Analysis

Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, is a renowned example of how emotional intelligence (EI) can shape leadership success. His ability to understand and manage his emotions and those of others played a vital role in his visionary leadership.

- **Empathy and Customer Focus** - Jobs' deep understanding of consumer needs and desires, driven by his passions, allowed him to anticipate market trends and create products that resonated with customers. For instance, his vision for the iPod was rooted in his love for music and his understanding of consumers' desire for a portable music player.
- **Self-Regulation and Resilience** - Despite his demanding nature, Jobs demonstrated exceptional self-regulation. Despite setbacks and criticisms, he could channel his perfectionism and drive into creating innovative products. This resilience allowed him to persevere through challenges and maintain focus on his long-term goals.
- **Inspirational Leadership** - Jobs' ability to articulate a compelling vision and inspire others to follow him was a hallmark of his leadership. His contagious charisma and passion motivated employees to work towards a common goal. This was evident in his famous "Think Different" campaign, which encouraged employees to challenge the status quo and pursue innovative ideas.

Mary Barra

Kanter (2013) case study on Mary Barra, the CEO of General Motors, also shows how emotional intelligence can be applied in leadership situations. Her deep understanding of the automotive industry, her ability to foster teamwork and collaboration, and her commitment to listening and learning contribute to her success. Barra's background as an engineer and her father's work in a Pontiac plant gives her a deep understanding and empathy for the automotive industry. Her ability to relate to employees, customers, and stakeholders on a personal level demonstrates her commitment to teamwork and collaboration. Her experience in various roles within GM, including as the former head of HR, demonstrates her self-awareness and adaptability. Her ability to understand her strengths and weaknesses and adapt to different roles showcases her emotional intelligence in navigating complex organizational structures. Overall, Barra's case demonstrates the powerful impact of emotional intelligence on leadership, inspiring teams, fostering a positive work environment, and achieving long-term success.

Analysis

Mary Barra, the CEO of General Motors, is another example of how EI can drive leadership success. Her background in engineering and her father's work in the automotive industry gave her a deep understanding of the company and its employees.

- Empathy and Connection - Barra's ability to connect with employees personally and understand their challenges was crucial in rebuilding trust after the company's safety crisis. Her empathy and compassion helped to create a more positive and supportive work environment.
- Collaborative Leadership - Barra's focus on teamwork and collaboration was instrumental in transforming General Motors. She recognized the importance of working together to address challenges and achieve shared goals. By fostering a culture of collaboration, she empowered employees to contribute their best and drive positive change.

- Resilience and Adaptability - Barra demonstrated exceptional resilience and adaptability when navigating General Motors' challenges. She led the company through a major crisis, implementing necessary changes while maintaining a focus on the company's long-term vision.

These case studies illustrate the powerful impact of EI on leadership success. Steve Jobs and Mary Barra demonstrated exceptional EI, enabling them to inspire their teams, build strong relationships, and manage complex challenges. By understanding and managing their emotions and those of others, these leaders created a positive and productive work environment, driving innovation and achieving lasting success.

d. Relating EI Models to Empirical Evidence

Goleman's Model

- Research Studies - The research studies by Sembiring et al. (2020), Sanchez-Gomez and Bresó (2020), and Edward and Purba (2020) support Goleman's model by highlighting the importance of self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship management, and motivation in leadership.
- Meta-Analysis - Gorgens-Ekermans and Roux's meta-analysis (2021) also supports Goleman's model, which found a strong positive correlation between EI and transformational leadership.

Mayer and Salovey's Model

- Meta-Analysis - Jaroslaw Grobelny, Patrycja Radke, and Daria Paniotova-Maczka (2021) support Mayer and Salovey's model by emphasizing the importance of self-reported ability-based EI in leadership effectiveness. This suggests that leaders who can perceive, understand, and regulate emotions effectively are more likely to be successful.

Bar-On's Model

- **Research Studies** - While Bar-On's model is not explicitly supported by the specific studies cited in the article, it aligns with the broader findings on the importance of

interpersonal and intrapersonal skills in leadership. These skills are essential for building relationships, managing stress, and adapting to changing circumstances.

Overall, the empirical evidence supports all three emotional intelligence (EI) models. The study consistently demonstrates the importance of EI for effective leadership, regardless of the specific model used to define and measure it. This suggests that EI is a multi-layered construct with various components contributing to leadership success.

Benefits and Challenges

a. Benefits of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI), the ability to understand and manage one's emotions and those of others, offers numerous benefits for individuals and organizations. EI cultivates stronger relationships and enhances interpersonal interactions by promoting empathy, active listening, and effective communication. Moreover, EI plays an important role in decision-making. By mitigating biases, considering multiple perspectives, and promoting resilience, EI enables individuals to make more informed and balanced choices. This is particularly valuable in today's complex and uncertain world. EI is essential for effective leadership and a positive organizational culture in the workplace. EI empowers leaders to inspire, motivate, and guide their teams, creating a supportive and inclusive environment. Additionally, EI contributes to increased employee engagement, job satisfaction, and overall organizational success.

Beyond its professional benefits, EI also fosters personal well-being. By managing emotions effectively, individuals can reduce stress, increase resilience, and improve their mental health. Emotional intelligence is a valuable asset that can benefit individuals and organizations in countless ways.

b. Challenges and Limitations

Despite its many benefits, emotional intelligence (EI) has several challenges and limitations. Assessing EI can be subjective, involving intangible qualities like self-awareness and empathy. Additionally, there is no universally agreed-upon definition or measurement tool for EI, making it difficult to assess and compare levels across individuals accurately. Cultural

factors also play a significant role in EI, as different cultures may have varying norms and values regarding expressing and interpreting emotions. This can make it challenging to assess EI across diverse cultural contexts, as measurement tools and assessments may be culturally biased. Furthermore, EI is a natural ability that varies among individuals. Some have a natural inclination toward it, while others may need to develop these skills through training and practice. Personality traits and temperament can also influence an individual's EI, affecting their ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions effectively.

Recognizing these challenges is essential for developing and applying EI effectively. By being aware of the limitations and biases associated with EI assessment, individuals and organizations can take steps to address these challenges and maximize the benefits of this valuable skill.

Practical Implications

1. Leadership Development and Emotional Intelligence

Organizations can enhance their leadership capabilities by investing in emotional intelligence (EI) development. Training and development programs can equip employees with essential EI skills, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, and motivation. These programs can be tailored to meet the specific needs of different leadership levels and organizational goals. Additionally, leadership coaching can provide personalized guidance and support for developing EI. Coaches can help leaders identify their strengths and areas for improvement, develop strategies for managing emotions effectively, and build stronger relationships with their teams.

Incorporating EI into performance evaluations can also drive positive change. By assessing employees' ability to manage emotions, build relationships, and resolve conflicts effectively, organizations can identify areas for development and provide targeted support, leading to a more emotionally intelligent and effective workforce.

2. Organizational Practices

Organizations can create a more supportive and productive work environment by promoting a culture that values and promotes emotional intelligence. This can be achieved by emphasizing empathy, communication, and collaboration in all aspects of organizational life. Empathetic leadership is essential in creating a positive and inclusive work environment. Leaders can inspire and motivate their teams by developing their EI skills and cultivating a sense of belonging and support. Additionally, organizations can implement conflict resolution training programs emphasizing EI, equipping employees with the tools to manage conflicts constructively and build stronger relationships.

By prioritizing EI, organizations can create a culture where employees feel valued, motivated, and empowered to contribute their best. This, in turn, can lead to increased productivity, innovation, and overall organizational success.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the foundation of effective leadership. It empowers leaders to manage complex challenges, build strong relationships, and inspire others. This article explored the theoretical framework of EI, examined empirical evidence supporting its importance, and analyzed case studies illustrating its practical application of EI in leadership.

a. Key Findings

1. Theoretical frameworks - Various models of EI emphasize its importance for leadership, including self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship management, and motivation.
2. Empirical evidence - Research consistently demonstrates the positive relationship between EI and leadership effectiveness, supporting its role in inspiring followers, building relationships, and making informed decisions.

3. Case studies - Steve Jobs' and Mary Barra's case studies highlight the practical application of EI in leadership, demonstrating its impact on innovation, employee engagement, and organizational success.

b. Recommendations

1. Leadership development - Organizations should invest in EI training and development programs to equip leaders with the necessary skills.
2. Performance evaluations - EI should be incorporated into performance evaluations to assess and develop employees' EI competencies.
3. Organizational culture - Organizations should cultivate a culture that values and promotes emotional intelligence, emphasizing empathy, communication, and collaboration.
4. Individual development - Individuals can enhance their EI through self-reflection, training, and practice.

Leaders can create a more positive, inclusive, and effective work environment by understanding and developing emotional intelligence. EI is not just a soft skill but a critical competency that empowers leaders to navigate the challenges of today's complex world and achieve lasting success.

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