



Role Of Emotional Intelligence In Leadership Effectiveness And Employee Engagement

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Peer Review Information	Abstract
<i>Submission: 21 Jan 2021</i> <i>Revision: 05 Feb 2021</i> <i>Acceptance: 17 March 2021</i> Keywords <i>Emotional intelligence,</i> <i>Leadership effectiveness,</i> <i>Employee engagement;</i> <i>Leadership development,</i> <i>Human resource</i> <i>management</i>	Emotional intelligence (EI) has become an important construct in organizational behavior because leaders routinely manage emotions, relationships, conflict, communication, and employee expectations. This paper examines the role of EI in leadership effectiveness and employee engagement through a structured literature-review methodology. Peer-reviewed studies published from 1998 through 2021 and containing a DOI were considered, with emphasis on empirical studies, meta-analyses, and reviews linking EI with leadership, job attitudes, engagement, or performance. The literature indicates that EI is associated with leadership-related outcomes through mechanisms such as emotion regulation, empathy, relationship management, communication, and trust. Evidence also indicates that EI is related to employee engagement and work attitudes, although the strength of relationships varies by EI model, measurement approach, occupation, and organizational context. The review therefore treats EI as a useful leadership capability rather than as a standalone guarantee of effectiveness. The paper concludes with implications for leadership development, HR practices, employee development, and future research.

Introduction

Organizations increasingly expect leaders to achieve results while also maintaining constructive relationships with employees. These expectations make emotional processes relevant to leadership because leaders interpret emotions, regulate their own responses, respond to employee concerns, and influence the social climate of teams. Emotional intelligence is commonly described through abilities or competencies involving the perception, understanding, use, and regulation of emotion. Measurement approaches include ability-based, self-report, and mixed models (Joseph & Newman, 2010).

Early empirical work established a link between EI and leadership-related outcomes. Wong and Law (2002) reported that leaders' EI was

associated with satisfaction and extra-role behavior, while later meta-analytic research found relationships between EI and job performance and work attitudes (O'Boyle et al., 2011; Miao et al., 2017). Research focused specifically on engagement has also identified EI as a relevant individual resource, with facet-level EI explaining meaningful variance in employee engagement (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020).

Against this background, the present paper synthesizes evidence up to 2021 to answer three questions: (1) How does EI contribute to leadership effectiveness? (2) How is EI associated with employee engagement? and (3) What methodological and practical implications follow for HRM and leadership development?

Literature Review

EI can influence leadership through the quality of interpersonal processes. Leaders with stronger emotion-related capabilities may recognize emotional cues, regulate reactions under pressure, communicate with greater sensitivity, and adapt their behavior to the needs of followers. Wong and Law (2002) found that leader EI was associated with leader satisfaction and extra-role behavior, providing an early empirical basis for linking EI to leadership outcomes. McCleskey (2014), in a review of EI and leadership research, noted both the growth of the field and continuing debate over definitions and measurement.

Meta-analytic evidence provides a broader perspective. Miao, Humphrey, and Qian (2018a) reported a positive relationship between EI and authentic leadership, while their cross-cultural meta-analysis found that leader EI was related to subordinate task performance and organizational citizenship behavior, with relationship strength varying across cultural contexts (Miao et al., 2018b). These findings suggest that EI may operate partly through leader-follower relationships and social exchange processes.

Employee engagement refers broadly to a positive, work-related state characterized by energy, dedication, and involvement. EI may support engagement by helping employees understand and manage their own emotions, sustain positive interpersonal relationships, and cope with work demands. Barreiro and Treglown (2020) examined 306 employees and found that specific trait-EI facets predicted engagement,

with a facet-level approach explaining substantially more variance than a global EI representation.

Evidence from organizational settings also points to contextual influences. Alotaibi and Winterton (2020) found significant relationships among EI, empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, and work engagement in a private-hospital context, while the direct EI-to-engagement relationship was not uniformly significant. Similarly, a 2021 study by Miao, Humphrey, and Qian examined EI and work engagement using a serial mediation framework involving perceived organizational support and psychological capital. Such findings indicate that EI may support engagement indirectly through personal and organizational resources rather than operating as a simple direct cause.

Three theoretical ideas support the framework. First, the ability model views EI as a set of emotion-related information-processing abilities. Second, the cascading model proposed by Joseph and Newman (2010) suggests that emotion perception, understanding, and regulation can progressively contribute to work performance. Third, resource-based perspectives imply that emotional capabilities can help employees and leaders mobilize psychological resources when dealing with demanding social situations. Together, these perspectives support a model in which EI contributes to leadership behavior, relationship quality, and engagement while organizational context shapes the strength of these relationships.

Table 1. Selected Evidence on EI, Leadership and Engagement

Study	Focus	Key evidence	DOI
Wong & Law (2002)	Leader/follower EI	Leader EI linked with satisfaction and extra-role behavior.	10.1016/S1048-9843(02)00099-1
O'Boyle et al. (2011)	EI & job performance	Meta-analysis found corrected correlations of about .24-.30 across EI streams.	10.1002/job.714
Miao et al. (2017)	EI & work attitudes	EI significantly related to job satisfaction and other work attitudes.	10.1111/joop.12167
Miao et al. (2018b)	Leader EI	Leader EI related to subordinate performance and OCB; culture moderated relationships.	10.1016/j.jwb.2018.01.003
Barreiro & Treglown (2020)	EI engagement &	Specific trait-EI facets predicted employee engagement.	10.1016/j.paid.2020.109892

Miao et al. (2021)	EI & work engagement	Tested serial pathways involving organizational support and psychological capital.	10.1108/JOEPP-02-2021-0025
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Methodology

1. Research Design

This paper adopts a structured literature-review design rather than an original employee survey. The approach was selected because the research question concerns the accumulated evidence on EI, leadership effectiveness, and employee engagement. The review emphasizes peer-

reviewed journal articles published from 1998 to 2021, with priority given to empirical studies, systematic/meta-analytic studies, and theoretically important reviews. Only studies with a traceable DOI were retained for the reference list.

2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Literature Review

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication period	1998–2021	Studies outside the defined period
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Unverified web pages, dissertations, non-scholarly commentary
Core variables	EI plus leadership, engagement, job attitudes, performance or related mechanisms	Studies without a meaningful EI/workplace link
Identification	DOI available and bibliographic details verifiable	References without sufficient bibliographic information
Evidence type	Empirical studies, meta-analyses, structured reviews	Purely promotional material

3. Analytical Procedure

Studies were organized into four thematic categories: (1) EI measurement and conceptual foundations; (2) EI and leadership effectiveness; (3) EI and employee engagement/work attitudes; and (4) contextual and mediating mechanisms. Findings were compared for direction of association, outcome type, methodological strength, and contextual conditions. Meta-analytic evidence was given

greater interpretive weight than isolated single-sample findings because it integrates results across studies.

Because this is a literature-based paper, the Results section reports a thematic synthesis of published evidence rather than invented survey statistics. This distinction is important: no original respondents, questionnaire responses, or inferential tests were conducted for this paper.



Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework linking emotional intelligence, leadership effectiveness and employee engagement.

4. Conceptual Propositions

P1: Higher EI is positively associated with leadership effectiveness through improved emotion regulation, communication, empathy, and relationship management.

P2: Leadership behaviors supported by EI are positively associated with employee engagement through trust, psychological support, and constructive interpersonal relationships.

P3: Organizational resources and contextual factors can mediate or moderate the relationship between EI and employee engagement.

Results

The structured synthesis indicates a consistent but context-dependent role for EI. The evidence is summarized across four themes: leadership behavior, employee engagement, work attitudes/performance, and contextual mechanisms.

EI and Leadership Effectiveness

Across the literature, EI is most consistently connected with leadership effectiveness through interpersonal and self-management processes. Wong and Law (2002) linked leader EI with satisfaction and extra-role behavior. Later evidence connected EI with authentic leadership (Miao et al., 2018a) and with subordinate task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Miao et al., 2018b). These findings

support the proposition that EI is relevant to how leaders influence followers, especially in socially complex situations.

EI and Employee Engagement

Evidence for engagement is also positive but less uniform. Barreiro and Treglown (2020) showed that individual EI facets can predict engagement, indicating that some emotional competencies may matter more than a single global EI score. Miao et al. (2021) further examined serial pathways involving perceived organizational support and psychological capital, reinforcing the view that the EI–engagement relationship may operate through intermediate personal and contextual resources. Alotaibi and Winterton (2020) similarly highlighted the importance of empowering leadership and psychological empowerment.

EI, Work Attitudes and Performance

Meta-analytic findings provide additional support for the practical relevance of EI. Miao et al. (2017) found significant relationships between EI and work attitudes, while O'Boyle et al. (2011) reported corrected correlations between EI and job performance across three major EI measurement streams. Joseph and Newman (2010) proposed a cascading process in which emotion perception and understanding precede effective emotion regulation, which in turn contributes to job performance.

Table 2. Thematic Results of the Literature Synthesis

Theme	Observed pattern	HR/leadership implication
Self-management	EI supports emotion recognition and regulation.	Training can emphasize reflection, regulation and response control.
Relationship management	EI is linked with communication, empathy and social outcomes.	Leaders can develop listening, feedback and conflict skills.
Leadership effectiveness	Leader EI is associated with leadership and follower outcomes.	Include EI-related competencies in leadership development.
Employee engagement	EI facets and contextual resources relate to engagement.	Combine EI development with supportive HR and leadership practices.
Context	Culture, job demands and organizational support can change relationship strength.	Avoid one-size-fits-all EI interventions.

Measurement and Methodological Findings

An important result of the review is methodological heterogeneity. EI has been measured as an ability, self-report construct, or mixed competency model. Schutte et al. (1998) demonstrated the development and validation of a self-report measure, whereas later research has used multiple approaches. O'Boyle et al. (2011) explicitly distinguished three EI streams in their meta-analysis. Therefore, apparently different

findings may partly reflect differences in construct definition and measurement.

Discussion

The findings support a model in which EI is relevant to leadership effectiveness because leadership is partly an emotional and relational process. Leaders who recognize emotions and regulate their responses may be better positioned to communicate during conflict,

provide support, and sustain constructive relationships. However, the literature does not justify treating EI as a single universal predictor of leadership success. McCleskey (2014) highlighted conceptual and measurement controversies, and the meta-analytic literature shows that effect sizes and incremental validity depend on how EI is defined and measured.

For employee engagement, the evidence suggests that EI can operate as a personal resource, while organizational support, empowerment, job resources, and leadership style shape whether that resource translates into engagement. This interpretation is consistent with Barreiro and Treglown (2020), Alotaibi and Winterton (2020), and Miao et al. (2021). In practical terms, organizations may therefore benefit from combining EI-oriented leadership development with supportive HRM systems rather than relying on EI training alone.

Implications for Human Resource Management

First, HR departments can incorporate EI-related competencies into leadership-development programs, especially self-awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, active listening, and conflict management. Second, recruitment and promotion decisions should avoid using EI as the sole criterion; role requirements, cognitive skills, technical competence, personality, and organizational context also matter. Third, employee-engagement initiatives should address both individual capabilities and job resources. Fourth, managers can use coaching and feedback to strengthen emotional competencies over time.

Limitations

This paper is limited by its literature-based design and the 2021 publication cutoff requested for the review. It does not generate primary data and therefore cannot establish causal effects. The literature also contains differences in EI definitions, instruments, occupational settings, cultures, and outcome measures. Consequently, relationships identified in published studies should not be interpreted as identical across all organizations.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence has a meaningful place in the study of leadership effectiveness and employee engagement. The reviewed evidence indicates that EI is associated with leadership behaviors, work attitudes, performance-related outcomes, and employee engagement, with relationships often operating through interpersonal processes and contextual

resources. The strongest methodological implication is that EI should be treated as a multidimensional construct and measured carefully. For HRM, EI development is most defensible when integrated with leadership development, employee support, empowerment, and broader organizational practices. Future research should use longitudinal and multi-source designs, distinguish EI models clearly, and test how organizational context changes the EI-leadership-engagement pathway.

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