

# A Qualitative Analysis on "The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Effective Leadership"

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#### Abstract:

Importance of the studies in social sciences are growing day by day, so is the study in topics such as emotional intelligence and leadership. Emotional intelligence and its impact on leadership is one of the widely discussed subjects in the modern times. This thesis is an attempt to comprehend, from individuals in leadership positions, the perception of emotional intelligence and the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership.

The article consists of literature on background and evolution of emotional intelligence, its components, and its relationship with leadership as its theoretical framework. A qualitative approach was applied for the purpose of this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with leaders from different industries to gather rich text data. Such data were initially coded, and themes were generated from them using the technique of thematic analysis.

The two research questions of this study have been answered in the form of themes of their own. Factors such as self-awareness, empathy, communication, relationship management and so on are the topics of significant findings of this study.

#### Key words

Emotional intelligence, emotions, empathy, leadership, self-awareness, self-management, thematic analysis.

#### DOI: 10.48047/ecb/2023.12.9.244

#### Introduction:

The title of this study is "Importance of emotional intelligence in leadership". As the title suggests, this thesis is an attempt to study the impact of emotional intelligence in leadership. My choice to conduct research in this topic is based on the interest in emotional intelligence and leadership that was derived from the numerous course contents on leadership during the degree programme.

The term 'emotional intelligence' (EI) is quite often used in the modern times and is seen as an important element in many aspects of life, whether it be personal or professional. Emotional intelligence, in simple words, can be understood as the ability to manage emotions effectively. Emotions are vital components of human lives and managing them properly often seems to be difficult functions for most of us. Their effective management is necessary for us to succeed in our personal, social and professional relationships.

Leadership, simply understanding, is the act of leading a group of people or an entity. A leader needs to inspire others to do their job in order to achieve the set goals. It is a difficult task to become a leader as it requires a variety of qualities and skills such as integrity, awareness, communication, empathy and so on. The work of the leader is quite hectic and stressful and because of these reasons the importance of emotional intelligence is vastly growing among the established and aspiring leaders.

The aim of this study is to explore the impact of emotional intelligence on leadership. The research is an attempt to understand the connection between emotional intelligence and leadership. Understanding the viewpoints of different leaders on emotional intelligence and its importance in leadership are the primary objectives of this thesis.

This study is guided by following research questions that will facilitate in achieving the aim of the study: What is emotional intelligence? and Why is emotional intelligence important for leadership?

Theoretical part is included to explain about literature background of the topic. The theory deals with the background of emotional intelligence and leadership, their development throughout the history, the aspects of emotional intelligence, and different types of leadership styles. Literature relating to the connection between emotional intelligence and leadership is explored and the importance of EI on leadership is also studied as a part of the theory. Scientific research articles were searched on Research Gate, Google Scholar, and other available platforms.

This article is the result of a qualitative study undertaken to identify the influence of emotional intelligence on the leadership. Interview based questions are used as research tools in this thesis. An interview guide consisting of the semi-structured interview questions was prepared and interviews were conducted in accordance with the interview guide. The primary data collection was done through these interviews which were then analysed using the technique of 'thematic analysis' to find the results of the study. This study will help to understand the effects of emotional intelligence on leadership and will provide information regarding the use of emotional intelligence in the workplace.

# Background

Emotional intelligence, often understood as EI or EQ, is a set of skills relating to emotional and social nature, that influence people's perception and expression of themselves. Emotional intelligence (EI) is getting high attention in research field from the last decade. It is the concept that is new in both the fields of management and psychology. (Lubbadeh 2020.) The book 'Emotional Intelligence' by Daniel Goleman, published in 1995, is considered a milestone in the field of EI. After this book came out, it grabbed the attention of many researchers in different fields. In this very book, Goleman indicated that a person's intelligence quotient (IQ) is responsible for providing only 20% of the factors contributing towards success in life while emotional intelligence (EI) is an important part of remaining 80%. (Lubbadeh 2020). Joseph and Newman have also furthered that the allure of EI as a crucial base for success in performing a job has been growing (Guillen & Florent-Treacy 2011).

Many studies have indicated that there is a relation between leadership and emotional intelligence. The relationship has often been stressed in abilities of empathic listening, resonance, and self-awareness (Guillen & Florent-Treacy 2011). Similarly, Goleman has indicated in his writings that there is a common denominator in most of the highly effective leaders and that commonality is emotional intelligence. He even stated that technicalities and IQ are more of entry level prerequisites for leadership positions while EQ is 'sine qua non', i.e., it is an absolutely necessary condition. Goleman has further added that a person may possess intelligent ideas and critical thinking skills and may have been trained in the best possible manner, but without emotional intelligence, the person would still not become a great leader. (Ovans 2015.)

Emotional intelligence depicts the aptitude, capacity, skill, or self-perceived capability to recognise, evaluate and manage emotions of one's own, and also of the others, including the groups (Serrat 2017). Martinez refers to emotional intelligence as "an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressure" (Ahangar 2012). Individuals with high degree of EI are aware of themselves and are also able to sense others' emotions (Serrat 2017). EI is similarly perceived by Ilona Jerabek. She defines EI as people's self-awareness of their feelings and needs, the capability to identify them suitably, and to combine them with their own long-term personal needs as well as the needs and feelings of other people. (Berenson, Boyle & Weaver 2008.)

Robert K. Cooper defines EI as the ability to feel, comprehend and successfully apply the strength and wisdom of emotions as a basis for human energy, information, communication, and influence (Houston 2021). Similarly, Byron Stock has explained emotional intelligence as the inherent potential of sensing, utilizing, conveying, identifying, recollecting, learning from, coping with, comprehending, and explaining emotions (Tripathy 2018). Among other definitions, Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves describe EI as one's capacity to distinguish and comprehend emotions in oneself and others, and one's capability to apply that knowledge to handle behaviours and relationships (Tripathy 2018).

# **Components of emotional intelligence**

Daniel Goleman, a scholar on the field of emotional intelligence, first proposed 5 components of EI, namely, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (MindTools 2020). In the book 'The Emotionally

Intelligent Workplace' by Cary Cherniss and Daniel Goleman (2001), Goleman stated that the 5 components had been redesigned into 4 components, namely, selfawareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. The former two have been categorised as intrapersonal skills while the latter two have been characterised as interpersonal skills. (Smith 2002.) The following figure is the framework of emotional competencies proposed by Daniel Goleman.

	Self (Personal Competence)	Other (Societal Competence)	
<b>Recognition</b> Self -Awareness		Social Awareness	
	Emotional Self Awareness	Empathy	
	Accurate Self- Assessment	Organisational Awareness	
	Seld Confidence	Service Orientation	
Regulation	Self-Management	Relationship Management	
	Self - Control	Developing Others	
	Adaptability	Influence	
	Trust worthiness	Leadership	
	Achievement Drive	Conflict Management	
	Initiative	Change Catalyst	
	Conscientiousness	Building bonds	
		Teamwork and	
		Collaborations	

Self- awareness: Self-awareness is having a deep understanding of one's own strength, weakness, emotions, needs and desire. It simply means knowing self in the deeper level before trying to know everything else. People who assess their own self honestly are self-aware people. Self-awareness is often deemed as the most significant component of EI. It is a general consensus that individuals that are conscious of their emotions have the better ability to handle their own lives and they also learn to have faith in their gut feelings which helps them in making difficult decisions. (Hinds 2017.) 8 The self-awareness component consists of emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence (Serrat 2017). It involves tracking of different emotions and recognising them correctly. It also includes the acknowledgement of relationship between feelings and actions, and the comprehension of one's own strengths and limitations (Craig 2021). Individuals with the competence of self awareness are able to diagnose how their emotions influence their performance. They are able to reflect on their experiences, strengths, and limitations, and are also decisive. (Serrat 2017.)

**Self-management:** Self-management is another component of emotional intelligence where people work on themselves. Humans are made in such a way they cannot get away from their emotions but least can manage them. Goleman explains self-regulation is the inner conversation that frees people from being prisoners of their own feelings. Generally, people who are able to manage their

emotions have a better performance. It is because they have a clear thinking. (Hinds 2017.) Hinds further explains that to manage emotions is not to restrain or negate them but to understand them and use that understanding to make productive decisions. The elements of self-management include emotional selftrustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability. control. achievement drive/orientation, and initiative. The dimension of self-management incldues issues such as managing the feelings of impulse and distress, and demonstrating clarity of thoughts, composure and positivity in difficult circumsatnces. Similarly, fulfiling the commitments, being accountable for one's own actions, practicing ethical behaviors while fearlessly confronting the unethical ones, adapting according to the circumstances, flexibility, and looking for new ideas and perspectives are the subjects of self-management. (Serrat 2017.)

**Social awareness:** The dimension of social awareness in Goleman's emotional intelligence quadrant, consists of empathy, organizational awareness, and service (Kanesan & Fauzan 2019). Empathy simply means the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. It is the capacity to communicate and comprehend other person's emotional state. This ability is also often termed as "put oneself into another's shoes" which means to experience the emotions of another person within oneself. (Loannidou & Konstantikaki 9 2008.) In a nutshell, empathy means to recognise others' emotions, to understand the reasons behind them, and to be able to participate in someone's emotional experience without actually being a part of it (Loannidou & Konstantikaki 2008).

The elements of organizational awareness and service enhance an individual's competence to reward others' achievements and appreciate their strengths, provide insightful feedbacks, provide fitting assistance after perceiving the needs of customers, and look for ways to enhance customer satisfaction. For a leader, it is really important to have this characteristic. It gives new perspective to look at the situation from the other side and evaluate the situation better. Individuals with social awareness are good listeners and are aware of the emotional signals, are sensitive to the perspectives of other individuals, and are ready to help others with the understanding of their emotional needs and feelings. (Serrat 2017.)

**Relationship management:** Relationship management is an element of social competence proposed by Goleman. It is the ability of an individual to relate to others. The aspects such as developing others, influence, communication, conflict management, visionary leadership, building bonds, teamwork, collaboration, and catalyst for change are included in the dimensions of relationship management. (Cherniss & Goleman 2001.) Relationship management correlates with the other 3 components of emotional intelligence. When individuals are first able to understand and manage their own and others' emotions and are empathetic, then only they can build an effective relationship with others. (Cherniss & Goleman 2001.) A leader should always

be vocal and friendly at the same time. It is also about managing healthy relationship with all the team members (Hinds 2017). The individuals that have mastered the competence of relationship management are able to lead and inspire others with the use of variety of skills and tactics. They are also strong advocates of teamwork and collaboration and have the ability to resolve conflicts. (Riopel 2021.)

# Emotional intelligence in leadership

Leadership and emotional intelligence are getting more important due to competitive work environment and globalization of the companies. Global presence of the organization creates a pressure among employees to perform and sustain. Leaders have higher pressure to fulfil the owner's expectations and maintaining the employee's performance. (Dobre 2013.) Leaders must manage the conflicts and to solve the conflicts, emotional intelligence plays a very important role. Leaders must be able to detect the problem, conflicts, and issues and to identify a style which can resolve it (MindTools 2020). To maintain a healthy environment in the company, leaders must know how to handle their emotions and maintain an equilibrium among employees' behaviour and his own reaction (Barsade & O'Neill 2016).

Research has shown that EI has a positive impact on the different leadership styles specially in terms of understanding of and responding to a problem. impact of emotional intelligence has been observed in the Major transformational leadership style. In transformational leadership style, a leader works closely with employees and tries to understand their needs, motivate them, and encourage creativity. Researchers Bass and Avolio also mentioned that transformational leaders "motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often more than they thought possible. They set more challenging expectations and typically achieve higher performances". (Jyoti & Dev 2015.) The behaviour of these leaders revolves around motivating employees, encouraging intellectual thinking and individualized approach whereas in the transactional leadership styles, a transaction between leader and the colleague, followers and employees is observed. A non-transactional leader usually avoids being a part of the project which turns into wrong direction and they are weak in making decisions. (Hamstra, Yperen, Wisse & Sassenberg 2013.) Leadership outcomes apply to the additional effort workers are prepared to make in order to achieve defined targets (Abbas & Asghar 2010). Research has been done to show that emotional intelligence and leadership style are related. A good example is the research performed by the Johnson and Johnson Customer Care and Personal Care Community, which found that emotional intelligence is substantially greater for the top performing managers than for other managers (Cavallo & Brienza 2001).

# **Research Methodology:**

Since this research revolves around the concept of emotional intelligence, a component of social sciences, the use of qualitative approach is suitable. For this research, the perceptions and experiences of the respondents form the core of textual data that was gathered through semi-structured interviews.

#### Sampling

The sampling technique used for the purpose of this thesis is convenience sampling method. It is one of the nonrandom or non-probability sampling types. It is also sometimes known as haphazard or accidental sampling. This sampling technique is generally based on conditions such as ease of access to the respondents, availability of the respondents, respondent's readiness to participate and so on. (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim 2016.) I interviewed those individuals in leadership positions that were easily accessible and were willing to answer the interview questions.

#### Research tools and settings

I chose to implement semi-structured interviews as the research tool for this thesis. It is one of the widely used research tool in qualitative data collection. The semi-structured interview is appropriate for studying the qualitative topics (Rahman 2019). The semi-structured interviews use blend of openended and closed-ended questions. It is simple and flexible in nature and provides the opportunities to ask follow-up questions such as what, how and why. (Adams 2015.) The interviews were conducted one at a time in virtual settings. Due to the COVID-19 situation and also the lack of geographical proximities, the interviews could not be conducted face to face and hence had to be done through online channels such as Zoom and email. Due to the increase in studies that apply qualitative research methods in the last few decades, the use of email interviews is also growing. This type of interview is less structured when compared to the traditional method of structured interviewing. (Meho 2006.)

#### **Research procedure**

The foremost task before beginning this research was to make an interview guide that consisted of semi-structured questions. 6 different individuals in leadership positions in different industries were 17 chosen for the interview through convenience sampling. 3 of the interviews were recorded via Zoom while 3 of the interviewees decided to send their responses through email due to the time constraints. The interview responses received via email did not require to be transcribed as they were already in written form while the recorded interviews were transcribed and sent to the interviewees to confirm that the transcript truly reflected their views and opinions. The text data were then analysed using the technique of thematic analysis. Themes were derived from the analysis which are also the findings of this study. Following are the details of the interview participants.

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Interviewee	Industry/Profession	Position	Interview Mode
1.	Food & Beverages	Chairman	Online
2.	Education	Chairman	Face to face
3.	Retail Chain Store	Manager	Face to face
4.	Banking	Manager	Online
5.	Insurance	Manager	Online
6.	Manufacturing	Manager	Face to face

	Details	of the	interview	participants
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#### Thematic analysis

The technique of thematic analysis has been applied in this study to come up with the findings. In thematic analysis, the data collected from the interviewees is first transcribed into rich text data and such data is then used to generate themes. Thematic analysis systematically detects, manages, investigates, and reports the recurring and unique patterns in the dataset. The main idea in this analysis is to recognise commonalities in the data and deduce meanings from them. (Braun & Clarke 2012.) In the words of Braun and Clarke (2012), "thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into, patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset". The objective of thematic analysis is to recognise those patterns across the dataset that seem to have important or unique characteristics (Maguire & Delahunt 2017).

In this study, Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis procedure has been applied. 18 TABLE 3. Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis (adapted from Maguire & Delahunt 2017) The six steps include,

- 1. Become familiar with the data
- 2. Generate initial codes
- 3. Search for themes
- 4. Review themes
- 5. Define themes
- 6. Write-up

#### Reliability and validity:

In qualitative research, the core of reliability is the consistency in the analytical procedures that are applied in the research process (Noble & Smith 2015). The reliability in this qualitative study has been maintained by using the same replicative procedures in semi-structured interviews and their analysis. While preparing the semi-structured interview questions, the 'Handbook of practical program evaluation' (Adams 2015) was referred to.

Validity of a qualitative study depends on various factors such as choosing the appropriate methodology, sampling, and analysis techniques. It is also related to the validity of conclusions with respect to the sample population and

research context. (Golafshani 2003.) Semi-structured interview is one of the widely used data collection tools in qualitative study. Similarly, thematic analysis is an effective qualitative data analysis technique. They are valid methods and tools for the research. Furthermore, many years of experiences of the interviewees in the area of this research and also the process of member check, that is, checking and validating the interview transcripts by the respondents, adds to the validity of this study.

#### Ethical approval:

All the participants signed a consent form which mentioned that their participation is voluntary, and their identity remain confidential. The necessary degree of confidentiality has been maintained in this thesis work and the communication with all the related parties have been done with integrity and transparency.

# Findings

#### **Research Question-1: What is Emotional Intelligence?**

#### Understanding and managing emotions:

The leaders that were interviewed outlined the core of emotional intelligence as understanding and managing emotions of oneself and of the other team members. They stressed on the ability to control and manage emotions of themselves and their team in a positive approach.

The responses of the interviewees signify the understanding and managing of their own and others' emotions as the core of emotional intelligence. The phrases such as 'realizing emotions', 'managing emotions', and 'understanding emotions of others' are repeatedly found in the interview transcripts, which led me to include this theme in the findings.

#### Relationship management:

Even though the prospect of relationship management was not conveyed by all the interviewees, responses from 3 of them could not be totally ignored. They stressed on the use of emotional intelligence in managing relationships with their teammates and subordinates. Relationship management was also an important part of the answers from half o the interviewees when asked about their understanding of emotional intelligence. They expressed that emotional intelligence is the use of emotions in managing the personal, social and professional relationships.

# 2 Research question 2: Why is emotional intelligence important for leadership?

The answers to the research question 2 have been categorised into three themes. The themes indicate why emotional intelligence is an important trait

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Section A -Research paper

in leadership. The three themes are self-awareness and decision-making, increased empathy and decision-making, and effective communication and conflict management.

**Self-awareness and decision-making:** The interviewees articulated that emotional intelligence brings self-awareness in them and when they are emotionally intelligent, they can see the situations with more clarity and can understand the emotions of their team members. According to them, self-awareness helps them to make good judgement and is effective for the overall decision-making process.

**Increased empathy and relationship management:** The analysis of the rich textual data indicated that the leaders who feel more empathetic are able to understand their own emotions properly which helps them to accurately assess the emotional state of their team members as well. This helps them to build a connection, not only with their team members, but also with other co-workers and clients. The findings suggest that empathy is vital in managing relationships at the workplace. Empathy helps them to put themselves in somebody else's shoes hence driving them towards making more thorough and purposeful decisions.

**Effective communication and conflict management:** The respondents were of the opinion that possessing emotional intelligence helps in more effective communication. The leaders agreed that their emotional intelligence has helped them become a good communicator. The leaders consented that effective communication enhances the team's efficiency at work. Effective communication has facilitated them in uniting and motivating their teams and have also assisted in conflict resolution.

#### **Discussion:**

The understanding of emotional intelligence by the interviewed leaders most likely matched with the commonly used definitions of emotional intelligence. Serrat (2017) explains emotional intelligence as "the ability, capacity, skill, or self-perceived ability to identify, assess, and manage the emotions of one's self, of others, and of groups". In the interview responses, the interviewees portrayed emotional intelligence as the ability to understand and manage the emotions of themselves and of their team members. They also related emotional intelligence with the ability to manage relationships with their team. The findings of the study suggest that the leaders, even though working in different industries such as military, hospitality, cleaning, and businesses, have a similar understanding of emotional intelligence. The personality traits such as emotional stability and conscientiousness have been observed very important irrespective of the sector or position to which the individual belongs to (Hjalmarsson & Dåderman 2020).

Research question 2 of this study delves into understanding the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership. The findings were categorised into three

themes, namely, self-awareness and decision making, increased empathy and relationship management, and effective communication and conflict management. The interviewees' responses indicated that self-awareness and decision-making are closely related to each other while effective communication and conflict management also share a strong connection. The findings also implied a bond between increased empathy and relationship management.

### **Conclusion:**

The perception and understanding of emotional intelligence of 6 leaders operating in diverse industries have been expressed in these sections. Similarly, the question of why emotional intelligence is important for leadership has also been answered based on the responses of the interviewees. The core findings included that emotional intelligence is the ability to understand, manage and regulate the emotions of oneself and of the others and it is important for leadership for reasons such as self-awareness, decision making, increased empathy, relationship management, effective communication and conflict management.

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# **Interview Questions:**

- 1. What is emotional intelligence according to you?
- 2. How do you see yourself as a leader? (Self-awareness)
- 3. How much do you value emotional intelligence in your workplace and why?

4. Tell me about a time when your self-management/self-discipline was important to the outcome of your team. (Self-discipline)

5. Being a leader, how important is it to be empathetic and why? (empathy)

6. How do you approach to a situation when your team fails to meet the deadline? (positive outlook)

7. What was your biggest challenge starting in a leadership role? How did you adapt to this situation? (adaptability)

8. In what way do you think your presence influence your team? (Influence)

9. What kind of strategy do you use to motivate your team? (Achievement orientation)

10. What is the main factor behind an efficient teamwork? (Teamwork)

11. You've noticed that a team member is aggressive or arrogant toward the rest of the team. How would you approach this person? (conflict management)

12. If you can change one thing at your workplace to improve the emotional wellbeing of employees, what will you change?