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The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Enhancing Effective Leadership

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Abstract

In today's organizational context, leaders are expected not only to think logically but also to be emotionally attuned in managing workplace interactions. This study seeks to explore how emotional intelligence contributes to building effective leadership. Using a qualitative methodology, data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically. The results indicate that leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence are generally more capable of regulating emotions, fostering constructive workplace relationships, and cultivating a productive team environment. Emotional intelligence also plays a role in enhancing decision-making, resolving conflicts, and boosting team motivation. Within the Indonesian organizational culture, empathy and self-awareness emerge as vital components of effective leadership. Thus, enhancing emotional intelligence is a strategic effort in developing resilient, adaptable, and inspiring leaders.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Effective Leadership, Empathy, Self-Awareness, Organizational Culture

Introduction

The changing dynamics of organizations today require leaders not only to be proficient in making rational decisions but also to possess sensitivity toward the emotional aspects of workplace relationships. As workplace challenges become increasingly complex ranging from interpersonal conflicts and declining employee motivation to growing work pressure emotional intelligence is increasingly recognized as a crucial quality that a leader must have. In this context, the ability to understand and manage emotions, both one's own and those of others, becomes a significant added value in building effective leadership.

A number of studies have shown that leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence tend to foster more harmonious and productive working relationships. For example, research findings indicate that leaders who are able to recognize their own emotions and respond appropriately to the emotions of others are more likely to make wise decisions and facilitate healthy communication among team members. This is particularly important in work environments that demand collaboration and rapid adaptation to change (Fitriani, 2022; Haq, 2022).

In addition, an understanding of emotional values also plays a crucial role in helping leaders build a strong organizational culture that can withstand challenges, particularly when facing organizational pressures or dynamic policy changes. Several studies have even emphasized the role of emotional intelligence in strengthening transformational leadership styles leadership that is capable of inspiring, motivating, and empowering subordinates to optimally achieve shared goals (Haetami et al., 2023; Mulya et al., 2024).

However, upon closer examination, there are still gaps in previous studies, particularly in the local context. Most of the available literature tends to focus on theoretical aspects and has not sufficiently explored how emotional intelligence is implemented in day-to-day leadership practices especially within Indonesian organizational cultures, which have distinct characteristics in terms of communication, social relations, and hierarchy (Faridh et al., 2024). This highlights the need for more in-depth and contextual research to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Leaders in Indonesia, particularly in the education sector and social organizations, face a variety of unique challenges related to cultural norms, team emotional dynamics, and high professional demands. This is where emotional intelligence can play a vital role in helping leaders remain calm under pressure, show empathy toward their subordinates' conditions, and build trust an essential foundation for strong teamwork (Viera Valencia & Garcia Giraldo, 2019; Santoso, 2023; Abi, 2019).

Furthermore, recent literature highlights that empathy and self-awareness are two key dimensions of emotional intelligence that are closely linked to leadership effectiveness. The ability to understand others' feelings, while simultaneously managing one's own emotions wisely, has become a defining trait of successful leaders across various sectors (Laelawati, 2025). Given the significance of this role, the present study aims to explore more deeply how emotional intelligence can be translated into real and impactful leadership practices. The main focus of this research is to examine how leaders utilize emotional aspects in managing teams, making decisions, and creating a healthy and productive work climate.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach, as its primary focus is to explore the meaning and personal experiences of leaders regarding the role of emotional intelligence in their daily activities. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to understand how leaders respond to various emotional situations and how these responses influence their effectiveness in leading. Rather than relying on numbers or statistics, the qualitative approach emphasizes narratives, stories, and perceptions from individuals who are directly involved in leadership practices (Nea, 2024). The participants in this study were selected purposively, meaning they were chosen based on specific criteria deemed relevant to the objectives of the study. These criteria include having at least three years of leadership experience, holding a relatively strategic position within the organizational structure, and being recognized for strong interpersonal relationship skills by their work environment. The number of informants interviewed was not predetermined; instead, data collection continued until no new information emerged or until the data was considered sufficiently representative (Setiawan et al., 2022). Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide to ensure that the conversation remained focused while also being flexible enough to naturally explore the informants' personal experiences. These interviews delved into how leaders cope with emotional pressure, how they interact with their teams, and how emotional intelligence assists them in decision-making and influences team performance. In addition to interviews, the researcher also conducted distant observations and utilized available documents as supplementary data sources (Santoso,

2023). To analyze the collected information, the researcher employed a thematic analysis approach. This process involved thoroughly rereading the interview transcripts, identifying emerging patterns, organizing key themes, and interpreting the meaning of each theme. Through this method, the researcher was able to uncover both a general overview and in-depth insights into how emotional intelligence functions within leadership practices. Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were strictly upheld. The identities of the informants were kept confidential, and their participation was based entirely on informed consent. Informants were also given full freedom to discontinue the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable (Mulya et al., 2024). Through this approach, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of emotional intelligence in shaping effective and influential leadership styles.

Results and Discussion

Based on a number of analyzed studies, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence (EQ) plays a crucial role in supporting a leader's effectiveness in carrying out their duties. Leaders with high levels of EQ tend to be more capable of regulating their own emotions and understanding the feelings of others, building harmonious relationships with team members, and demonstrating strong communication and decision-making skills.

Research conducted by Rakhmaniar (2023) supports this, showing that emotional intelligence ($B = 0.568$, $p < 0.001$) has a significant impact on leadership effectiveness. In the regression model used, it was explained that 67.2% of the variation in leadership effectiveness is influenced by EQ and communication efficacy (Rakhmaniar, 2023). These findings emphasize that mastery of EQ is far more critical than merely having technical or cognitive skills in the context of leadership.

In line with these findings, a systematic literature review by Sintya and colleagues (2023) revealed that individuals with high emotional intelligence possess greater abilities in conflict resolution, sound decision-making, and fostering healthy workplace relationships. EQ is also closely associated with transformational and servant leadership styles both of which are known to be effective in empowering and motivating teams (Sintya et al., 2023).

A qualitative study by Fahrudin (2024), conducted in an educational setting, provides a concrete example of a foundation leader applying emotional intelligence in their role. The leader demonstrated self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience under pressure reflecting the practical application of emotional intelligence in everyday organizational life (Fahrudin, 2024).

Similar findings were also revealed by Kurnia et al. (2022), who studied the context of primary education and found that emotional intelligence influences the work climate and stress management within school environments. Thus, EQ not only supports leadership effectiveness but also fosters a conducive and productive workplace atmosphere (Muhammad Ade Kurnia, Siti Hasnah, Muhammad Subhan Iswahyudi, 2022). Meanwhile, in the business sector, a study by Haq & Dhana (2022) showed that EQ significantly contributes to leadership quality, employee motivation, and the integration of work quality particularly in the consulting services industry. This demonstrates that emotional




intelligence is highly relevant not only in social interactions but also in achieving an organization's strategic goals (Haq, 2022).

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence (EQ) plays a significant role in fostering effective leadership across educational, social, and business settings. Leaders who possess the ability to recognize and manage emotions both their own and those of others tend to build more constructive working relationships, make wise decisions, and create a synergistic and productive work environment. A number of research findings further reinforce that EQ is closely linked to leadership capabilities, particularly in managing pressure, communicating effectively, and providing motivational support to their teams. In the context of Indonesia's work culture which is characterized by distinctive patterns of communication and social structure the application of emotional intelligence in leadership becomes increasingly relevant. This study highlights the importance of adopting a more contextual approach in understanding and developing EQ-based leadership. Elements such as empathy, self-awareness, and the ability to remain emotionally stable have proven to be essential foundations for resilient and inspiring leaders. Therefore, it can be concluded that enhancing a leader's emotional capabilities is a vital strategy for strengthening leadership quality and fostering a healthy, adaptive work environment that is oriented toward achieving optimal team performance.

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