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Original Article

Assessing the Role of Emotional Intelligence in Effective Leadership: A Case Study in Vietnam

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Abstract: In recent years, leadership has emerged as a pivotal factor influencing organizational success, particularly in dynamic and complex environments. Within this context, emotional intelligence (EI) has gained increasing attention as a critical attribute of effective leaders. This study aims to assess the role of emotional intelligence in effective leadership through a case study in Vietnam, a country undergoing rapid economic and organizational transformation. Drawing on a quantitative survey conducted among 222 Vietnamese professionals across various sectors, the research explores how dimensions of EI, such as self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation, correlate with perceived leadership effectiveness. Findings indicate that leaders with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to inspire trust, manage team dynamics efficiently, and navigate interpersonal challenges. The results underscore the growing importance of emotional competencies in leadership development, especially in culturally diverse and transitional economies like Vietnam. This study contributes to the expanding literature on EI by offering localized insights and practical implications for leadership training and organizational policy.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, Vietnam.

I. INTRODUCTION

In an ever-evolving world of organizational management, the ability to lead well goes beyond technical competence and cognitive intelligence. Researchers and practitioners are increasingly recognizing emotional intelligence (EI) as a factor in leadership success. Originally described by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and later popularized by Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is the ability to detect, understand, manage, and adjust emotions. Emotional intelligence deals with how to manage emotions, one's own and others' emotions, rather than focusing on traditional concepts of intelligence that encompass logic, reasoning, and problem solving; or, in other words, intelligence is predicated on interpersonal skills and abilities that help one navigate through the complexities of human relations in organizations and management.

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) has gained importance in today's businesses as a vital competency for effective leadership. Emotional intelligence was initially described by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as the ability to identify, understand, regulate, and control one's own emotions as well as those of others. Goleman (1998) elaborated on this framework, including the following five domains: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Each domain supports the success of leaders in different ways. A broad and expanding literature base has provided evidence that emotional intelligence has significant effects on leadership effectiveness. For instance, Barling et al. (2000) showed that EI was positively linked to leader transformational leadership behaviours. Wong and Law's (2002) study further supported this assertion in that follower and leader EI was positively related to job satisfaction and team performance.

Self-awareness has been noted to be critical for good self-regulation and relationships with other people (Goleman, 1998). As an additional element of emotional intelligence (EI), empathy is useful for resolving conflicts, improving communication, and enhancing teamwork (Boyatzis, 2008). Social skills, or the ability to influence and build relationships with others, are also valuable to a leader in motivating and mobilizing others toward shared outcomes. Some research has noted there are variances in that the dimensions of EI can have unequal influences on leadership outcomes. Social or relation-oriented dimensions such as empathy and communication consistently link to leadership outcomes, whereas self-regulation and motivation have less direct or less consistent effects (Mayer et al., 2004). This difference illustrates the need for research in the context of leadership to better examine how systems of EI contribute to leader effectiveness.

Like emotional intelligence itself, leadership is inherently a relational process that includes important aspects, such as communication, empathy, emotional regulation, and adaptability to change. Leaders need to exercise these skills across their work to develop strategic visions, influence, motivate and emotionally engage their followers. In high-pressure, ever-changing environments, EI also helps leaders manage stress, help others resolve conflicts, and support a more collaborative organizational



culture. The implication is that EI is not just a useful skill to have but an essential ability that has an intentional impact on the effectiveness of leaders.

Although the existing research literature provides a great deal of theoretical justification for the influence of emotional intelligence (EI) on leadership, there is still a need for empirical research to substantiate these claims in particular organizations. It is important to note that a number of studies have reported that an emotionally intelligent leader demonstrates higher transformational leadership behaviors, has happier, more satisfied teams, and is better able to manage change and uncertainty (Barling et al., 2000; Wong & Law, 2002). However, there is a need for data specific to a particular context looking at self-reported EI competencies in relation to the perception of leadership in practice. A structured survey was used to acquire empirical evidence of EI in leadership among 222 individuals who had held or were in a leadership role in organizations. The research utilized a motivated self-assessment tool with eight questions to identify key dimensions of emotional intelligence in relation to leadership: self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, adaptability, relationship management and inspirational communication.

As the study seeks to analyze the responses to these items, the study will gain deeper insights into what EI-related traits are recognized and used by leaders, as well as the relationships with leadership effectiveness. The study will contribute to an expanding body of empirical literature as it relates to the importance of developing EI and leadership. Further, it entails actionable implications for organizational practitioners, particularly human resource professionals and leadership coaches, who are expected to develop EI with leadership as a competitive advantage in an unstable and emotionally complex working environment.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to explore the predictive relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness. This approach was selected to allow for standardized measurement and statistical inference based on self-reported data. The study sample consisted of 222 individuals voluntarily completing the questionnaire without incentives. No personally identifiable information was collected, and responses were kept confidential.

The research instrument was a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 18 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). These items were designed to measure the five key domains of emotional intelligence based on Goleman's (1998) framework:

Self-Awareness (e.g., "I understand the impact of my emotions on my work performance")

Self-Regulation (e.g., "I stay calm and focused under pressure")

Motivation (e.g., "I remain optimistic even when faced with setbacks")

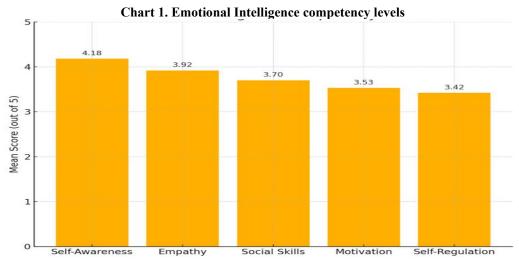
Empathy (e.g., "I take time to understand others' perspectives before making decisions")

Social Skills (e.g., "I build positive relationships with my team members")

Internal consistency reliability for the 18-item scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of $\alpha = 0.91$, indicating excellent internal consistency. Descriptive statistics were computed for each of the 18 items and grouped into five subscales. Correlation analysis (Pearson's r) was used to analyze the relationships between the EI dimensions and leadership effectiveness. Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine which subscales were significant predictors of leadership effectiveness. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on survey responses from 222 responders, the following five emotional intelligence (EI) subscales were analyzed: Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, Empathy, and Social Skills. These subscales are considered foundational to effective leadership, and their descriptive statistics provide insights into participants' emotional competencies.



Source: Survey result

- 1. Self-Awareness: The self-awareness subscale received the highest rating, indicating that participants feel confident in recognizing and understanding their own emotions. Self-awareness is recognized in the literature as a key component of emotionally intelligent leadership. Leaders who are self-aware are better able to regulate their actions and respond to challenges in a socially aware manner.
- 2. Empathy: The strength of the rating for empathy indicates that participants generally feel that they are aware of the emotions of others, an important trait to develop as building trust, managing disagreements, and motivating a team are all based on understanding others. Empathetic leaders are seen as more approachable and supportive.
- 3. Social Skills: Participants rated their social skills in a moderate range. Participants perceived themselves as possessing a reasonable degree of competence in the areas of relationship building, communication and teamwork. While not the highest of the four, participants were confident they could manage interpersonal relationships as part of their leadership experience, a critical competency of successful leaders.
- 4. Motivation: Motivation was rated slightly lower than the other three subscales, which suggests variability as their internal drive and commitment towards long-term goals could not have been equally strong for all participants. Leaders with strong emotional intelligence tend to have a high degree of optimism and perseverance, an important trait when setbacks occur. Future developmental opportunities could stem from this point by addressing ways to improve resilience and long-term commitment to their goals.
- 5. Self-regulation: This subscale recorded the lowest mean score and indicates a likely challenge for participants around controlling emotional impulses, remaining calm under pressure, or being flexible to changes. Self-regulation is a foundation for leadership in high-stress situations, and it suggests an opportunity for growth, particularly for leadership development programs. The search analysis of data also indicates that the participants are generally strong at self-awareness and empathy to help understand self and others. However, the comparatively lower scores in self-regulation and motivation may hinder their ability to lead effectively under pressure or through long-term organizational change. The assessment of EI (emotional intelligence) competency levels highlights the patterns of self-perceived emotional abilities of participants as it relates to leading. Out of the five EI domains: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills, self-awareness had the highest mean score (M = 4.18), which indicates that many people in the sample are comfortable with recognizing and understanding their own emotions. Further, it corroborates with the existing literature, establishing self-awareness as fundamental to emotional competence and self-management (Goleman, 1998).

Empathy (M = 3.92) and social skills (M = 3.70) followed closely as good competencies. These two competencies are significant for leaders who lead teams, problem-solve, and engage in collaborative work. This suggests participants are generally tuned in to the feelings of others and can form positive professional relationships.

Conversely, motivation (M = 3.53) and self-regulation (M = 3.42) were the lowest scores. This may indicate difficulties with emotional control and maintaining a positive rationale in high-stress or changing contexts. Since many aspects of leadership involve managing uncertainty and stressful situations, this finding emphasizes the need for development in this area. Leaders who struggle with emotional regulation may experience trouble with decision-making, team morale, and handling conflict.

Overall, the data indicates that while participants perceive they possess good emotional awareness and relational skills, they may need help managing their own emotional reactions, especially in high-stress contexts. This information helps in

formulating precise training for leaders, with an emphasis on building resilience workouts focused on adaptability and impulse control. These findings also support the premise that strong leadership is not just about having technical expertise but also relies heavily on the subtleties of one's emotional competencies.

Table 1. Regression Summary Table

EI Subscale	Coefficient (B)	p-value	Significance
Self-Awareness	0.2775	0.000	Significant
Self-Regulation	-0.0945	0.098	Not Significant
Motivation	0.1185	0.055	Marginal
Empathy	0.2318	0.001	Significant
Social Skills	0.3435	0.000	Significant

Source: Authors' self-compiled

Important new information is provided by the multiple linear regression analysis in this study regarding the prediction of self-rated leadership effectiveness by Emotional Intelligence (EI) subscales. The model demonstrated a medium amount of explanatory power with an R2 value of 0.50; R2 explains 50% of the variance in leadership effectiveness. The regression coefficients and significance levels for each EI subscale have significant theoretical and practical implications.

The most significant and strongest predictor of leadership performance was social skills. For Social Skills, the regression coefficient for the model was B = 0.3435 (p < 0.001). This finding points directly to the importance of interpersonal competence in a leadership role. Social skills involve supervisor abilities such as influence, teamwork, conflict resolution, and transparent communication skills - all relevant to getting people moving, resolving disagreements, and devising a strategy for teamwork. Also, with respect to the power of predictive accounting for leadership effectiveness, it is consistent with the model of Goleman (1998) and with prior empirical studies demonstrating the importance of social-emotional competencies in effective leadership (Wong&Law, 2002).

Additionally, Self-Awareness has a significant positive relationship with leadership effectiveness (B = 0.2775, p < 0.001) and also reflects the role of self-awareness as a basis of emotional regulation, authentic behavior, and making emotionally intelligent decisions. Leaders that understand their emotional tendencies are well-positioned to not only acknowledge the impact of their behavior on others but to act accordingly with organizational values. Self-aware leaders can also understand feedback and focus on personal growth, both important characteristics for longevity in a leadership role.

Empathy, with a coefficient of B = 0.2318 (p = 0.001), was another significant predictor. This finding confirms that emotionally intelligent leaders are required to understand themselves and know how to meaningfully relate to others. Empathy allows leaders to identify emotional cues that team members possess, mold their communication styles to each member, and, in some cases, provide support. Empathetic leaders are more willing to be inclusive, are better listeners, and are more trustworthy, all critical elements in a diverse, multi-faceted organizational context.

Leadership effectiveness had a marginally significant relationship with Motivation (B=0.1185; p=0.055). This indicates a potential effect of motivation on leadership effectiveness but did not reach the 0.05 threshold for statistical significance. Motivation remains conceptually important. Leaders who are intrinsically motivated probably have a greater tendency to persist, have a high goal orientation, and are optimistic—all original advantages when dealing with organizational change or uncertainty. The marginal outcome could illustrate either the measurement difficulties we experienced or variability in definitions of motivation and how it was experienced by participants.

Lastly, Self-Regulation had a negative, albeit non-significant coefficient (B=-0.0945; p=0.098). This is particularly surprising since self-regulation is typically considered one of the primary components of emotional intelligence. One conceivable explanation is that while self-regulation may be requisite for personal equilibrium, this is less visible or directly affects how the participant was perceived or self-perceived as a leader. Another explanation is that diminished variance in responses or social desirability inhibited the effect they perceived. Perhaps future studies using behavioral assessments or third-party assessments could clarify the role of self-regulation in leadership.

In summary, the regression analysis suggests that interpersonal emotional skills, in particular social skills, empathy, and self-awareness, are the best predictors of leadership effectiveness in this sample. Internal regulation and drive (self-regulation and drive) are conceptually important, but in this sample, their contribution to prediction was much less direct. These results suggest executive coaching should simply refocus relationship building, emotional understanding, and interpersonal communication. Finding new methods to support emotional regulation and motivation in a high-stress environment is also critical.

Table 2. Correlation of EI Subscales and Leadership Effectiveness

EI Subscale	Correlation (r)	Strength
Social Skills	0.63	Strong
Empathy	0.57	Strong
Self-Awareness	0.53	Moderate-Strong
Motivation	0.50	Moderate
Self-Regulation	0.38	Moderate-Weak

Source: Authors' self-complied

The findings suggest that while all subscales showed a positive relationship with leadership effectiveness, interpersonal areas such as social skills and empathy had the strongest relationships.

Social Skills and Leadership Effectiveness: Social skills are the ability to manage relationships, influence other people, and manage team processes. It had the strongest correlation with leadership effectiveness (r = 0.63), providing support for Goleman's (1998) assertion that relationship management is a key leadership skill. To the extent that leaders possess good social skills, are able to motivate, resolve conflicts, and build cohesive teams, they create perceptions of effective leadership. This can be considered increasingly important in today's organizations, where collaborative decision-making and team-based environments are prevalent. The strong correlation may also imply that leadership is not about doing the work, but rather how the leader is perceived in terms of their communication, engagement, and whether they earn trust with the team. Social skills allow leaders to create optimal climates where others are more willing to align their goals with those of the leader's organization.

Empathy and Leadership Effectiveness: Empathy was identified as having a strong relationship with leadership effectiveness (r = 0.57). Please note that empathy is the ability to perceive and respond to people's feelings. Empathy also allows participants to perceive verbal and non-verbal indicators of emotion. When leaders are empathetic, they can identify what is happening in team dynamics and respond effectively to individual team members' issues. This attunement to nuance builds trust and psychological safety. This, in turn, influences employee engagement and team performance (Boyatzis, 2008). In a leadership context, empathy can facilitate more inclusive (input from every team member) decision-making, enhance employee satisfaction, and contribute to effective conflict resolution. Empathy also enables leaders to adjust their communication style; rather than having a single style, leaders have an appropriate emotional response depending on the emotional state of others. Overall, the strength of this correlation gives significant weight to the idea that leadership is indeed relational in nature and that effectively emotionally connecting with others is foundational to influencing others effectively.

Self-Awareness and Leadership Effectiveness: Self-awareness showed a moderate to strong correlation with leadership effectiveness (r = 0.53). This sub-scale shows the extent to which a person understands the emotions they are feeling, their strengths and weaknesses, and how their behavior impacts others. Self-aware leaders are more likely to be authentic, take accountability for their decisions, and think clearly under pressure. Self-awareness means a person can self-correct and be open to feedback while mobilising their actions in alignment with core values and leadership objectives. This is important for credibility and consistency in leadership. In addition, self-awareness is the first step to developing many of the other dimensions of EI, including self-regulation and empathy, so it is a prerequisite.

Motivation and Leadership Effectiveness: Motivation, described as the internal movement and commitment to goals, was moderately positively correlated with leadership effectiveness (r = 0.50). A leader with a high degree of intrinsic motivation will approach goals with excitement, passion and a long-term vision. Intrinsically motivated leaders often have a self-directed, achievement orientation and consistently inspire others through pure commitment to themselves and their goals. The moderate strength of the correlation indicates that motivation matters but that it may or may not be as readily apparent in self-perception or a team's interactions with one another as is the case with social skills or empathy. Further, motivation could look very different depending on the context; some leaders may exhibit motivation by prioritizing innovation, while other leaders may exhibit leadership motivation by favoured consistency or accountability. Motivation may also have an effectiveness measure in the context of other EI competencies. For example, a motivated leader who lacks empathy or social skills may be understood as driven but emotionally detached, which could lessen his or her overall effectiveness.

Self-Regulation and Leadership Effectiveness: The weakest, yet still positive, correlation was found with self-regulation (r = 0.38). Self-regulation is defined as the capacity to govern one's behaviours or impulses, reduce reactivity to stress, and use constructive and contemplative responses to emotional triggers. While often considered theoretically central to emotional intelligence, the weaker statistical relatedness to effectiveness may comprise several factors. First, self-regulation is an internally focused competency, which is generally not possible to see on the self-evaluation checklists for assessment in leadership. As such, reports of self-regulation as a leader may yield either an underestimation or overestimation, leading to even greater variance in reporting precision. Second, self-regulation may have a more indirect influence because it increases the likelihood of increased

effectiveness through the use of other competencies, such as empathy or social skills. Although self-regulation has been shown to lower effect size correlation, it is still an important behaviour or trait to consider, particularly in sectors in which they must shape behaviour in unpredictable times or under great pressure. If a leader is incapable of self-regulation, they may unintentionally fail with emotionally charged uncontrolled outbursts, have ineffective conflict management capabilities, or only be able to manage a crisis-in-action without resolving critical public relations problems. In this situation, short-term leadership effectiveness may not account for compromised long-term kinds of effectiveness.

The types of correlations obtained suggest that leadership effectiveness may be more closely related to interpersonal emotional competencies, particularly social skills and empathy, than to intrapersonal self-management capabilities, such as self-regulation. These findings support Goleman's assertion that leaders who are emotionally intelligent lead within a social context. From a practical perspective, organizations should think about providing more emphasis on relationship-oriented training in their leadership development efforts. Simulations and feedback are well-suited for strengthening social communication, listening and emotional awareness and would likely lead to more advancement in leadership than focusing only on separate technical or managerial skills. The moderate correlations with self-awareness and motivation suggest that these constructs are also important. However, they are more likely to enable competencies necessary for leadership, rather than being sufficient for strong relational engagement.

The analysis above indicates a positive correlation between leadership effectiveness and all five EI subscales, with different strengths of relationships across each domain. The social skills, empathy and self-awareness subscales were the most influential and consistent with the relational and emotionally complex attributes of leadership. Self-control and motivation are important, as are other factors, but without the influence of other abilities, they could not have the same level of impact. The data also illustrates the importance of developing leadership programs that include relational and emotional skill training as other-than-behavioural or cognitive training. Organisations that emphasise Emotional Intelligence (EI), particularly relational AI (interpersonally conscientiousness) to a greater extent compared to cognitive components, are likely to develop a more compassionate, dependable, capable, and ultimately more effective leadership population.

IV. CONCLUSION

The current study supports the significant role of emotional intelligence in leadership effectiveness. Emotional intelligence will be especially beneficial in 21st-century organisational contexts that demand relational adaptability and sensitivity, including awareness of the emotions of others and flexibility in communicating this knowledge. While this study examined the five primary ei subscales self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, it demonstrated that emotional competencies are substantively meaningful and statistically predictive in relation to leadership effectiveness. Social skills, empathy, and selfawareness were the strongest positive predictors of leadership effectiveness. This suggests that interpersonal EI capacities are pivotal to being able to engage with others, create trust, and motivate the efforts of followers. Despite motivation being the most meaningful variable, it had only a small effect, and self-regulation was not statistically significant, suggesting that internal control of emotions is important in terms of the basis for emotional competence but without the relational competencies of social skill and empathy, the perceived success of leadership may not be as dominant. Moreover, the correlations and regression analyses indicate that emotional and social levels of leadership effectiveness are as important, if not more important, than levels of formal authority and technical knowledge. Leaders with emotional intelligence are better equipped to deal with stress, make informed choices, and manage teams effectively in the face of complexity and change. The findings indicate clear priorities for leadership development in three areas: empathy, relationship management, and self-awareness. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to improving motivation and emotional regulation because they are the internal scaffolding upon which sustainable leadership behavior is supported; otherwise, leaders might feel helpless to bring about meaningful change. This study adds to the growing body of evidence that shows emotional intelligence is not optional but absolutely necessary in effective leadership. Future research should illuminate these dynamics at different levels of the organization, in various cultures, and among different leadership styles so we can enhance our understanding of how the EI competencies influence leadership outcomes in practice.

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