



Emotional Intelligence: A Panacea for Organizational Effectiveness?

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) has gained widespread recognition as a key factor in organizational management, leadership, and employee relations, particularly in today's fast-paced, complex business environment. Defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and others, EI has been linked to numerous positive organizational outcomes, including improved leadership effectiveness, enhanced employee engagement, better teamwork, and a stronger organizational culture. This paper offers a critical exploration of the relationship between EI and organizational effectiveness by reviewing empirical studies and theoretical frameworks. The findings suggest that emotionally intelligent leaders are better equipped to manage interpersonal dynamics and foster employee engagement, while emotionally intelligent teams tend to exhibit higher levels of productivity and collaboration. Despite these benefits, the study highlights several limitations to the universal application of EI in organizations. For instance, EI can sometimes lead to the suppression of genuine emotions, resulting in burnout or disengagement. In high-pressure environments, emotionally intelligent leadership may impede swift decision-making, particularly in cultures that value authority or efficiency over emotional regulation. Furthermore, while EI contributes to a positive organizational culture, it may also obscure systemic issues, such as power imbalances and inequities. The commodification of EI in the workplace can even result in emotional labor, where employees are pressured to perform emotions according to organizational norms, further complicating its effectiveness. The paper concludes that while EI plays a significant role in enhancing organizational effectiveness, it is not a panacea for all workplace challenges. Organizations need to adopt a more balanced approach, integrating EI with broader reforms addressing systemic issues, to achieve sustainable results. This study contributes to ongoing discussions on the role of emotional intelligence in organizational success, offering recommendations for future applications and critical examinations of its limitations.

Subject Areas

Psychiatry & Psychology

Keywords

Emotional Intelligence, Organizational Effectiveness, Leadership, Employee Engagement, Teamwork, Organizational Culture, Critique

1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) appears to have attained significant attention in organizational management, seen by many as a critical tool for enhancing leadership, improving team dynamics, and fostering employee engagement. A study claims that EI is the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others, making it a useful skill in navigating complex interpersonal and organizational relationships [1]. The growing attention given to EI has led many to view it as a remedy for numerous workplace challenges, from toxic cultures to leadership failures. In particular, advocates of EI argue that it leads to team cohesion, boosts employee morale, and enhances organizational performance [2].

However, the universal applicability of EI remains a matter of debate. Critics argue that while EI can facilitate organizational harmony, it risks oversimplifying the complexities of human behavior and organizational structures [3]. Moreover, the overemphasis on emotional regulation could obscure structural issues, such as inequities in leadership practices, or lead to burnout through the suppression of genuine emotions [4]. This article critically examines the influence of emotional intelligence on organizational effectiveness, focusing on leadership, employee engagement, teamwork, and organizational culture. In doing so, the study poses the following questions:

- 1) How does emotional intelligence influence leadership effectiveness, and are there limitations to its applicability?
- 2) What is the nuanced relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement?
- 3) In what ways might emotional intelligence both facilitate and hinder teamwork and collaboration?
- 4) How does emotional intelligence influence organizational culture, and what are the critiques regarding its role in fostering positive work environments?

2. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore both the potential and limitations of emotional intelligence in organizational contexts. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Analyze how emotionally intelligent leadership impacts team dynamics and organizational outcomes, both positively and negatively.

- Investigate the extent to which EI enhances employee engagement or oversimplifies deeper motivational drivers.
- Examine the balance between emotional regulation and authenticity within teams.
- Evaluate the role of EI in shaping organizational culture while considering its ability (or inability) to address broader systemic issues.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Defining Emotional Intelligence and Its Dimensions

Existing studies confirm emotional intelligence is generally divided into five key dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills [1]. These dimensions appear to have been widely embraced in organizational studies, where emotionally intelligent employees are thought to be better equipped to navigate workplace challenges, manage stress, and foster productive interpersonal relationships.

However, critiques have emerged regarding the overemphasis on emotional regulation, suggesting that it often ignores the emotional labor that employees, particularly in high-stress industries, must perform [5]. Furthermore, this approach to self-regulation may inadvertently encourage organizational conformity, prioritizing the appearance of emotional control over authentic emotional expression [4]. In addition, critics further posited that placing the burden of emotional management on individual employees can obscure larger organizational or structural factors contributing to workplace stress, dissatisfaction, and even disengagement [6].

3.1.1. Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

Emotionally intelligent leadership is widely believed to enhance organizational effectiveness by fostering a harmonious work environment, improving team motivation, and reducing conflicts. It could be said that leaders with high EI are thought to be more adept at managing emotions within their teams, navigating complex interpersonal dynamics, and promoting engagement [3]. However, in general, the relationship between EI and leadership effectiveness is not always straightforward. Critics argue that high-EI leaders may struggle in high-pressure environments where quick, decisive action is required [7]. In such contexts, the prioritization of emotional harmony over tough decision-making can hinder performance [5]. One explanation for this is that EI's impact on leadership varies significantly across cultural contexts where hierarchical or task-oriented leadership styles are more valued; the emphasis on emotional regulation may be less effective [4]. Thus, while EI may foster leadership effectiveness in certain contexts, its applicability is culturally contingent and not a one-size-fits-all solution.

3.1.2. Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement

It is generally known that the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement is similarly multifaceted. There is substantial evidence to

suggest that emotionally intelligent employees are more engaged, as they are better able to manage workplace stress and navigate interpersonal challenges [8]. Emotionally intelligent employees also tend to be more resilient and adaptable, which contributes to higher levels of job satisfaction and retention [9].

However, the positive correlation between EI and employee engagement could often be overstated. Critics argue that focusing on EI as a tool to boost engagement risks oversimplifying employee motivation by attributing disengagement to personal emotional deficiencies rather than structural issues such as inadequate compensation, unclear career paths, or poor working conditions [3]. Moreover, when emotional intelligence is commodified, employees may feel pressure to perform specific emotional behaviors aligned with organizational expectations, which can lead to emotional dissonance and reduced job satisfaction [10].

3.1.3. Emotional Intelligence and Teamwork

Teamwork is widely considered by many as an essential tool for organizational success and is also seen as benefiting from a high level of EI. Teams with emotionally intelligent members are more likely to manage conflicts effectively and maintain high productivity levels [11]. However, critics argue that emotional regulation within teams may suppress dissenting voices or uncomfortable truths, leading to groupthink or a lack of genuine innovation [12]. In some cases, an overemphasis on emotional harmony could stifle creativity, particularly in environments that require psychological safety for innovation and problem-solving. The result may be emotionally performative interactions, which undermine the trust necessary for high-functioning, collaborative teams [8]. Moreover, the expectation for team members to manage their emotions could shift focus away from fostering authentic relationships within teams.

3.1.4. Emotional Intelligence and Organizational Culture

Strengthening the line of reasoning, emotionally intelligent leaders cultivate inclusive and positive organizational cultures, fostering psychological safety and encouraging employee engagement [13]. However, there are critical concerns about EI's capacity to address deeper systemic issues within organizations. While EI can contribute to a supportive work environment, it is not a cure-all for deeper structural issues. Relying solely on EI to shape culture may place undue emphasis on individual emotional responsibility, obscuring necessary organizational reforms that address systemic inequities, power dynamics, and diversity challenges [6].

Moreover, some leaders may exploit EI principles to manipulate or control employee behavior under the guise of maintaining a "positive" culture, which can ultimately harm the very organizational outcomes EI is meant to improve [9].

4. Discussion and Critical Analysis

Although EI holds considerable promise in enhancing organizational effectiveness, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations, especially when applied in isolation.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is often seen as a panacea for various organizational issues, including leadership challenges, employee disengagement, and poor team dynamics. However, overemphasis on emotional regulation could sometimes lead to superficial outcomes that may not address deeper systemic issues. This section explores both the benefits and critiques of EI in organizations, offering a critical analysis of its role in addressing structural and systemic challenges.

4.1. The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

Emotionally intelligent leaders are often seen as more effective because they can navigate interpersonal dynamics, foster psychological safety, and create a supportive work environment. A study confirms that emotionally intelligent leaders tend to exhibit higher levels of empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, which help them manage conflict and motivate their teams [1]. Similarly, research also suggests that EI improves decision-making and helps leaders adapt to changing circumstances [8].

However, EI could also hinder leadership in certain contexts. Indeed, in high-pressure situations where quick decision-making is required, emotionally intelligent leaders may prioritize maintaining emotional harmony over making difficult, yet necessary, decisions [5]. Furthermore, the reliance on EI to manage emotions within teams may lead to emotional labor, where employees feel compelled to suppress their genuine emotions in favor of those deemed acceptable by leadership [4]. Moreover, it is widely believed that emotional labor, in turn, can result in burnout and disengagement, further complicating the effectiveness of emotionally intelligent leadership.

Similarly, leaders who focus exclusively on emotional intelligence may fail to address underlying structural problems, such as inequities in the distribution of resources and power dynamics or inadequate communication channels. In fact, this can create a disconnect between emotionally intelligent leadership and organizational effectiveness as structural issues remain unresolved [2]. Therefore, while EI can enhance leadership effectiveness, it must be integrated with broader leadership competencies, including strategic decision-making, accountability, and ethical leadership practices.

4.2. Employee Engagement and Emotional Labor

It seems likely that emotionally intelligent employees are often more engaged because they can manage workplace stress, navigate interpersonal conflicts, and remain adaptable to organizational changes [8]. This adaptability could lead to higher job satisfaction, increased productivity, and improved retention rates. Employees with high EI tend to display resilience and are more likely to contribute positively to team dynamics [11]. However, the commodification of EI in the workplace could pressure employees to conform to emotional norms that may not align with their authentic feelings. In fact, emotional dissonance, which arises when there is a disconnect between what an employee feels and what they are

expected to express, can lead to emotional exhaustion and disengagement [10]. In general, the demand for constant emotional regulation can also contribute to burnout, particularly in high-stress industries where employees are required to maintain a positive demeanor regardless of their internal emotional state.

Moreover, it could be argued that focusing solely on EI as a driver of engagement can obscure other important factors, such as fair compensation, career development opportunities, and inclusive organizational policies [2]. What this suggests is that organizations could, therefore, avoid over-relying on EI as a solution to employee disengagement and instead adopt a more comprehensive approach that addresses both emotional and structural needs. This could involve creating opportunities for authentic emotional expression, ensuring fair workload distribution, and implementing policies that promote diversity and inclusion.

4.3. Emotional Intelligence and Team Dynamics

In general, emotional intelligence is often praised for its role in fostering teamwork and collaboration. Teams with high EI are better at managing conflict, building trust, and maintaining open lines of communication [11]. It is widely believed by many that EI could facilitate a deeper understanding of team members' emotional states, allowing for better coordination and cooperation. However, critics argue that an overemphasis on emotional harmony within teams can suppress dissenting opinions or critical feedback, leading to groupthink [12]. A recent study supports that groupthink occurs when team members prioritize consensus over innovative or critical thinking, potentially stifling creativity and reducing the team's capacity for problem-solving [5]. In some cases, emotional regulation could become performative, where team members engage in emotionally prescribed behaviors rather than fostering genuine emotional connection. In the same way, this emotional performance may hinder the development of psychological safety, which is crucial for authentic communication and innovation [14]. In addressing these issues, a study proposes EI integration with a focus on fostering authentic emotional expression and psychological safety [15]. Further research suggests the encouragement of teams to embrace constructive conflict and dissenting views as opportunities for growth and innovation [11]. In general, team leaders could balance the use of EI with efforts to foster creativity, autonomy, and critical thinking.

4.4. Emotional Intelligence and Organizational Culture

The influence of emotional intelligence (EI) on organizational culture is widely acknowledged. A study demonstrates that EI leaders are often credited with shaping positive organizational cultures that promote engagement, psychological safety, and inclusivity [13]. However, this study suggests that, while EI could contribute to a supportive work environment, it should not be seen as the only panacea for addressing deeper structural issues within organizations. Overreliance on EI could lead to a focus on individual emotional responsibility at the expense of

systemic reforms [9]. Strengthening the line of reasoning, an organization that emphasizes EI may inadvertently overlook structural barriers to inclusivity, such as inequitable access to opportunities, power imbalances, or implicit bias in decision-making processes [6].

Moreover, organizations that focus primarily on cultivating emotional intelligence may neglect other critical aspects of organizational culture, such as transparency, accountability, and the promotion of diversity. To address these limitations, this study suggests the integration of EI with efforts to implement structural reforms. This could include creating transparent communication channels, ensuring equitable access to leadership opportunities, and fostering a culture of accountability. By combining EI with broader organizational reforms, leaders could create a more sustainable and inclusive work environment.

5. Initiating Emotional Intelligence to Address Structural Changes

This study suggests that to use EI as a catalyst for structural changes, organizations could first acknowledge the role that EI plays in addressing systemic issues. Similarly, the study advises that rather than using EI solely to manage emotions, leaders could leverage it to foster open, honest communication about structural barriers [16]. For instance, emotionally intelligent leaders could use empathy to understand the challenges faced by underrepresented groups, facilitating discussions about power dynamics and equity within the organization [13]. In the same way, EI could be used to promote a culture of inclusion by ensuring that all employees feel heard and valued [17]. EI could help leaders recognize the emotional toll that systemic inequities take on employees, leading to more informed and compassionate leadership decisions [3]. In the same way, this study suggests integrating EI with diversity and inclusion initiatives; by doing so, organizations could create a more equitable work environment where employees are empowered to express their authentic emotions and contribute meaningfully to organizational success.

6. Recommendations

Given the findings and critical analysis, this study recommends the following innovative and actionable strategies to enhance the role of emotional intelligence in organizational effectiveness.

6.1. Balanced Leadership Development

1) Develop training programs that combine emotional intelligence with decision-making, ethical leadership, and strategic thinking [4]. Leaders should be trained to balance emotional regulation with the ability to make tough decisions in high-pressure situations.

2) Introduce 360-degree feedback systems that allow employees to assess leadership effectiveness in both emotional and structural areas, ensuring that emotionally intelligent leadership is aligned with organizational goals [3].

6.2. Contextualized Employee Training

1) Implement training programs that focus on fostering authentic emotional expression rather than emotional performance [15]. Encourage employees to express dissent and engage in constructive conflict as part of team dynamics.

2) Provide emotional resilience training tailored to the specific demands of high-stress industries, addressing both the personal and organizational factors that contribute to emotional labor and burnout [18].

6.3. Structural Reforms Integrated with EI Initiatives

1) Use emotional intelligence as a foundation for structural reforms that address power imbalances, diversity, and equity [11]. Create channels for open communication about systemic issues, using empathy and emotional awareness to inform policies and practices that promote inclusivity and fairness.

2) Develop organizational policies that combine EI with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, ensuring that emotional intelligence is used to support marginalized voices and address systemic barriers [4].

6.4. Fostering Authentic Team Dynamics

1) Encourage team leaders to cultivate psychological safety by embracing diverse perspectives and allowing for constructive dissent [8]. Emotional intelligence could be used not just to maintain harmony but to foster creativity and innovation within teams.

2) Implement tools for measuring team emotional intelligence and provide feedback on how teams can balance emotional regulation with authentic emotional expression and critical thinking [10].

6.5. Creating an Inclusive Organizational Culture

1) Use emotional intelligence to create a culture of inclusion where employees feel heard, valued, and empowered to bring their whole selves to work. Empathy should be used as a tool for understanding and addressing the emotional impact of structural inequities [5].

2) Promote transparency and accountability in organizational decision-making, ensuring that emotionally intelligent leadership is complemented by efforts to address systemic issues like power imbalances and unjust access to opportunities [19].

By integrating emotional intelligence with structural reforms and leadership development, organizations could achieve a more balanced and sustainable approach to improving organizational effectiveness.

7. Conclusions

It is reasonable to conclude that emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical factor in enhancing organizational effectiveness, particularly in leadership,

employee engagement, and team dynamics. Leaders who are emotionally intelligent could create more inclusive, empathetic, and adaptable work environments [10]. However, emotional intelligence alone is insufficient to address deeper structural and systemic challenges within organizations [3]. The overreliance on EI without integrating it with broader leadership competencies and systemic reforms can limit its potential impact [20].

This study demonstrates that while EI fosters psychological safety, employee engagement, and collaboration, it could be used in conjunction with strategies that address organizational inequities, power imbalances, and systemic barriers to inclusion [3]. Emotional intelligence should not be confined to managing individual emotions but should serve as a foundation for promoting structural changes that ensure fairness, equity, and genuine inclusion.

Actionable strategies such as balanced leadership development, authentic emotional expression, emotional resilience training, and integrating EI with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives are essential for ensuring long-term organizational success [13]. By combining emotional intelligence with ethical leadership, structural reforms, and inclusive policies, organizations can foster a culture that is both emotionally supportive and structurally sound, leading to improved productivity, innovation, and employee well-being [21].

In conclusion, emotional intelligence is a powerful tool for fostering organizational effectiveness, but its true potential is unlocked when it is aligned with comprehensive organizational strategies that address both emotional and structural needs.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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