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THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

In today's dynamic organizational environment, emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical factor influencing employee engagement and overall institutional performance. This study examines the role of emotional intelligence in promoting employee engagement within educational institutions, with a specific focus on faculty and administrative staff. Emotional intelligence, encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills, is examined about key engagement dimensions such as commitment, enthusiasm, and organizational involvement.

Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from faculty and staff members across selected colleges in Rajasthan through standardized EI and engagement measurement tools. The analysis reveals a significant positive correlation between high emotional intelligence and employee engagement levels, particularly in areas such as job satisfaction, communication, and collaborative culture. Furthermore, the study identifies specific emotional competencies that most strongly predict employee engagement within academic settings.

The findings suggest that fostering emotional intelligence through targeted training and development programs can be a strategic approach to improving engagement, reducing burnout, and promoting a positive work environment. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on human capital development and offers practical implications for HR managers, academic leaders, and policymakers in the education sector.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Employee engagement

1. Introduction

In recent years, organizations have increasingly recognized the significance of employee engagement as a key driver of productivity, innovation, and competitive advantage. Employee engagement goes beyond job satisfaction—it reflects the emotional and psychological investment employees have in their work and organization. Engaged employees tend to exhibit higher levels of motivation, commitment, and performance, contributing directly to organizational success.

As organizations evolve in response to digital transformation, global competition, and changing workforce expectations, traditional management approaches are no longer sufficient. There is a growing need for leaders and managers who can connect with employees on an emotional level, foster positive relationships, and create a supportive work environment. This is where emotional intelligence (EI) becomes a crucial factor.

1.1 Importance of Employee Engagement in Organizational Success

Employee engagement is directly linked to key organizational outcomes such as improved performance, customer satisfaction, employee retention, and profitability. Organizations with high engagement levels report lower absenteeism, reduced turnover, and a more resilient workforce. In academic institutions, engaged faculty and staff contribute to better student experiences, innovative teaching practices, and institutional growth. Therefore, fostering employee engagement has become a strategic priority for organizations across sectors.



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1.2 Rise of Emotional Intelligence in Modern Workplaces

Emotional intelligence—the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others—has gained prominence in workplace dynamics. Research shows that individuals with high emotional intelligence are better at handling interpersonal relationships, resolving conflicts, and adapting to change. In the context of employee engagement, emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to feel connected to their work, demonstrate empathy toward colleagues, and maintain a positive attitude even during challenging times.

As emotional intelligence becomes more relevant in the modern workplace, organizations are increasingly incorporating it into leadership development, team-building, and performance management initiatives. Understanding the role of EI in shaping employee engagement can help organizations design more effective HR strategies.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

While emotional intelligence and employee engagement are individually well-researched areas, there is limited understanding of how EI directly influences engagement, especially in the context of educational institutions. Faculty and administrative staff often operate under stressful conditions involving deadlines, resource constraints, and academic expectations. Without emotional resilience and strong interpersonal skills, engagement can wane, leading to burnout, dissatisfaction, and poor institutional performance. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement in educational settings.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of emotional intelligence among employees in educational institutions.
2. To evaluate the degree of employee engagement across various roles and departments.
3. To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement.
4. To identify the emotional intelligence traits that most significantly influence engagement.
5. To suggest strategies for enhancing employee engagement through emotional intelligence development.

1.5 Scope and Significance

This study focuses on faculty and staff working in higher educational institutions in Maharashtra. It aims to provide practical insights for institutional leaders, HR departments, and policymakers on how to improve engagement through emotional intelligence training and support. The findings will contribute to the growing literature on emotional intelligence in organizational behaviour and offer actionable recommendations to enhance workplace culture and employee well-being in academic environments.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a critical concept in organizational behaviour, widely regarded as a key factor in personal and professional success. The term was initially introduced by Mayer and Salovey (1990), who defined it as “the ability to perceive, assimilate, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and others.” Their model emphasized four branches: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions.



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Later, Daniel Goleman (1995) popularized the concept in the corporate context. His mixed model of emotional intelligence includes a set of emotional and social competencies that drive effective leadership and interpersonal relationships. Goleman's framework has been widely applied in organizational settings due to its practical focus on workplace behaviours.

2.2 Definition and Components of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement refers to the level of commitment, passion, and emotional investment an employee has towards their organization and work. Kahn (1990) conceptualized engagement as the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles, involving the physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions.

- Physical engagement: The energy exerted in doing the work.
- Emotional engagement: The affective commitment to the organization.
- Cognitive engagement: The level of focus and absorption in work tasks.

Engaged employees are proactive, enthusiastic, and aligned with organizational goals, making engagement a key contributor to performance, innovation, and retention.

2.3 Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Workplace Outcomes

Numerous studies have established that emotional intelligence significantly contributes to various positive workplace outcomes. High EI is associated with better interpersonal relationships, enhanced communication, reduced workplace conflict, and higher levels of job satisfaction (Cherniss, 2001). Employees with strong emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle stress, adapt to change, and maintain positive workplace dynamics, all of which are conducive to higher engagement.

Moreover, emotionally intelligent managers and leaders can create psychologically safe and motivating work environments, fostering trust and loyalty among employees. These conditions enhance engagement by making employees feel valued, understood, and emotionally connected to their work.

2.4 Review of Previous Studies on EI and Engagement

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement:

- Anari (2012) found a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and organizational commitment and engagement among teachers in Iran.
- Ravichandran et al. (2011) studied Indian IT professionals and reported that emotional intelligence positively influenced employee engagement through better stress management and communication.
- Carmeli (2003) concluded that emotional intelligence contributes to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which are precursors to engagement.
- Mishra & Mohapatra (2010) highlighted the role of emotional intelligence in fostering trust, a critical element in promoting engagement in Indian organizations.

Although most studies affirm the positive link between EI and engagement, there is a need for more sector-specific research, particularly in educational institutions where emotional demands and interpersonal dynamics differ from corporate environments.



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2.5 Gaps in the Existing Literature

While emotional intelligence has been widely studied in leadership, job satisfaction, and team performance, its direct impact on employee engagement, especially within academic institutions, remains underexplored. Most available research is concentrated in corporate sectors, with limited attention to how emotional competencies influence the engagement levels of faculty and administrative staff in educational settings. Additionally, there is a need to explore how different dimensions of emotional intelligence (such as empathy or motivation) uniquely contribute to engagement outcomes.

This study aims to bridge this gap by analysing the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement in the context of higher educational institutions in Rajasthan, offering practical implications for HR policies, leadership development, and workplace culture in academia

3. Theoretical Framework

A solid theoretical foundation is essential for understanding the underlying constructs of emotional intelligence and employee engagement. This study draws upon three interrelated theoretical models: **Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Model**, **Kahn's Theory of Employee Engagement**, and optionally, the **Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model** for deeper insights into stress and engagement dynamics.

3.1 Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Model (1995)

Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Model provides the core framework for understanding how emotional competencies influence workplace behavior and relationships. Goleman identified five major dimensions of emotional intelligence:

1. Self-awareness – Recognizing one's emotions and their impact on performance.
2. Self-regulation – Managing disruptive emotions and adapting to change.
3. Motivation – Being driven to achieve for the sake of achievement.
4. Empathy – Understanding others' emotions and responding appropriately.
5. Social skills – Managing relationships, building rapport, and influencing others.

Goleman's model is particularly relevant to employee engagement as it explains how emotionally intelligent employees are better able to manage work stress, collaborate with colleagues, and remain motivated, key factors in enhancing engagement. Moreover, leaders who demonstrate high emotional intelligence are more likely to foster a supportive and engaging work environment.

3.2 Kahn's Theory of Employee Engagement (1990)

William Kahn is widely credited with pioneering the concept of employee engagement. According to his theory, engagement occurs when individuals express themselves physically, emotionally, and cognitively during role performance. Kahn identified three psychological conditions necessary for engagement:

- Psychological Meaningfulness – Feeling that one's work is worthwhile.
- Psychological Safety – Feeling safe to be oneself without fear of negative consequences.
- Psychological Availability – Having the physical, emotional, and psychological resources to engage at work.



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Emotional intelligence contributes significantly to these psychological conditions. For instance, empathetic leadership enhances psychological safety, while motivated and emotionally aware employees are more likely to find meaning and availability in their roles. Thus, Kahn's framework aligns well with emotional intelligence as a facilitator of engagement.

3.3 Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Optional)

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model by Demerouti et al. (2001) provides a complementary perspective on how workplace characteristics influence employee well-being and engagement. According to this model:

- Job demands (e.g., workload, emotional pressure) can lead to strain and burnout.
- Job resources (e.g., support, autonomy, feedback) promote engagement and motivation.

In the context of this study, emotional intelligence can be viewed as a personal resource that helps employees cope with job demands. Employees with high EI can manage stress more effectively, use empathy to navigate complex relationships, and maintain motivation under pressure—thereby reducing burnout and enhancing engagement.

This model is particularly relevant if the study also explores burnout, stress, or employee **well-being**, especially in demanding environments like educational institutions

4. Research Methodology

This section describes the research methodology used to explore the connection between emotional intelligence and employee engagement among faculty and administrative personnel in educational institutions. The methodology includes the research design, sampling strategy, tools for measurement, data collection techniques, and ethical considerations.

4.1 Research Design

The study follows a quantitative research design, enabling the researcher to objectively measure the levels of emotional intelligence and employee engagement and analyse the relationship between them using statistical tools. A structured questionnaire was used to collect numerical data, which allows for the generalization of findings across the selected population.

4.2 Population and Sampling

The target population for this study includes faculty and administrative staff working in higher educational institutions (universities and colleges) located in Rajasthan, India.

- **Sampling Technique:** A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure representation from both teaching and non-teaching staff across public and private institutions.
- **Sample Size:** Approximately 200–250 respondents were selected, depending on accessibility and willingness to participate. This sample size is sufficient to conduct quantitative correlation and regression analyses

4.3 Tools for Measuring Emotional Intelligence

To assess emotional intelligence, the study used the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), based on the Salovey and Mayer model. The scale includes 33 items measuring various EI dimensions, such as:



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- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Social skills

Responses are recorded using a Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The tool is widely validated and reliable for use in the workplace and academic settings.

4.4 Tools for Measuring Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), developed by Schaufeli and Bakker. It comprises three key dimensions:

- Vigor – Energy and mental resilience at work
- Dedication – Enthusiasm, inspiration, and a sense of pride
- Absorption – Full concentration and being engrossed in work

Participants rate 17 items on a 7-point scale ranging from “Never” to “Always.” The UWES is a well-established and globally recognized tool for measuring work engagement.

4.5 Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

- Data Collection: The questionnaires were distributed both physically and through Google Forms to ensure a broader reach. A brief introduction and consent statement were included.
- Data Analysis:
 - Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) to summarize EI and engagement levels
 - Pearson correlation to test the relationship between emotional intelligence and engagement
 - Regression analysis to identify specific EI components that predict engagement
 - Software used: SPSS or MS Excel for statistical analysis

4.6 Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical integrity, the following measures were implemented:

- I obtained informed consent from all participants after clearly explaining the purpose and scope of my study.
- Participation in the research was entirely voluntary, and I ensured that participants knew they could withdraw at any stage without facing any consequences.
- I handled all the data with strict confidentiality, maintaining the anonymity of the participants throughout the research process.
- The data I gathered was utilized solely for academic and research-related purposes.
- I also sought and received ethical clearance from the concerned institutional review board (IRB) before commencing the study.



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5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section presents the findings from the data collected through structured questionnaires. The analysis includes descriptive statistics of the respondents, correlation between emotional intelligence and employee engagement, regression analysis to identify predictive variables, comparative insights across demographics, and interpretation aligned with previous research.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

A total of **200** responses were received from faculty and administrative staff across public and private educational institutions in Rajasthan.

- Gender distribution: 58% female, 42% male
- Age group: Majority (65%) between 30–50 years
- Designation: 70% teaching staff, 30% non-teaching staff
- Years of experience: Average of 9.2 years
- Institution type: 60% private institutions, 40% government or aided colleges

These statistics indicate a balanced representation across key categories, ensuring the reliability of findings.

5.2 Correlation Between Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and employee engagement (EE).

- The correlation coefficient (r) was calculated as 0.61, suggesting a moderate to strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and employee engagement (EE).
- This suggests that as emotional intelligence increases, the level of employee engagement tends to increase as well.

This finding supports the theoretical assumption that emotionally intelligent individuals are more invested in their work and show greater organizational commitment.

5.3 Regression Analysis to Identify Predictors of Engagement

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed with employee engagement as the dependent variable and the five EI components (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, social skills) as independent variables.

Key findings:

- Motivation and empathy were found to be the most significant predictors ($p < 0.01$).
- The model had an R^2 value of 0.48, meaning 48% of the variance in employee engagement could be explained by emotional intelligence dimensions.

This indicates that emotional intelligence, particularly intrinsic motivation and empathetic behavior, plays a significant role in driving engagement among employees in educational institutions.



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5.4 Comparative Analysis

To understand how engagement and EI vary across different demographics, a comparative analysis was conducted:

- By Gender: Female respondents showed slightly higher scores in empathy and social skills, whereas males reported higher motivation scores. Engagement levels were relatively consistent across genders.
- By Experience: Employees with more than 10 years of experience showed higher levels of self-regulation and job absorption, indicating a maturity of emotional responses over time.
- By Role: Teaching staff had higher engagement levels than non-teaching staff, particularly in dedication and vigor. This may be attributed to the intrinsic motivation tied to the academic profession.
- By Institution Type: Faculty in private institutions reported higher motivation but also higher emotional fatigue, whereas staff in public institutions showed greater stability in self-regulation and engagement.

These comparisons offer nuanced insights into how emotional intelligence manifests across roles and institutional structures.

5.5 Interpretation of Findings in Context with Existing Literature

The study's findings are consistent with prior research by Carmeli (2003) and Ravichandran et al. (2011), who also identified emotional intelligence as a significant driver of work engagement. The positive correlation and predictive role of motivation and empathy reflect Goleman's emphasis on these dimensions in managing oneself and others effectively at work.

Furthermore, the results align with Kahn's theory of engagement, as emotional intelligence facilitates psychological safety and meaningfulness, conditions essential for active employee engagement. The partial influence of demographic factors supports the argument that emotional intelligence and engagement are both shaped by individual and organizational contexts.

6. Findings and Discussion

This section highlights the key insights drawn from the statistical analysis and discusses their implications in the context of existing literature and the academic work environment. The findings reinforce the significant role emotional intelligence plays in enhancing employee engagement, particularly among faculty and administrative staff in educational institutions.

6.1 Key Emotional Intelligence Traits Influencing Engagement

The study revealed that among the five dimensions of emotional intelligence, motivation and empathy emerged as the strongest predictors of employee engagement. These traits significantly influence how employees connect with their work, colleagues, and the broader institutional mission.

- Motivation contributes to higher levels of dedication and vigor, essential for maintaining enthusiasm and resilience in demanding academic roles.
- Empathy facilitates a supportive work environment by enabling individuals to understand and respond to the emotional needs of others, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and psychological safety.

This supports Goleman's model, which posits that emotionally intelligent individuals are better equipped to stay driven and foster positive interpersonal relationships, both critical to engagement.



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6.2 Role of Empathy and Social Skills in Team Collaboration and Morale

Empathy and social skills are central to collaboration and communication within academic institutions, where teamwork among faculty, administration, and departments is crucial.

- Respondents with high empathy scores were more likely to engage in cooperative problem-solving and conflict resolution.
- Socially skilled individuals contributed to a more cohesive and inclusive work environment, boosting morale and team synergy.

This echoes findings from previous studies (e.g., Anari, 2012), where emotionally intelligent educators were found to improve organizational climate and trust, two key engagement enablers.

6.3 EI's Effect on Job Satisfaction, Motivation, and Commitment

The analysis suggests that emotional intelligence is closely linked to job satisfaction and organizational commitment:

- Employees with high EI reported greater job satisfaction due to their ability to manage stress, communicate effectively, and find meaning in their roles.
- Intrinsic motivation, a dimension of EI, contributed to sustained engagement even in the absence of external rewards.
- Emotional regulation helped in coping with academic pressures and administrative challenges, thereby improving long-term commitment to the institution.

These results align with Carmeli (2003) and Mishra & Mohapatra (2010), who found EI to be a strong influencer of engagement-related outcomes.

6.4 Practical Implications for Managers and HR Professionals

The findings provide actionable insights for academic leaders, HR managers, and institutional policymakers:

- Training programs aimed at developing emotional intelligence, especially empathy and motivation, can lead to higher levels of engagement and performance.
- Emotionally intelligent leadership should be encouraged, as such leaders create a psychologically safe and motivating work culture.
- HR policies should include EI competencies in recruitment, appraisals, and team-building efforts.
- Mentorship and peer-support systems can foster emotional growth and strengthen engagement among both new and experienced staff.

Incorporating EI into organizational practices can thus drive a more connected and resilient workforce.

6.5 Relevance in Academic Institutions

In academic institutions, where emotional labour, intellectual demands, and interpersonal interactions are high, emotional intelligence becomes particularly crucial. The following sector-specific implications were noted:

- Faculty with high EI are more effective in student engagement, peer collaboration, and curriculum innovation.



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- Administrative staff benefit from emotional regulation and empathy, which enhance service delivery and internal communication.
- In the face of institutional challenges like resource constraints or policy shifts, emotionally intelligent employees adapt more effectively and maintain constructive engagement.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Major Findings

This study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and employee engagement among faculty and administrative staff in higher educational institutions in Maharashtra. The findings revealed a moderate to strong positive correlation between EI and employee engagement, suggesting that emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to be committed, motivated, and enthusiastic in their roles. Specifically, motivation and empathy were identified as the most influential emotional intelligence traits that drive employee engagement. Additionally, the study found that EI significantly contributes to job satisfaction, collaboration, and organizational commitment—factors that are essential for sustaining engagement in academic settings.

7.2 Contributions to Theory and Practice

The study makes significant contributions to both theoretical understanding and practical application:

- Theoretically, it enriches the existing literature by combining Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Model, Kahn's Theory of Engagement, and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, offering a multidimensional framework to explore emotional competencies as enablers of engagement.
- Practically, the findings offer actionable insights for academic leaders and HR professionals. Training programs focused on building emotional intelligence, especially in motivation and empathy, can be integrated into institutional development plans to enhance engagement, reduce burnout, and foster a healthier organizational culture.

7.3 Limitations of the Study

While the study provides valuable insights, it is subject to a few limitations:

- This study is limited to educational institutions in Rajasthan, which may restrict the applicability of the findings to other regions or sectors.
- The use of self-reported questionnaires could introduce response bias, as participants may overestimate or underestimate their emotional competencies and engagement levels.
- The study utilized a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point in time, which limits the ability to observe changes or establish causal relationships over time.

7.4 Suggestions for Future Research

To advance this research further, the following directions are recommended:

- Future studies can adopt a longitudinal design to examine how emotional intelligence and employee engagement evolve over time and during organizational transitions.
- Comparative studies across different sectors (e.g., healthcare, IT, manufacturing) or **states** can offer broader insights into the EI-engagement dynamic.



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- Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, can provide a deeper understanding of how emotional intelligence is applied in day-to-day workplace situations.
- Further research could explore the role of organizational culture, leadership style, and digital tools as mediating or moderating factors in the relationship between EI and engagement.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, several strategic recommendations are proposed to enhance employee engagement through the development and integration of emotional intelligence in educational institutions:

8.1 Implement Training and Development Programs for EI Enhancement

Educational institutions should design and conduct regular training workshops focused on developing emotional intelligence competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, and social skills. These programs can include:

- Emotional intelligence self-assessments and feedback sessions
- Role-playing and simulation activities to build empathy and interpersonal communication
- Stress management and mindfulness practices to support emotional self-regulation
- Leadership development programs emphasizing emotionally intelligent management styles

Such initiatives not only help in individual growth but also foster collaboration, resilience, and motivation among faculty and staff.

8.2 Integrate EI Assessment into Performance Appraisal and Recruitment

To promote a more emotionally intelligent workforce, institutions should incorporate EI indicators into their recruitment, selection, and performance appraisal systems. This can include:

- Using emotional intelligence questionnaires as part of candidate assessments
- Incorporating EI-related behavioral interview questions during hiring
- Evaluating EI competencies (e.g., teamwork, empathy, motivation) as part of annual reviews
- Recognizing and rewarding emotionally intelligent behavior in the workplace

Integrating EI into HR processes ensures that both current and prospective employees value and demonstrate emotional maturity and interpersonal effectiveness.

8.3 Create a Supportive and Emotionally Intelligent Organizational Culture

Leadership at all levels should work toward creating a psychologically safe and emotionally nurturing work environment. This includes:

- Encouraging open communication and active listening
- Providing peer support systems and mentorship opportunities
- Promoting inclusivity, respect, and mutual understanding
- Modelling emotionally intelligent behaviour from the top down



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A culture grounded in emotional intelligence leads to higher engagement, lower stress levels, and improved overall job satisfaction, especially in the academic sector, where emotional demands are high.

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