

The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Women in Leadership: A Comparative Study

Princi Tanwar

*PhD Student, Communication Management, Turiba University, Latvia
tanwarprinci1992@gmail.com*

Abstract: Emotional Intelligence (EI) is more than just a skill—it is a powerful strength that many women leaders naturally bring into their roles. This study takes a closer look at how Emotional Intelligence shapes leadership experiences for women working in different fields, including business, education, and non-profit organizations. It explores how qualities like empathy, self-awareness, and effective communication not only help women manage workplace challenges but also inspire stronger, more connected teams. Through personal interviews and real-life examples, the research highlights how emotionally intelligent women are able to handle stress, resolve conflicts, and lead with authenticity. It also shows how these leaders create more inclusive, respectful and encouraging work environments that people genuinely want to be part of. This paper emphasizes that Emotional Intelligence is not just a “nice-to-have,” it is a valuable leadership strength that can help organizations grow while supporting women to lead with confidence and care.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Women in Leadership, Empathy, Inclusive Leadership, Gender and Communication, Organizational Culture, Soft Skills, Leadership Development

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving work culture, leadership is no longer just defined by titles or task execution, it is defined by connection. At the heart of meaningful leadership lies Emotional Intelligence (EI), the ability to navigate one's own emotions while relating to others with empathy, awareness, and authenticity. As a woman leading across diverse environments from academic settings to international conferences, I have realized that what truly shapes effective leadership is not just credentials but the emotional depth and social awareness we bring into every interaction. These "soft" qualities often become silent forces behind successful leadership stories. Women, in particular, naturally express emotional intelligence in ways that build trust, manage high-pressure dynamics, and foster inclusive teams. Whether it is responding with empathy during conflict or creating a safe space for team members to have their voices heard, emotionally intelligent women lead not by dominating, but by engaging, uplifting, and empowering others.

This paper explores the lived experiences of women in leadership roles across business, education, and the non-profit world, highlighting how EI not only strengthens their ability to lead, but often becomes their greatest, yet underappreciated, asset in the workplace.

Initiatives like the Forbes Women's Summit in the Czech Republic reflect a growing awareness of the need for emotionally intelligent and inclusive leadership. Although this study is based on grassroots interviews, such global platforms highlight the importance of amplifying women's voices in leadership conversations.

Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in effective leadership. While earlier leadership models emphasized authority, assertiveness, and task execution (Goleman, 1995), newer frameworks highlight empathy, self-awareness, and relational depth as essential to resilient, people-centered leadership (Boyatzis & McKee, 2013).

Research consistently shows that women tend to demonstrate higher emotional intelligence than men, particularly in empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationships (Bar-On, 2006). Yet, in performance-driven or male-dominated environments,

these emotional strengths are often undervalued, leading many women leaders to suppress their emotional expression. This suppression can contribute to stress, burnout, and eventual disengagement from leadership roles (Sharma & Verma, 2023).

Despite these challenges, emotionally intelligent women leaders have been shown to improve team cohesion, foster psychological safety, and drive inclusive organizational cultures (Goleman, 1998). These challenges make leaders gain enough expertise in developing and using the emotional skills of leadership (Caruso & Salovey, 2004). Their leadership style emphasizes listening, trust-building, and long-term relationship cultivation often leading to more sustainable performance outcomes.

What remains underexplored, however, is the lived experience of these women, how they emotionally navigate leadership, and what internal or external support systems shape their resilience. This study contributes to closing that gap by focusing on real voices and personal leadership journeys of women across diverse sectors.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how Emotional Intelligence (EI) influences women in leadership across various professional sectors, including education, business, and non-profit organizations. The primary aim is to capture the lived experiences and emotional insights of women leaders to better understand how EI contributes to, or at times complicates, their leadership roles.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with four women leaders based in Brno, Czech Republic. Participants were drawn from the tech industry, academia, and the social sector. Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and virtually, depending on participant availability. Each interview lasted approximately 25 to 40 minutes and was audio-recorded with the informed consent of participants.

Open-ended questions guided the discussions, focusing on the participant's understanding of emotional intelligence, their leadership journey, experiences with emotional regulation, expressions of empathy, and how emotions influenced their decision-making and team dynamics.

The recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding. This allowed for the identification of key patterns, recurring emotional strategies, and sector-specific leadership challenges. All data were de-identified to maintain confidentiality and ensure ethical integrity.

Limitations

This study is limited by its small sample size, which may affect the broader generalizability of the findings. While the participants are currently based in Brno, Czech Republic, they represent diverse national backgrounds, including Lithuania, Kenya, and Vietnam, which adds valuable cross-cultural insight. However, the study's qualitative nature and limited number of participants mean that findings should be interpreted with caution. Future research could benefit from a larger and more varied sample across different industries and leadership levels to deepen understanding of Emotional Intelligence in global women's leadership contexts.

Findings & Analysis

The thematic analysis of participant interviews revealed five dominant themes that illustrate the distinct ways in which women leaders apply Emotional Intelligence in professional settings. These themes reflect both the strengths and struggles that emotionally intelligent leadership entails.

1. Empathy as a Gateway to Problem Solving

One participant emphasized that practicing empathy allowed her to identify the root causes behind her team's underperformance. Rather than reacting to declining results, she chose to listen attentively. This revealed hidden personal challenges among team members and allowed her to address issues with compassion. As a result, both team morale and productivity improved. This finding underscores how empathy can serve as a practical leadership tool rather than a passive trait.

2. Emotional Suppression and Mental Health Struggles

Another leader shared her experience of emotional suppression in the workplace, driven by fear of appearing too sensitive. This pattern eventually contributed to anxiety and emotional exhaustion. Over time, she began embracing her emotional landscape, leading to improved mental clarity, deeper interpersonal relationships, and more active, grounded leadership. This evolution suggests that acknowledging and managing emotions is not only healthy but critical for sustainable leadership.

3. Undervaluing of Emotional Strengths in Result-Oriented Cultures

A recurring theme was the systemic undervaluing of emotional skills in environments focused heavily on measurable performance metrics. One participant stated, *My emotional skills were often overlooked because hitting targets seemed more important*. Participants expressed that emotional intelligence, especially empathy, intuition, and active listening was often viewed as secondary or soft, despite its direct impact on team cohesion and long-term success.

4. Evolution of Leadership Style Through EI

Several participants noted that their leadership styles evolved significantly as they became more emotionally self-aware. This journey often involved moving from a task-focused or emotionally distant approach to one that was more people-centric, reflective, and inclusive. They reported that this shift improved not only team relationships but also their own confidence and decision-making under pressure.

5. Lack of Emotionally Aware Mentorship and Support

Most participants identified a common barrier: the absence of emotionally intelligent mentors or senior leaders. This lack of emotional guidance created a sense of isolation, especially during emotionally charged or high-stakes situations. Without role models who valued emotional awareness, women leaders often had to learn through trial and error, and internal resilience.

Table 1. Emotional Intelligence Themes in Women's Leadership

| Theme | EI Skill Demonstrated | Impact Observed |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Empathy as a Gateway | Empathy, Active Listening | Improved team performance |
| Emotional Suppression | Self-awareness, Regulation | Better mental clarity and leadership engagement |
| Undervaluing EI | Cultural Sensitivity, Resilience | Emotional strengths undervalued in KPIs |
| EI Evolution | Reflective Practice | Transformation to inclusive and confident leadership |
| Lack of Mentorship | Social Awareness, Support Seeking | Emotional isolation and trial-by-error leadership learning |

These findings reveal not only the emotional competencies demonstrated by women leaders but also the systemic and cultural challenges they navigate, especially in environments where EI is not recognized as legitimate leadership strength. The insights suggest that fostering emotionally intelligent leadership requires not just personal growth but also organizational change, including the cultivation of emotionally aware leadership ecosystems.

Discussion

The interviews reveal that while women naturally apply Emotional Intelligence (EI) in leadership, these strengths often go unrecognized in performance-driven environments. Participants shared that empathy, emotional regulation, and communication were undervalued compared to KPIs and measurable outcomes.

A key insight was the personal growth participants experienced when they embraced their emotional strengths. This shift not only improved their leadership effectiveness but also their mental well-being.

Equally notable was the lack of emotionally intelligent mentorship. Without supportive role models, many women had to rely on trial and error to navigate emotional challenges in leadership. These findings highlight the need for leadership development that values EI and fosters emotionally aware mentorship.

Conclusion

This study highlights how Emotional Intelligence empowers women to lead with empathy, clarity, and authenticity. While systemic challenges persist, such as undervaluing emotional intelligence (EI) and a lack of emotional mentorship, participants are leveraging their emotional strengths to create more inclusive and human-centered work cultures.

The findings suggest that organizations must go beyond technical skills and prioritize emotional fluency in leadership development. Supporting emotionally intelligent women is not just about equity. It is key to building stronger, more adaptive leadership for the future.

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