



## Understanding Emotional Intelligence in Leadership: A critical Factor for Effective Leadership in Nigerian University System

**Olofu, Paul Agbade**

**Rev. Fr. Aniekop Ifiok Pius**

**&**

**Nyinebi Maryrose Ochanya**

Department of Educational Management

Faculty of Education, University of Abuja

### **Abstract**

*The heartbeat of every organization (educational system inclusive) lies on its leadership; as it is what controls and influences the behaviours of the workers toward efficiency and organizational greatness and effectiveness. The efficiency and effectiveness of the leadership of the university system and organizations generally; is not just dependent or restricted to the cognitive intelligence (mental ability) of the leader to make rational and logical decisions but also requires emotional intelligence among other skills and abilities. Hence, a leader's ability to know and understand his/her emotions, those of his/her employees and know how to positively manipulate both emotions remain very key to leadership success. This study therefore, centered on understanding emotional intelligence in leadership: A critical condition for effective leadership in the university system in Nigeria. The work extensively discussed the concept of emotional intelligence and historical dimension of emotional intelligence in leadership. Also explicated herein were strategies on how leaders can develop emotional intelligence in leadership, components of emotional intelligence and the importance of developing emotional intelligence in leadership. The study concluded that-as organizations and leaders become increasingly aware of the importance of emotional intelligence, a healthy relationship between leaders and their subordinates will be promoted, mutual understanding and the rate of conflict will be minimal; thereby culminating in organizational efficiency and effectiveness.*

**Key words:** Emotional Intelligence, Effective Leadership and University. System.

### **Introduction**

Leadership is the ability to influence the behaviours of others in order to achieve predetermined goals identified by a group of people. In organizational context, leadership is the process of motivating, guiding, directing and stimulating others towards attaining specific organizational aims and objectives with efficiency and effectiveness. Northouse (2007) in Bass (2014) defined leadership as a process whereby an individual influence a group of people or individuals to achieve a common goal in an organization. It is the act of social influence which is geared towards the maximization of the efforts and abilities of subordinates with a view to realizing common organizational goals. In the

same vein, Kruse (2013) perceived leadership as a process of social influence which maximizes the efforts of others towards the achievement of a goal. Thus, it is imperative to stress that a leader's ability to influence others lies not on his/her power but social influence to get the common or identified goals attained maximally. While the boss uses power to get job done, a leader motivates, inspires, guides and directs others towards collective goal realization.

In the process of influencing the behaviour of subordinates or employees in order to ensure effective goal attainment, a leader requires series of skills and abilities to be able to move on well with his/her subordinates. Therefore, one of such critical skills a leader should have and exhibit is his/her ability to know and understand himself, know his/her own emotions, recognize and be sensitive to other people's emotions, know when it is wise to speak or not to or act as a leader, know how to calm down when he/she is upset and should be able to predict the next actions of his/her subordinate among other things. A leader's ability of being able to read the emotions of his/her subordinates conveyed by eyes gives him/her a high level of sensitivity and alertness. Thus, emotional intelligence remains one of the critical skills and factor every leader should have in order to manage his/her follower more effectively and efficiently (Gabriel, 2015).

[Corroborating the above assertion, Shanthaku, Milroy and Mahenthiran \(2010\) maintained that](#) leadership is the heart of every organization and to get better outcome from the employees as well as optimally achieve organizational goals, the leader should be able to understand the pulse of the employees and his/her own. To be effective, leaders must have a solid understanding of how their emotions and actions affect the people around them. The better a leader relates to and works with others, the more successful he or she will be. A leader should take the time to work on self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Working on these areas would help him/her excel as a leader. More precisely, Fletcher (2012) cited in Kruse (2013) submitted that what distinguishes the best leaders from the majority is their level of emotional intelligence. Similarly, Goleman (1996) cited in Landry (2019) observed that "the most effective leaders are all alike in one crucial way: They all have a high degree of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence. It is not that intelligence quotient and technical skills are irrelevant. They do matter, but they are the entry-level requirements for executive positions".

## **Concept of Emotional Intelligence**

The concept of emotional intelligence is otherwise referred to as emotional leadership, emotional quotient and emotional intelligence quotient. Different scholars have defined and explained the concept of emotional intelligence in different ways. Colman (2008) defined emotional intelligence as the "capability of individuals to [recognize](#) their own [emotions](#) and those of others, discern between different feelings and label them appropriately, use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior and manage and/or adjust emotions to adapt to environments or achieve one's goal(s)". Davitz and Beldoch

(1976) cited in Steve (2019) maintained that although the term emotional intelligence was first used by Joel Robert Davitz and Michael Beldoch in 1964, it gained popularity in 1995 in a book written by Daniel Goleman; titled Emotional Intelligence. On the contrary, Landry (2019) opined that the term was first coined in 1990 by John Mayer and Peter Salovey but was later popularized by Daniel Goleman. In the same vein, Cristopher (2018) stated that the definition of emotional intelligence was first advanced by Peter Salovey and John Mayer but popularized by Daniel Goleman.

Landry (2019) defined emotional intelligence as the ability for one to understand and manage his/her own emotions as well as recognizes and influences the emotions of those around him/her. Emotional intelligence has evolved over the years into a must-have skill by both leaders and employees. Landry (2019) stressed that while leaders with high emotional intelligence have the tendency to have better understanding of themselves and their employees as well as motivate their employees' potentials towards greater performance, employees with high emotional intelligence are more likely to stay calm under pressure, resolve conflict effectively and respond to their superiors and co-workers with empathy. Muktak (2017) perceived emotional intelligence as the ability to understand and manage moods and emotions in the self and others, contributes to effective leadership in organizations. It is the act of leading of followers through the proper identification and management of an array of emotions and influencing the outcome of their subsequent needs.

In the opinion of Koehler (2018), emotional intelligence is the ability of an individual to comprehend, control and develop his/her own feelings while also being able to understand and manage the feelings of others. Koehler added that emotional intelligence goes beyond the administrative nuts and bolts of being a great leader. Rather, it emphasizes on how the emotions of a leader affect others and how the leader can use that knowledge to create positive outcomes both personally and with the people he/she manages. Koehler submitted that though leadership still requires an authority over the team's vision but it must be intertwined with putting employees and their needs and emotions into consideration too. This acknowledgment from leadership creates happier, more productive worker force and more effective managers while also reducing employee turnover.

Emotional intelligence is the "aptitude to recognize emotions and apprehend, what they convey about the situation and behaviour of the people affected by a certain situation". It also determines one's perception and response to the emotional behaviours of others. Thus, collaboratively emotional intelligence manages human relations and promotes a healthy work environment (Singh, 2019). Singh admitted that everyone has a unique personality, unique needs and desires, and unique traits to express their emotions and feelings. Dealing with all these nuances effectively requires emotional intelligence. Therefore, emotional intelligence plays a vital role in maintaining emotional balance in one's life both on personal and professional fronts. Hence, emotional intelligence is the most valued attribute for leadership.

## Historical Dimension of Emotional Intelligence

Davitz and Beldoch (1976) cited in Steve (2019) maintained that although the term emotional intelligence was first used by Joel Robert Davitz and Michael Beldoch in 1964, it gained popularity in 1995 in a book written by Daniel Goleman; titled Emotional Intelligence. In 1983, Howard Gardner in his book titled-Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Howard Gardner introduced the idea that traditional types of intelligence such as intelligent quotient fail to fully explain cognitive ability. Thus, Howard Gardner introduced the idea of multiple intelligences which included both interpersonal intelligence (the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people) and intrapersonal intelligence (the capacity to understand oneself, to appreciate one's feelings, fears and motivations) (Smith, 2012).

By 1985, the term emotional intelligence subsequently appeared in Wayne Payne's doctoral thesis titled: A study of emotion: Developing emotional intelligence. However, the first published use of the term emotional quotient was an article by Keith Beasley in 1987 in the British Mensa magazine. In 1989, Stanley Greenspan developed a model to describe emotional intelligence and this was followed by a work published by Peter Salovey and John Mayer titled emotional intelligence in 1990. However, the term became widely known in 1995 with the publication of Goleman's book: Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ. It is to this book's best-selling status that the term emotional intelligence gained its popularity (Payne, 1986 cited in Steve, 2019).

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## Components of Emotional Intelligence

The components of emotional intelligence are also regarded as the pillars or elements of emotional intelligence. Goleman (1995) cited in Landry (2019) identified five very fundamental components/pillars of emotional intelligence as briefly explained thus.

**i. Self-Awareness:** This is pillar or component is very key; as it describes a leader's ability to understand his/her strengths and weaknesses as well as recognize his/her emotions and the effect which such emotions have on him/her and his/her employees' performance. Thus, this element of emotional intelligence is very important to a leader because not being aware of self, limits a leader's utilization of his/her potentials. Landry (2019) maintained that working with employees who are not self-aware greatly reduces the level of job performance and organizational success. In order to bring out the best in others, a leader must first need to bring out the best in him/herself.

**ii. Self-Management/Regulation:** This refers to the ability of a leader or an individual to manage his emotions; particularly in stressful situations as well as maintain a positive outlook despite setbacks. According to Payne (1986) cited in Steve (2019), leaders who lack self-management tend to react and have a harder time keeping their impulses in check. The absence of self-management in a leader, his/her reactions to issues tend to be automatic and this often make leaders regret their actions thereafter. Hence, the more a leader is in tune with his/her emotional intelligence, the easier he/she is likely to make the transition from reaction to response. To achieve this, it is important for a leader to always remember to pause, breathe, collect him/herself before doing whatever it takes to manage his/her emotions. Leaders who regulate themselves effectively rarely verbally attack others, make rushed or emotional decisions, stereotype people or compromise their values. Self-regulation is all about controlling the emotions of oneself.

**iii. Motivation:** This has to do with both self-motivation and motivating others as well. A self-motivated leader works consistently towards goals realization and has extremely high standards for the quality of his/her work. According to Muktak (2017), it has to do with the tendency for a leader to enjoy achievement for its own sake. A leader who has strong passion for the work he/she does, is very likely to motivate others too. Thus, optimism and energy to improve are the key hallmarks of an emotionally intelligent and motivated person. When leader is unhappy with his/her job and tends to struggle to remember why he/she wanted to do, then such a leader is not self-motivated.

**iv. Empathy or Social Awareness:** Social awareness describes a leader's ability to recognize other people's emotions and the dynamics in play within the organization. Leaders who excel in social awareness practice empathy. They strive to understand their employees' feelings and perspectives which enables them to communicate and collaborate more effectively with their subordinates. In the view of Singh (2019), by communicating with empathy, a leader is more likely to better support his/her team with a view to improving the performance of both the leader and those of his/her employees. Leaders with empathy have the ability to put themselves in someone else's situation and they help develop the people in their team, challenge others who are acting unfairly, give constructive feedback and listen to those who need it.

**v. Relationship Management/Social Skills:** This simply refers to a leader's ability to influence, coach, mentor others and resolve conflict effectively. Muktak (2017) stated that leaders without relationship management ability often prefer to avoid conflict. However, it is better and important to properly address issues as they arise. Building positive relationship with workers does not only serve as a morale booster but promotes healthy, peaceful, friendly and productive workers.

## Developing Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

There are several ways or strategies in which leaders and potential leaders can develop their emotional intelligence. Commenting on the techniques of developing and

improving emotional intelligence in leadership, Joel and Natalie (2015) maintained that the developing emotional intelligence in leadership remains very fundamental to every leader and should be a continuous process. Joel and Natalie therefore, outlined basic strategies or approaches that could be used to develop and improve the emotional intelligence of a leader as thus: the leader should know his/her own emotional intelligence, strengths and weakness, he/she should stop getting sucked into other people's negative emotions, the leader should stop his/her emotions from escalating by knowing early warning signs and triggers, the leader should reduce and release stress so that it does not build up, he/she must overcome negative emotions, the leader should stop him/herself from crying or getting angry at work, he/she should recognize non-verbal communication and body language that shows him/her what others are feeling, the leader should understand, manage and influence other people's emotions, develop rapport and connect to co-workers or staff, develop true empathy which will increase his/her influence, authority and ability to be supportive. The leader should also communicate and listen effectively as well as improve his/her relationships with subordinates, he/she should handle others' emotional states, including apathy, defensiveness or anger as well as create a more positive work environment with low conflict and high productivity.

Being guided by the five pillars of emotional intelligence, Landry (2019) identified five techniques of developing emotional intelligence.

- i. **Self-Awareness:** First and foremost, the leader should devise means of understanding his/her strengths and weaknesses. He/she should also understand the kind of emotion he/she has. Thus, realizing the self-aspect of a leader is a journey to developing emotional intelligence.
- ii. **Self-Regulation:** Having realized the kind of emotions the leader has, he/she needs to start managing his/her emotions in a manner that will not affect him/her. In doing this, the leader needs not to allow stressful situations and setbacks overwhelm him/her; thereby abhorring the tendency to react and have a harder time keeping impulses in check.
- iii. **Motivation:** In developing emotional intelligence as a leader, he/she also needs to motivate himself and those around his/her team. First, the leader should ensure that the job, work environment and its components are motivating. The principles, targets and attitudes of the leader should also be motivating. The leader should be happy with his/her job and have strong passion for the job he/she does.
- iv. **Empathy:** This has to do with a leader's ability to recognize other people's emotions. A leader can achieve this by striving to understand the feelings, needs, emotions and interest of employees. Once this is done, team spirit will be developed, effective communication will be sustained and supportive atmosphere will be promoted.

- v. Relationship Management: A leader who needs to develop his/her emotional intelligence should ensure his/her relationship with employees is cordial and peaceful. Conflict, though unavoidable but should be kept at its minimum bearing. Conflict should be timely and sagaciously resolved as soon as it occurs to avoid its escalation. Building and managing human relationship as a leader promotes committed, dedicated and productive workforce.

## Importance of Developing Emotional Intelligence

Several studies have established the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership. Therefore, the relevance of emotional intelligence in leadership especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be over accentuated. According to Muktak (2017), in this current age of information, leaders cannot afford to ignore or even avoid follower emotions in the workplace. Muktak therefore, maintained that emotional intelligence enhances cognitive processes and decision making, promotes self-development of the manager and his leadership qualities, illuminates positive effects that can be observed and measured by higher productivity as well as stimulates building positive relations and gaining emotional commitment of employees.

Leaders are obviously human beings with the full range of moods and emotions potentially available to them. Both positive and negative moods and emotions serve numerous functions in the lives of leaders and this can sometimes be the cause of leadership and organizational dysfunctionality. There is no denying fact that emotions and feelings play a substantial role in evaluating leadership effectiveness. Apart from intelligent quotient, emotional intelligence also determines the success of a leader. This is because a leader's effectiveness may be hampered by the experience of certain moods and emotions. For instance, leaders who experience anger frequently may have a difficult time building good relationships with followers and engendering their trust. Similarly, a leader who frequently experiences positive moods on the job may fail to notice and attend to performance shortfalls that are less than apparent (Muktak, 2017).

Dabke (2016) posited that leaders need emotional intelligence in order to motivate and create a sense of belongingness that will make employees feel comfortable; thereby making them work more effectively. As such, leaders need to grow emotionally in order to handle different problems of stress and lack of life balance, among other things. A proper way to grow emotionally, for instance, is developing a sense of empathy since empathy is a key factor when it comes to emotional intelligence.

Stressing on the need for emotional intelligence for all leaders, Landry (2019) observed that leaders set the tone of their organizations and if they lack emotional intelligence, it could have more far-reaching consequences such as lower employee engagement, poor productive performance, conflict and a higher turnover rate. In the vein, Koehler (2018) maintained that analytical skills, cognitive intelligence, experience and vision are all traits often associated with the best organizational leaders but emotional intelligence which is an overlooked quality is what makes successful boss. Koehler therefore, added that

leaders who develop and nurture high emotional intelligence inevitably become better leaders; as making sound decisions by leaders requires an understanding of how their feelings affect judgment, productivity, attitudes and a lot more. The best leaders are self-aware of not only their emotions but also their weaknesses and limitations, as well as their strengths.

Leaders who make impulsive decisions or fail to control their emotions and lash out can quickly lose the respect of their subordinates. Those unregulated moments can undo any rapport previously built by a leader and getting it back is never easy. Emotional intelligence breeds self-regulation that prevents the moments you wish you could take back. Leaders with high emotional intelligence have a good understanding of their own emotional states; which allows them to more accurately gauge the emotions of others. It also promotes collaborative communication because it makes leaders to understand their co-workers. Emotionally intelligent leaders can immediately pick up the tone of the room or group and subsequently speak with honesty and sincerity to match that tone or mitigate unresolved tension. Leaders with emotional intelligence manage work stress better and may not let it consume them. They also refuse to take any negative feelings out on their co-workers or families (Koehler, 2018).

## Conclusion

To get better outcome from employees and to achieve organizational goals with efficiency and effectiveness, leaders should be able to understand their pulse and the employees' too. Generally, employees in an organization expect that their leader should understand their own feelings and respect them. Therefore, the leader should be very careful in dealing with employees' emotions. Through a greater understanding of one's emotions as well as the emotions of others, it allows leaders to positively affect their situation by creating an environment of open communication, enhanced trust and greater empathy. As organizations and leaders become increasingly aware of the importance of emotional intelligence, a healthy relationship between leaders and their subordinates will be promoted, mutual understanding and the rate of conflict will be minimal; thereby culminating in organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

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