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Research Title

Strengthening Team Harmony and Leadership Effectiveness: A Study of Emotional Intelligence in Virtual Work Environments in Multinational companies and international schools in Saudi Arabia

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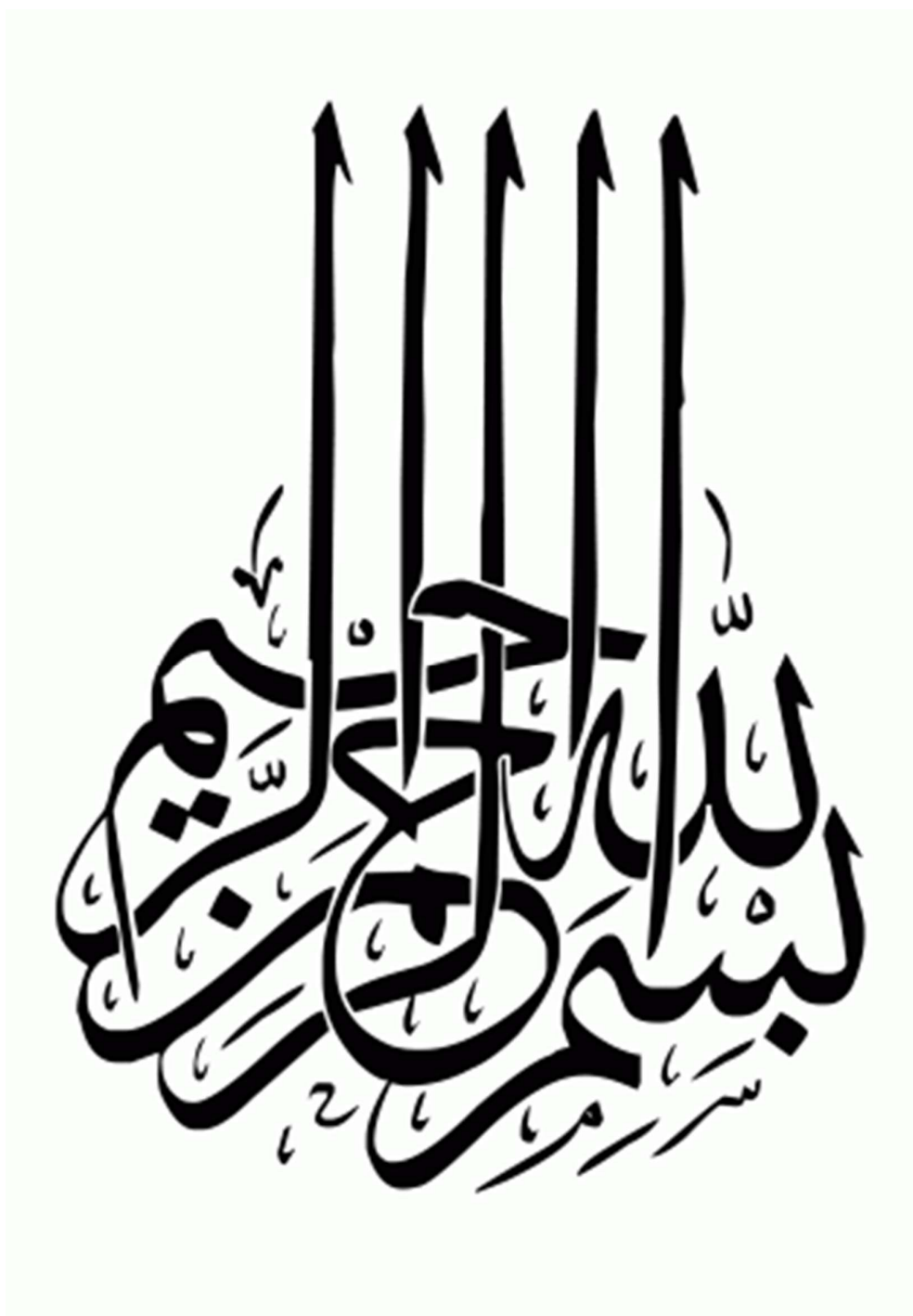
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Abstract

The shift to remote work environments, which has been forced upon the world through disruption and digitalization, is the core change in leadership dynamics in multinational middle managers and international schools in Saudi Arabia. In these artificial environments, conventional forms of leadership frequently do not cut the ice, especially in the establishment of trust, committal and team bonding when distant digital venues are involved. This study investigates the potential role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a pivotal element of virtual leadership in such diverse and intricate organizational settings.

Adopting a qualitative perspective, the research utilizes in depth interviews with managers at MNCs and teachers in international schools to explore how leaders 'read' and act upon emotion cues, promote a sense of psychological safety and negotiate interpersonal challenges in online communication. The results indicate that EI competencies, including empathy, emotion regulation, and active listening, are pivotal for sustaining team morale, alleviating tensions, and fostering cooperation within remote context. Yet at the same time, the development of these skills in an online setting may face its own set of obstacles, such as cultural disparities, low readings of nonverbal feedback and connectivity issues.

Implications for organizations This research has practical implications for organizations wanting to increase leadership effectiveness in remote or hybrids roles. It also highlights best practices to develop EI, such as specific training, peer feedback tools, and leadership development programs specifically designed for virtual settings. **Contributions** The research extends what is known about EI in global digitally connected teams and adds to the broader field of organizational behavior by asserting the centrality of EI in dispersed teams and offering a model for how to integrate EI into virtual leadership practices.

Although, the results emphasize the virtues of EI in the remote leadership, they are also warning, as they show that the effect is not guaranteed and depends on contextual conditions such as organizational culture, team composition, and access to digital tools. This thesis lays a framework for future studies and applied work centered on enhancing leadership in virtual domains, especially within culturally diverse fields such as international education and global business.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

1.1 Background

There have been major changes in leadership practices due to technological changes and the global workplace. One of the key changes in recent years has been the emergence of (MNCs) and (international schools in Saudi Arabia, with the growth of virtual teams and remote work. Digital technologies have made it possible for us to be more flexible and work across borders more easily, but also to face new challenges in communication, trust and team dynamics. Conventional leadership styles sometimes don't work in such environments where people do not meet everyone on a regular basis and can read emotional signals better.

In this regard, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has established its place as an essential element of successful leading in virtual teams. Emotional Intelligence, the capacity to recognize and understand emotions in oneself and others, is essential for digital leadership. In contrast to face-to-face workspaces in which nonverbal and informal communication are pivotal, emotional intelligence must be consciously integrated into the virtual arena.

Likewise, in Saudi Arabia global business growth and the influx of international schools have resulted in a diverse group of workers and connected staff. Leaders in these cultures are required to work around not just technological limitations but cultural sensibilities and different norms around how frequently communication should occur and what team working should look like. Lack of (in person) Presence Miscommunication, Lack of perceived psychological safety and a less engaged team/crew if leaders are not skillful in how to be emotional in a virtual environment.

Even in the present era of hybrid working there is a lack of clarity on the role emotional intelligence plays in virtual leadership effectiveness, especially in MNCs as well international schools in Saudi Arabia. This study filled this theoretical and practical knowledge gap, and sought to investigate the relationship between emotionally intelligent leadership, trust, co-operation and team performance in telecommuting. This paper seeks to inform organizations and educators in creating more adaptive and emotionally informed leadership practices suitable to the virtual work context.

1.2 Problem Statement

The emergence of virtual teams in MNCs and international schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has come with new challenges for leadership. Task coordination and cross-border collaboration are made possible by digital tools, but the complex emotional and interpersonal demands of leading in dispersed contexts are not. Challenges to virtual leadership in the CSCL. These situations are creating challenges for virtual leadership, including:

- **Lack of Emotional Visibility:** Leaders cannot see important non-verbal signals from others, including facial expressions, body language and tone of voice. This hinders their abilities to spot early signs of stress, too, as well as disconnection, or interpersonal strife, which are easier to pick up in in-person settings.
- **Reduced Trust and Psychological Safety:** Without in-person communication, there is decreased development of personal trust and psychological safety among remote teams. Team members may tend to be isolated, might be reluctant to communicate their concerns or might not know whether their messages were heard, resulting in lower team cohesion.
- **Communication Misalignment:** Because communication occurs virtually, the probability of misunderstanding, delayed response and emotional distance are much higher, especially when working with diverse cultures with varied communication style. All of this leads to disconnection and makes it hard for the leader to engage and align with the people.
- **Inadequate Leadership Approaches:** A band of leaders still try to manage the remote teams on old-fashioned task-oriented or authoritarian leadership ideal, which don't fits the emotional complexity of virtual teams-as-work group. These techniques rarely promote empathy, emotional regulation, or social awareness all but necessary for successfully leading remote teams.

Although there is a growing popularity of remote working in the post-pandemic world, there is still a significant gap between theory and practice regarding how EI can help to overcome these challenges in virtual leadership. The present research aims at exploring the relationship between EI, team connectedness, communication quality, and emotional climate in virtual settings in the context of both MNCs and international schools in Saudi Arabia.

1.3 Study Objectives

Current research This study... Emotional intelligence does come in handy on multiple occasions in managing virtual teams, and this what the study sought to clarify in downstream sections. The research does not only dwell in theory; it's about knowing how EI works in real life, in the places and situations where leaders often need to lead and support and connect with individuals they might not necessarily meet in person. These are the main aims of this study:

- **Investigating the role of Emotional Intelligence on the effectiveness of virtual leadership**

The research aims to uncover how leaders who are highly emotionally skilled can successfully maintain momentum, focus, and cohesion with virtual teams, particularly when operating under stress and communicating across time zones.

- **To know about the elements of EI that help leaders cope with emotional demands in the remote teams.**

Remote work leads to stress, loneliness or miscommunication. This research examines how leaders wield empathy, self awareness and emotional regulation to balance those tasks.

- **To investigate the relationship between EI and team engagement, trust and collaboration**

Effective virtual teams rely on deep emotional connections. The study examines why EI builds trust, lowers conflict and helps teams functioning cohesively.

- **To measure the EI in its Mayer and Salovey model in a remote working system**

Trusty Scientific Model The research applies a trusted scientific model to investigate leaders' reactions to and suppression of emotions in digital environments.

- **To provide practical dimensions about training virtual leaders with emotional intelligence**

Finally, the study aims to offer companies concrete tools they can use to train or identify leaders who can thrive emotionally not just technically in the era of remote work.

1.4 Research Questions

This research investigates and develops an understanding of the contribution of **Emotional Intelligence (EI)** to leadership effectiveness in virtual contexts: **Multinational Companies (MNCs)** and **International Schools (IS)** in Saudi Arabia. The study aims to include the outcomes of emotionally intelligent leadership practices on the performance of a team, psychological safety, communication, and emotional well-being in a distributed team.

To address this, the following research questions are proposed, which correspond to different dimensions of **emotional processes**, **leader–team dynamics**, and **organizational behavior** within digitally mediated work contexts:

1. **How does Emotional Intelligence affect the leadership of the virtual team?**

This question aims to examine how important core EI competencies such as empathy, self-regulation, and social awareness are in order for leaders to lead virtual teams successfully. It looks at how Emotional Intelligence impacts decision-making, productivity, and clarity of communication in the work done in teams that are not co-located.

2. **How do emotionally intelligent leaders build trust and create a sense of psychological safety within virtual teams?**

When interactions are not face-to-face, creating trust and psychological safety between individuals is difficult. This prompt is meant to highlight how leaders can leverage EI to create inclusive, respectful settings in which team members feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and raising issues during discussion.

3. **How does Emotional Intelligence affect communication and conflict management in virtual teams?**

Misunderstandings and unaddressed aggravation over digital communications are also all too easy. This item examines how emotionally intelligent leaders leverage empathic listening, recognition of emotions, and techniques of de-escalation to recognize and resolve conflicts between individuals at onset.

4. **What are the implications of Emotional Intelligence, virtual team engagement, and virtual emotional well-being?**

Leaders impact performance as well as the emotional climate of their teams. This question also speaks to the relationship of leaders' EI and outcomes in terms of team morale, and (lack of) burn-out or virtual burn-out.

5. **What implications for leadership development for virtual settings can be derived from the Mayer and Salovey model of Emotional Intelligence?**

Integrating theoretical knowledge with applied relevance, the present research considers how the model by Mayer and Salovey (1997) may support the development of evidence-based training modules for leaders to effectively manage the emotional demands of remote working.

6. **What is the role of Emotional Intelligence in leadership flexibility in the constantly changing virtual world?**

When the leaders who lead are dealing with unpredictability in their remote settings. This question is for learning how EI promotes flexibility, resilience, and behavioral adaptation, then leaders leading teams in these times of uncertainty affect their performance and cohesion.

7. **How does cultural diversity moderate the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and virtual team performance?**

Cultural diversity is a strength and yet a potential barrier to virtual collaboration. The central question addressed in this article regards the intersection of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and Emotional Intelligence to foment cross-cultural empathy, reduce discord, and how it gives rise to high-performing global teams.

8. **How does Emotional Intelligence play a role in digital feedback giving and performance management?**

Without the cues from being in-person, giving and receiving feedback is also more emotionally complex. This question asks: "How do emotionally intelligent leaders compassionately deliver feedback with clear intention to further a person's growth and development in the context of a remote performance evaluation?"

9. How can emotionally intelligent leaders pick up—and address—remote team emotional disengagement?

Virtual disengagement can be subtle and undermine collective performance. This question explores how EI enables leaders to sense withdrawal, interpret the source of emotional shifts, and respond with personalized emotional relief to re-engage emotionally disconnected team members.

10. What types of digital leadership competencies can be particularly fostered by Emotional Intelligence in virtual collaboration tools?

There are new communication barriers between asynchronous tools and video conferencing platforms. In this section we address how EI contributes to a leader's use of digital media to express emotional tone, maintain sharing of information, and maintain relational presence on multiple media channels.

1.5 Hypotheses

The following are the hypotheses from the research questions and the framework of Emotional Intelligence (EI) developed by Mayer and Salovey. All of these reasons are based on the assumption of how EI may impact virtual leadership and team performance.

1: High Emotional Intelligent Leaders are better able to lead virtual teams.

This assumption proposes that being emotionally intelligent leaders will be more aware of team interactions, and that they will adjust their leadership styles to mitigate tackling virtual communication challenges.

2: Emotional Intelligence has a positive effect on developing trust in remote leadership.

As trust doesn't come naturally without being together, it's likely that leaders who demonstrate empathy and emotional awareness will make teams feel more trusting.

3: Greater Emotional Intelligence helps to cooler heads prevail in conflict resolution and communication in virtual teams.

This theoretical article examines how EI helps leaders interpret subtle emotional cues and react with calm to miscommunications via text based or video technologies.

4: When there's emotional intelligence at the helm, teams become more engaged and psychologically safe.

The concept being that EI enables the development of emotionally nurturing climates where people feel it is safe to share ideas, take risks and remain motivated.

5: Emotional Intelligence is a tool that allows creating adaptive leadership in dynamic virtual settings that indirectly promotes a successful project completion.

That's because EI helps leaders stay adaptable, manage stress, and make more informed decisions when managing remote projects under stress.

6: Virtual project teams characterized by high levels of emotional composition (both positive and negative) are more resilient and show less conflict and more engagement.

Finally, this theory considers the emotional composition of the group as a whole, rather than only its leader suggesting that emotionally varied and sensitive teams are likely to perform more effectively.

1.6 Significance of Study

This research contributes meaningfully to both academic knowledge and real-world leadership practices. Its significance can be explained through the following dimensions:

Adding to What We Know (Academic Contribution):

We know a lot about Emotional Intelligence (EI) in traditional workplaces, but when it comes to leading virtual teams, it's still a bit of a mystery. Our study dives deep into this underdeveloped area, using the trusted Mayer and Salovey (1997) EI model. We are essentially building a roadmap to show how EI influences everything from how virtual teams communicate to how they build trust and manage emotions.

Real-World Help for Organizations (Practical Relevance):

With remote and hybrid work, companies especially big multinational ones are scrambling to figure out how to lead effectively in this new field. Our research offers some much-needed answers. Giving leadership development pros actionable insights into the emotional skills that can truly boost team performance, cut down on conflict, and make virtual collaboration actually work.

Guiding Educational Leaders (Implications for Educational Leadership):

This study also has a special relevance for international schools, where cross-cultural staff and virtual classrooms are becoming the norm. Imagine knowing how emotionally intelligent leaders can create a safer, more supportive environment for everyone. Our findings can help shape training programs for school administrators and team leaders, empowering them to better support their team well-being.

Navigating Diverse Teams (Support for Culturally Diverse Teams):

In places like Saudi Arabia, the workplace is a melting pot of cultures. This research directly addresses how EI helps leaders bridge cultural gaps, build trust, and keep teams harmonious, even when communicating across digital channels. It's incredibly relevant for today's diverse, modern workplaces.

1.7 Structure of the Research

This Study is organized into nine chapters, each designed to explore the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in virtual leadership across multinational companies (MNCs) and international schools (IS) in Saudi Arabia:

- **Chapter One: Introduction**
This chapter presents the background of the study, outlines the research problem, and defines the objectives, significance, and research questions. It also introduces the theoretical framework and clarifies the scope of the study.
- **Chapter Two: Literature Review**
This chapter reviews existing literature related to **Emotional Intelligence, virtual leadership**, and remote team dynamics. It includes discussion of the **Mayer and Salovey (1997) model** and highlights gaps this research aims to address.
- **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**
This chapter outlines the overall research design, including the qualitative approach, participant selection, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. It also discusses how validity and reliability were ensured throughout the study.
- **Chapter Four: Emotional Intelligence in Leadership Contexts**
This chapter explains the core principles, practices, and benefits of Emotional Intelligence, especially in leadership roles within MNCs. It links EI to adaptability, inclusiveness, and performance in culturally diverse and virtual environments.
- **Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion**
This chapter provides the main results of the study, including a thematic analysis of interview responses. It connects the findings to the original research questions and relevant academic literature.
- **Chapter Six: Recommendations**
This chapter summarizes the study's outcomes and practical implications. It offers actionable recommendations for leadership development, EI training, and improving emotional awareness in virtual leadership settings.
- **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**
The final chapter reflects on the entire research process. It summarizes the main findings, discusses the study's contributions to knowledge, acknowledges its limitations, and provides closing remarks on the significance and future direction of the topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Overview

With the rise of remote work, the model for thought leadership has changed. Emotional Intelligence (EI), which was once an esoteric asset, has now become a core competency of a virtual leader. This paper investigates the theoretical underpinnings of EI and provided data on its application in VEs, as well as the issues, challenges, and problems on remote management, especially in MNCs and international schools in Saudi Arabia. Borrowing from a rich body of scholarly work, this review consolidates theoretical roots, empirical evidence, and pragmatic wisdom to situate EI as a critical component to effective leadership in the digital age.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation of Emotional Intelligence

The concept of EI originates from previous psychological theories such as social intelligence (Thorndike, 1920) that focused on the capacities to understand and manage human relation. But the concept of 'Emotional Intelligence' was introduced otherwise, by Peter Salovey, and John D. Mayer, in 1990 *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*. They described EI as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them.” (Mayer & Salovey, 1990)

Their four-branch model continues to be an influential part of research on EI. It includes:

1. **Perceiving Emotions** – the ability to recognize emotions in faces, tone, and behavior.
2. **Using Emotions to Facilitate Thought** – channeling emotions to promote cognitive activities.
3. **Understanding Emotions** – comprehending emotional language and the causes of emotions.
4. **Managing Emotions** – the regulation of emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

This model emphasizes EI as a set of **mental abilities**, measurable and distinct from personality traits. It inspired the development of ability-based assessments such as the **MSCEIT** (Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test).

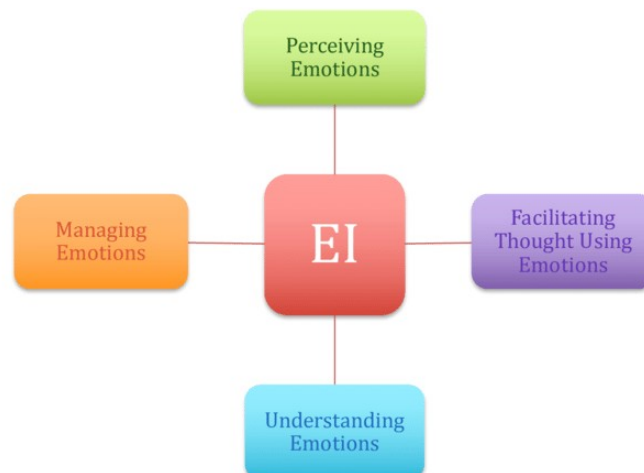


Figure 1: Four-Branch Model

By contrast, EI, which is a mixed model of emotional competencies, social skills, and personality, was popularized in mainstream psychology and leadership literature by Daniel Goleman (1995, 1998). Goleman posited that EI might matter even more than IQ when it comes to success in work and life. His model was originally composed of five essential elements:

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



Figure 2: Goleman Framework

Later, Goleman refined this model into a set of **12 emotional competencies**, organized under four domains: **Self-Awareness**, **Self-Management**, **Social Awareness**, and **Relationship Management** (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). These competencies are widely used in corporate leadership development and emotional competence training programs.

In educational and organizational psychology, several other frameworks have also gained attention. For example:

- The **RULER Model** developed by Yale's Center for Emotional Intelligence (Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, Regulating emotions).
- The **PERMA Model** (Seligman, 2011), often used in Positive Psychology, which indirectly supports EI by promoting emotional well-being and meaningful engagement.

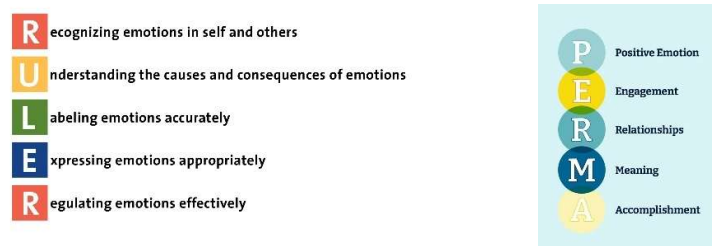


Figure 3: RULER & PERMA Models

All frameworks are based on different conceptions of what EI is – a cognitive ability, an acquired skill, or combination of traits and behaviors. This variety in approaches reflects the ever-increasing complexity of EI research as well as its cross-disciplinary appeal to the likes of leadership, education, psychology, and cross-cultural management.

2.3 Previous Studies on Emotional Intelligence and Emotional leadership

Impact of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on Leadership Efficacy in Virtual environment Some of the literature has examined the affects of EI on leading effectively in the virtual environment. These researches indicate the importance of EI in handling distributed teams, enhancing engagement, and managing cross-cultural issues.

Study 1: Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness (Goleman, 2000)

It was from that background breaking research the works of Daniel Goleman showed up to show that up to 90% that made the difference between the average leader and the extraordinary one was founded on emotional competencies like: Self awareness Empathy Relationship management. From corporate examples, Goleman maintained that leaders with higher levels of emotional intelligence were better at achieving organizational success than those who idolized technical skills or IQ. His studies led to the conclusion that EI emerged as a key attribute for successful leadership practice and as a fundamental competitive advantage for management and leadership development internationally.

Findings: Source: Goleman What at first may appear as an intimidating list of traits, is proven to be one of the biggest indicators of a leader with potential. By participating in a dialogue about competencies, acknowledging the significance and our own ability to develop EQ within our organizations, and arming our leaders to take action, we can harness the potential of emotionally intelligent leaders in all sectors of business even hot-headed sales people. Emotional and Social Competencies at Work Goleman discovered that 85-90% of success in leadership is accredited to emotional versus technical or cognitive competencies in high performing organizations. More specifically, self-awareness, empathy and relationship management were key skills required to motivate teams, improve relationships and deal with stress in the organisation.

Study 2: Emotional Intelligence and Virtual Team Effectiveness (*William L. Quisenberry,*)

This research investigates the impact of emotional intelligence (emotional intelligence) on virtual team performance of IT organizations. It is based in India, and examines the relationship between team members' emotional intelligence and various aspects of virtual team performance, such as, quality of communication, trust, collaboration, and decision-making. Data were gathered using structured questionnaires distributed among 130 IT employees working from virtual supports.

Findings: This study concludes that virtual team dynamics is greatly increased by greater emotional intelligence. Teams made up of emotionally intelligent participants had more effective communication, greater interpersonal trust, and more cooperation. Emotional regulation and empathy enabled a decrease in miscommunication and digital tension, and emotional self-awareness in team members led to faster conflict resolution. Implications The results highlight the centrality of emotional intelligence as an essential skill in facilitating virtual collaboration and maintaining performance in geographically dispersed teams.

Study 3: The Influence of EI on Employee Performance (Dr. Rajesh Ramasamy, Dr. Pankaj Kumar, Dr. Sadanandam Ariyaputhiri, Dr. Arokiaraj David)

This study employed quantitative methods to assess how EI influences employee outcomes in Saudi-based multinational companies. A strong association between leaders' EI and employee satisfactions, communication quality, and work engagement was reported based on a sample of more than 300 employees. The study underscored the importance of EI in handling cultural diversity and reducing emotional distance in virtual environments and concluded that EI training is a critical factor in developing MNC leadership.

Findings: The findings indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between leader's emotional intelligence and employee job satisfaction, job engagement and performance. IT leadership was particularly clear and effective to express and reduce emotional tensions and enhance communication clarity within multicultural teams.

Study 4: Effect of Principal's Emotional Intelligence Management on Leadership Quality (Dea Dwi Amelia , Hasan Hariri , Dedy Hermanto Karwan , Riswanti Rini , 2021)

Focusing on how emotional intelligence management affected school principal leadership quality in different socio-cultural areas globally, this literature review. By reviewing 21 peer-reviewed studies across various countries, researchers looked at how principals' EI skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and emotional management affect their success as school leaders. The review suggests successful school leadership is more and more reliant on a principal's emotional ability to engage staff, manage crises, and foster collegial interaction.

Findings: Principals with high EI created more inclusive school cultures, better managed crisis situations (e.g., COVID-19 lockdowns), and improved staff retention. Emotional attunement was especially critical in culturally diverse schools.

Study 5: Is Team Emotional Composition Essential for Virtual Team Members' Well-Being? (Nuria Gamero , Baltasar González-Anta , Virginia Orengo , Ana Zornoza and Vicente Peñarroja)

This study analytically examined the effect of organizational emotional intelligence on virtual team collaboration, psychological safety and conflict resolution. Results suggested that teams with members that were emotionally in sync had fewer misunderstandings, stronger solidarity and more effective decision making. This leadership that role model such and reinforcement this behavior helped the team to adapt and perform under pressure. The research contributes to the understanding that team-level emotional dynamics are as important as individual EI .

Findings: Teams with emotionally intelligent leaders and members experienced less conflict, more psychological safety, and higher productivity. Emotional congruence among team members strengthened trust and decision-making efficiency.

Study 6: Role of Emotional Intelligence in Virtual Project Management (Shazia Nauman, Maliha Elahi, Zeeshan Ahmed Bhatti and Umair Khalid , 2006)

This research investigated the affect of EI on the VPM performance in a DE. The authors developed a conceptual framework connecting Goleman's EI competences (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management) to the main issues faced in virtual project management (VPM) communication voids, trust impairments, cultural distances, and motivation gaps.

Based on survey and semi-structured interviews with software professionals in Pakistan's software industry, the study inquired into how project managers' emotional competencies empowered them to bridge constraints arising from a lack of AVFs. Emotional intelligence was charted against virtual project requirements including decision making, flexibility, creativity, trust formation, and conflict resolution.

Findings: The research results showed that EI contributes significantly in the project managers' ability to effectively manage distributed teams. Self-management and social awareness proved particularly important, aiding leaders contending with cultural barriers and digital communication mishaps. The key mediators between EI and successful virtual collaboration were perceived to be trust and motivation. The study developed a conceptual model that incorporates overlapping relationships between EI competencies and VPM elements and suggests EI as a strategic benefit in virtual project environments.

2.4 Gaps in Existing Research

EI has been widely researched in Leadership and Organizational Behavior; there has been very little specialized research on the place of EI in virtual leadership in the Saudi Arabian context especially in MNCs and IS. With the virtual work environment being priapism among the permanent structures in many of the industries, the emotional dynamics of distributed leadership are still under-examined especially in culturally diverse and digitally reliant contexts like the Saudi Arabia. Identified Gaps:

- **Limited Sector-Specific Research:** A shortage of studies examining how EI-based leadership functions in MNCs and international schools operating in Saudi Arabia's multicultural and remote work settings.
- **Virtual Leadership Focus:** Most existing EI research highlights face-to-face leadership; few explore how emotional intelligence is practically applied and measured in virtual environments.
- **Cultural Dimension:** Limited exploration of how **cultural diversity** within international teams in Saudi Arabia influences the application and effectiveness of emotionally intelligent leadership.
- **Empirical Qualitative Data:** A lack of **in-depth, interview-based qualitative research** that captures real-life leadership experiences in virtual settings in the Saudi context.

Research Focus:

- **Qualitative Investigation:** This study uses expert interviews to explore how emotionally intelligent leadership impacts communication, trust, and team cohesion in virtual workspaces.
- **Applied Leadership Models:** It connects EI theory particularly Mayer & Salovey's model with practical leadership behaviors in digital environments.
- **Practical Recommendations:** The research objects to provide evidence-based suggestions for developing EI-centered leadership programs for virtual leaders in Saudi-based MNCs and IS environments.

By addressing these research gaps, this study intentions to advance the understanding of emotional intelligence in virtual leadership, offering practical perceptions that are relevant to both academic research and organizational practice in culturally diverse, digitally mediated settings.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative approach, structured to explore the impact of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on leadership in virtual environment specifically within Multinational Companies (MNCs) and International Schools (IS) in Saudi Arabia. The qualitative design allows for rich, in-depth understanding of how emotionally intelligent leadership influences communication, trust-building, motivation, and team cohesion in remote environments.

Objectives of the Research Design:

- To explore how EI competencies (e.g., empathy, self-regulation, social awareness) are practiced by virtual leaders in MNCs and IS.
- To investigate how virtual leaders recognize and manage emotional dynamics in distributed teams.
- To assess the role of EI in overcoming challenges such as miscommunication, disengagement, and cultural differences in virtual settings.
- To generate practical recommendations for leadership development based on EI models (e.g., Goleman, Mayer & Salovey).
- To contribute to the body of knowledge on virtual leadership in multicultural, digitally facilitated workspaces.

3.2 Data Collection

The study utilizes **qualitative semi-structured interviews** as the primary data collection method. This method was chosen to gain detailed insights into the lived experiences of virtual leaders and team members in diverse organizational contexts.

3.3 Data Analysis Technique

The study applied **Thematic Analysis** to examine the interview data. This method allows for the systematic identification of recurring patterns and themes that capture how EI manifests in virtual leadership. Thematic Analysis was guided by Braun & Clarke's (2006) approach:

- Familiarization: Reading transcripts multiple times.
- Coding: Assigning codes to EI-related behaviors.
- Theme Development: Grouping related codes into themes.
- Theme Refinement: Validating themes against raw data.
- Narrative Construction: Presenting themes with participant quotes.

3.4 Validation and Reliability

It is necessary to make certain the quality and reliability of the qualitative data. This study employed several strategies:

Validation:

- Triangulation: Multiple participant roles (managers, teachers, coordinators) were included to provide varied perspectives.
- Member Checking: Participants were invited to review preliminary findings to ensure accurate interpretation of their statements.

Reliability:

- Consistent Data Collection: The same interview guide was used across participants to maintain consistency.
- Audit Trail: Detailed notes were kept throughout the research process, including design decisions, codebooks, and analysis memos, to enable future replication or auditing of the study.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

- Informed Consent: Participants were briefed and consented.
- Confidentiality: Anonymity ensured through pseudonyms.
- Voluntary Participation: Right to withdraw at any point.

3.6 Limitation of the Methodology

- Findings may not generalize beyond sample.
- Cultural biases may affect EI interpretation.
- Virtual interviews may limit nonverbal cue analysis.

Chapter 4: Emotional Intelligence in leadership Contexts

4.1 Introduction

With workspaces more virtual than ever, leaders are grappling with how they can connect, support, and support their teams without the face-to-face interaction we're accustomed to. Here, Emotional Intelligence (EI) is not simply a good quality of good leaders it is a survival skill. Chapter Content Theoretical foundations of emotional intelligence Emotional intelligence (EI), as a framework for improving virtual leadership, is a relatively novel construct that illustrates significance in modern, globalized business environments, including those of the MNCs and international schools in Saudi Arabia. Attention is given to how emotionally intelligent leaders adjust their behavior to digital environments and cultural diversity.

4.2 Core Principles of Emotional intelligence

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is not a single trait but a combination of emotional awareness, regulation, and interpersonal skills that shape how people interact, make decisions, and lead others. Several leading theories define EI from different perspectives, offering frameworks that help us understand how it operates in leadership especially in remote and multicultural environments.

Goleman's Five Domains of EI

The Goleman model is among the most well-known models studied in leadership literature. It identifies five elements that emotionally intelligent leaders are likely to have mastered:

Self-Awareness

This is the ability to come become aware of and understand both your feelings and how they impact your thoughts and actions. As you have strong self-awareness, you are able to see when your emotional buttons are being pushed and when you may be taking out your mood or stress on the team. In purely virtual contexts, where reflection is the key player, self-awareness is at the source of one's ability to control one's emotions.

Self-Regulation

This means restraining or redirecting disruptive feelings and adjusting to change. Strong self-regulation leaders can keep a cool head in the heat of battle, don't react impulsively and can demonstrate being levelheaded to their teams. In virtual leadership misunderstandings can rise easily without visual cues and that way we can keep it calm professional.

Motivation

Emotionally intelligent leaders are internally rather than externally motivated. They demonstrate perseverance and positivity, even in the face of failure. This mission driven culture contributes to team morale and motivation especially in remote working where it can sometimes be hard to maintain motivation due to isolation or no direct supervision.

Empathy

Empathy the ability to feel what another person feels. In leadership, it refers to reading the room and your team's concerns, needs and emotional state even if you're not being told how those feelings explicitly connect to the work at hand. In tool-mediated interactions, which lack of emotional signals, leaders with empathy can detect burnout or disengagement or frustration early.

Social Skills

These are the kinds of skills that are used by leaders to manage relationships, to build rapport, to resolve conflicts, and to build collaboration. Strong social skills help leaders communicate well, motivate, and foster positive group dynamic all critical when teams are working away from one another.

Goleman's model stresses the idea that EI is learned and can be developed through a conscious effort, which would make it particularly useful for developing leaders.

Mayer and Salovey's Ability-Based Model

Peter Salovey and John Mayer were among the first to define EI as a set of mental abilities related to emotional processing. Their model views EI as a form of intelligence something measurable and distinct from personality traits. It includes four key abilities:

1. **Perceiving Emotions** – recognizing emotions in yourself and others through facial expressions, tone of voice, and other cues
2. **Using Emotions to Facilitate Thought** – harnessing emotions to prioritize thinking, guide problem-solving, or increase creativity
3. **Understanding Emotions** – knowing how emotions evolve over time or how different emotions might interact
4. **Managing Emotions** – regulating your own and others' emotions to promote growth or maintain emotional balance

This model frames EI as cognitive processing a skillset that leaders can use to make better decisions and form deeper connections, especially in complex or emotionally charged situations.

Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i)

Reuven Bar-On introduced a third model, the EQ-i, which focuses on emotional and social competencies that influence how people understand themselves, relate to others, and cope with stress. His model is broader and includes:

- **Intrapersonal Skills** – like self-regard, emotional self-awareness, and assertiveness
- **Interpersonal Skills** – like empathy and social responsibility
- **Adaptability** – including problem-solving and flexibility
- **Stress Management** – resilience and impulse control
- **General Mood** – optimism and happiness

The EQ-i is often used in workplace assessments because it connects EI with actual performance outcomes. For leaders, this model highlights how emotional strength and adaptability influence everything from team morale to personal decision-making under pressure.

Putting the Models Together

While these three models differ in emphasis — with Goleman focusing on leadership behaviors, Mayer and Salovey on emotional reasoning, and Bar-On on social and emotional functioning — they complement each other. Taken together, they offer a layered understanding of EI:

- **What it is** (abilities, traits, and skills)
- **How it works** (perception, regulation, application)
- **Why it matters** (better relationships, decisions, and resilience)

In the context of virtual leadership, the value of these EI principles becomes even more pronounced. Leaders must not only understand their own emotions and behavior but also adapt quickly to subtle signals from others, often through limited digital channels. Emotional intelligence allows them to do this with empathy, clarity, and presence — despite physical distance.

4.3 Emotional intelligence in Leadership Practice

Emotional Intelligence (EI) influences how leaders present themselves, how they speak and how they deal with adversity. It's not a "nice to have" so much as a factor influencing team performance, trust, and resilience, particularly in virtual environments where face-to-face encounters are rare or nonexistent. In practice, such leadership looks like the everyday decisions people make: how a manager reacts to frustration, a principal after a teacher loses her temper, or a team leader who reads not only the words but also the silence between the lines of a terse email.

Communication and Clarity

Leaders who have high emotional intelligence understand that the how is often more important than the what. In remote work settings, this is all the more crucial for two reasons: the tone, clarity, and timing hold greater significance. The risk for misunderstanding is higher with email, chat, or video calls-led communication. What one writes to be direct may be cold, and a delay in response might be seen as lack of interest.

EI helps leaders:

- Select their words with a bit more emotional sensitivity
- Change their tone to accommodate the sensitivity of the subject
- Validate emotions in digital communication ("I have noticed how this has been difficult we can work through it together")
- Be aware that silence or slow responses can be misread

Take a manager in an MNC (Multi-National Corporation) who is delivering a tough project update, for instance - starting with acknowledging the efforts of the assembled team, then walking through the challenges calmly, while performing a balancing act of being up-front and encouraging. This emotionally connected sharing drives out panic and provides psychological safety.

Decision-Making Under Pressure

Decisions in leadership are often required on short notice, and at times with incomplete information. It is one of the many skills that people with strong Emotional Intelligence (EQ) possess, and it allows leaders to be able to tell when their own emotions (for example, stress or frustration) are affecting their judgment and to pause before reacting.

EI-driven leaders:

- Think before you react, especially when overheated emotionally.
- Consider impact of decisions on team members emotionally
- Remain open to input and feedback, instead of defending your ego
- Remain fair and compassionate, even if discipline or correction is in order

Imagine a school principal who must confront a teacher on his consistent tardiness in turning in student reports. The emotionally intelligent path would be through a private conversation, expressed not as an accusation but as a concern, making an effort to listen and understand if there is some deeper issue behind the alienating behavior. It maintains dignity but sets standards.

Conflict Resolution and Relationship Management

Disagreements are to be expected among any team — and they can flare up even more in the virtual world, where tone and intention can be easily misinterpreted. Emotional Intelligence trains leaders to handle such situations with serenity, empathy and justness.

Instead of either supporting one party or denying its existence, emotionally intelligent leaders:

- Know the signs of early emotional strain (snappy responses, silence, decrease in engagement).
- Ask open-ended questions that will bring out the issues
- Validate different perspectives
- Lead the team to collective solutions without making an assignment of blame

This kind of emotional sensitivity is useful for leaders to act as bridges rather than obstacles in MNCs, where cross-cultural differences can exaggerate misunderstanding. In the schools, it allows leaders to navigate parent-teacher or staff conflict without adding more stress to an already overburdened staff.

Motivating and Inspiring Teams

So many corporate hacks think of motivation in terms of meeting KPIs or receiving external rewards when it's really about purpose, recognition and connection. Leaders with emotional intelligence understand what motivates employees and work hard to connect the dots between the day-to-day grind and broader meaning in the world.

They:

- Recognize and celebrate small wins
- Offer personalized encouragement
- Reconnect team members with their sense of purpose.
- Remember to stay positive and think about solutions in setbacks

For example, a teacher doing virtual classes may be tired and isolated. A principal who has a high EQ might stop by informally, praise the teacher's work and provide an opportunity to vent transforming a moment of exhaustion into one of appreciation.

Adapting to Change

From changing policies to unexpected crises to new technologies, leaders are always addressing some form of change. EI enables them to navigate through their own uncertainty and be a soothing presence to others.

High-EI leaders:

- Be open to change openly and confidently
- Recognize emotional reactions ("I know this is hard, we're in this together.")
- Ensure the team participates in problem-solving rather than being dictated to from top down.
- Stay flexible and model resilience

For instance, during COVID-19, emotionally intelligent school leaders helped keep morale high during long virtual semesters. They accomplished this not through having all the answers, but by being present, responsive and emotionally available.”

Leadership in EI This is why EI in leadership is not some abstract concept it is all there in how leaders manage stress, communicate with empathy, manage conflict and create motivation. These behaviors are heightened on virtual settings, where communication is thinner and emotional cues are more difficult to pick up on. MNCs and international schools with leaders who show high EI will be able to maintain stronger bonds, better togetherness, and better work cultures no matter how much their teams may be dispersed across cities, countries, or even continents.

4.4 Emotional intelligence and Virtual Leadership in Multinational Companies (MNCs)

In MNCs, virtual teams often span time zones, cultures, and languages. EI enables leaders to recognize emotional differences, adapt their communication styles, and encourage complete team cultures. High EI helps leaders manage uncertainty, keep spread teams engaged, and mitigate conflicts that arise from misunderstandings or cultural gaps. It supports resilience and adaptability, fast-changing corporate settings.

In MNCs, leaders typically manage workforces in which:

- Members of the team have various first languages
- The norms about feedback, conflict, and communication are different There is no one size fits all advice for how to navigate your new work relationships.
- Jobs are performed asynchronously based on the time zone.
- Face-to-face interaction is rare or non-existent

In these contexts, emotionally intelligent leadership is key. For example, a colleague from a high-context culture (like Japan or Saudi Arabia) may raise an issue indirectly, while one from a low-context culture (like Germany or the U.S.) may want to deal with it head-on. A leader with high emotional intelligence can recognize these nuances in culture and modify their style of response as to not create misunderstandings, or possibly even insult.

EI also helps virtual leaders:

- Identify emotional “red flags” via digital channels, including a rude email or unresponsive behaviors on a video call
- Control their response to stress or delays, showing grace and perseverance.
- Develop environments that are emotionally safe for giving and discussing feedback even in the chat or email format
- Demonstrate empathy by consistently checking in and addressing both logistical and emotional struggles the team is wrestling with you are not only a boss but a counselor as well.

For example, a regional director in an MNC based out of Saudi Arabia could have a virtual check-in every Monday, where not only Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are reviewed, but questions are asked like, “How are people feeling? “Any worry we haven’t painted yet?” This simple act, coming from an empathetic place, helps us to trust others and to bridge the emotional gap of virtual work.

EI should also be a central consideration in conflict prevention. In MNCs, misunderstandings in the virtual context tend to grow out of proportion where instant measures for resolution are not available. The emotionally intelligent leader who tunes into that tension (even without overt complaints) will perhaps pull the complaining individual aside for a one-on-one to bring these hidden concerns to the surface before they affect the larger team.

4.5 Emotional intelligence and Virtual Leadership in International schools (IS)

Relationship-driven in international schools When it comes to leadership in international schools, relationships is the game. Principals, coordinators, and teachers work in varied, touch-intensive settings with students, parents, and staff members who represent various cultural and emotional homebases. This diversity is a strength but it also makes E.I. all the more critical for day-to-day leadership and long-term school culture.

Emotionally intelligent school leaders:

- Recognize and be sensitive to cultural variation in the expression and management of emotions.
- Offer emotional support during transitions (i.e., beginning of the school-year, exam periods, crises such as COVID-19).
- Create teacher teams that reflect and serve teacher's personal and professional interests.
- Address disciplinary cases in a compassionate and just manner.

Such was a case when a principal of an international school in Riyadh noticed a teacher from Europe getting frustrated and isolating himself during Ramadan. Instead of waiving off the problem or providing a generic pep talk, an EI-influenced leader would pull the teacher aside and inquire as to their well-being or extend an olive branch by way of relief with scheduling or covering a class.

Emotionally intelligent teachers also have a relatively large impact on student outcomes. In online and blended learning environments, EI allows them to:

- Sense if a student is overburdened or tuned out, with or without verbal indications.
- Encourage and Occasion Confidence Enhance confidence with encouraging language and active listening.
- Build classrooms in communities affected hard by poverty, violence, and trauma where students are seen and heard across difference in deep and authentic ways.

4.6 Benefits of Emotional intelligence in Virtual Work Environment

Working from home is efficient and flexible and increasingly necessary but it's no day at the beach, emotionally speaking. Team mates may feel alone, unheard or unseen. Emotional Intelligence becomes an antidote to these hazards, allowing leaders to sustain coherence, proximity, and focus across distances.

Psychological Safety

When leaders demonstrate empathy, manage their emotional tone and are appropriately vulnerable, they establish a culture that allows others to speak up. If anything, this is more pronounced in virtual environments due to the reduced frequency of informal, in-office chat, which would have provided that informal reassurance.

One who follows emotional intelligence might remark in an internal team meeting:

"I found few people speaking up today do you sense something pressing on the team? This is a safe space."

Those kinds of comments help to normalize open conversation, and to bring peoples' full selves to work.

Preventing Burnout and Emotional Fatigue

You can easily check in with virtual co-workers for emotional recognition, and that will prevent disconnection and burnout. EI helps leaders identify early indicators delayed responses, lack of participation or changes in communication style and intervene with support.

This might look like:

- Offering a lighter workload temporarily
- Promoting vacation or flexible work hours
- Checking in informally without judgment

Digital Empathy, and 'Reading the Room' From Afar

We do this through facial expressions, body language and a host of other responses that help us interpret what actions are acceptable. Online, leaders need to pay attention to subtler cues: a delay before answering, a sharper tone in a message, or a change in the use of emojis or punctuation.

Leaders who possess high EI are more likely to:

- Stop and question, before jumping to conclusions.
- Tense threads, gently clarify meaning
- Apply the warmth and excitement to counter the coldness of the text.

For instance, give team members who reply to a short message say, “Got it. Sure,” the emotionally intelligent leader doesn’t just leave it there. They could follow up directly: “Hey, just checking in you were a little quiet earlier. Everything okay?” That simple act of caring can forestall misunderstanding and foster trust.

Sustaining Team Morale and Performance

EI enables leaders to keep emotions in virtual teams healthy. They promote recognition, celebrate wins, and provide valuable feedback beyond transactional updates. They also flex their leadership style to what each member of the team needs whether it’s structure, autonomy, reassurance, or challenge.

Emotional intelligence is what holds virtual teams together as an invisible string... That makes sure they work well, remain emotionally and mentally robust and can produce results. In MNCs and international schools, where the cultural and geographical distance is palpable, EI humanizes remote leadership and makes it so much more effective.

4.7 Summary

This chapter explored how Emotional Intelligence helps leaders navigate the complexities of virtual environments. Through models like Goleman’s, Mayer and Salovey’s, and Bar-On’s, we see how EI influences leadership style, decision-making, and team cohesion. In both multinational companies and international schools in Saudi Arabia, emotionally intelligent leadership is not just helpful it’s critical. It enables leaders to adapt to digital communication, cultural differences, and human needs, helping teams thrive no matter where they are.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and interprets the core findings of the study on Emotional Intelligence (EI) in virtual leadership. Through a combination of semi-structured interviews and surveys, the study explored how leaders in multinational corporations (MNCs) and international schools (IS) in Saudi Arabia experience, demonstrate, and evaluate EI within remote work contexts. The aim is to connect participants' lived experiences and behavioral patterns with the theoretical frameworks of EI discussed in earlier chapters particularly those of Goleman, Mayer and Salovey, and Bar-On.

The chapter follows a thematic structure, reflecting both the open-ended nature of the interviews and the survey data's quantitative insights. Each section explores a different dimension of EI from emotional awareness and conflict resolution to trust-building and motivational strategies and shows how these dimensions play out differently in MNCs and schools. By triangulating interview quotes, survey responses, and theoretical analysis, this chapter offers a rich, layered understanding of how emotional intelligence functions in virtual leadership settings.

5.2 Participants Demographics and Interview Methodology.

The data source for the qualitative part of this study was based on interviews of 100 managers in MNCs and 75 teachers and managers of international schools in Saudi Arabia. This group was comprised of all sorts of nationalities and backgrounds, reflecting the rich diversity of the work places they live. All held leadership roles, be it in managing teams, directing classrooms or coordinating departments, and all were familiar with remote or hybrid work, particularly in the post-COVID era.

The interviews were semi-structured, with some room for participants to provide subjective interpretations of their experiences. There was clustering of questions around the central views of EI, namely emotional perception, self-regulation, empathy, and relationship management. Participants were questioned specifically in regards to behaviors or techniques that they utilized in virtual worlds, including:

- How do you measure your team's emotional wellbeing in a remote environment?
- You ever tried to get emotional responses via indirect means (jokes, teasing, etc.)?
- How do you react when a virtual meeting gets emotionally charged or sidetracked?
- How to Build Trust and Connection on Your Remote Team or Classroom

As well as interviews, a questionnaire based survey was completed by a total of 150 respondents across the two sectors. The survey was structured using close-ended questions and was based on the qualitative outcomes, with special attention on emotional perception, communication patterns, responses to stress, and motivational strategies in the virtual world.

The overall data set has both depth and breadth it provides us with individual insights through interviews and measurable patterns through surveys.

5.3 Thematic Analysis of EI in Virtual Leadership

The analysis of interviews and survey responses revealed eight recurring themes that capture how Emotional Intelligence is applied in virtual leadership. These themes offer understanding into how leaders interpret emotions remotely, maintain team unity, and address the emotional challenges of virtual work environments. While some behaviors reflect universal EI principles, others are shaped by sector-specific dynamics particularly cultural norms in Saudi-based MNCs and educational pressures in international schools.

Theme 1: Emotional Perception and Lack of Nonverbal Indications

Among the challenges leaders said they faced most often was reading emotions in a virtual environment. Body language and facial expressions and posture, the traditional markers of emotional state in face-to-face situations, are largely absent in digital life, requiring leaders to develop new ways of reading emotions.

All of the 100 MNC employees who were interviewed claimed they pay much attention to the tone of the voice, the length and complexity of speech and the timing of response when speaking on video or audio calls. One manager put it clearly:

“Sometimes you know something is wrong not because they say it — but because of how they say even a simple ‘yes.’”

Teachers also mentioned paying attention to silence, students turning off cameras and disengaging. Some developed a practice of sending private chat messages to students exhibiting signs of withdrawal.

From the survey data:

- 54 percent of managers said slow replies to messages were the clearest signal of emotional distress or disengagement.
- Tone of voice was cited by 96% of respondents as one of the most clear emotional indicators in a conversation when not in the same room.

This is much in line with Mayer and Salovey’s notion of emotional perception as one of the basic components of emotional intelligence.

Theme 2: Empathy in Action

According to the survey, empathy the capacity to understand and respond to others' emotional states was the single most frequently mentioned characteristic of successful virtual leaders. In both MNCs and IS contexts, leaders explained how they utilized empathy to keep an emotional connection and to support well-being.

Among teachers, there have been stories of adjusting lesson delivery, lightening academic pressure or providing one-on-one help to students who were emotionally distressed. One teacher said:

"Sometimes, I forget the lesson plan. If I feel the energy is low, I stop and just ask them how they are doing. It matters more."

MNC leaders also used empathy as a tool to manage workload, suggesting flexible deadlines, offering informal check-ins, or simply validating stress. For example:

"If I see someone is overwhelmed, I tell them: 'Let's prioritize together. You're not alone.' That one sentence can lift pressure off their shoulders."

This illustrates Goleman's principle that empathy fuels leadership, especially when teams feel isolated or emotionally strained.

Theme 3: Reactions to testing and emotional intelligence strategies

One unique theme to surface throughout the interviews was the utilisation of non-traditional methods of monitoring team emotions. Some leaders admitted to poking the bear in hopes of eliciting a response, all the better to learn where their team's emotional walls stood.

Key strategies included:

- Cracking a joke to gauge mood (53 of 100 managers)
- Mild irritation deliberately introduced to test the irritability threshold (26 managers)
- Fishing for undeserved compliments to see reactions (7 managers)

These moves arise from a practical, at times experimental sensibility that has arisen around EI in digital conditions particularly in situations where leaders are starved for the candid emotional feedback they need.

These methods may be culturally risky, but they also show leaders attempting to develop emotional diagnostics without a physical presence. In particular, leveraging humor, became an important strategy to:

- Diffuse tension
- Signal emotional openness
- Determine who is emotionally accessible to involve themselves within

These behaviors are related to self-awareness and social awareness, core EI domains which concern the perception and regulation of interpersonal behavior.

Theme 4: Conflict Management in Remote Environments

Handling disagreement virtually requires patience, awareness, and tact. Leaders from both MNCs and schools emphasized the importance of **emotional control** and **measured language** when conflict surfaced during video calls or chat threads.

In survey results related to managing tense discussions:

- **93%** preferred to **call for a short break** when a conversation became too heated
- **40%** used **direct acknowledgment** of tension as a de-escalation tactic
- **64%** opted to **move the discussion to a private or alternate channel** (e.g., Slack DM, 1:1 call)

These choices demonstrate high emotional regulation — a key component in both Goleman’s and Bar-On’s models. One school leader shared:

“When tension rises in a virtual meeting, I don’t ignore it. I stop and say, ‘Let’s pause I think we’re getting emotional here.’ Just naming it helps people reset.”

Another manager said:

“I set rules for emotional boundaries in meetings. Disagree all you want, but never raise your voice.”

This shows a deliberate effort to maintain psychological safety while navigating disagreement — a key leadership responsibility in virtual work environments.

Theme 5: Motivation & Emotional Engagement

Team or student motivation was among the most frequently cited challenges in each sector. They used Emotional Intelligence to view this — recognising when motivation started to plummet and reacting fast to lift morale.

Several strategies were mentioned:

- Employing short-term goals and deadlines to focus the energies of a group (verified by 80% of survey respondents).
- Celebrating minor victories in public spaces
- Taking emotional “temperature” at the beginning of a meeting or class
- Inviting open sharing in the form of “how are we feeling today?” prompts

A school principal noted:

“We started doing ‘one-word check-ins’ at the start of every meeting. Just saying one word — ‘stressed’, ‘tired’, ‘hopeful’ makes people feel seen.”

In MNCs, many leaders used informal praise, GIFs, emojis, or humorous memes to re-engage teams and soften long hours. These emotionally intelligent micro-interventions contributed to sustained productivity.

Theme 6: Fostering Trust and Psychological Safety

Participants in interviews and surveys both stressed that it's more difficult but also more crucial to build trust from afar. EI was identified as the primary vehicle for psychological safety development.

EI-driven behaviors included:

- Consistency in tone and mood.
- Transparent communication during uncertainty.
- Active listening, with a focus on the private conversation.
- Apologizing when wrong, which several leaders described as a major trust-builder

Strangely, many of the leaders reported being more emotionally vulnerable in the virtual platform; this actually increased the emotional power of their presence. One manager said: *"You can't just 'walk the floor' online. So when I speak, I make sure they hear me not just as a boss, but as a human."*

This echoes research suggesting that emotionally intelligent leadership fosters psychological safety, even in environments lacking physical closeness.

Theme 7: Leadership As Presence and Responsiveness

Among participants, the one with the strongest correlate of emotional intelligence especially when it came to their digital interactions was the capacity for staying present and responsive despite being physically apart. It is more than just answering messages promptly. It's about being emotionally present, offering a steady sense of presence and being there when people need help on a regular basis.

In interviews, both the managers at MNCs and the leaders of schools talked specifically about creating room for regular check-ins that were not strictly business-focused. For example:

- Hosting single team members to “open door” Zoom hours
- Responding to team questions when off, as required
- Checking in after meetings to see how people felt privately

One teacher shared:

“After an online class, I’ll occasionally message students and ask, ‘Hey, I noticed you were not saying anything today — is everything O.K.?’ They won’t always be ready to open up immediately, but they remember that I inquired.”

It is a direct manifestation and realization of empathic engagement that fosters team retention and overcomes emotional distance frequently inherent in remote teams.

Survey data also supported this:

- 54% of MNC said that they use response-time not just to monitor the status of work, but also the emotional state towards each other.
- 40% of educators said that mood changes they observed in virtual meetings lead them to reach out to students or staff.

The frequency with which these behaviours occur demonstrates how leadership presence, even when mediated by a screen, has an impact on team morale and perceptions of trustworthiness.

Theme 8: Sector Differences MNCs vs. International Schools

Finally, all the MNCs were under pressure to combine, or merge, cost-effectiveness with high standards, whereas the samples of the international schools were not.

Although many of the approaches to emotional intelligence were common across sectors, there were discernable differences in tactics, depending on context, audience and leadership expectations.

In MNCs:

- Leaders often described the cultural making it work as a part of daily life. One respondent noted:

“When you’re in a call with a Saudi engineer and a Jordanian analyst and a Filipino admin, emotions are different things. You have to learn fast.”

- They also put an emphasis on economy of emotional expression. Most emotional check-ins were short, interwoven into performance talks.
- Managers in other MNCs referred to their emotional leadership style as “calculated”, targeted at decreasing uncertainty, and facilitating the management of communication—especially with globally dispersed teams (and those with whom they work in different time-zones).

In International Schools:

Leaders shifted towards an increased focus of emotional support and care, particularly in students' and staff's interactions.

Teachers talked about the emotional labor of managing kids’ anxiety, particularly during remote learning, and the significance of EI for keeping everything in balance. As one teacher said:

“It’s not just the kids — parents are upset as well, and they take it out on us. If I don’t manage my emotional response, things can go to hell.”

School principals reported using EI to facilitate emotionally safe professional

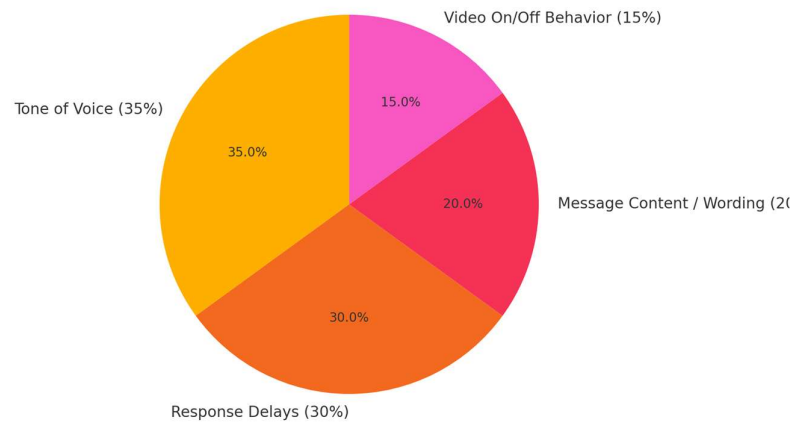
communities, wherein staff members could voice challenges without concern for negative repercussions.

These contrasts between sectors indicate that, whilst the central components of EI may be relatively stable, the way EI is expressed is context dependent, influenced by the culture of the organization and the emotional requirements of constituencies.

5.4 Survey Result and Statistical pattern

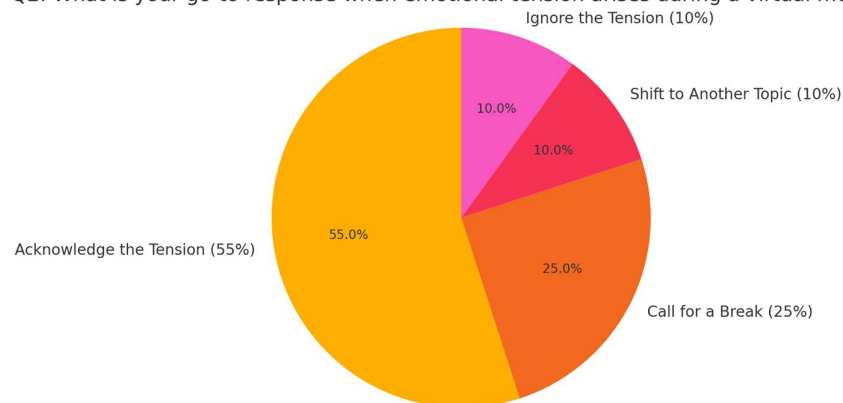
Q1: How do you most commonly assess emotional state in virtual communication?

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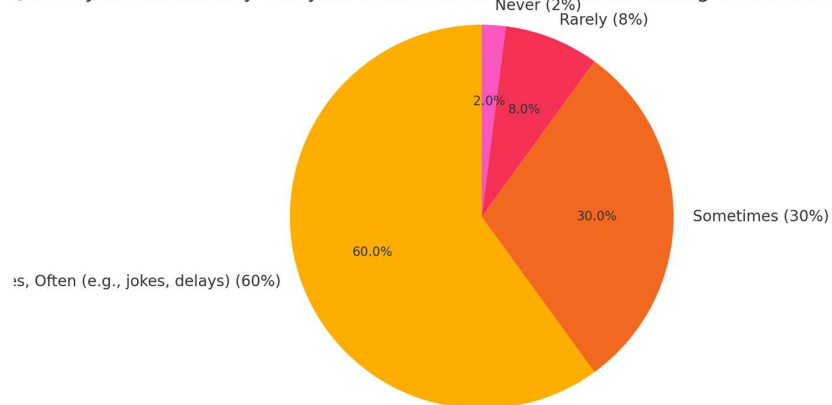
Q2: What is your go-to response when emotional tension arises during a virtual meeting?

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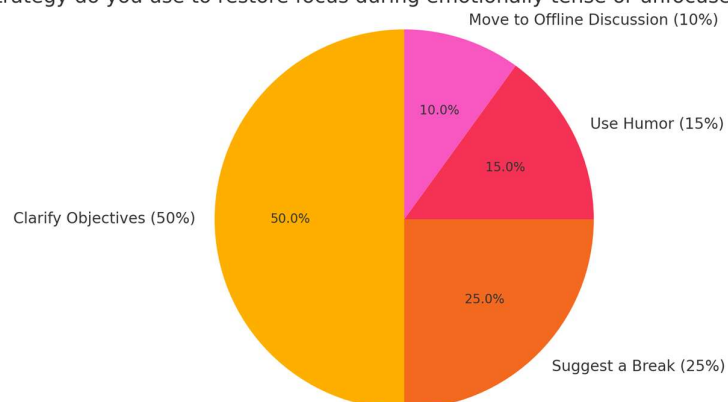
Q3: Do you intentionally test your team's emotional reactions during virtual communication?

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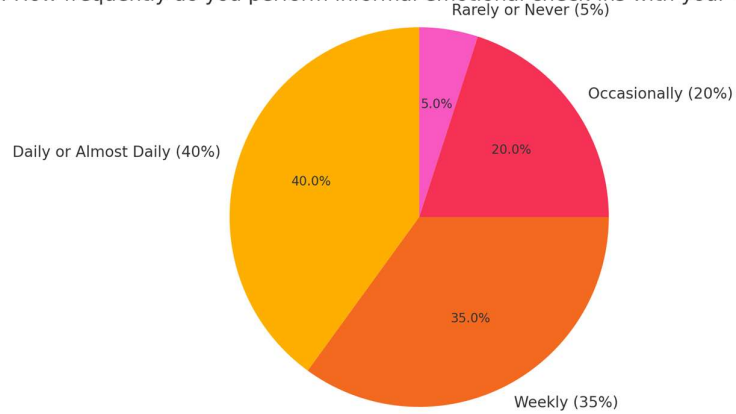
Q4: What strategy do you use to restore focus during emotionally tense or unfocused virtual meetings?

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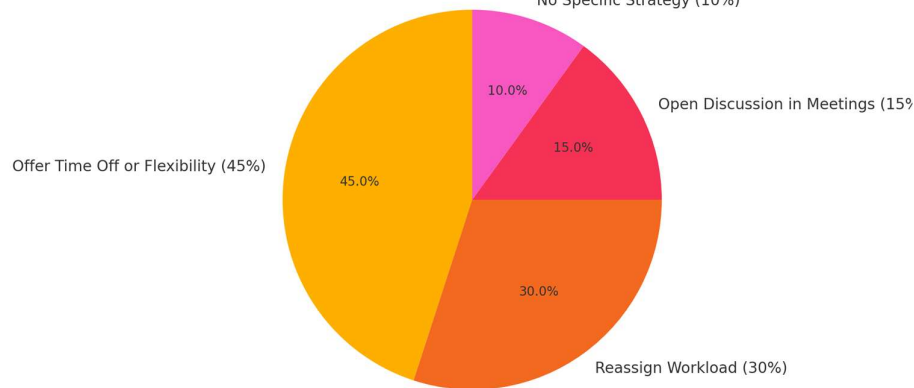
Q5: How frequently do you perform informal emotional check-ins with your virtual team?

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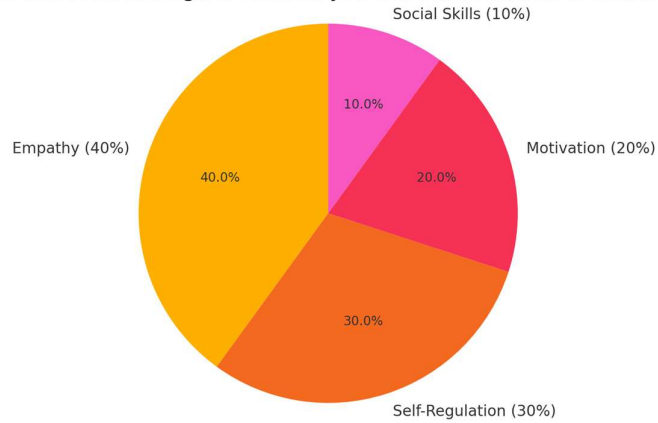
Q6: How do you typically respond to signs of virtual burnout?

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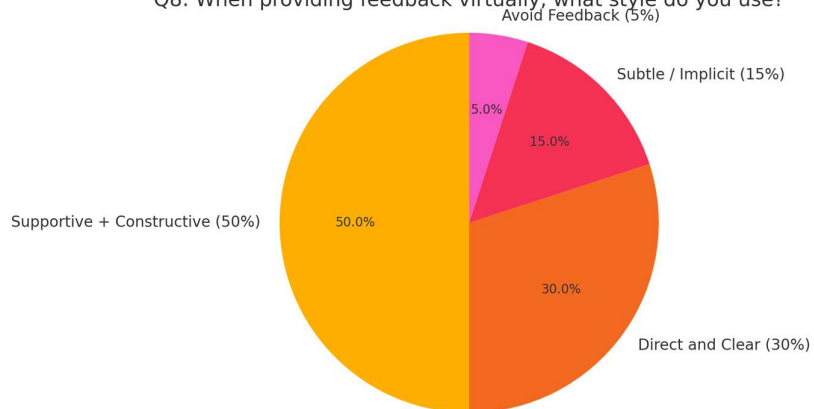
Q7: Which emotional intelligence trait do you find most valuable in virtual leaders?
Survey results for Q7 are displayed below:

Q7: Which emotional intelligence trait do you find most valuable in virtual leaders?



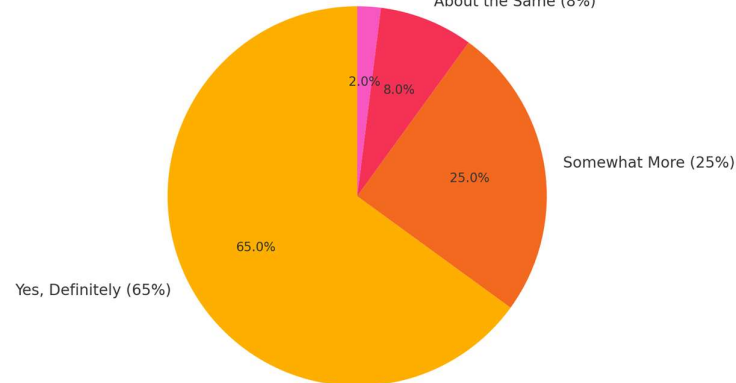
Q8: When providing feedback virtually, what style do you use?

Q8: When providing feedback virtually, what style do you use?



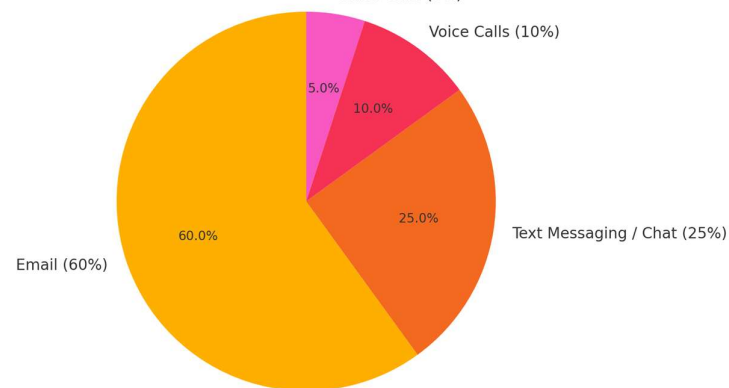
Q9: Do you believe virtual leadership requires more emotional intelligence than in-person leadership?

Do you believe virtual leadership requires more emotional intelligence than in-person leadership?



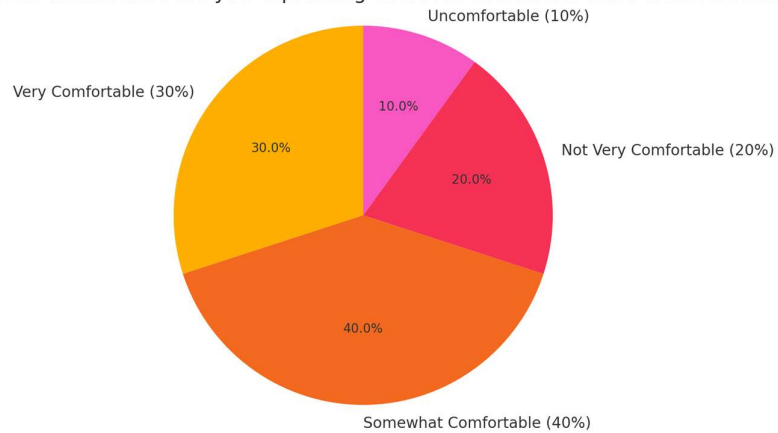
Q10: Which channel makes it hardest to detect emotions?

Q10: Which channel makes it hardest to detect emotions?



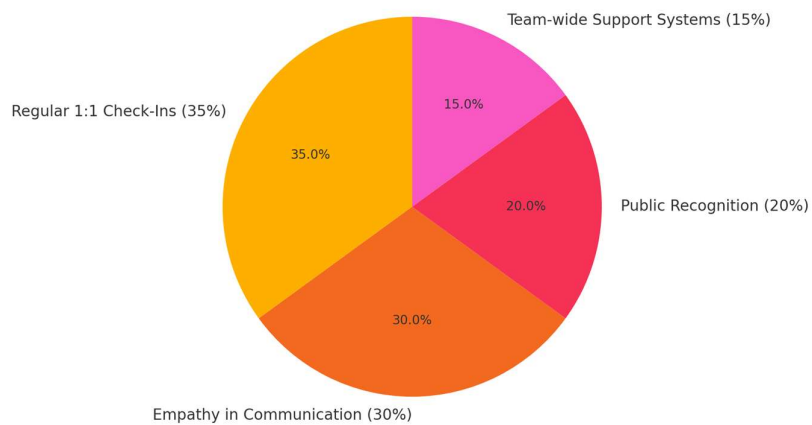
Q11: How comfortable are you expressing emotions in a virtual team environment?

Q11: How comfortable are you expressing emotions in a virtual team environment?



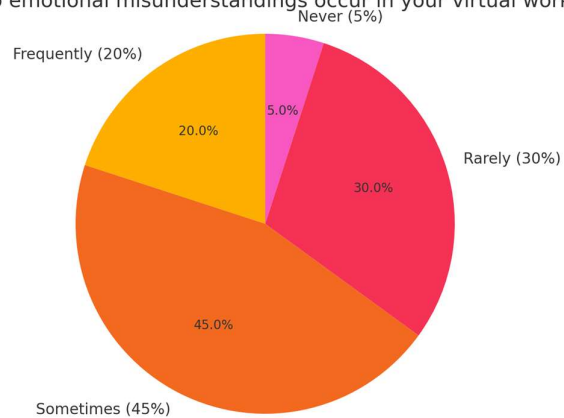
Q12: What helps you feel emotionally supported by your leader?

Q12: What helps you feel emotionally supported by your leader?



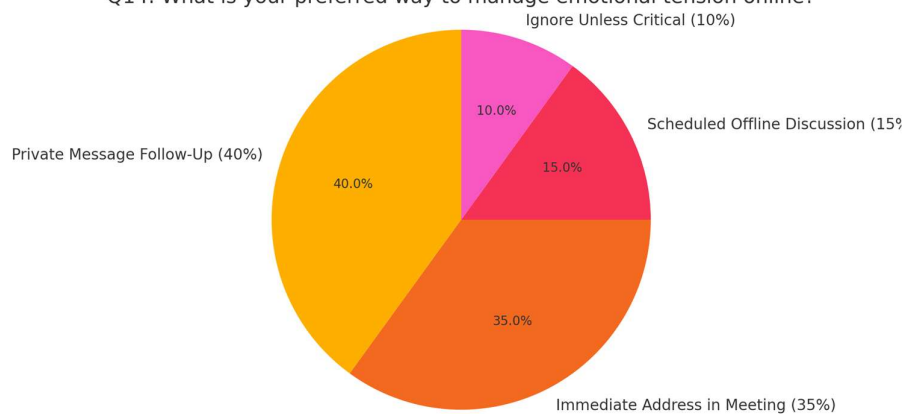
Q13: How often do emotional misunderstandings occur in your virtual work environment?

Q13: How often do emotional misunderstandings occur in your virtual work environment



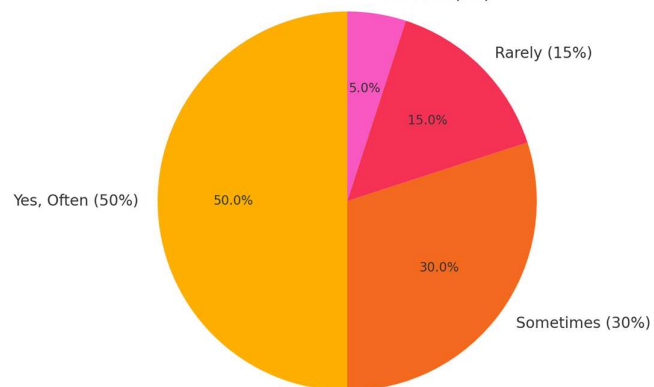
Q14: What is your preferred way to manage emotional tension online?

Q14: What is your preferred way to manage emotional tension online?



Q15: Do cultural differences affect how emotions are expressed or perceived virtually in your team?

: Do cultural differences affect how emotions are expressed or perceived virtually in your



5.5 Connection to Theoretical Models

The findings of this study support the relevance of all three major EI models Goleman's five domains, Mayer and Salovey's ability-based framework, and Bar-On's emotional and social competencies in different but complementary ways.

Goleman's Model: The Leadership Lens

Goleman's five components — self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills — were strongly reflected in participant behaviors:

- Self-awareness and self-regulation appeared when leaders described pausing before reacting, adjusting tone, and modeling calm during tense discussions.
- Motivation was clear in how leaders energized teams, continuous morale, and remained positive even during remote work fatigue.
- Empathy was consistently mentioned, particularly in one-on-one check-ins and emotionally responsive teaching.
- Social skills appeared in how leaders used humor, structure, and clear communication to keep their virtual teams unified and emotionally connected.

Goleman's framework served as the clearest match for leadership behavior — especially when leaders discussed their EI in terms of intentional strategy and team influence.

Mayer and Salovey's Model: Cognitive Processing of Emotion

Mayer and Salovey's model offered a useful lens for understanding how participants:

- Apparent emotional indications in digital formats (e.g., silence, tone, response time)
- Used emotional information to adapt leadership responses
- Understood emotional dynamics within teams
- Managed emotions usefully in high-stress moments

This model was especially helpful in analyzing how participants described their emotional reasoning that is, how they noticed an emotional shift and adjusted their communication accordingly. It supported findings where leaders made deliberate, thoughtful choices in how to frame feedback, manage tension, or respond to disengagement.

Bar-On's EQ-i: Emotional and Social Functioning

Bar-On's broader model including intrapersonal skills, interpersonal relationships, adaptability, stress management, and general mood helped explain the long-term emotional health and balance that many participants tried to maintain.

This was seen in:

- Resilience-building behaviors during crises like COVID-19.
- Active stress management in emotionally intense teaching roles.
- Balancing structure and empathy during remote leadership transitions.
- Creating emotionally supportive environments where teams felt safe and valued.

Bar-On's model provided context for understanding emotional intelligence as a daily practice, not just a leadership technique something lived, not just applied.

5.6 Summary of Key Findings

This chapter explored implementing Emotional Intelligence (EI) in the leadership experiences of remote managers and educators. Several recurring themes emerged between the interviews and the questionnaires. It was obvious EI is key in virtual leadership, namely in leading the critical skills of reading emotional cues, managing conflict and building psychological safety on teams. In digital interaction, non-verbal cues are replaced largely by tone, timing and shades of feeling. Leaders test, interpret, and react to emotions through humor, close readings of messages, and keen observation of response behavior. In addition, motivating and keeping team morale high is handled by routines based on empathy, such as personalized check-ins, emotional check-ins, and a high level of awareness around workload. A gap was identified in the perspective of MNC leaders that focus on strategic, culturally flexible EI compared to that of school leaders that focuses on emotional support and relational connection. These results are in line with most important EI models, highlighting their relevance across different occupational domains and communication media. All combined, these findings clearly show that Emotional Intelligence is not just “nice to have” in virtual leaders, but a fundamental capability driving how teams trust*, perform, and sustain human connection when they’re far apart.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the key findings of the study and provides practical recommendations for leaders operating in virtual environments, particularly within multinational corporations (MNCs) and international schools (IS) in Saudi Arabia. Drawing on the thematic analysis, survey data, and theoretical models presented in earlier chapters, this conclusion highlights the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a critical leadership competency in remote work contexts. The chapter also identifies the implications of these findings and offers suggestions for future research.

6.2 From Insight to Actions

This study has confirmed that Emotional Intelligence is relevant to leadership in virtual environments and is indeed implicit. Most of the emotional competencies we discussed include some that are familiar in conventional leadership work (empathy, emotional regulation, and social awareness) but, when adapted to remote work, they demand a fresh look at both challenges and opportunities.

Now that world leaders have to read the digital tea leaves, steward emotionally diverse teams across platforms and still keep the human touch from six feet away. These results may indicate that EI Leadership plays a role as one of the most effective activities for the balance between technological strengthening and team building.

Crucially, EI was also identified as being widely transferable to other industries. It allowed executives at MNCs to better handle cultural complexity, decrease misalignment, and ensure clarity through formality in asynchronous interaction. And at international schools, it allowed teachers to establish trust with students and colleagues, deal with emotional fatigue and stay motivated under pressure. These variations carry the same message that the heart of EI is constant but the way in which it is applied needs to be attuned to the emotional beats in the environment. In the end, the study backs up the notion that virtual leadership is not merely a technical or managerial skill it is an emotional practice. Leaders who invest in learning to recognize and manage emotions are much more likely to be able to build trust, diffuse stress, and sustain performance in virtual environments.

6.3 Practical Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the subsequent recommendations are offered to leaders and organizations for the development of Emotional Intelligence within the virtual context:

1. Invest in EI Training for Virtual Leaders

Organizations can offer targeted programs that incorporate EI development in discussions around remote communication, emotion perception and stress management. Leaders need to be coached on how to read emotional cues digitally and how to react positively.

2. Build Emotionally Intelligent Communication Routines

Teams need to make it routine to: Check on emotions Monitor tone Reflect on the message Incorporating “pulse checks” in meeting routines or creating an opportunity for emotional sharing facilitates continuity of engagement and connection.

3. Encourage Culturally Sensitive EI Practices

In heterogeneous virtual teams, managers would do well to get to grips with the differences in emotional expression across cultures. International management training must also incorporate cross-cultural EI skills to prevent misunderstanding and promote inclusive communication.

4. Include EI in Performance and Feedback Structures

Performance evaluations shouldn't just focus on task outcomes, but also on emotional leadership behaviors like listening, empathy and regulation — particularly in a remote or hybrid context.

5. Use Technology to Enhance EI

Use digital instrument (by, for example, providing anonymous feedback channels or analysing engagement analytics and tracking an online mood survey) to enable leaders to monitor emotions across virtual teams and act accordingly.

6. Support Emotional Well-being in Schools

School administrators and academic leaders should create emotional support mechanism for the teachers and students in educational settings. The professional development on classroom-based EI should be emphasized in curriculum design and implementation particularly for remote learning environments.

6.4 Implications for Future Research

Although this study has contributed significant perspectives, there are still areas which could be pursued further:

- What are the virtual implications of Emotional Intelligence across leadership levels (e.g., middle- v/s senior-management)?
- What is the lasting effect of emotionally intelligent leadership on retention and performance in virtual teams?
- What's the relationship between specific EI characters (e.g., empathy vs self-regulation) and employee satisfaction in remote work?
- How can AI and digital tools help to raise or potentially weaken emotional intelligence in virtual leadership?

Future research should investigate EI in digital workplaces using larger and more diverse samples, with a longitudinal perspective or mixed-method design, to expand our insights into EI in the ever-changing digital workplace.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Overview of the Study

Aim of the study The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of EI on virtual leadership in the context of two critical career environments in Saudi Arabia, MNCs and IS. To guide and support their teams at a time when face-to-face interaction is either impossible or forbidden, leaders are now grappling with how to connect virtually and communicate remotely. Emotional Intelligence something that has been recognized as critical for traditional leadership is now as (if not more) important for technology environments. Integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews, this study explored how leaders perceived, reacted to, and managed emotional dynamics in remote contexts. It also contrasts corporate and educational applications of emotional intelligence, providing a richer perspective of leadership across varied virtual environments.

7.2 Limitations of The Study

Implications for practice Although this theoretical paper provides valuable insights into Emotional Intelligence related to virtual leadership, there are limitations that must be considered. First, the study worked with two particular professional settings multinational corporations and international schools and even though these contexts are diverse, they might not represent the wide width of different leadership practices or EI manifestations displayed in other sectors. Second, the data were primarily captured by self-report in interviews and surveys. Although this method allows for personal insights and behaviors to be captured, it is susceptible to biases such as selective recall or social desirability. Moreover, although the sample was comprised of professionals with different cultural and national backgrounds, the study did not control for independent variables such as the degree of leadership seniority, years of experience, the specific personality trait that can filter the application of Emotional Intelligence. These are issues that may require further examination in future studies. Finally, remote work is a rapidly changing space in which perceptions and implementation of Emotional Intelligence may further evolve. The conclusions drawn in this study reflect a singular point in time and are part of an ongoing dialogue on leadership in the virtual world.

7.1 Final Reflections

Virtual leadership isn't a temporary adjustment anymore it is how many organizations operate. As we endeavor more into remote and hybrid, emotional intelligence will continue to define strong leadership. This research supports the idea that tech can't create teams, fix conflicts, or maintain motivation on its own. These are tasks for leaders who are emotionally astute, who listen hard and adjust course and leave room for the human side of digital work. For leaders, educators and organizations trying to succeed in this new world, Emotional Intelligence isn't a nice to have, it's a must-have. And as this paper shows, it's a skill worth practicing.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Questions