

# Academics' Response to Workplace Managerial Practices of Emotional Intelligence: Evidence from Nigeria

**OKHAWERE Nekpen Euodia**

Department of Human Resource Management

Faculty of Management Science, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

*For correspondence, email: nekpen.okhawere@uniben.edu*

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## Abstract

Workplace emotional intelligence is the regulation of feelings and interpersonal interactions among members of an organization. An understanding of employees' response to workplace managerial practices of emotional intelligence is crucial to determining managerial policies and actions to adopt. This study investigated academics' (as employees in universities) display of emotional intelligence and associated challenges as response to managerial practices of workplace emotional intelligence. The study utilized a qualitative design that allowed the collection of data using 20 face to face semi structured interviews of academics in non-managerial role from the Faculty of Management Science at the University of Benin, Nigeria. The analytical methods were thematic analysis and content analysis. While the thematic analysis provided themes concerning academics' display of emotional intelligence, content analysis was employed to determine the challenges academics are confronted with. The thematic analysis produced sub themes, leading to five general themes, which were empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation and relationship management. The outcome of the content analysis showed that communication barrier was the most recurring challenge that confronted both male and female academics. Also, poor awareness, demotivating organizational culture and practices, poor engaging leadership style and negative emotional culture were the additional challenges of emotional intelligence. The study's contributions and limitations are further presented.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, Managerial practices, Qualitative Analysis, Workplace, Nigeria, Academics' Response

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## INTRODUCTION

Ensuring the sustainability of any workplace has gone beyond the management of extrinsic variables to include intrinsic factors such as emotional intelligence (EI). EI is defined as being self-aware of emotions, expressing emotional needs accurately and distinguishing between

honest and tricky emotional expressions (Odukoya, and Olowookere, 2020). EI can promote workplace interpersonal interactions, improve productivity, create a motivating work environment and ultimately contribute to the growth of the organization. On the other hand, unguided emotions have negative consequences such as uncontrollable work conflict (Cheshin, 2020; Drigas, Papoutsi and Skianis, 2023). Consequently, it is recommended that employees make effort to display EI and managers engage effective strategies that support employees' efforts (Köksal et al., 2023).

Since the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990s, universities governance has infused private sector management systems such as branding and cost-cutting efficiencies. The shift for universities from being public institutions to quasi corporation require academics to engage in multidisciplinary collaborations, commit to student satisfaction and embrace administrative responsibilities (Mintz, 2021). Academic managers, such as heads of departments/schools, faculty deans and other supervisors of academic performance also demand that individual academic accounts for the usage of resources and time (Troiani and Dutson, 2021). These changes mean that academics must learn to be consistently motivated to manage their emotions as well as the emotions of those in their workspace (Arar and Öneren, 2021). Handling their emotions appropriately produces the right response to the culture of excessive workload and the pressure from increasing performance expectations.

The need for EI among academics has resulted in several researches. Some studies have examined the relationship between EI and other factors such as job satisfaction (e.g. Kassim, Bambale, and Jakada, 2016) and performance (Khassawneh et al., 2022), while others have focused on potential contributions by EI to the workplace. However, most of these studies examined EI from the perspectives of the individual academic with less focus on the role that managerial practices can play. Therefore, the current study focused on providing more understanding of managerial practices that can be adopted in universities, what response such practices attract from academics, challenges that academics face as well as the gender perspective of emotional intelligence. The aim is to contribute to assisting managers to adopt the right practices that support emotional intelligence

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was guided by the theories of EI as discussed below. Managerial practices in the workplace and the study research questions are also presented.

### **Workplace Emotional Intelligence**

Understanding and measuring EI is traced to the attempts to gauge intellect, and how such intellect is utilized by individuals in varied socio-cultural context. The concepts of intellect and emotion are integrated and explained by the theories of emotional intelligence, which include ability theory (Mayer and Salovey, 1997), trait model and mixed model (Goleman, 2005; Chaidi and Drigas, 2022). The ability theory places emphasis on the ability to utilise and effectively manage emotions while the trait model proposes that the management of emotions is also influenced by traits and not only by efforts. The mixed model integrates the ideologies of both the ability and trait models and extends to recognize the social intelligence as a factor to

be considered in emotional intelligence. It includes Petrides and Furnaham's model, Goleman's model and Bar-On model. Models in this category interpret EI as a combination of non-cognitive abilities, personality traits, motivational factors, abilities, and skills that determine how successfully a person copes with environmental and social pressures. Therefore, EI is the variety of competencies, and skills that impacts on an individual's ability to survive environmental and social demands (Bar-On, 2010).

This study is structured along the line of Goleman's model. The model identifies the elements of EI as empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and social skills (relationship management). It also proposes that EI is not innate but needs to be practiced and can be improved upon. Consequently, employees will experience various challenges either from their individual nature or from workplace systems. This theory therefore informed the analysis of EI along the line of display and challenges in this study.

### **Managerial practices of Emotional Intelligence**

Organizations recognize that measurable benefits can be derived from emotional intelligence, hence management adopts practices that can enhance employees' abilities to recognize, understand, and manage emotions effectively. According to Kaplan et al. (2014); and Nguyen et al. (2019). Some key practices for managing EI as discussed below;

**Emotional Intelligence Training Programs:** managers implement comprehensive training programs such as workshops, seminars, and interactive sessions that focus on motivating the display of EI among employees

**Emotional Intelligence Assessments:** managers conduct EI assessments to help employees understand their current EI levels and focus on specific areas for improvement.

**Conflict resolution:** managers provide training on conflict resolution techniques such as negotiation, active listening, and problem-solving skills to help employees navigate challenging situations, preserve relationships and find mutually beneficial resolutions.

**Leadership Development:** managers provide leadership development programs that focus on EI for team head, so team heads can set a positive example for their teams and foster a culture of emotional intelligence

**Feedback and Self-Reflection:** managers encourage regular feedback and self-reflection among employees to promote continuous improvement in EI.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the ways academics display EI in the workplace?
2. What are the challenges of EI among academics?
3. What are the challenges of EI among academics from the male and female perspective?

### **METHODOLOGY**

To provide answers to the research questions of this study, thematic and content qualitative analysis were employed. While thematic analysis focused on exploring themes related to RQ1

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(identifying academics' display of EI in the workplace), content analysis focused on RQ2 (ascertaining challenges of among academics) and RQ3 (identifying challenges of EI among academics based on male and female gender).

Thematic analysis involves the identification and reporting of themes, which include significant and relevance facts about the qualitative data as it concerns the research questions (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). In the current study, the researchers identified the themes from the data inductively by following Pope, Ziebland and Mays (2000) proposed framework. The other qualitative data analysis approach utilized in this study is the content analysis. Content analysis aims at identifying words or group of word that occur frequently in a text based on a group of coding decision. The three distinct approaches of content analysis are conventional, directed and summative. The conventional approach derives coding groups directly from the text, while directed approach begins with existing literatures of theories and previous research findings, which then guides the bringing forth of initial codes. The summative approach, which is used in this study counts and compares single words, which are later interpreted within a defined content (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

#### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data for both the thematic and content analysis included 20 face to face semi structured interviews of purposeful selected academic staff from the Faculty of Management Science, University of Benin, Nigeria. Although 50 academics who were not in managerial positions were invited to participate in the study, only 20 of them volunteered their participation. The choice of 50 academic is in line with Saunders and Townsend (2016), which recommended a sample size of 30 for a single organization and 50 for more than one organization for qualitative studies. Based on qualitative research principle of volunteerism, confidentiality and information saturation (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022), the 20 participants were deemed adequate for the study. The 20 participants cut across all cadre of academics from assistant lecturer to professors. The interviewees were happy to be interviewed in their offices.

Some of the questions asked include; *can you tell me how you are able to recognize and manage your feelings and thoughts while dealing with work-related situations? How do you understand, interpret and react to the verbal and nonverbal correspondence between you and people you work with?* The interviews were recorded with an audio recorder and ranged from 25 minutes to 78 minutes. Thematic and content analysis were utilized for the study. Based on Pope, Ziebland and Mays, (2000), the thematic analysis involved the following five stages: familiarization process, identifying a thematic framework, indexing/refining the data, charting/retaining data in context and mapping and interpretation

The content analysis involved reading and rereading of the interview transcripts to get familiar with the data and obtain a deeper understanding of the whole content. Several rereading of the transcripts led to the identification and highlighting of Key concepts. The above process resulted in challenges categorized as; poor awareness, demotivating organizational culture and practices, poor engaging leadership style, communication barriers, negative emotional culture. In the Microsoft excel coding scheme, there were five columns (frequency of cases, types of display, types of challenges, gender, and identified challenge for gender). Categorized data was

analyzed based on the discourse of the study objective and descriptive frequencies was applied to the analyzed data to produce challenges of emotional intelligence.

**RESEARCH RESULTS**

This section presents the answers to RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 as stated in section 2.3

**Employees’ display of emotional intelligence in the workplace**

Based on thematic analysis, five general themes of employees’ display of EI in the workplace were identified as follows: (1) Empathy (2) Self-awareness (3) Self-regulation (4) Motivation and (5) Relationship management. Each of these themes is composed of various sub-themes, which show the content of the main theme. The themes and sub-themes, descriptions-examples, transcripts are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Themes and Sub-themes of the Display of Emotional Intelligence**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Description - example</b>
Empathy	Understanding others	Comprehending the emotions of colleagues - a team member grasping a co-worker’s stress offers assistance.
	Active listening	Fully concentrating, comprehending, and responding to what others are conveying - a supervisor showing attentive interest in an employee’s concerns.
	Providing support	Offering assistance to colleagues in times of need, cultivating trust - a peer helping a team member overwhelmed with tasks showcases empathy.
Self-awareness	Recognizing emotions	Identifying one’s emotions accurately, contributing to better decision-making - a leader acknowledging their frustration before addressing a team.
	Personal growth	Actively seeking self-improvement through reflection and feedback - an employee consistently setting goals to enhance their skills.
	Acknowledging strengths	Understanding one’s capabilities and leveraging them for better - a team member utilizing their communication skills in presentations exemplifies this.
Self-regulation	Managing stress	Handling stress to maintain focus - an employee using deep breathing techniques to stay composed during a challenging project.
	Impulse control	Refraining from impulsive actions driven by emotions - a supervisor considering consequences before responding to a provocative email.
	Adaptability	Adjusting emotional responses in changing circumstances - team member staying composed during unexpected setbacks demonstrates this trait.
Motivation	Goal orientation	Channeling emotions towards achieving goals - an employee’s determination to meet sales target through

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Description - example</b>
		consistent effort showcases goal orientation.
	Positive outlook	Maintaining optimism even in challenging situation -a manager inspiring the team by focusing on solutions rather than problems.
	Intrinsic drive	Internal passion for the work itself - a team member who takes an extra task voluntarily due to their genuine interest demonstrates intrinsic motivation.
Relationship Management	Conflict resolution	Resolving conflicts to maintain a harmonious environment - a supervisor mediating a disagreement between team members showcases this skill.
	Team building	Fostering connections among colleagues to enhance collaboration - a team leader organizing team-building activities to improve cohesion.
	Communication	Clear expression and active listening, promoting effective interactions - team member openly sharing feedback ideas exemplifies strong communication.

Source: Researcher's field work

### **Challenges to the display of emotional intelligence**

The findings of the content analysis as presented in Table 2 below reveal five challenges (poor awareness, demotivating organizational culture and practices, poor engaging leadership style, communication barriers, negative emotional culture) employees face. In addition to identifying the challenges of EI poor awareness, demotivating organizational culture and practices, poor engaging leadership style, communication barriers, negative emotional culture, the findings of the content analysis show that the male and female employees' experience all the challenges. There was no difference in the experience of the challenges for both male and female employees. However, the findings indicate that both gender experience communication barriers more regularly than other challenges.

**Table 2: Themes and Sub-themes of the challenges of Emotional Intelligence**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Description - Example</b>
Poor awareness	Limited Training Opportunities	Inadequate formal training on emotional intelligence - the university's training programs focus solely on expertise skills, leaving academics unaware of the significance of EI development.
	Misunderstanding Importance	Perception of EI as unimportant - when team members dismiss the relevance of discussing emotions during meetings, believing that it doesn't contribute to their job performance.
demotivating organizational culture and	Emphasis on Technical Skill	Company culture prioritizes technical skills over emotional ones - when performance evaluations that primarily focus on quantitative achievements,

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Description - Example</b>
practices		while emotional skills are rarely acknowledged.
	Lack of Supportive Policies	Absence of policies to promote EI development - lack of formal policies that encourage academics to engage in activities fostering emotional growth, resulting in limited emphasis on this aspect.
Poor engaging leadership style	Authoritarian Leadership	Managers' autocratic style suppresses emotional expression - discouragement from openly expressing emotions or sharing feedback, as the top - down leadership style promotes conformity over emotional openness.
	Dismissive Attitude towards Emotions	Leaders don't value emotional discussions, focusing only on tasks - dismissal of emotional discussions during decision-making meetings, preferring to concentrate solely on project-related tasks.
Communication barriers	Language and Cultural Differences	Communication breakdown due to language and cultural disparities - language barriers and varying cultural norms can hinder effective emotional expression, leading to misunderstandings among team members.
	Deficiency in Active Listening	Failure to actively listen inhibits understanding of emotions - when managers don't actively listen to academics' emotional concerns, it discourages open conversations and creates a barrier to addressing emotional challenges.
Negative emotional culture	Fear of Retaliation	Fear of repercussions discourages expressing genuine emotions - academics avoid expressing concerns out of fear that their emotional honesty might be met with negative consequences from higher-ups.
	Toxic Competition	Unhealthy competition fosters negative emotions and distrust - intense competition among academics for promotions or recognition creates an environment where colleagues view each other as threats rather than collaborators, leading to negative emotions.

Source: Researcher's field work

### **Discussion of Findings**

The study utilized a thematic analysis to provide answers to RQ1. In line with existing literature, the display of EI by employees was derived from five themes. First was empathy. This refers to the ability to understand others, active listening and providing support (Ioannidou

and Konstantikaki, 2008; Fernández-Abascal and Martín-Díaz, 2019). Second was self-awareness. Self-awareness is interpreted as recognizing emotions, personal growth and acknowledging strengths; and third was self-regulation. Self-regulation concerns managing stress, impulse control and adaptability (Jordan and Ashkanasy, 2013). Motivation, which means being goal oriented, having positive outlook and expressing intrinsic drive was fourth. Relationship management as the fifth theme is the capacity to handle conflict resolution, team building and communication (Fianko, and Dzogbewu, 2020). Content analysis was employed in the study to answer RQ2 and RQ3 and the findings are discussed below.

In line with other studies (e.g., Drigas and Papoutsis, (2020); Adinew (2023); Raeissi et al. (2023), the challenges that confront employees were derived from five themes. First was poor awareness. Poor awareness means limited training opportunities and misunderstanding importance. The second was demotivating organizational culture and practices which describes emphasis on technical skill and lack of supportive policies and the third was poor engaging leadership style. Poor engaging leadership style means authoritarian leadership and dismissive attitude towards emotions. Communication barriers, which was the fourth theme refers to language and cultural differences and deficiency in active listening. The last theme was negative emotional culture and it means fear of retaliation, toxic competition. Although some studies (see Zeidner, Matthews, and Roberts, 2004; Li et al., 2021) opined that the challenges employees face with regards to the display of EI varies from organization to organization, the challenges are notably influenced by the managerial practices of each organization. Surprisingly, this study indicated no gender differences in the challenges of emotional intelligence as both male and female employees expressed that they face all the types of challenges indicated in table 1. Also, the communication barrier was the most common challenge faced by both male and female employees

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study investigated the responses that managerial practice of EI attracts from academic in the form of displays and challenges encountered. The study makes its theoretical contribution by extending the understanding of EI among academics in universities. Practically, the knowledge provided by this study is useful to both academics and their managers. This is because managerial contributions based on the understanding of the challenges that confront academics in their attempts to display emotional intelligence were made. As a result, academic managers can be better informed to decide the policies and practices that would support EI in universities. The study is limited by generalization since its investigation was restricted to only one university in Nigeria. Therefore, future studies should examine EI in more than a singular university within Nigeria or other universities outside Nigeria.

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#### **Bio-note**

Dr. Okhawere Nekpen Euodia is a senior lecturer in the department of Human Resource Management, University of Benin, Nigeria. Dr. Okhawere's research focus is on current and change issues within human resource management and related disciplines. She is a recipient of scholarship and several grants and has several publications in both local and international journals. Dr. Okhawere has presented her research findings in several conferences and other academic forums.