

Exploring the Role of Emotional Intelligence in Leadership Effectiveness and Employee Engagement

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the impact of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on Leadership Effectiveness (LE) and Employee Engagement (EME) within commercial banks in South Sudan. It seeks to determine how EI influences LE and EME and how LE subsequently affects EME in this context. A quantitative research design was employed, using a cross-sectional survey approach. Data were collected from 360 employees across various commercial banks in South Sudan through a structured questionnaire. The study utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze the relationships among EI, LE, and EME. The analysis revealed that EI has a positive effect on both LE and EME. Leaders with high EI were found to manage emotions effectively, communicate better, and build stronger relationships, which enhanced their leadership effectiveness. This effectiveness, in turn, significantly improved employee engagement, characterized by increased enthusiasm and commitment. Additionally, LE directly and positively impacted EME, indicating that effective leadership fosters a supportive environment that boosts employee involvement and satisfaction. The findings emphasize the importance of incorporating EI training into leadership development programs to enhance leadership effectiveness and employee engagement. For commercial banks in South Sudan, adopting EI-focused leadership strategies can improve organizational performance and employee morale. This study provides actionable insights for banking institutions to implement EI-based leadership practices that foster a more engaged and productive workforce.

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Introduction

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others (Shoib and Pathan, 2022; Kerr et al., 2006). It includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These components help individuals handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically, contributing to personal and professional success. In recent years, the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) has garnered significant attention within the realm of leadership and organizational behavior. Defined broadly as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively, EI has been identified as a crucial factor influencing leadership effectiveness and employee engagement. This growing interest reflects an increasing recognition that leadership extends

beyond traditional measures of competence and authority, necessitating a deeper understanding of the emotional competencies that underpin successful leadership and foster a productive work environment.

Leadership effectiveness refers to the ability of a leader to achieve desired outcomes, influence others, and drive organizational success through their actions and behaviors. It encompasses the leader's capability to set clear goals, motivate and inspire team members, make sound decisions, and foster a positive and productive work environment. Effective leadership results in improved team performance, goal attainment, and overall organizational success. Emotional Intelligence, as outlined by Shoaib and Pathan (2022), significantly impacts leadership effectiveness. Their study underscores that leaders who exhibit high levels of EI are more adept at navigating interpersonal relationships, resolving conflicts, and creating a positive work atmosphere. This assertion aligns with earlier research by Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, and Boyle (2006), which found a strong correlation between EI and leadership effectiveness across various organizational contexts. Their findings suggest that leaders with well-developed emotional competencies can inspire and motivate their teams more effectively, thereby enhancing overall organizational performance. Further expanding on the relationship between EI and leadership, Singh et al. (2021) explored how EI interacts with different leadership styles to influence perceived leadership effectiveness. Their research, conducted in Bhutan, demonstrates that leaders who integrate EI with their leadership approach can adapt more effectively to diverse team dynamics and cultural contexts. This adaptability not only improves their effectiveness but also enhances their ability to engage and retain employees.

The importance of EI is not confined to traditional business environments; it extends to various sectors, including the military. Koh and O'Higgins (2018) investigated the link between EI and leadership effectiveness within a military context, revealing that emotional competencies play a critical role in managing stress, making strategic decisions, and leading teams under pressure. This study highlights the universal applicability of EI, emphasizing its relevance across different organizational settings. In the educational sector, Al-Shatarat et al. (2023) utilized structural equation modeling to examine EI's impact on leadership effectiveness in Jordanian schools. Their research provides compelling evidence that EI significantly contributes to effective leadership in educational settings, which in turn enhances the overall performance of educational institutions. Similarly, Herbst and Maree (2008) demonstrated that thinking style preferences, combined with EI, influence leadership effectiveness. Their findings suggest that leaders who are both emotionally intelligent and cognitively flexible are better equipped to address complex challenges and drive organizational success. Weinberger (2009) further supports the notion that EI is a key determinant of leadership effectiveness. By examining the interplay between EI and leadership styles, Weinberger highlighted that leaders with high EI are more capable of adapting their approach to meet the needs of their team members, thereby improving their overall effectiveness. This adaptability is crucial in fostering a supportive and productive work environment, which is essential for achieving organizational goals.

Employee engagement is the level of enthusiasm, commitment, and emotional investment that employees have toward their work and organization. It reflects how connected and motivated employees feel about their roles, which can lead to higher productivity, job satisfaction, and overall performance. Engaged employees are more likely to go above and beyond in their work, contribute to organizational goals, and stay with the company long-term. The link between EI and employee engagement has also been a focal point of recent research. Mohamad Saferdin et al. (2023) investigated this relationship within Malaysian public sectors and found that leaders' EI significantly impacts employee engagement levels. Their study underscores the importance of emotional competencies in fostering a motivated and engaged workforce, which is vital for achieving organizational success. Similarly, Edelman and van Knippenberg (2018) examined how EI affects the management of subordinates' emotions and its subsequent impact on leadership

effectiveness. Their research revealed that leaders who effectively manage their own and their subordinates' emotions are more successful in achieving desired outcomes and maintaining high levels of employee engagement. The role of EI in employee engagement has been further explored by various scholars. For instance, Sanjay (2021) highlighted the impact of spiritual and emotional intelligences on employee engagement and organizational citizenship behavior. This research suggests that leaders who cultivate both spiritual and emotional competencies can enhance employee engagement and foster a culture of organizational citizenship.

In the context of the commercial banking sector in South Sudan, recent studies have shed light on how strategic leadership and emotional intelligence influence organizational performance and employee engagement. Ater et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of strategic leadership in commercial banks, noting that leaders who leverage EI are better positioned to drive strategic initiatives and improve organizational outcomes. Similarly, Olobo et al. (2021) and Songa et al. (2023) examined credit risk management and its impact on the financial performance of banks, further highlighting the critical role of effective leadership in navigating the complex challenges faced by commercial banks in South Sudan. In summary, the body of research underscores the profound impact of Emotional Intelligence on leadership effectiveness and employee engagement. Leaders who possess high levels of EI are better equipped to manage their own emotions, understand and influence the emotions of others, and create a supportive and engaging work environment. This, in turn, enhances overall organizational performance and employee satisfaction. As the landscape of leadership continues to evolve, the integration of EI into leadership practices will remain a pivotal factor in driving organizational success and fostering a motivated and engaged workforce.

Literature Review

The relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and leadership effectiveness has been extensively explored in organizational research. EI, encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and motivation, is critical for leaders to manage their own emotions and those of their team members effectively (Shoaib & Pathan, 2022; Weinberger, 2009). Leaders with high EI are generally more adept at building relationships, resolving conflicts, and motivating their teams, which are essential components of effective leadership (Kerr et al., 2006; Koh & O'Higgins, 2018). Numerous studies confirm a positive correlation between EI and leadership effectiveness. For instance, Koh and O'Higgins (2018) found that leaders with high EI are perceived as more effective compared to those with lower EI. Singh et al. (2021) further supported this by demonstrating that EI significantly contributes to leadership effectiveness across various styles, suggesting that it helps leaders adapt their strategies to meet team needs more effectively. This notion is reinforced by Kerr et al. (2006), who highlighted that EI enhances interpersonal skills, which in turn improves leaders' ability to motivate and guide their teams. Koh and O'Higgins (2018) also extended these findings to a military context, illustrating that EI affects both perceived and actual leadership effectiveness in high-pressure environments. Similarly, Al-Shatarat et al. (2023) applied structural equation modeling in Jordanian schools and found that emotionally intelligent leaders are more effective, contributing to improved organizational outcomes.

In addition to its impact on leadership effectiveness, EI influences employee engagement. Employee engagement, characterized by enthusiasm and commitment towards one's work, is crucial for organizational success (Deshwal, 2015; Sanjay, 2021). Leaders with high EI create a more engaging work environment by fostering positive relationships, addressing employee needs, and providing constructive feedback (Amah, 2023; Naz et al., 2019). For example, Yucel Karamustafa et al. (2018) demonstrated that EI positively affects employee engagement, with the impact moderated by gender, indicating variability across different demographics. There is also a well-established link between leadership effectiveness and employee engagement. Effective leaders who inspire and motivate their employees often see higher levels of commitment and

performance (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022; Hasibuan et al., 2018). This connection underscores the role of EI in leadership, as emotionally intelligent leaders are better equipped to enhance employee engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity (Milhem et al., 2019; Alafeshat & Tanova, 2019).

The commercial banking sector in South Sudan, pivotal to the country's economic development, presents unique challenges such as economic instability and infrastructural limitations. In this context, understanding the interplay between EI, leadership effectiveness, and employee engagement is essential. Effective leadership and high employee engagement are crucial for overcoming these challenges and achieving organizational goals (Ater et al., 2023; Olobo et al., 2021). This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by examining how EI influences leadership effectiveness and employee engagement, specifically within South Sudan's commercial banking sector. By exploring these relationships, the research seeks to provide valuable insights for enhancing leadership practices and employee engagement strategies in this critical sector. Recent literature highlights the growing importance of EI in organizational dynamics. Shoaib and Pathan (2022) confirm that high EI enhances leadership effectiveness by improving emotional management and interpersonal skills. Similarly, Kerr et al. (2006) show that superior interpersonal skills linked to high EI contribute significantly to effective leadership, a finding echoed by Singh et al. (2021) in their study of Bhutanese leadership styles. In high-pressure environments, such as those studied by Koh and O'Higgins (2018), EI is crucial for managing both personal and subordinate emotions to achieve optimal performance. Al-Shatarat et al. (2023) support this view, noting that emotionally intelligent leaders in Jordanian schools achieve better organizational outcomes.

The impact of EI on employee engagement is well-documented. Herbst and Maree (2008) and Weinberger (2009) discuss how leaders with high EI foster greater employee engagement. Mohamad Saferdin et al. (2023) further demonstrate this relationship within the Malaysian public sector, highlighting the critical role of EI in fostering an engaged workforce. Deshwal (2015) and Sanjay (2021) add that EI's positive impact on employee engagement is evident across various sectors, with Deshwal noting a direct effect and Sanjay emphasizing the role of both emotional and spiritual intelligences. Das et al. (2022) and Yucel Karamustafa et al. (2018) explore the mediating role of EI in the relationship between employee engagement and job satisfaction, showing that EI significantly influences both. Mediating factors such as job satisfaction and work motivation also play a role in this relationship, as highlighted by Amah (2023) and studies by Naz et al. (2019) and Sulyantie and Gani (2023). Context-specific studies further enhance our understanding. Milhem et al. (2024) and Karmacharya (2023) explore the role of EI in employee engagement within different sectors and geographical locations, revealing its significant positive impact. In South Sudan's banking sector, Ater et al. (2023) highlight how EI enhances leadership effectiveness and employee engagement, complementing research on credit risk management practices (Olobo et al., 2021; Songa et al., 2023). The literature underscores that high EI contributes to both effective leadership and a more engaged workforce. It improves leadership effectiveness through better emotional management and interpersonal skills and enhances employee engagement by influencing factors such as job satisfaction and work motivation. Future research should explore these relationships further in various contexts and consider additional moderating and mediating variables to develop targeted EI development programs that can enhance leadership effectiveness and employee engagement.

Hypothesis Development

Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Leadership Effectiveness (LE)

The relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Leadership Effectiveness (LE) has been extensively explored across various contexts and industries. Shoaib and Pathan (2022) underscore the importance of EI in leadership by demonstrating that high EI levels enable leaders

to manage stress, communicate effectively, and build strong relationships, all of which contribute to enhanced leadership effectiveness. Similarly, Kerr et al. (2006) found that specific dimensions of EI, particularly experiential EI, are strong predictors of leadership effectiveness, though some components, such as managing emotions, were questioned for their conceptual validity. Singh et al. (2021) extended this understanding by revealing that EI significantly impacts perceived leadership effectiveness in Bhutanese financial institutions, acting as a mediator between leadership styles and effectiveness. Koh and O'Higgins (2018) provided further support by showing that EI positively correlates with both perceived and actual leadership effectiveness in a military context, suggesting that EI plays a crucial role in various high-pressure environments. This is corroborated by Al-Shatarat et al. (2023), who found that dimensions of EI, including self-awareness and social management, significantly influence leadership effectiveness within Jordanian schools.

Herbst and Maree (2008) explored the interplay between thinking style preferences, EI, and leadership effectiveness in higher education, highlighting that EI, along with cognitive styles, can predict transformational leadership behaviors. On the other hand, Weinberger (2009) found no significant relationships between EI and leadership style or perceived effectiveness, indicating that other factors might also influence leadership outcomes. The importance of EI in enhancing leadership effectiveness is also evident in studies by Mohamad Saferdin et al. (2023) and Edelman and van Knippenberg (2018), which emphasize that EI contributes significantly to leadership performance and managing subordinates' emotions. Xianjun (2022) and Ismail et al. (2020) reinforce these findings by demonstrating that high EI correlates with successful leadership outcomes in education and coaching contexts, respectively. Nabih et al. (2023) highlighted the moderating role of gender in the EI-LE relationship, suggesting that gender dynamics may influence how EI impacts leadership effectiveness. Singh and Pathardikar (2010) and Kasapi and Mihiotis (2014) further supported the role of EI in leadership effectiveness, with Singh and Pathardikar finding that EI, alongside personality traits, predicts leadership effectiveness, and Kasapi and Mihiotis proposing a theoretical model linking EI to decision-making and leadership effectiveness. Based on the extensive literature reviewed, it is clear that Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays a critical role in determining Leadership Effectiveness (LE) across various contexts. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: *Emotional Intelligence (EI) is positively related to Leadership Effectiveness (LE) in commercial banks in South Sudan.*

Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement

A growing body of research highlights the crucial role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in fostering employee engagement across various sectors. Milhem et al. (2024) demonstrated a significant positive relationship between EI and employee engagement within Palestine's ICT sector, where EI was shown to directly enhance engagement levels (Beta = 0.302; P-value = 0.000). Similarly, Sulyantie and Gani (2023) found that EI positively impacts both employee engagement and performance, with engagement mediating the EI-performance relationship. Karmacharya (2023) reported that EI dimensions positively influenced employee engagement in the service sector of Pokhara Metropolitan City, explaining 61% of the variance in engagement levels. Sarangi and Vats (2015) identified that mood repair, a component of EI, significantly improves engagement among Indian professionals. In Kenya, Mwangi (2014) observed that EI positively affects employee engagement in public universities, supporting its relevance in various organizational contexts. Additionally, Joseph and Stewart (2021) highlighted EI's role in managing engagement and burnout among U.S. law enforcement professionals, emphasizing its importance in high-stress environments. Shafa, Sutrisna, and Barlian (2022) found that EI significantly impacts employee engagement among non-managerial employees in the hospitality sector. Milhem, Muda, and Ahmed (2019) further supported these findings, showing that EI mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement in Palestine's ICT sector.

In the educational sector, Absah, Rini, and Sembiring (2020) found that EI, along with spiritual intelligence and flexible working arrangements, positively influences employee engagement, emphasizing the broader applicability of EI. Devi (2016) explored the link between spirituality, EI, and employee engagement, suggesting that EI enhances employees' psychological bonding with their organizations. In the Indian IT sector, Das, Mehra, and Singh (2022) identified EI as a partial mediator between employee engagement and job satisfaction. Sudibjo and Sutarji (2020) found that EI positively affects employee engagement among teachers, indicating its importance in educational settings. Alferaih (2021) highlighted EI's role in improving employee satisfaction and performance, with engagement mediating this relationship in Saudi Arabian private companies. Yucel Karamustafa, Kunday, and Prof (2018) demonstrated a significant relationship between EI and employee engagement, noting no significant moderating effect of gender. Naz et al. (2019) explored how EI impacts employee performance and engagement, finding that job satisfaction mediates these relationships. Sanjay (2021) examined the role of EI and spiritual intelligence in predicting employee engagement among call center employees, confirming a positive correlation between EI and engagement. Deshwal (2015) provided a nuanced view, indicating a negative association between high EI and low engagement, suggesting that the relationship may be more complex than previously thought. Amah (2023) emphasized the importance of leaders' EI in enhancing employee engagement through trust and voice. Ahmed et al. (2020) confirmed a positive relationship between leaders' EI and employee engagement in Bahrain's private sector. Finally, Selvi and Aiswarya (2023) found a strong correlation between EI and work engagement among automobile sector employees in Chennai, supporting the broader relevance of EI. Given this extensive evidence, Hypothesis H2 proposes that Emotional Intelligence (EI) is positively related to Employee Engagement (EME) in commercial banks in South Sudan. The consistent findings across diverse sectors and regions suggest that increasing EI among employees in the banking sector could similarly enhance engagement levels, supporting the hypothesis that EI significantly influences employee engagement in this context.

H2: *Emotional Intelligence (EI) is positively related to Employee Engagement (EME) in commercial banks in South Sudan.*

Leadership Effectiveness and Employee Engagement

Prior research has consistently demonstrated the positive impact of leadership effectiveness on employee engagement. For example, Ricardianto et al. (2020) found that effective leadership enhances work effectiveness through increased employee engagement. This underscores the role of leadership in creating a supportive environment that fosters higher levels of employee involvement and satisfaction. Similarly, Mazzetti and Schaufeli (2022) revealed that engaging leadership boosts both individual employees' motivation and team dynamics, leading to improved work engagement and effectiveness. Hasibuan et al. (2018) further corroborate this by showing that effective leadership positively impacts employee engagement, which in turn enhances overall work effectiveness. Suwarno et al. (2022) also found that transformational leadership influences work effectiveness through its effect on employee engagement, indicating that leaders who inspire and motivate their employees can significantly boost engagement levels. Algarni and Munshi (2023) support this relationship, noting that both servant leadership and leader-member exchange (LMX) styles are crucial in fostering employee engagement. Dwiedienawati et al. (2020) highlight the role of transformational leadership in improving employee engagement, which subsequently affects organizational effectiveness. Koekemoer et al. (2021) demonstrate that leadership behavior directly impacts work engagement, and Mutha and Srivastava (2023) emphasize the importance of effective leadership in engaging virtual teams, which is particularly relevant in modern work contexts. Adding to this, Klebe and Felfe (2023) investigated the effectiveness of health-oriented leadership in both on-site and digital working contexts. Their study found that while staff care positively influences employee engagement and job satisfaction, these effects are somewhat weaker in digital environments compared to on-site

settings. This suggests that while leadership effectiveness remains critical, the working context can moderate its impact on employee engagement. Alafeshat and Tanova (2019) further illustrate that servant leadership and high-performance work systems (HPWS) practices positively affect employee satisfaction and retention through enhanced engagement. Their research emphasizes that engagement is a key mechanism linking leadership practices to improved organizational outcomes, demonstrating the universal applicability of effective leadership across different cultural and organizational contexts. Based on these studies, it can be hypothesized that Leadership Effectiveness (LE) is positively related to Employee Engagement (EME) in commercial banks in South Sudan. The evidence suggests that effective leadership, through various styles and approaches, significantly enhances employee engagement by creating an environment that supports and motivates employees. This hypothesis is consistent with the broader literature indicating that leadership effectiveness is a critical determinant of employee engagement across diverse organizational settings.

H3: *Leadership Effectiveness (LE) is positively related to Employee Engagement (EME) in commercial banks in South Sudan.*

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework connecting Emotional Intelligence (EI), Leadership Effectiveness (LE), and Employee Engagement (EME) integrates key dimensions of organizational behavior and leadership theory. Emotional Intelligence, encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and motivation, significantly impacts leadership effectiveness by enabling leaders to manage stress, communicate effectively, and build strong relationships. Research by Shoaib and Pathan (2022) and Kerr et al. (2006) highlights that high EI enhances leadership effectiveness through improved emotional management and interpersonal skills. Singh et al. (2021) and Koh and O’Higgins (2018) further confirm that EI is crucial for effective leadership in diverse contexts, including high-pressure environments.

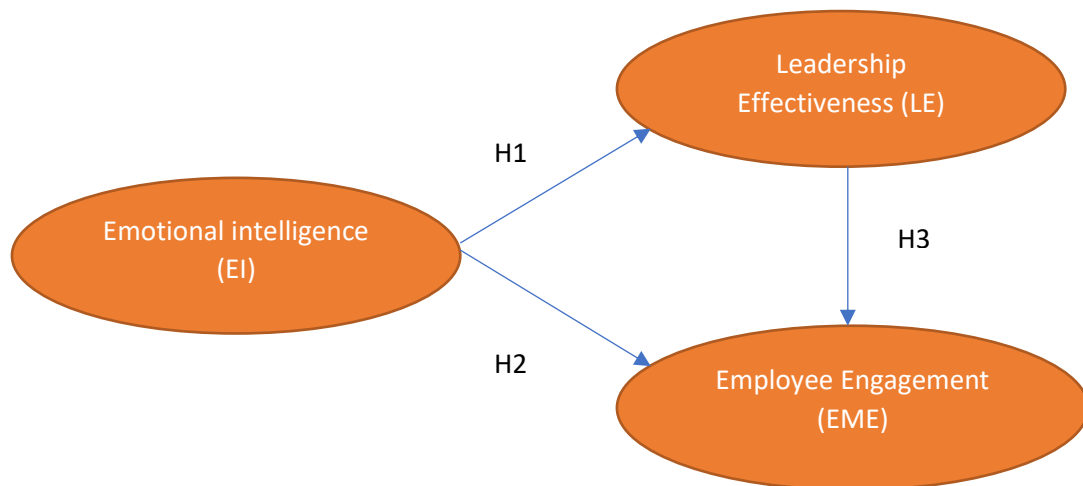


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

In addition to its impact on leadership effectiveness, EI also plays a vital role in employee engagement. Engaged employees exhibit high enthusiasm and commitment to their work, which is fostered by leaders with high EI who create positive work environments. Studies by Milhem et al. (2024) and Sulyantie and Gani (2023) demonstrate that EI directly enhances employee engagement and performance. Further evidence from Karmacharya (2023) and Sarangi and Vats (2015) supports the positive effect of EI on employee engagement across various sectors. Leadership effectiveness, in turn, significantly influences employee engagement. Effective leaders foster supportive environments that enhance employee involvement and satisfaction. Research

by Ricardianto et al. (2020), Mazzetti and Schaufeli (2022), and Hasibuan et al. (2018) shows that effective leadership increases engagement by motivating employees and improving team dynamics. Transformational leadership, in particular, has been shown to positively impact engagement (Suwarno et al., 2022; Algarni & Munshi, 2023). In the context of South Sudan's commercial banking sector, understanding these relationships is crucial due to the sector's unique challenges. The framework depicted in Figure 1 illustrates how EI influences leadership effectiveness and employee engagement, and how leadership effectiveness affects employee engagement, providing a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics in this sector.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to explore the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in leadership effectiveness and employee engagement within commercial banks in South Sudan. A cross-sectional survey approach was adopted, allowing for the collection of data at a single point in time from a sample of employees working in various commercial banks across the country.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire that was distributed to employees working in various commercial banks across South Sudan. The questionnaire was meticulously designed to capture relevant data and was divided into four key sections: demographic information, Emotional Intelligence (EI), Leadership Effectiveness (LE), and Employee Engagement (EME). Each section included items adapted from validated scales found in existing literature to ensure the reliability and validity of the measures used. Specifically, the items measuring Emotional Intelligence were adapted from the works of León et al. (2024) and Gao et al. (2024). Leadership Effectiveness was assessed using items adapted from Kerr et al. (2006), while Employee Engagement items were drawn from the scale developed by Schaufeli and Salanova (2002) (presented in table 1). Emotional Intelligence was assessed using four items. These items included: EI1, which measured Self-Emotion Appraisal ("I am usually aware of how my emotions affect my thoughts and actions, especially during challenging situations at work"); EI2, which measured Others' Emotion Appraisal ("I can easily recognize and understand the emotions of my colleagues, even when they do not openly express how they feel"); EI3, which assessed the Use of Emotion ("I effectively use my emotions to inspire and motivate my team, ensuring a positive and productive work environment"); and EI4, which measured the Regulation of Emotion ("I can manage my emotions well, even under pressure, and I do not let negative feelings affect my interactions with others or my decision-making process"). Leadership Effectiveness was assessed with four items that explored various aspects of leadership behaviors. These items included: LE1 ("I feel comfortable approaching my supervisor with questions or concerns related to banking operations and procedures"); LE2 ("My supervisor regularly checks in on my well-being and provides the necessary support to help me achieve my targets and meet customer needs"); LE3 ("I believe that my supervisor treats all employees fairly, especially in terms of work assignments and recognition within the bank"); and LE4 ("I feel involved in decisions that affect my work in the bank, particularly in areas related to customer service and financial products"). Employee Engagement was measured using five items that captured the respondents' level of engagement at work. The items included: EME1 ("I feel energized and motivated to contribute to the bank's success, particularly when my supervisor demonstrates emotional intelligence"); EME2 ("I have a strong enthusiasm for my job at the bank, especially when I feel supported and understood by emotionally intelligent leadership"); EME3 ("The emotional intelligence of my supervisor inspires me to perform at my best and stay engaged in my work at the bank"); EME4 ("I look forward to going to work at the bank each day, knowing that my contributions are valued and that my emotional well-being is recognized by leadership");

and EME5 ("I take pride in the work I do at the bank, especially when I see that emotionally intelligent leadership positively influences the team's morale and productivity").

Sample and Sampling Technique

The target population for this study consisted of employees from commercial banks in South Sudan. A total of 387 responses were collected using a convenience sampling technique, which is suitable for accessing a large number of respondents within a short time frame. After removing incomplete and missing responses, the final sample size comprised 360 valid responses, ensuring a sufficient sample size for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis.

Respondent Profile

The respondent profile (presented in table 2) indicated that 74% of the participants were male, and 26% were female. The age distribution showed that 10% were between 25-30 years, 21% were between 31-35 years, 31% were between 36-40 years, and 38% were 40 years or above. Regarding education level, 7% had a high school diploma, 55% held a bachelor's degree, 27% had a master's degree, and 11% had other forms of education. In terms of work experience, 26% of the respondents had 0-1 years of experience, 33% had 2-3 years, 35% had 4-5 years, and 6% had more than 5 years of experience.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS 24. The SEM approach was chosen to assess the relationships between Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Effectiveness, and Employee Engagement. This technique is appropriate for testing complex models involving multiple variables and allows for the simultaneous assessment of direct and indirect effects. Descriptive statistics were first calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the distribution of the study variables. Then, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the measurement model, followed by the structural model assessment to test the hypothesized relationships.

Table 1: Study Variables, Items, and Sources

Variables	Items	Source
Emotional intelligence (EI)	EI1 (Self-Emotion Appraisal): I am usually aware of how my emotions affect my thoughts and actions, especially during challenging situations at work.	León et al (2024); Gao et al. (2024)
	EI2 (Others' Emotion Appraisal): I can easily recognize and understand the emotions of my colleagues, even when they do not openly express how they feel.	
	EI3 (Use of Emotion): I effectively use my emotions to inspire and motivate my team, ensuring a positive and productive work environment.	
	EI4 (Regulation of Emotion): I can manage my emotions well, even under pressure, and I do not let negative feelings affect my interactions with others or my decision-making process.	
Leadership Effectiveness (LE)	LE1: I feel comfortable approaching my supervisor with questions or concerns related to banking operations and procedures.	Kerr et al. (2006)
	LE2: My supervisor regularly checks in on my well-being and provides the necessary support to help me achieve my targets and meet customer needs.	
	LE3: I believe that my supervisor treats all employees fairly, especially in terms of work assignments and recognition within the bank.	
	LE4: I feel involved in decisions that affect my work in the bank, particularly in areas related to customer service and financial products.	
Employee Engagement (EME)	EME1: I feel energized and motivated to contribute to the bank's success, particularly when my supervisor demonstrates emotional intelligence.	Schaufeli and Salanova (2002)
	EME2: "I have a strong enthusiasm for my job at the bank, especially when I feel supported and understood by emotionally intelligent leadership."	
	EME3: "The emotional intelligence of my supervisor inspires me to perform at my best and stay engaged in my work at the bank."	
	EME4: "I look forward to going to work at the bank each day, knowing that my contributions are valued and that my emotional well-being is recognized by leadership."	
	EME5: "I take pride in the work I do at the bank, especially when I see that emotionally intelligent leadership positively influences the team's morale and productivity."	

Table 2: Respondent Profile Characteristics

Variable	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	265	74
Female	95	26
Age		
25-30	35	10
31-35	75	21
36-40	112	31
40 or above	138	38
Education Level		
High School	25	7
Bachelor's Degree	198	55
Master's Degree	98	27
PhD	0	0
Other	39	11
Years of Experience		
0-1 years	95	26
2-3 years	117	33
4-5 years	125	35
5+ years	23	6
Type of Organization		
Bank	360	100

Data analysis

Table 3 presents the measurement items used in this study, along with their respective factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) values. The table is organized by the three key variables: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Leadership Effectiveness (LE), and Employee Engagement (EME). For Emotional Intelligence (EI), the items include Self-Emotion Appraisal (EI1), Others' Emotion Appraisal (EI2), Use of Emotion (EI3), and Regulation of Emotion (EI4). The factor loadings for these items range from 0.83 to 0.89, indicating strong correlations between the items and their underlying construct. The composite reliability (CR) for EI is 0.85, suggesting a high level of internal consistency among the items. The average variance extracted (AVE) for EI is 0.75, which is above the acceptable threshold of 0.50, indicating that a substantial portion of the variance is captured by the construct. For Leadership Effectiveness (LE), the items include LE1 through LE4, with factor loadings ranging from 0.75 to 0.88. The composite reliability for LE is 0.82, and the AVE is 0.72, both of which reflect strong reliability and validity of the measures. For Employee Engagement (EME), the items EME1 through EME5 demonstrate factor loadings between 0.73 and 0.85. The composite reliability for EME is 0.78, indicating a moderate to high level of internal consistency, while the AVE is 0.69, which also suggests that the items adequately represent the construct. Overall, the table indicates that the measurement items used in this study demonstrate strong factor loadings, good composite reliability, and satisfactory average variance extracted values, ensuring the robustness and reliability of the constructs measured.

Table 4 presents the squared intercorrelations among the three primary constructs of the study: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Leadership Effectiveness (LE), and Employee Performance (EP). The diagonal values in the table represent the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct, which are 0.83 for EI, 0.85 for LE, and 0.88 for EP. These values suggest that the constructs have strong internal consistency and validity. The off-diagonal values indicate the squared correlations between the constructs. Specifically, the squared correlation between EI and LE is 0.73, demonstrating a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness. Similarly, the squared correlation between EI and EP is 0.78, indicating a robust positive relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance. Additionally, the squared correlation between LE and EP is 0.82, reflecting a very strong positive

association between leadership effectiveness and employee performance. Overall, the table underscores the strong interrelationships among the constructs while also affirming that each construct maintains its distinctiveness. The higher diagonal values compared to the off-diagonal values confirm that the constructs exhibit good discriminant validity, meaning they are adequately distinct from one another and effectively measure their respective underlying concepts.

Table 3: Measurement items

Variables	Items	Factor loadings	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Emotional intelligence (EI)	EI1 (Self-Emotion Appraisal): I am usually aware of how my emotions affect my thoughts and actions, especially during challenging situations at work.	0.88	0.85	0.75
	EI2 (Others' Emotion Appraisal): I can easily recognize and understand the emotions of my colleagues, even when they do not openly express how they feel.	0.83		
	EI3 (Use of Emotion): I effectively use my emotions to inspire and motivate my team, ensuring a positive and productive work environment.	0.89		
	EI4 (Regulation of Emotion): I can manage my emotions well, even under pressure, and I do not let negative feelings affect my interactions with others or my decision-making process.	0.85		
Leadership Effectiveness (LE)	LE1: I feel comfortable approaching my supervisor with questions or concerns related to banking operations and procedures.	0.78	0.82	0.72
	LE2: My supervisor regularly checks in on my well-being and provides the necessary support to help me achieve my targets and meet customer needs.	0.75		
	LE3: I believe that my supervisor treats all employees fairly, especially in terms of work assignments and recognition within the bank.	0.84		
	LE4: I feel involved in decisions that affect my work in the bank, particularly in areas related to customer service and financial products.	0.88		
Employee Engagement (EME)	EME1: I feel energized and motivated to contribute to the bank's success, particularly when my supervisor demonstrates emotional intelligence.	0.73	0.78	0.69
	EME2: "I have a strong enthusiasm for my job at the bank, especially when I feel supported and understood by emotionally intelligent leadership."	0.81		
	EME3: "The emotional intelligence of my supervisor inspires me to perform at my best and stay engaged in my work at the bank."	0.85		
	EME4: "I look forward to going to work at the bank each day, knowing that my contributions are valued and that my emotional well-being is recognized by leadership."	0.77		
	EME5: "I take pride in the work I do at the bank, especially when I see that emotionally intelligent leadership positively influences the team's morale and productivity."	0.83		

Table 4: Squared intercorrelation among the constructs

		1	2	3
1	Emotional intelligence (EI)	0.83		
2	Leadership Effectiveness (LE)	0.73	0.85	
3	Employee Performance (EP)	0.78	0.82	0.88

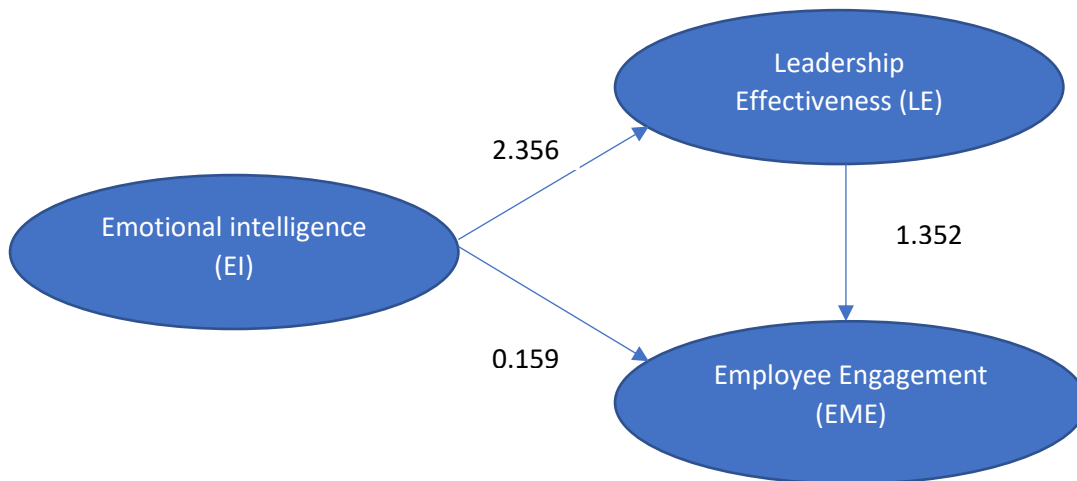
The goodness-of-fit indices for the model reveal its adequacy in representing the observed data (presented in figure 2). The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) is 0.85, indicating a generally good fit, though it falls slightly short of the ideal threshold of 0.90. The Chi-Square (χ^2) value of 1012, when considered with the Degrees of Freedom (df) of 575, suggests that while the model fits the data, the chi-square statistic alone may be influenced by the large sample size. The Adjusted Goodness

of Fit Index (AGFI) is 0.93, reflecting a strong fit after adjusting for degrees of freedom. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.052, which is below the recommended cutoff of 0.05, indicating a close fit between the model and the data. Additionally, the Incremental Fit Index (IFI) is 0.97, the Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) is 0.93, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) is 0.95, and the Confirmatory Fit Index (CFI) is 0.94. All these indices are well above the 0.90 threshold, suggesting that the model performs exceptionally well in explaining the data relative to a baseline model. Collectively, these indices demonstrate that the model has a good fit, with most measures meeting or exceeding the commonly accepted standards for evaluating model adequacy.

Table 5 illustrates the direct, indirect, and total effects among Emotional Intelligence (EI), Leadership Effectiveness (LE), and Employee Engagement (EME), highlighting how changes in one variable affect others within the model. Direct effects represent the immediate impact of one variable on another. Specifically, a one-unit increase in Leadership Effectiveness (LE) results in a direct increase of 2.356 units in LE itself, reflecting a high level of self-influence or internal consistency within this construct. A one-unit increase in Emotional Intelligence (EI) results in a direct increase of 0.159 units in Employee Engagement (EME), indicating a modest influence of EI on EME. Conversely, a one-unit increase in Leadership Effectiveness (LE) directly increases Employee Engagement (EME) by 1.352 units, showing a strong influence of LE on EME. Indirect effects measure the impact of one variable on another through intervening variables. In this model, a one-unit increase in Leadership Effectiveness (LE) indirectly increases Employee Engagement (EME) by 0.115 units. This effect occurs through other variables or mediators in the model, demonstrating the indirect pathways through which LE influences EME. Total effects combine both direct and indirect effects to show the overall impact of one variable on another. For Leadership Effectiveness (LE), the total effect on itself is 2.356, as the direct effect is self-contained and not mediated by other variables. For Employee Engagement (EME), a one-unit increase in Emotional Intelligence (EI) results in a total effect of 0.274 units, combining the direct effect of 0.159 units and the indirect effect from LE of 0.115 units. Furthermore, a one-unit increase in Leadership Effectiveness (LE) leads to a total effect of 1.352 units on EME, reflecting the strong direct impact of LE on EME.

Table 5: Direct, indirect and total effects—estimates

	Emotional intelligence (EI)	Leadership Effectiveness (LE)
Direct effects		
Leadership Effectiveness (LE)	2.356	
Employee Engagement (EME)	0.159	1.352
Indirect effects		
Leadership Effectiveness (LE)		
Employee Engagement (EME)	0.115	
Total effect		
Leadership Effectiveness (LE)	2.356	
Employee Engagement (EME)	0.274	1.352



Note: Goodness of fit index): 0.85; Chi square: 1012; Degrees of freedom): 575; Adjusted goodness of fit index: 0.93; Root mean square error of approximation: 0.052; ; Incremental fit index: 0.97 Non-normed fit index): 0.93; Normed fit index: 0.95; Confirmatory fit index: 0.94

Figure 2: Direct, indirect and total effects

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the relationships between Emotional Intelligence (EI), Leadership Effectiveness (LE), and Employee Engagement (EME) within commercial banks in South Sudan. The research highlights the significant impact that Emotional Intelligence has on Leadership Effectiveness and, consequently, on Employee Engagement. The findings reveal that leaders with high levels of Emotional Intelligence are better equipped to manage stress, communicate effectively, and foster strong interpersonal relationships. These attributes not only enhance their leadership effectiveness but also create a positive and supportive work environment that significantly boosts employee engagement. The study's results underscore the critical role that EI plays in shaping effective leadership practices and improving employee outcomes. By demonstrating that leaders who are emotionally intelligent can drive higher levels of employee enthusiasm and commitment, the research emphasizes the importance of EI in achieving organizational success. This understanding provides valuable insights into how organizations can leverage Emotional Intelligence to improve both leadership effectiveness and employee engagement, ultimately leading to enhanced overall performance and satisfaction within the workplace.

Theoretical Applications

This study makes a substantial contribution to the theoretical understanding of Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Effectiveness, and Employee Engagement. By providing empirical evidence on the interconnections between these variables, the research supports and extends existing theoretical models in organizational behavior and leadership. The findings affirm that Emotional Intelligence is a crucial determinant of effective leadership and that effective leadership significantly impacts employee engagement. This aligns with and builds upon established theories that highlight the importance of Emotional Intelligence in enhancing leadership capabilities and fostering a positive work environment. The study advances theoretical frameworks by demonstrating the specific ways in which EI influences leadership and employee outcomes within the context of South Sudan's commercial banking sector. It offers a nuanced perspective on how EI can be integrated into leadership practices to improve organizational effectiveness, thus contributing to the broader theoretical discourse on EI and leadership. This research provides a foundation for further theoretical exploration and

development of models that incorporate Emotional Intelligence as a key factor in leadership and employee engagement.

Practical Applications

The practical implications of this study are significant for practitioners, especially within the commercial banking sector in South Sudan. The research highlights the importance of Emotional Intelligence in enhancing leadership effectiveness and employee engagement. Organizations are encouraged to invest in the development of Emotional Intelligence among their leaders through targeted training programs. Such programs can help leaders acquire the skills needed to manage their own emotions, understand and influence the emotions of others, and create a supportive and engaging work environment. By prioritizing EI development, banks can improve their leadership practices, resulting in higher levels of employee motivation, satisfaction, and overall performance. This approach not only benefits individual employees but also contributes to the organization's success by fostering a positive work culture and improving employee retention. For practical implementation, banks should consider incorporating EI assessment and development into their leadership training curricula and performance evaluation processes. This will enable leaders to better meet the needs of their employees, enhance team dynamics, and achieve organizational goals more effectively.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. One major limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the research, which restricts the ability to establish causality between Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Effectiveness, and Employee Engagement. Future research could address this by employing longitudinal study designs to track changes over time and establish causal relationships more definitively. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response biases, such as social desirability bias, affecting the accuracy of the findings. To mitigate this, future studies could incorporate multi-source data collection, including peer and supervisor assessments, to provide a more comprehensive view of Emotional Intelligence and its effects. The study's focus on the commercial banking sector in South Sudan also limits the generalizability of the results. Expanding research to include other sectors and geographical regions could validate and extend the findings, offering a broader understanding of the impact of Emotional Intelligence across different contexts. Furthermore, exploring additional variables such as organizational culture, job characteristics, and contextual factors could enrich the analysis and provide a more detailed picture of the dynamics influencing leadership effectiveness and employee engagement. These future research directions will help build on the current study's findings and enhance the understanding of Emotional Intelligence in organizational settings.

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