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# LEADING THROUGH CRISIS: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, SELF-EFFICACY, AND RESILIENCE OF MALAYSIAN LEADERS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the connection between leaders' emotional intelligence and workplace engagement, while also examining the potential mediating roles of self-efficacy and resilience in this relationship. A structural equation model test was conducted using Smart PLS 3.0, focussing on a structural equation model with participants from knowledge-based industries, including higher education, insurance, IT, and engineering services in Malaysia. The bootstrap results indicate that leaders' emotional intelligence significantly influenced workers' job engagement. This study further validated the mediation hypothesis, demonstrating that self-efficacy and resilience play a moderating role in the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and their engagement at work. The findings indicate that enhancing emotional intelligence can lead to increased excitement and engagement among employees regarding their work. This holds particular significance during occurrences such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicate that leaders' emotional intelligence significantly contributes to enhancing employees' psychological resourcefulness, thereby increasing their competence and resilience. This consequently results in enhanced levels of engagement.

**KEYWORDS:** Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, Work Engagement, Self-efficacy, Resilience, Decent Jobs.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The pandemic, COVID-19, exerted a worldwide influence, affecting both commercial businesses and standard daily functioning (Fabeil *et al.*, 2020; Korzeb & Niedziółka, 2020). That has created an environment in which business can be difficult to do. It is hard for businesses to make sure their staff are competent at their jobs and dedicated to the job while yet retaining a greater degree of immersion and commitment to the task. The following habits are vital to the success of businesses, and they are especially important in times of crisis (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). In the academic realm, this concept is called involvement in the work setting. In times of pandemic, like the COVID-19 crisis, leaders play a big influence in promoting employee behaviors and results, and therefore their support and facilitation is equally essential (Islam *et al.*, 2020). To make matters worse, employees need additional emotional support and affiliation during the adverse times; hence, leaders' emotional intelligence might be crucial in keeping workers' commitment to the task at hand (Walmsley *et al.*, 2020).

The proliferation of the COVID-19 has produced a sense of fear and unease in the general population and has also created a huge personal strain to address the various problems it causes. A firm's resilience has become important to the prosperity of the enterprise (Dawahli *et al.*, 2020). Positive psychology uses the term "resilience" to describe organizations and individuals who demonstrate strength and virtue to deal with an unexpected situation (Hadi & Supardi, 2020). The research found that work engagement, organizational commitment, and self-efficacy all contribute to a good organizational attitude. These studies indicated that employee and organizational commitment are closely related to self-efficacy. The job commitment and organizational commitment that results from a person being actively involved in his work leads to increased self-efficacy (Bloom *et al.*, 2020; Hossain, 2021; Jallow *et al.*, 2020; Teresiene *et al.*, 2021).

### 1.1. Aim

The aim of this study is to determine how leaders' emotional intelligence may enhance workers' job satisfaction connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, while the emotional intelligence of leaders is an abstract notion, it immediately impacts or correlates with engagement via specific psychological factors such as efficiency and resilience, which foster absorption, vigour, and staff commitment. The research primarily examines the association between emotional intelligence and

employee engagement, while also investigating whether self-efficacy beliefs and resilience serve as mediators in the linkage with job engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Extensive research has been conducted on the influence of job engagement on personal and work-related well-being; however, greater investigation into the potential mediating factors in this connection is needed. This study addresses significant research gaps to assist organisational researchers and practitioners in managing and sustaining employee job engagement during crises.

### 1.2. Objectives

- Examine the beneficial link between leaders' mental agility and professional enthusiasm.
- Investigate whether the self-efficacy modulates the relationship among executives' cognitive abilities and employment involvement.
- Explore whether fortitude regulates the relationship amongst leaders' psychological capacity and their job passion.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A prevalent theoretical argument used to examine the influence of several antecedents of workplace engagement (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018) is the theory of Conservation of Resources (COR). COR stated stress arises from the depletion of vital resources, the deprivation of vital resources, or obstacles encountered in acquiring these crucial resources (Hobfoll, 2011). In the COR hypothesis, those with scarce resources are assumed to be more likely to experience later losses, whilst those with many resources are more likely to benefit from future gains. COR theory posits that the underlying principle of risk is unequal in the sense that the consequences of resource loss to sustenance are far more severe than the benefits of resource acquisition (Guo *et al.*, 2020; Leung *et al.*, 2011). So, not only is resource loss more significant than resource gain, but it also impacts individuals more quickly and affects them more dramatically over time.

Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge that prior studies have used COR theory to elucidate the connection between leadership potential and employee engagement. Additional studies have emphasised the use of COR to assess intellectual assets (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007). The COR model posits since people exist predisposed to protect assets to facilitate their own behaviour. The theory posits that humans are intrinsically driven to obtain, preserve, and protect resources to avoid adverse

consequences (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 2001). This investigation suggests that leaders' emotional intelligence is critical for workers to assist them increase their workplace engagement (Alarcon et al., 2011). Furthermore, this may also contribute to the development of other individual resources, including resiliency and confidence in oneself, which further augment job engagement.

## 2.1. Professional Interaction

Schaufeli et al. (2002) stated professional commitment, the current name for positive psychology, is characterised as "a pleasant, satisfying, job-related frame of mind that is marked by energy, commitment, and absorption." It is a positive, productive, and satisfying mindset about work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The vitality of a team member refers to their energy and flexibility at work. The dedication one has to his or her job may be characterized by how immersed he or she is in the task, the amount to which he or she is challenged, and the enthusiasm and interest he or she has. Employees are dedicated to completing their jobs because of the absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Better worker performance may be shown in those who are more enthusiastic about their work, are in excellent health, and are more productive (Clark et al., 2021, Miller & Merrell, 2012; Thorp et al., 2012). A multitude of studies has demonstrated that when employees are more enthusiastic about their work, they become more productive. They demonstrate a greater level of inventiveness and perform better than most others. To obtain better results, companies must get their staff involved.

Campbell and Zegwaard (2015) initially introduced the term work engagement to describe the psychological presence or absence of employees at the workplace. After that, involvement has become a subject of intense academic study. Kohntopp and McCann (2020) Work engagement is defined as "an individual's concurrent employment and manifestation of their preferred identity in task-related actions whereby foster work and social connections, individual embodiment (tangible, intellectual, and mental), and interaction, comprehensive performances". Hicklenton et al. (2019) asserts that employee engagement arises from such elements as on-the-spot service, a worker's understanding of his or her task participation, and having a sense of self-presence as well as efficient and successful performance. They embrace new and unusual challenges because they are available at work and are personally invested in getting things done. Examples of such workers are those who have

a strong sense of personal attachment to their jobs. Lower-performing personnel are less productive and efficient. High-level worker engagement results in more involved and devoted workers than those with low-level engagement. They can share their thoughts and information readily, like imparting their experience, and constantly do their best to give them all. Another benefit is that work engagement helps to show how much the workers are committed to their tasks (Hudson, 2010; Jaschik & Lederman, 2015; Rizzotti & DePalma, 2021).

Various prominent experts believe that, according to their analysis, work engagement is composed of three classifications: psychologically significance, mental equilibrium, and neurological connectivity (Arroyo, 2011; Bakker, 2008; Hicklenton et al., 2020; Joplin et al., 2021; Lelchook, 2012). Employees anticipate a certain return, given their whole psychological and physical dedication to what they were doing. Staffs become more motivated and have more success when they feel valued and that they are a part of a greater purpose, resulting in a sense of meaning. A psychologically secure setting implies employees may share their views without fear of being shamed, between their self-perception and self-esteem is unharmed, and where working circumstances and location are safe and not dangerous. Secure psychological wellbeing translates into greater productivity and efficiency (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). As workers' mental and emotional capabilities expand, their capacity to manage whatever unexpected scenario arises is expanded as well. Employees in every business will encounter obstacles and difficulties and the quality of their work is determined by resources they have or can access. The issues and obstacles employees could have in their job can be addressed through greater resource availability and resource use. It is generally agreed that job engagement is closely related to one's leadership style or conduct. In addition, there are the types of leadership such as genuine, transformative, and ethical leadership (Stoffell, 2017). A leader's positive attitude increases the engagement of workers, which results in a greater interest in their position. The boost in employee performance that may be achieved by making improvements to job resources is similar (Müceldili & Erdil, 2016).

## 2.2. Leaders' Emotional Cognition

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability for comprehension and control your emotions and use that to improve your own mental processes (Mayer et al., 2000). Researchers has demonstrated emotional capacity may be able to predict occupational

contentment and nurse well-being and may also help in the advancement of the field (Schutte et al., 2002). People with greater degrees of mindfulness tend to be more emotionally intelligent and thus have more subjective well-being. EI seemed to mediate the connections between stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and happiness in a group of teenagers (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2020).

Intellectuals in recent years have been known to emphasize and applaud EI. They believe that an EI quotient is essential to be a good leader. An individual's emotional intelligence is usually defined as the capacity to be self-aware and considerate of others' feelings. Understanding others is a great approach to become closer to them (Dirican & Erdil, 2020; Kirk et al., 2011). The EI approach is a good strategy for managing emotions. Jain (2018) noted the oversight of "leadership theory and research in not considering how leaders' moods and emotions affect their effectiveness" (p. 221). Gardenswartz et al. (2010) asserted that EI helps leaders make their full contribution. Studies have shown that leaders tend to have better emotional intelligence scores than their followers. In the scientific literature, researchers often regard EI as either a cognitive ability or an enduring characteristic (Serrat, 2017). The evidence shows that the link between emotional intelligence and personal and occupational well-being has been widely documented. One of the most significant emotional intelligence traits is the capacity to regulate emotions, which is linked to both good life and job-related attitudes (Krishnakumar et al., 2016; Makkar & Basu, 2019).

Studies have shown that emotionally savvy leaders tend to succeed in several work environments. Expert sources say that EI relates to a leader's ability to instill transformative change, as proven by academic studies. This means that when the leader's EI goes up, so does their efficiency. It follows that those with greater levels of emotional intelligence usually find their jobs more fulfilling. Furthermore, new research has discovered that leaders' EI influences the staff's conduct inside the business (Loi et al., 2021; Nel, 2019). Through increasing their resilience, self-efficacy, flexibility, effectiveness, and quality performance, the EI of leaders helps workers achieve work engagement and job satisfaction.

### 2.3. Self-Efficacy

The personal capacity to manage one's own behavior, tasks, performance, and efficiency is called self-efficacy (SE). Employees that are more confident in their abilities are more likely to accomplish their

goals and objectives. It supports corporate goals while increasing self-control regarding workers (Bandura, 2006). The application also shows how workers are feeling and thinking about the company, and how they might be inspired (Bandura, 2006). Furthermore, SE is associated with employee engagement. Transformational leadership (like emotionally intelligent leaders) has been linked to SE in three ways, as described by (Bandura, 2006). Mastership experience is the initial source of strong self-efficacy, which refers to a high SE with experience, knowledge, and abilities in a field. A transformational leader's basic responsibility is to distribute tasks to their team based on their individual strengths and experience so that they can do it well and accomplish their goals. By showing support for the transformational leaders and their followers, they both gain a sense of accomplishment and it leads to master-learner experience (Chan, 2018; Kanten et al., 2016).

Another way to develop SE is to have someone else experience it vicariously. A vicarious experience group may be highly influential in some scenarios, such as when one sees a cohort of others be successful due of the same steady, physical effort (Bartsch et al., 2012). Transformational leaders emphasize the importance of having a firm belief in the organization's goal and spending time and energy to achieve it. Transformational leaders are characterized by their ability to guide others via example, as well as by their ability to motivate their followers to adopt new and unique ideas that they have in mind (Glessner et al., 2017). Thirdly, a social approach to building self-efficacy is another possibility. Employees can be persuaded to increase their skill level. The quality of their work will increase, and they will gain confidence in their abilities. Transformation leaders always encourage their supporters to trust in future success (Lent et al., 2017). However, the leaders must convey to their followers that they must share their expertise, ideas, and experiences to address the workplace challenges they confront. Intellectually stimulated leaders are known for their unwavering faith in their subordinates and for inspiring their confidence.

Previous research has indicated that SE is significantly correlated with staff devotion and compassion in employees has also been proven to be important. Consequently, it is advisable for presidents improve their emotional intelligence, which will then support their self-efficacy, which in turn improves followers' engagement. It is expected that leaders with higher EI will have stronger self-efficacy and more work engagement. Employees that

are more SE are willing to tackle difficult jobs. They always do their jobs with total vigor and energy, which allows them to meet corporate goals by overcoming any obstacles they may encounter at work (Rigotti et al., 2020). Both the leadership and the followers are demonstrating their devotion through these activities.

#### 2.4. Resilience

The idea of resilience was first discussed in the 1800s, as explained by Jackson et al. (2007), and has been advanced by present-day writers. However, much of the research in this area has been directed at children and adults. From contemporary organizational literature, the understanding of the positive aspects of resilience has been enhanced by research that shows how employee performance is related to company resilience. The capacity to come back from tough times, get stronger, and grow in a wide variety of areas, including work, social, communal, and literary, despite the presence of mental stress and strain. It is a percentage of the mind and the soul. The extent to which a person can bounce back from tough times is strongly linked to qualities like optimism, positivism, and certainty. The ability to bounce back in the face of continual change and adversity is what allows individuals to persevere. The capacity to survive crises and get forward in life (Ojo et al., 2021).

Although several perspectives on resilience exist, the current study has chosen to view resilience as a personality attribute. Therefore, a positive attitude toward the unexpected is advantageous since it encourages a willingness to adjust and adapt. It is a chain of personality qualities that helps people cope with stressful situations (Malik & Garg, 2020).

To sum up, resilience is associated with the success and well-being of companies, personal fulfillment with life, self-concept, and job satisfaction. The qualities are closely related to self-assurance, strong values, and determination; trust in oneself, in both being able to withstand harmful effects and being able to accept those effects; encouragement effects of stress and anxiety; accepting change; being in control; and being affected by spiritual influences.

A positive and adaptable attitude among employees strongly influences the organization's culture. Depending on the organization's mission and how it is operated, this process can lead to beneficial or negative outcomes. The academic community has concluded that employee emotional intelligence can be an aid to improving work engagement (Meynaar et al., 2021).

#### 2.5. Emotional Wisdom of Leadership and Staff Motivation

The conduct of those who work for leaders is directly affected by the leaders themselves. While leaders need to supervise their staff, subordinates become inspired by their bosses. It is therefore noted that a leader's demeanor might influence the actions of their subordinates (Alotaibi et al., 2020). However, involvement at work displays a lasting and thorough method of both cognitive and physical exertion that comprises three fields: endurance, devotion, and concentration. EI's beneficial impacts on employee engagement have been extensively shown by past research. Personal resources are critical to job engagement in accordance with the Job Demands-Resources Theory.

In this investigation, leaders' emotional intelligence is a personal resource that drives staff engagement. These engaged employees/workers may be more likely to experience an increase in positive emotions, including elation, contentment, and excitement. Studies have proven that work involvement has a favorable relationship with beneficial results (Ochalski, 2015; Yan et al., 2018). Employees who are deeply interested in what they do are prone to experience job satisfaction. Research indicates that professional attachment serves as an intermediary between human characteristics and organisational outcomes, such as staff efficiency, job fulfilment, and promotion. Leaders' moods will almost always exert a substantial influence on the whole workplace environment, including their colleagues' performance, attitude, and work engagement.

EI is defined as being able to recognise and differentiate between emotions and sentiments, and to apply this understanding to guide one's thoughts and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Social intelligence is a component of EI, and it is inextricably related to transformative leadership behavior. It is affirmed by several researchers that employees with high EI tend to work better and behave in a more suitable manner. Additionally, it has been determined that transformational leaders encourage, elevate, and psychologically inspire workers, and this has proven that a beneficial link exists between transformational leadership and employee behaviour. Transformational and emotionally intelligent leaders both utilize their ability to help workers achieve their goals and modify their behavior by means of their encouragement, motivational skill, intellectual drive, and individualized interests (Vyas, 2015).

A recent study has also discovered a favorable

correlation between transformative leadership and workplace engagement. Studies have been done that identify the link between the EI of leaders and the behavior of various workers in a company. Karimi and Karimi (2016) performed a detailed investigation of the sound effects of leaders' EI to give an example (skills, self-report, and talent). The leaders' EI is also connected to the job happiness of their co-workers and staff, as they have identified. It is a better use of time and resources to assign employees jobs based on their talents and knowledge so that their overall EI is enhanced. In addition, it improves the employees' conduct within the company.

The staff's health results are also impacted. The results of this study also showed that the leaders' emotional intelligence and employee satisfaction are strongly linked. AlZgool *et al.*, (2020) did a more thorough study of the same data. Researchers have established the link between the job happiness of employees and the emotional intelligence of the leaders by defining the cultural effect on the situation. The researchers found that leaders' emotional intelligence was related to both greater task performance and increased work satisfaction (Liu & Cho, 2018).

According to Akanni *et al* (2019), in recent years the work engagement of mental nurses has been directly influenced by many circumstances. The research has discovered a favourable link to nurse involvement and supervisors' emotional intelligence. Moreover, Milhem *et al* (2019) investigated the influence of Bahrain leaders' social competence in relation to personnel retention. The researchers discovered that a leader's social intelligence level correlates with employee work engagement in Bahrain. The team's work engagement is strongly linked to leader/member interaction, according to Uddo *et al.* (2020).

Moreover, Mérida-López *et al.* (2020) evaluated the correlation between perceived EI, work engagement, burnout, and job satisfaction among 238 Italian schoolteachers. The researchers' conclusions found that instructors who possessed greater emotional intelligence were more engaged in their profession. Ding and Yu (2021) found that EI is directly linked to involvement in the workplace.

Job satisfaction (as a construct) is examined more than any other job behavior in organizational studies, according to a survey of the literature. EI research should thus prioritize job satisfaction and performance. Previous research has shown that managers with high emotional intelligence enhance employee involvement and make them more productive, demanding, and efficient (Song, 2019).

## 2.6. Coaching of Self-Reliance

A work force's conduct, according to Bandura (2006), is dependent on the personal resources of the employees (e.g., the emotional intelligence of the managers and self-efficacy), as well as the motivation of the workers (e.g., workers are engaged in their positions). This study states that leaders' emotional intelligence is the primary personal resource that increases job commitment through self-efficacy. As a significant feature in the workplace, self-efficacy helps people improve their job engagement and raises their confidence level. In previous studies, a strategy for more self-confidence was advised (Cattelino *et al.*, 2019).

A prior study has found that professionals who are confident in their ability to do their task across a range of work situations are characterized by high self-efficacy. They have confidence in themselves to create better outcomes. It is suggested that emotion-based techniques might impact employee engagement. Alghamdi *et al.* (2019) found an encouraging association between emotional intelligence, occupational engagement, and self-worth. Furthermore, previous studies have investigated confidence in ourselves as an intermediary across innovative leadership and several outcomes' factors among them employee well-being, knowledge-sharing ability, innovative work behavior, and work engagement.

Since self-efficacy is defined as "belief in one's capacities to organize and execute courses of action necessary in controlling potential situations," it is the leader who may encourage it in their followers (Bandura, 2006). The link between leadership style and worker engagement was influenced by self-efficacy, according to several research. Therefore, we conclude that self-efficacy will serve as a mediator of the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and staff engagement. Leaders' EI will help employees to have higher self-efficacy to capture engagement in the workplace.

## 2.7. Regulation of Endurance

An effective leader must be able to read emotions, and emotional intelligence is the key to understanding others. EI-proficient leaders are more effective and efficient. Thus, leaders' emotional intelligence is crucial in anticipating varied actions and consequences. According to one theory, EI is a characteristic that defines a leader's success (Treglown *et al.*, 2016). EI is an ability that leaders must have to be successful and stand out. Leaders that are emotionally savvy cause their people to reach their goals more quickly and to achieve better

results at work.

Furthermore, resilience is another personality trait that is related to EI, as both attributes are necessary to have while confronting the varied challenges and sufferings encountered in the job. A central challenge in maintaining organizational resilience is how to overcome the various difficulties and challenges inside the organization, how to ensure stability, how to retain control over organizational matters, and how to effectively manage and resolve conflict and other external pressures. Studies have shown that EI may help people become more resilient. Research on EI and resilience linkages has focused on service-based professions, including retail staff, healthcare workers, and administrative personnel, as they interact with patients daily. The experts in this field encounter challenging conditions, stress, and disputes, which commonly lead to anxiety and burnout. Even while some people can cope with upsetting or traumatic circumstances more rapidly than others, they will still struggle to deal with them (Zhou et al., 2017).

Research suggests that the emotional intelligence of leaders may be used to predict resiliency. Havnen et al. (2020) discovered that EI helps individuals face unexpected situations by bolstering their resilience. Uncertain occurrences may be challenging from the point of view of assessments, as well as other functional obstacles. The researchers found in their study that, similarly, Scandurra et al. (2018) believed that EI plays a significant influence in the resilience of a company. The researchers Nam et al. (2018) revealed that psychological resilience is intimately connected to EI. It is their belief that those with greater EI are better equipped to deal with stressful situations. According to Li et al. (2020), individuals with stronger EI skills can outperform others even when working under stressful conditions. They stated that they can properly sense and understand their emotions, know-how, and when to express their sentiments, and can also manage their moods (p. 294). After Mcdermott et al. (2020) made their remarks, they said that people with a higher EQ are more apt to demonstrate resilience, which, in turn, benefits employees who are engaged at work.

The present study details the whole range of information about the links between EI and resilience, and how it impacts job engagement. Nevertheless, few studies examine the link between these factors together. In a multinational setting, Maidaniuc-Chirilă (2015) analyzed the interrelationships among resilience, EI, and perceived stress. A group of 696 students in

undergraduate programs participated in the study. The test sample was gathered from two institutions in the United States and Spain. The conclusions of the study indicate that stress levels are lower among emotionally intelligent and resilient pupils. It also appears that resilience was a beneficial intermediary in the correlation connecting psychological ability along with apparent stress in pupils. Anyan et al. (2020) also found that people's life happiness and well-being are influenced by their resilience, which is a trait that can be developed via mindfulness practice. A study of undergraduate students ( $n = 327$ ) revealed substantial evidence of resilience mediating the impact of risk on EI (Yalcin-Siedentopf et al., 2021).

Because of this, there are few researchers focused on the intervening role of resilience in the relationship between organizational leaders' EI and job engagement. The connection between two of the factors included in this study is easy to spot in a few of the studies. Links between EI and resilience, EI and workers' job engagement, and resilience and work engagement are some of the connections explored (Gensimore et al., 2020). The three dimensions examined in this study (leaders' EI-resilience-work engagement) are all linked to each other, and thus in this regard, we should consider the scenario described above. To meet the demands of the company's leadership, this research gap must be bridged.

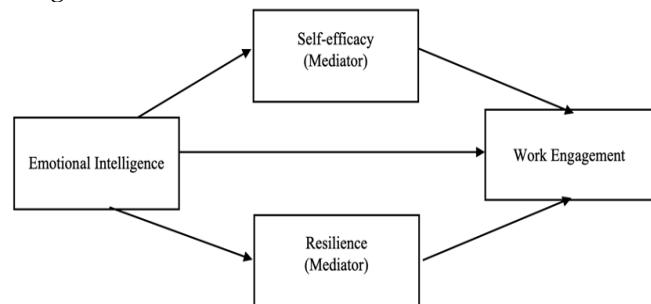


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Mental Agility

Participants' social intelligence was checked out using the Wong Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong & Law, 2002). It is composed of 16-item questions, including "I have a deep understanding of my own feelings", "I am good at noticing the emotions of people", "I consistently affirm my competence," and "I possess a firm grasp on my own emotions". It consists of the following parameters: OEA, SEA, UOE, and ROE, each measured on a scale consisting of five points, which goes from 1 (strongly

disapproving) to 5 (highly concur). In the current study, the Cronbach alpha indices for OEA, SEA, UOE, and ROE were 0.80, 0.79, 0.79, and 0.89, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for psychological aptitude remained 0.87. Emotional intelligence was assessed by using four different metrics: OEA, SEA, UOE, and ROE.

### 3.2. Self-Efficacy

To assess optimism, we adapted three enquiries from Sherer *et al.* (1982). Subjects were instructed to respond to an assortment of statements using a scale consisting of seven points (1 = completely opposed to 7 = completely concur) to assess their degree of acceptance or disapproval. Sample statements are "I possess confidence in my capabilities to execute my responsibilities" and "I have attained mastery of the requisite skills for my role." The value of Cronbach's alpha equalled 0.926.

### 3.3. Resilience

The short toughness metric comprising 6-items questions derived from Hjemdal *et al.* (2011) was used to measure resilience. Items 1, 3, and 5 kept their responses, however 2, 4, and 6 were reverse coded. For their remarks on resilience, the respondents were asked to rate their level of consensus on a scale of seven stars (1 = firmly opposed to 7 = greatly favour). Declarations like "I often recover fast from setbacks" and "I find it difficult to manage stressful events" are examples of the above paraphrase. Cronbach's alpha for this measure is 0.764.

### 3.4. Professional Involvement

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9), (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006) is a nine-item measure of work engagement. A shorter version was used to examine participants' engagement. It has three distinct parts: absorption, devotion, and vigor, each of which is evaluated by three items. The Cronbach's alpha ratings for vigour plus uptake, devotion were 0.73, 0.68, and 0.81, respectively, in the current study. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for job satisfaction was 0.90. The three variables utilized to evaluate job engagement included energy, absorption, and commitment.

### 3.5. Sampling and Participants

Data was obtained using a self-administered survey to validate the study model that was hypothesized. The survey was given to three scholars and three HR practitioners in Malaysia prior to the survey being distributed to their peers. The questions were improved with their feedback, and the updated

draft included their input. For instance, we altered the objectives of the research, based on the participants' responses. Online surveys were performed in Malaysia as part of the MCO phase (i.e., from May 2020 to August 2020). To curb the dissemination of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Malaysian government issued a ban on travel and assembly on March 18, 2020. To enforce the MCO's restrictions, all businesses had to be closed except for those required to keep the country running.

To reach as many participants as possible, we have chosen to use an internet platform (i.e., Google Forms) to disseminate the questionnaire. We purposefully chose those taking part employed in centred around information industries including higher education, IT, and engineering services because there was no sampling frame. The new normal among knowledge workers is the transition to remote job prospects and an online working scenario, which has been made more likely by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, we sent our connections who work in knowledge-based industries the survey link through email. The email has a cover letter that states the purpose of the study and offers participants the guarantee of anonymity in return for their voluntary participation. In addition, we asked responders to find others in their office to participate in the study. With well-validated measurements for the major research variables, socio-demographic factors (e.g. years of age, gender identity, profession qualifications, marital status, job experience, and tenure) were included.

Respondents from knowledge-based industries working in three states (Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, and Penang) in Malaysia made up the sample of 440 people in the study. 405 individuals (62.8% female) were drawn from a sample of volunteers, of which 35 did not complete the questionnaire. Their median chronological age were 45.38 years ( $SD = 8.03$ , range = 25–63 years). Contributors' marital affiliation comprised 56.8% got hitched, 20.5% unattached, 11.1% separated/divorced, 9.5% in a partnership, and 2.1% who did not disclose the extent to which they were married. The average working lifespan was 17 years, featuring a normative variance of 8.74 years, while the typical organisational longevity was 7 years, with a conventional departure of 6.28 years. Approximately 86.3% of those surveyed possessed a 5-decade degree, 8.4% held a 3-period degree, and 3.2% were holding a PhD.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS

The current study utilised computational modelling of structural equations with Smart PLS 3.0.

Adhering to the suggestions Hair et al. (2017), a dual-phase methodology was employed. The initial phase of the study assessed the statistical features of the template.

The test estimation outcomes presented in Table 1 include unique issue stresses, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) ratings. According to the heuristic method proposed by Hair et al. (2017) and MacKenzie et al. (2005), pieces with weights of 0.50 or higher were preserved. Table 1 presents charges for the kept components, which range from 0.627 to 0.728. Secondly, the

aggregate dependability scores, as indicated by Hair et al. (2017), were obtained readily surpassing the criterion of 0.70. The experimental simulation outcomes indicate a composite accuracy rating around 0.886 and 0.912. Consequently, AVE levels have been determined to satisfy the minimum requirement of 0.50 or aforementioned. Table 1 points out that the AVE rates vary from 0.723 to 0.835. Ultimately, the cognitive features of the framework were established by verifying inner dependability, overall accuracy, and convergent validation.

**Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity of Constructs Using Loadings, AVE, and Composite Reliability (CR).**

Construct	Measurement Items	Loadings	AVE	CR
Emotional Intelligence	EI1	0.697	0.743	0.898
	EI2			
	EI3			
	EI4			
	EI5			
	EI6			
	EI7			
	EI8			
	EI9			
	EI10			
	EI11			
	EI12			
	EI13			
	EI14			
	EI15			
	EI16			
Self-efficacy	SE1	0.653	0.723	0.912
	SE2			
	SE3			
Resilience	RE1	0.627	0.817	0.891
	RE2			
	RE3			
	RE4			
	RE5			
	RE6			
Work Engagement	WE1	0.728	0.835	0.886
	WE2			
	WE3			
	WE4			
	WE5			
	WE6			
	WE7			
	WE8			
	WE9			

#### 4.1. Pervasive Approach Prejudice

The questionnaire's reliance on its own reportage methodology may introduce common method bias, thus compromising the credibility of the findings. Consequently, a prevalent factor calculation was performed to assess the extent of conventional strategy bias's detrimental effect on the data at hand (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). Every moment content coefficient loadings of the elements are

crucial, but the majority of practice factor stresses are insignificant and exhibit low values, indicating that traditional method bias is unlikely to be a substantial issue in this current investigation.

#### 4.2. Discriminatory Authority

We evaluated the two primary approaches for measuring valid discrimination. Initially, we juxtaposed the inverse square core percentages of AVEs with the respective relationships. Table 2

demonstrates that the inverse square root quantities of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceed the association coefficients between the corresponding creates hence fulfilling the criteria for impartiality (Henseler et al., 2015).

**Table 2: Fornell-Larcker Criterion for Discriminant Validity among Constructs.**

Constructs	1	2	3	4
Emotional Intelligence	0.770			
Self-efficacy	0.431	0.833		
Resilience	0.386	0.441	0.736	
Work Engagement	0.325	0.387	0.422	0.902

Note: 1= Emotional Intelligence, 2= Self-efficacy, 3= Resilience, 4= Work Engagement.

Secondly, we analysed the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of connections (HTMT) (Henseler, 2017). The HTMT ratios, consistent with proposals, are below the cutoff amounting to 0.85, thereby affirming discriminant legitimacy (refer to Table 3).

**Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) for Discriminant Validity.**

Constructs	1	2	3	4

**Table 4: Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Results.**

Hypothesis	Constructs	$\beta$	t-value	P-value	Decision
H1	EI $\rightarrow$ WE	0.519	7.116	0.000	Supported
H2	EI $\rightarrow$ SE WE	0.257	3.717	0.001	Supported
H3	EI $\rightarrow$ RE WE	0.316	6.092	0.000	Supported

Note: EI= Emotional Intelligence, SE= Self-efficacy, RE= Resilience, WE= Work Engagement.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The research being conducted sought to examine the role of leaders' emotional intelligence in facilitating employees' engagement with their work. The analysis evaluated the relationship between business owners' compassion and employee loyalty, as well as the potential mediating roles of optimism along with endurance. The investigation revealed a substantial correlation between executives' mental agility and employee engagement. This supports earlier research suggesting that mental fortitude is essential for maintaining motivation and resolve during challenging times, like the COVID-19 pandemic. Present evidence asserts that leaders bear a greater role in fostering staff motivation, engagement, and enthusiasm by enhancing

Emotional Intelligence				
Self-efficacy	0.457			
Resilience	0.386	0.636		
Work Engagement	0.325	0.387	0.422	

Note: 1= Emotional Intelligence, 2= Self-efficacy, 3= Resilience, 4= Work Engagement.

The findings in Table 4 indicated that the established pathways in the equation were substantial and aligned against the speculation. After evaluating the behavioural qualities, the present study examined the proposed associations using the bootstrapping technique (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013). The discoveries from 5000 establishes indicated a substantial correlation across directors' interpersonal abilities and dedication to work ( $\beta= 0.519$ ,  $t=7.116$ ,  $p<0.000$ ), hence supporting proposition 1. Conclusions indicated that therapeutic self-worth supports the association connecting leadership' emotional acumen and job dedication ( $\beta= 0.257$ ,  $t=3.717$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), resulting in validating hypothesis 2. Finally, the analysis provided empirical testimony supporting the intermediary role of perseverance in the association involving managerial emotional competency and job dedication ( $\beta= 0.316$ ,  $t=6.092$ ,  $p<0.000$ ), subsequently corroborating premise 3.

individual emotional intelligence. This is supported by previous research, indicating that self-confidence influences the connection between directors' cognitive flexibility and job motivation. This indicates that emotional coping strategies are effective in forecasting employee engagement (Malik & Garg, 2020).

The conclusions drawn from the report indicate that leaders' empathetic demeanour and gestures of compassion, assurance, and gratitude may bolster workforce trust and their resilience in confronting adversities. This consequently results in heightened devotion to work, seen in enhanced vigour and immersion. Consequently, the necessity of managerial emotional intelligence in catastrophe scenarios, which includes the COVID-19 pandemic,

is essential for enhancing staff efficacy and boosting staff loyalty (Milhem et al., 2019).

Furthermore, research has aimed to address a significant academic vacuum by thoroughly examining the mediation of tenacity in the relationship between managers' emotional competence and job motivation. The results indicate that leaders' ability to empathise and articulate their emotions thoughtfully and intelligently benefits employees during challenging times, resulting in increased dedication to employment (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). The findings demonstrate how leaders' emotional intelligence can enhance employee resilience, thus motivating workers to elevate their passion, commitment, and energy.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The research investigation concluded that there is a considerable correlation across managers' mental agility and staff involvement, including optimism and perseverance serving as crucial mediators. The research also looked at the immediate association connecting leaders and their mental toughness and employee engagement and discovered a substantial mediation of self-efficacy and resilience in that connection.

### 6.1. Implications

The study has been shown to be linked to three significant implications. This study validates the relevance of leaders' emotional intelligence regarding employees' commitment to engage in employment. Furthermore, the research revealed that effectiveness and resilience are the two factors which act as mediators in the link between emotional intelligence along with participation of leaders (Tabors, 2019). Finally, in its overall conclusions, the data contributed to the significant role of individual psychological capital in encouraging involvement. The research findings reveal that employees may be more engaged by focusing on objectives that allow leaders to further develop their emotional

intelligence. Based on the results, three consequences are implied practically. Leaders must use extra effort and support to encourage better behaviors and outcomes during the critical period of the COVID-19 pandemic (Singh et al., 2021). In this regard, emotional intelligence in executives may be of tremendous help to knowledge-based sectors' personnel. Further, these findings suggest the necessity for bolstering staff efficacy and resilience, therefore they are searching for new strategies to accomplish so. Knowledge-based sectors' HR practitioners must examine the training initiatives for both management and employees. Finally, the study findings suggest that an emotional quotient is crucial for raising employees' defensive mechanisms in the face of adversity and obstacles in the workplace, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which leads to an augmentation of their contribution's values.

### 6.2. Constraints as well as Parameters for Subsequent Research

While this study has its share of limitations, there are three major ones to keep in mind. The first thing to note is that the research utilizes a cross-sectional methodology. Considering this, future research might examine a similar model, but over a longer period. To that end, the research team surveyed knowledge-based sectors employees from 3 main cities in Malaysia. To better understand the role of occupational engagement in other areas, academics may want to examine the importance of the mental sharpness of rulers along with how it impacts the beneficial effects while robustness of their staff. Moving forward, future researchers may wish to further research this topic, doing a more academic, enlightened examination. Other future research may also look at how various types of leadership may affect people's participation levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also recommended that future studies look at the influence of institutional assets on dedication to their jobs.

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