Impact Of Leader Emotional Intelligence On Work Engagement; Mediatory Role Of Employees' Conflict Behavior

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Abstract

This study aims to unravel the intricate connections between leader emotional intelligence and work engagement, taking into account the mediating roles of diverse conflict behaviors, such as problem-solving behaviors, dominating conflict behaviors, and non-confronting conflict behaviors, within Karachi's banking landscape. A non-random sample of 382 individuals was employed, and structural equation modeling was applied to scrutinize four distinct hypotheses. The initial hypothesis (H1) postulated a direct and meaningful correlation between leader emotional intelligence and work engagement, a proposition that received empirical confirmation. The subsequent hypothesis (H2) established that problem-solving behavior functioned as a significant intermediary between leader emotional intelligence and work engagement. The next hypothesis (H3) substantiated that dominating conflict behavior was another consequential mediator in linking leader emotional intelligence and work engagement. In contrast, the final hypothesis (H4) determined that non-confronting conflict behavior lacked a significant mediating effect between leader emotional intelligence and work engagement. Consequently, the investigation enhances our comprehension of the specific conflict behaviors that either facilitate or obstruct the transfer of leader emotional intelligence to increased work engagement. Due to the study's concentration on Karachi's banking sector, it is recommended that future scholarly work corroborates these findings in a broader array of industries and geographical contexts.

Keywords: Leader Emotional Intelligence, Work Engagement, Problem-solving Behavior, Dominating Conflict Behavior, Non-confronting Conflict Behavior.

Introduction

In contemporary organizational contexts, the dynamic interplay between leadership qualities and work engagement has garnered significant scholarly attention (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020; Book et al., 2019). Leadership, as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, influences various aspects of workplace dynamics, including employee motivation, job satisfaction, and overall organizational performance (Baig et al., 2021; Mwesigwa et al., 2020). One dimension of leadership that has gained prominence in recent research is emotional intelligence – the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and effectively utilize emotions in oneself and others (Carragher & Gormley, 2017; Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). Leader emotional intelligence is considered a crucial

factor in shaping not only the work environment but also the attitudes and behaviors of employees. The way leaders manage their emotions and interact with their team members can significantly impact team dynamics and individual performance. Moreover, the effects of leader emotional intelligence often extend beyond direct interactions, influencing the overall organizational climate and culture (Abdullahi et al., 2020). Work engagement has emerged as a vital outcome of effective leadership and conducive work environments (Jiatong et al., 2022). Engaged employees are not only dedicated to their tasks but also experience a profound sense of fulfillment and enthusiasm in their work (Arokiasamy & Tat, 2020; Guo & Hou, 2022). This work engagement leads to improved productivity, reduced turnover, and enhanced overall organizational success (Gemeda & Lee, 2020). However, the pathway through which leader emotional intelligence affects employee work engagement remains an area of exploration (Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020). This study seeks to shed light on this intricate relationship by investigating the mediating role of problem-solving and dominating conflict behaviors. Problem-solving behaviors, which encompass the ability to address challenges and find constructive solutions (Aw & Ayoko, 2017), are believed to contribute to a positive work environment and subsequently enhance engagement. Similarly, the management of conflict is a pivotal aspect of leadership, and its effects on work engagement need further investigation, particularly in terms of dominating conflict behaviors. Against this backdrop, the present research aims to examine how a leader's emotional intelligence, problem-solving behaviors, and dominating conflict behaviors interact to influence employee work engagementThrough examining these correlations, this research aims to offer a nuanced insight into the ways leaders can cultivate a work setting that promotes both engagement and productivity. The results of this investigation have implications for cultivating leadership and HR strategies, thereby enhancing both theoretical and practical knowledge in the domain of organizational behavior and leadership.

In Pakistan, work engagement has become a critical issue for organizations (Arfat et al., 2017). Despite growing recognition regarding the significance of work engagement, numerous organizations in Pakistan continue to face challenges in establishing a work atmosphere that fosters engagement (Iqbal et al., 2017). Work engagement has been associated with heightened levels of job satisfaction and overall well-being among staff members. Engaged employees tend to feel more fulfilled and satisfied with their work, leading to better mental and physical health, and a lower likelihood of burnout and stress-related illnesses (Segalla, 2021). In Pakistan, Work engagement has been identified as the primary determinant of underperformance in the banking industry. (Naeem & Khurram, 2020; Sarwar et al., 2020), Work engagement is positively associated with job performance and productivity (Imran et al., 2020). Engaged employees tend to be more motivated, focused, and committed to their work, leading to higher quality work output and better outcomes for the organization. The banking sector of Pakistan is facing a challenging situation in terms of work engagement (Naeem & Khurram, 2020).

One of the major causes of work engagement when not cultivated is the behavior among employees (Xiong & Wen, 2020). Leaders' emotional intelligence can impact work engagement through their ability to build relationships with employees. Emotionally intelligent leaders are more likely to be empathetic, understanding, and able to connect with their team members on a personal level (Prati et al., 2003). This can result in elevated levels of trust, respect, and motivation within the workforce, which in turn can enhance work engagement. Additionally, a leader's emotional

intelligence can positively impact work engagement through their aptitude for controlling their emotional responses and influencing the emotional states of others (Alotaibi et al., 2020). In addition, leaders with high emotional intelligence are more likely to be effective communicators, providing clear and constructive feedback, listening to employee concerns, and providing support when needed (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). This can lead to higher levels of employee satisfaction and motivation, ultimately contributing to increased work engagement.

Employee behavior can govern the relationship between a leader's related behaviors and work engagement (Asim & Siddiqui, 2023). When conflict arises between employees, this can adversely affect both work engagement and the broader success of the organization (Rasool et al., 2021). Nonetheless, when leaders possessing strong emotional intelligence successfully navigate and resolve conflicts, it can result in heightened levels of work engagement. (Tiffany et al., 2019). In this way, leaders with low emotional intelligence may struggle to manage conflict effectively, leading to increased employee frustration and disengagement. This can lead to a negative impact on work engagement. In addition, employee conflict behavior can also impact work engagement directly. When employees engage in destructive conflict behaviors, such as aggression or avoidance, it can lead to decreased work engagement and job satisfaction.

Therefore, the relationship between a leader's emotional intelligence and work engagement can be mediated by employee conflict behavior. When leaders with high emotional intelligence effectively manage conflict or behaviors and promote positive conflict resolution strategies, it can create a positive work environment that fosters engagement among employees. Conversely, when leaders struggle to manage conflict and employees engage in destructive

conflict behaviors, it can have a negative impact on work engagement.

Research Objectives

RO1: To examine the impact of leader Emotional intelligence on work engagement.

RO2: To examine the mediating impact of Employees' conflict behavior (problem-solving behavior, dominating conflict behavior & and non-confronting conflict behavior) in the relationship between Leader emotional intelligence and work engagement.

RO3: To examine the impact of leader emotional intelligence on Employees' conflict behavior (problem-solving behavior, dominating conflict behavior & and non-confronting conflict behavior).

RO4: To examine the impact of Employees' conflict behavior (problem-solving behavior, dominating conflict behavior & and non-confronting conflict behavior) on work engagement.

Research Question

RQ1: What is the impact of a leader's Emotional intelligence on work engagement?

RQ2: Is there any mediating impact of Employees' conflict behavior (problem-solving behavior, dominating conflict behavior & non-confronting conflict behavior) in the relationship between Leader emotional intelligence and work engagement?

RQ3: What is the impact of a leader's emotional intelligence on Employees' conflict behavior (problem-solving behavior, dominating conflict behavior & and non-confronting conflict behavior)?

RQ4: What is the impact of Employees' conflict behavior (problem-solving behavior, dominating

conflict behavior & non-confronting conflict behavior) on work engagement?

Leadership has always been in the limelight for positive outcomes from employees and to cultivate the best performance that can lead to organizational success (AlShehhi et al., 2021; Nugroho et al., 2020; Siraj et al., 2022). However, fewer studies have been found on leader emotional intelligence toward work engagement (Alotaibi et al., 2020; Sebastian & Hess, 2019). In this study, We focused on the leader's emotional intelligence because it can regulate and understand the team member's or employees' behavior and emotions toward work engagement and it is still unexplored in the banking sector of Pakistan. Another gap that has been taken into this study, previously conflict management styles were used for governing and antecedents of the work engagements with leadership styles but a novel approach proposed by Aw and Ayoko (2017) has not been used to avoid overlapping, for example, conflict management styles

(accommodating, avoiding, compromising, collaborating, and competing) have been used in many studies (Aqqad et al., 2019; Caputo et al., 2019; Salarvand & Mousavi, 2022) but novel approach to avoid overlapping is still unexplored in the relationship. This novel approach is characterized as "Problem-solving behavior" which consists of integrating and compromising behavior. Secondly "Dominating" conflict behavior consists of competing behavior and the third one is "non-confronting behavior" which consists of avoiding and obliging behaviors (Asim & Siddiqui; Aw & Ayoko, 2017). However, these new approaches such as problem-solving behavior, dominating behavior, and non-confronting behavior have been utilized in governing roles in the relationship between leader emotional intelligence and work engagement. This study fills the gap by utilizing this new approach in the banking sector of Pakistan.

Conceptual framework
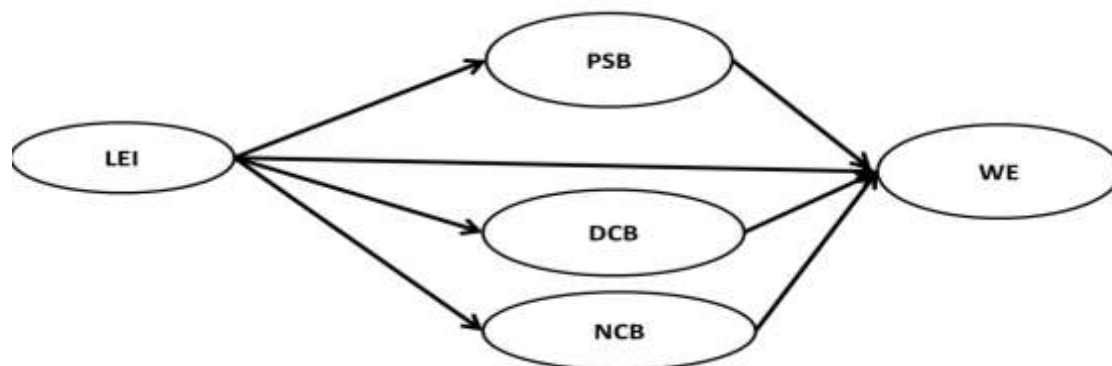
Literature Review

Theoretical Background

This framework can be illustrated by three main theories that have been suggested by past researchers. These theories are named as The Emotional Intelligence Theory. The Interpersonal

Conflict Theory and Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) theory. These theories give an in-depth understanding of how problem-solving behavior, dominating conflict behavior and non-confronting behavior affect a leader's ability to stimulate and influence workers to gain the

maximum output for the standardized goals of their firm.

Emotional Intelligence Theory

According to Salovey & Mayer, (1990) and Goleman, (2000) explained emotional intelligence as the measure to recognize, control, and assess sentiments of our own and those of others. Self-analysis, self-regulation, social concern, and relationship management are the four crucial key factors that make up emotional intelligence. George, (2000) describes emotional intelligence as a crucial component that affects several dimensions of leadership outgrowth. Emotionally smart leaders are better at developing unbreakable linkage with their potential group members, motivating them, and developing an environment that influences more commitments and job contentment (Goleman, 2000). In this study, the independent variable emotional intelligence, which suggested to admiringly affect followers' work engagement.

Interpersonal Conflict Theory

Interpersonal Conflict Theory suggests that conflict is an inevitable part of human interaction and can take various forms, such as problem-solving behaviors, dominating behaviors, or non-confronting behaviors (Rahim, 2003a). Conflict management, thus, plays a crucial role in workplace dynamics. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are likely to influence the conflict behavior of their followers. They may encourage more constructive problem-solving behaviors and reduce the likelihood of harmful conflict behaviors like dominating or avoiding conflicts (Mayer et al., 2008). In this study, these conflict behaviors serve as mediating variables that explain how leader emotional intelligence translates into work engagement.

Job Demand-Resource Theory

The Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model is a well-recognized framework for understanding work-related well-being, including job engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to the JD-R model, job demands can lead to burnout, while job resources can foster work engagement. In the current research, leader emotional intelligence can be considered a job resource that alleviates job demands and facilitates work engagement. Additionally, conflict behaviors and problem-solving approaches can either act as job resources or demands, thus mediating the relationship between a leader's emotional intelligence and work engagement.

Problem-solving behavior:

According to Afzalur Rahim et al., (2000), the phrases "problem-solving" and "solution-focused" conflict behaviors are utilized to explain integrating and compromising behaviors. Working relatively and cooperatively to identify an explanation that engages both ends (i.e., cooperation, a crucial concern for oneself as well as of the other party) is one technique for integrating conflict behavior. In contrast, (Chen et al., 2012) suggest that compromise conflict behavior (i.e., moderate worry for oneself and the other party) also implies give and take, which requires a certain crucial quantity of renunciation must be made by both groups in order to outstretch a willing conclusion. Those who engage in compromising conduct that is aimed at problem-solving try to reach an agreement. Rahim and Magner, (1995) illustrate outcome as, compromising is observed as a cooperative behavior and the most significant successful dispute resolution (Chen et al., 2012; Tjosvold, 1985). Since they both work to settle problems between parties, we inclusively categorize integrating and compromising conflict behavior as problem-solving conflict behaviors.

Dominating conflict behavior:

Dominating conflict behavior is conceptualized as competing or forcing conflict behavior in

which concern for self is far above the ground and concern for other are near to the ground. Moreover, this type of behavior comprises competing the conflicting individuals or groups into acquiescence at the expense of the next one's expectations, needs, concerns as well and opportunities (Afzalur Rahim et al., 2000). A study by Rosenthal-von Der Pütten et al., (2019), found that conflicts in which power and status differentials exist tend to be more destructive and negatively affect performance.

Non Confronting Conflict Behavior.

The area of conflict behavior includes avoiding and complying behaviors. In the long run, resolving conflicts is not aided by someone who consistently avoids conflict or yields to another person's demands (obliging) (Rahim, 2003; Van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Avoiding conflict is characterized by scholars as being uncooperative, unproductive, non-constructive, or even destructive (Chen et al., 2012) Likewise, accommodating conflict behaviors—which involve low self-interest and high concern for others—include aspects of self-sacrifice or overlooking one's own needs and expectations during a conflict situation (Afzalur Rahim et al., 2000).

Leader Emotional Intelligence and Work Engagement.

Emotional Intelligence, as introduced by Salovey & Mayer, (1990), encompasses the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions in oneself and others. Subsequent work by Goleman (1995) This idea was further developed by segmenting emotional intelligence into four key areas: self-awareness, self-regulation, social sensitivity, and interpersonal relationship management. George, (2000) underscored the significance of emotional intelligence as a critical competency for leaders, positing a considerable impact on leadership efficacy.

Studies have shown a robust relationship between the emotional intelligence of leaders and the satisfaction, motivation, and engagement levels of employees (George, 2000). Caruso and Salovey (2004) noted that leaders possessing elevated levels of emotional intelligence exhibit a heightened aptitude for discerning the emotional requirements of their followers, subsequently fostering increased work engagement. Such leaders are also more proficient in managing both their own emotional states and those of their team members. Such regulation fosters a more nurturing and affirmative workplace atmosphere, subsequently amplifying work engagement (Greenier et al., 2021). A significant part of work engagement is related to the reduction of interpersonal conflicts in the workplace. Emotionally intelligent leaders are better at resolving conflicts, thereby creating a more harmonious environment that supports work engagement (Abraham, 2004). Emotionally intelligent leaders often act as role models within their organizations. The employees are more likely to be engaged when they have positive role models to emulate (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). Emotional intelligence in leaders can foster better communication channels and build trust. These factors are essential for maintaining a high level of work engagement among employees (Shuck & Herd, 2012). The presence of emotional intelligence in leadership positions has been shown to have a notable impact on employee motivation and performance, which are critical components of work engagement (Ravichandran et al., 2011). On the basis of the stated arguments, we propose that

H1: Leader emotional intelligence has a positive impact on work engagement.

Follower's Conflict behaviors as the mediator

Leaders with high emotional intelligence have an enhanced capacity for recognizing,

understanding, and managing emotions, both their own and those of their subordinates (Goleman, 1995; (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This proficiency is linked to better problem-solving skills, as these leaders are more adept at fostering a cooperative atmosphere, identifying the root causes of issues, and encouraging dialogue (Miao et al., 2018). Problem-solving behaviors are positively correlated with work engagement, as they minimize conflict and maximize cooperative behavior, thus leading to a more positive work environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Frankish et al., 2019). Employees exhibit a higher propensity for engagement when conflicts are addressed in a constructive manner, thereby fostering a more favorable organizational climate (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In understanding the link between a leader's emotional intelligence and an employee's work engagement, problem-solving behaviors appear to act as a mediator. Leaders with high emotional intelligence tend to foster a conflict-resolving, problem-solving environment (Rahim, 2003a). When employees see their leaders as both emotionally intelligent and competent in problem-solving, they are more likely to be engaged in their work, viewing their work as meaningful and worthwhile (Kong et al., 2020).

Dominating conflict behavior is characterized by a win-lose approach, where one party aims to win at the expense of the other (Rahim, 2003b). Typically, this style is not conducive to collaborative work environments and could lead to decreased work engagement (West, 2003). Leaders with high emotional intelligence are typically better at conflict management (Ashkanasy, 2015). However, they might resort to dominating behaviors when quick decision-making is needed, or if they believe that a dominating approach is necessary to achieve organizational goals (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Work engagement may be negatively impacted by dominating conflict behavior due to the contentious nature of such interactions, which

can affect employee morale and productivity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). However, some research suggests that when dominating behavior is executed by emotionally intelligent leaders, it might not have the same adverse effects, particularly when employees perceive these behaviors as aligned with organizational goals (Hoch et al., 2018). In intricate workplace settings, dominating conflict behavior may serve as an intermediary variable between a leader's emotional intelligence and employee work engagement, particularly when deployed in a strategic and ethical manner by emotionally intelligent leaders. These leaders have the potential to employ assertive tactics for swift conflict resolution, resource allocation, or critical decision-making, thereby indirectly sustaining or even amplifying work engagement (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).

The function of non-confronting conflict behavior as an intermediary between a leader's emotional intelligence and employee work engagement introduces a complex dimension to the analysis. Although generally regarded as a less desirable conflict management style, this passive approach may possess unique advantages, particularly when executed by emotionally intelligent leaders. Characterized by conflict avoidance or evasion, non-confronting behavior is typically deemed counterproductive to cultivating a positive work atmosphere (Rahim, 2003a). However, sometimes avoidance serves as a short-term strategy to allow tempers to cool, giving leaders more time to strategize effective solutions (Kamil Kazan, 1997). Emotionally intelligent leaders are adept at reading and managing emotional cues and tensions, which can lead to more sophisticated conflict management strategies (Mayer et al., 2008). These leaders may strategically employ non-confronting behaviors to defuse volatile situations, create psychological safety, or give themselves time to gather necessary resources (Riggio & Reichard, 2008). When non-

confronting behavior is employed strategically by emotionally intelligent leaders, it can serve as a mediator between leadership and work engagement. In specific contexts, avoiding conflict can maintain a positive work atmosphere and protect employee well-being, thus fostering work engagement (Van Kleef et al., 2009). Leaders' emotional intelligence may shape their proclivity to engage in non-confronting behaviors. Emotionally intelligent leaders might strategically use avoidance in situations where immediate confrontation could lead to greater harm, thus indirectly influencing work engagement. Alternatively, excessive non-confronting behavior, even by emotionally intelligent leaders, might dampen work engagement by letting issues fester (Opie & Riddiough, 2020)

H2: Problem-solving behavior has a mediating impact on the relationship between a leader's emotional intelligence and work engagement.

H3: Dominating conflict behavior has a mediating impact on the relationship between a leader's emotional intelligence and work engagement.

H4: Nonconfronting conflict behavior has a mediating impact on the relationship between a leader's emotional intelligence and work engagement.

Methodology

Research design

In the present study, a quantitative methodology was utilized to evaluate the nexus between leader emotional intelligence and employee work engagement, while accounting for the mediating effects of followers' conflict behaviors, including problem-solving, dominating, and confronting strategies. The investigation was grounded in a positivist framework, which prioritizes objective phenomena and advocates for scientific methods

of inquiry. Adopting a deductive methodology, the investigation commenced with a proposed hypothesis, which was subsequently tested through empirical data. The primary objective was to elucidate the nexus between leader emotional intelligence, conflict dynamics, and the manner of work engagement. Data collection was conducted via a survey technique, gathering inputs from a subset of employees through a self-completed questionnaire. This instrument probed into a leader's emotional intelligence, conflict situations, and attendant followers' reactions to such conflicts.

Sample and Procedures

The current investigation is centered on the private banking sector in Karachi and utilized a non-random, convenience-based sampling strategy for gathering data. In total, 412 surveys were distributed to employees within this domain, resulting in 382 valid returns. The measurement tool was a standardized questionnaire, segmented into five separate constructs. Answer options were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, with 5 representing strong agreement and 1 indicating strong disagreement. Specifics regarding the selection and modification of questionnaire items can be found in Table I. With a confidence interval set at 99%, a tolerable error margin of 1%, and a standard deviation of 0.5, the achieved sample size of 382 respondents is considered sufficient for the purposes of this research. Despite prevailing standards regarding the optimal participant-to-indicator ratio, this study incorporated preliminary insights from an initial set of 10 feedback submissions, Westland (2010a) demonstrated that the "obligatory sample size is not a linear function exclusively of indicator count" (Westland, (2010a); P.476). Adopting (Christopher Westland, 2010b) method of the numerical algorithm for scheming the entire lowest size of the sample, the inferior obligation on sample size for this study is 382. It is grounded

on five latent variables. To examine our model, we utilized Smart Pls V.4 software using Partial Least Squares. Following the recommended two-stage analytical procedure for structural equation modeling, we first configured the outer model to assess construct reliability and validity. In the subsequent phase, we scrutinized the inner model, also known as the structural model. (Hair et al., 2013).

Table I
Questionnaire
development

Constructs	Items	Adopted/Adapted	Sources
Leader Emotional Intelligence	6	Adopted	(Davies et al., 1998; Law et al., 2004)
Problem-Solving Behavior	10	Adopted	(Rahim, 1983)
Dominating Conflict Behavior	5	Adopted	(Rahim, 1983)
Non Confronting Conflict Behavior	13	Adopted	(Rahim, 1983)
Work Engagement	5	Adopted	(Schaufel et al., 2006)

Table II

Measurement Analysis

Variables	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	CR	RhoA
	LE1	0.836	0.821	0.583	0.875	0.826
Leader Emotional Intelligence	LE2	0.817				
	LE3	0.774				
	LE4	0.741				
Problem-Solving Behavior	PSB 10	0.731	0.755	0.576	0.845	0.759
	PSB 4	0.770				
	PSB 5	0.782				
	PSB 7	0.752				
	DCB1	0.817	0.794	0.550	0.859	0.803
Dominating Conflict Behavior	DCB2	0.831				
	DCB3	0.860				
	WE1	0.736	0.849	0.625	0.893	0.852
	WE2	0.846				
Work Engagement	WE3	0.790				
	WE4	0.787				
	WE5	0.791				
	NCB5	0.714	0.795	0.551	0.859	0.804
Non Confronting Conflict Behavior	NCB6	0.776				
	NCB7	0.844				
	NCB8	0.765				

Fig. 2 Measurement Model
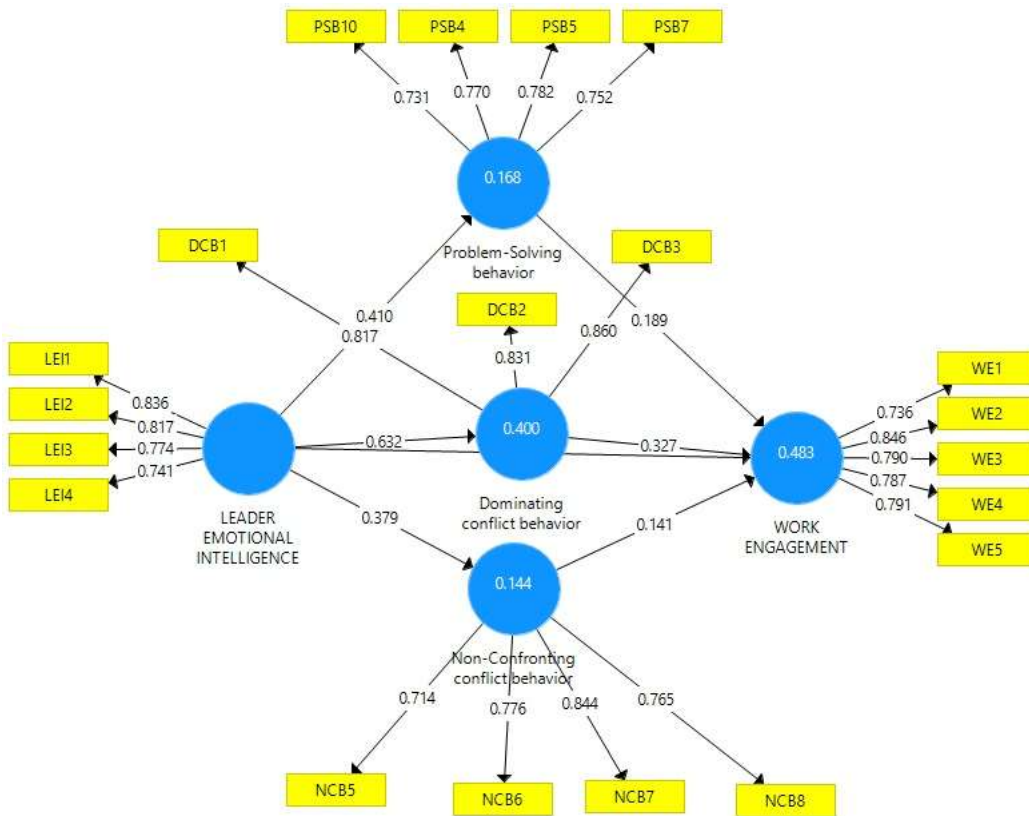
Table III
Discriminant Validity
Fornell and Larker Criteria

	DCB	LEI	NCB	PSB	WE
DCB	0.741				
LEI	0.465	0.764			
NCB	0.542	0.513	0.742		
PSB	0.597	0.403	0.498	0.759	
WE	0.438	0.643	0.492	0.460	0.791

Table IV
Discriminant Validity
HTMT

	DCB	LEI	NCB	PSB	WE
DCB	-				
LEI	0.560				
NCB	0.682	0.622			
PSB	0.769	0.504	0.641		
WE	0.524	0.769	0.594	0.572	-

Table V
Direct and Indirect Effects

Path Coefficient	Beta	T Stats	P Values	Results
LEI -> WE (H1)	0.235	3.529	0.000	Accepted
LEI -> PSB -> WE (H2)	0.078	3.029	0.002	Accepted
LEI -> DCB -> WE (H3)	0.207	5.25	0.000	Accepted
LEI -> NCB -> WE (H4)	0.053	2.079	0.038	Accepted

Results

Measurement Analysis

The initial phase of the investigation focused on assessing the convergent validity of the measurement model (see Fig. 2). This evaluation utilized factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) as evaluative metrics (see Table II). As demonstrated in Table II, all factor loadings exceeded the stipulated 0.7 threshold, as advised by (Hair et al., 2013). The CR values surpassed the recommended 0.7 threshold, affirming the apt representation of the latent construct by its indicators. Additionally, the AVE values exceeded the advised minimum of 0.5, underscoring the proportion of variance in the indicators that can be attributed to the latent construct.

Subsequently, the research undertook the task of ascertaining discriminant validity, which gauges the extent to which the measurements are independent of other extraneous variables. As indicated in Table III, the square root of each construct's AVE (found on the diagonal) is greater than its respective correlation coefficients, thereby fulfilling the criteria for discriminant validity as set by Fornell & and Larcker (1981). Despite recent critiques questioning the reliability of the Fornell and Larcker criteria in routine research techniques, an alternative evaluative method based on the multitrait-multimethod matrix was employed: the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratio (Hair et al., 2013). Results are documented in Table III. Discriminant validity is considered both conceptually and empirically distinct if the HTMT value is below 0.90, as advised by (Jarosik et al., 2011). This guideline is highly recommended (Henseler et al., 2015).

Structural Analysis

The evaluation of the study's hypotheses provides enlightening findings concerning both the direct and intermediary influences of Leader Emotional

Intelligence on work engagement (See Fig. 3, and Table V). Starting with the direct effect outlined in the first hypothesis, the empirical data robustly corroborates a meaningful and positive association. A beta value of 0.325, accompanied by a T-statistic of 3.529 and a P-value of 0.000—which is notably less than the standard 0.05 threshold—collectively substantiate the substantial influence of leader emotional intelligence on work engagement. Shifting the focus to the mediating effects, the second hypothesis indicates that problem-solving behavior acts as a significant intermediary, evidenced by a Beta coefficient of 0.078, a T-statistic of 3.029, and a P-value registering at 0.002. In a comparable vein, the third hypothesis, which pertains to dominating conflict behavior, also manifests statistical relevance with a beta coefficient of 0.207, a T-statistic of 5.250, and a P-value of 0.000. These mediators not only validate their statistical importance but also accentuate the robustness of their intermediary functions. Conversely, the fourth hypothesis offers the same governing scenario. As indicated by a subdued beta coefficient of 0.141, a T-statistic of 2.269, and a P-value of 0.023. This suggests an absence of a mediating role.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study's results provide an exhaustive insight into how leader emotional intelligence influences Work Engagement, both immediately and via intermediary variables. Firstly, the direct effect of leader emotional Intelligence on work engagement is established. This outcome is consistent with existing scholarly work that has underscored the pivotal importance of emotional intelligence in leadership and its subsequent impact on work engagement (Meyers, 2020); (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This is because A leader high in EI is better equipped to create a positive emotional climate, fostering a sense of psychological safety and belonging among team members (Edmondson, 1999). When employees

feel secure and valued, they are more likely to be engaged in their work (Wiesmann et al., 1975).

The study also delves into mediating variables that could affect this relationship. Further, the mediating role of problem-solving behavior has been found in the current study. The results reveal an even stronger correlation. This builds upon previous research which suggests that problem-solving behavior as a mediating factor can indeed enhance the influence of emotional intelligence on work outcomes (Daus & Ashkanasy, 2005).

Similarly, the study found evidence to support that dominating conflict behavior mediates the relationship between Leader emotional intelligence and work engagement. Previous studies have also highlighted the complex role conflict behaviors can play in work engagement, generally favoring dominating or assertive approaches as beneficial (Hattori et al., 1975). However, dominating conflict behavior might sometimes have fruitful results due to the reason that dominating conflict behaviors facilitate quick resolutions because they bypass lengthy deliberations. This is particularly useful in time-sensitive situations where immediate decisions are crucial (Laureiro-Martinez, 2014). This approach leaves little room for ambiguity, providing a clear direction for the team. It is beneficial in scenarios where the absence of decisive leadership can lead to chaos or missed opportunities (Hattori et al., 1975). By taking a dominant stance, leaders can keep the team focused on organizational goals, particularly when distracting interpersonal issues or irrelevant side debates threaten to derail productivity (Shahmandi et al., 2011).

The mediating effect of non-confronting conflict behavior was supported. the role of emotional intelligence in leadership has been well-documented. Leaders with higher emotional intelligence are often better equipped to understand, manage, and navigate interpersonal relationships and conflicts (Bejjani, 2009). This

understanding and management of emotions can directly influence the work environment, potentially leading to higher levels of work engagement among employees (Wguna et al., 2023). The introduction of non-confronting conflict behaviors as a mediator adds a nuanced layer to this relationship. Non-confronting conflict behaviors, as the name suggests, refer to behaviors that avoid confrontation. In many cultures (Lanf et al., 2023). Therefore, leaders who exhibit high emotional intelligence might be more adept at employing non-confronting conflict behaviors, thereby creating a harmonious work environment that fosters work engagement.

The acceptance of this hypothesis aligns with the cultural context of Pakistan, where indirect communication and avoidance of direct confrontation are often preferred in professional settings. Leaders who can navigate conflicts without confrontation, leveraging their emotional intelligence, can potentially foster a more engaged workforce (Bejjani, 2009). To conclude, the study solidifies the crucial role of leader emotional intelligence in influencing work engagement. It also significantly contributes to the literature by identifying the mediating roles of problem-solving behavior, dominating conflict behavior, and non-confronting conflict behavior.

Managerial Implications

This study provides managers with solid evidence that controlling employees' emotions is crucial for enhancing employees' engagement to achieve strategic and operational goals. Organizations should prioritize emotional intelligence as a key competency in leadership development programs. Training modules can be designed to enhance skills like empathy, self-awareness, and effective emotional regulation, which are key components of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; George, 2000b). Managers should be educated about how their emotional intelligence can positively impact problem-solving capacities among their subordinates. This

may include workshops on fostering an environment that encourages critical thinking and rewards innovative problem-solving. Leaders should thus not discourage dominating conflict behavior outright but understand its strategic application. Specifically, they could train their teams to recognize when such an approach is beneficial for quick decision-making and clear directional focus (Hattori et al., 1975). Managers need to revise their approach to conflict resolution, placing more emphasis on non-confrontational strategies as well if they are found to be effective in the context of leader emotional intelligence and work engagement.

Limitations and Future Research

In light of the potential for social desirability bias inherent in survey-based research, we recommend that future studies consider adopting qualitative or mixed-method approaches. In our own investigation, we incorporated all three dimensions of follower conflict behaviors—PSB, DCB, and NCB—as mediating variables. Future research may opt to explore alternative mediators, such as relationship conflicts or task conflicts. Additionally, it is worth noting that the scope of our study was confined to the banking sector within a single city Karachi. Therefore, we encourage subsequent studies to expand the geographical and sectoral scope by examining other industries and cities within Pakistan.

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