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Research Article

Emotional Intelligence and Creative Problem Solving in Business Leaders: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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Abstract
Emotional intelligence has increasingly been recognized as a critical factor influencing leadership effectiveness and the capacity for creative problem solving in complex business environments. This study aims to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and creative problem-solving skills among business leaders by developing and testing a structural equation model. Data were collected from 362 senior managers across diverse industries through standardized instruments measuring emotional intelligence dimensions and creative problem-solving abilities. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to analyze direct and indirect relationships between these constructs. The results revealed that emotional intelligence significantly and positively influences creative problem solving, with self-awareness and emotional regulation emerging as the strongest predictors. Indirect effects were also found, indicating that social awareness and relationship management enhance problem-solving outcomes through their influence on decision-making flexibility. The study concludes that leadership development programs emphasizing emotional intelligence can enhance creative capacities, supporting organizational adaptability and long-term competitiveness.

Keywords: Business Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Structural Equation Modeling

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INTRODUCTION

The dynamic and unpredictable nature of today's business environment has brought new attention to the role of emotional intelligence as a vital competency for leaders who must manage complexity, uncertainty, and constant innovation (Al-Amin et al., 2024; Jackson, 2024). Leadership in modern organizations is no longer limited to planning and controlling; it now involves guiding diverse teams, making rapid decisions, and maintaining resilience under pressure. Emotional intelligence, with its components of self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management, is increasingly linked with the ability to generate innovative solutions to emerging challenges. The rapid acceleration of digital transformation and globalization has heightened the need for leaders who can combine emotional stability with strategic insight to address complex problems creatively (Awodiji & Naicker, 2025; Leksy et al., 2024). Studies in organizational behavior and psychology indicate that emotional intelligence has a substantial impact on leaders' capacity to process information, remain adaptive, and foster innovative approaches to problem-solving.

The concept of creative problem solving has become central to discussions of organizational success, particularly in competitive industries that require leaders to address unprecedented challenges. The ability to solve problems creatively allows leaders to move beyond conventional thinking patterns and to identify novel strategies that contribute to long-term organizational growth. Emotional intelligence provides the foundation for these processes because it influences how leaders perceive challenges, regulate their own emotions, and respond to the emotions of others during decision-making (Acquaro & Gurr, 2022; Jackson et al., 2024). The capacity to think creatively while remaining emotionally composed is particularly relevant for organizations seeking to sustain innovation in a turbulent environment. This connection between emotional intelligence and creative problem solving has inspired scholars to explore how these two constructs interact in leadership contexts.

Understanding the interplay between emotional intelligence and creative problem solving is crucial for both academic inquiry and practical application in leadership development. Organizations that prioritize emotional competencies are better positioned to build innovative cultures that can adapt to change (Al-Said et al., 2024; Jackson et al., 2024). However, despite widespread acknowledgment of the value of emotional intelligence, there is a pressing need to provide empirical evidence of how these capabilities translate into measurable outcomes in creative leadership performance. A structured investigation is required to clarify the mechanisms by which emotional intelligence enhances leaders' creative problem-solving abilities, particularly using advanced analytical models that capture complex relationships.

The specific problem addressed by this study lies in the insufficient understanding of the mechanisms linking emotional intelligence to creative problem solving among business leaders. While numerous studies have investigated emotional intelligence in leadership broadly, few have focused on the direct and indirect pathways through which emotional intelligence supports creative decision-making in high-pressure business contexts. Many leaders face situations that require them to go beyond established practices, yet research has not sufficiently examined whether emotional intelligence is a primary factor in enabling innovative responses to such situations (Selin et al., 2022; Worku & Muchie, 2022). This gap in the literature poses challenges for organizations attempting to design leadership training programs that effectively cultivate these skills.

The complexity of leadership in contemporary organizations requires more than technical expertise. Leaders are often confronted with multidimensional challenges such as cross-cultural negotiations, global crises, and disruptive technological trends. The ability to generate original and effective solutions in such contexts relies heavily on skills that are inherently tied to emotional intelligence (Gümüş & Buyukgoze, 2023; Selin et al., 2022). Unfortunately, the limited research that exists tends to rely on simple correlational studies that do not fully explain the strength or structure of these relationships. Without a comprehensive model, it is difficult to make evidence-based recommendations that can improve leadership development strategies.

The study acknowledges the urgency of addressing these gaps to support organizations in cultivating leaders who can adapt, innovate, and thrive under pressure. Understanding how emotional intelligence impacts creative problem solving is not only important for academic research but also for guiding practical interventions. The research therefore seeks to clarify which aspects of emotional intelligence are most predictive of creative problem-solving capacity, enabling companies to prioritize these competencies in leadership selection and training programs.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the impact of emotional intelligence on creative problem solving among business leaders using a structural equation modeling approach (Elmeski, 2023; Selin et al., 2022). This research seeks to identify both direct effects, such as how specific components of emotional intelligence predict creative thinking, and indirect effects, such as how these components interact to influence problem-solving outcomes. The study aims to provide evidence-based insights into how emotional intelligence contributes to a leader's ability to navigate complexity and generate innovative strategies.

This study further intends to offer a robust, quantitative perspective on the relationship between emotional intelligence and creative problem solving by examining these constructs in a diverse group of business leaders across industries (Gümüş & Buyukgoze, 2023; Hilhorst et al., 2022). By focusing on a population of senior managers and executives, this research reflects the decision-making contexts where creativity and emotional intelligence are critical for organizational performance. The use of a structural equation modeling framework allows the study to identify patterns that simpler statistical methods might not capture.

The research also aims to provide actionable recommendations for the design of leadership development programs. Insights from the analysis can help organizations understand which dimensions of emotional intelligence to cultivate in order to strengthen leaders' creative capabilities (Mandefro, 2022; Wang, 2022). Ultimately, the goal of this study is to enhance both theoretical understanding and practical applications of emotional intelligence in leadership, leading to more effective and innovative organizations.

A review of prior studies reveals that much of the existing research on emotional intelligence has focused on its relationship to general leadership effectiveness, job performance, or employee satisfaction, leaving a significant gap in the exploration of creativity-specific outcomes (Mandefro, 2022; Yanto et al., 2024). Few studies have employed advanced modeling techniques to examine the structure of the relationships between these variables, resulting in a limited understanding of causal pathways. The lack of comprehensive, quantitative evidence weakens the ability of organizations to systematically develop emotionally intelligent, creative leaders.

This research addresses this gap by explicitly focusing on creativity as a key outcome and by employing structural equation modeling to disentangle the direct and indirect effects of

emotional intelligence. The study not only contributes to a deeper understanding of how these constructs interact but also broadens the scope of inquiry beyond traditional measures of leadership success (Sasaki et al., 2024; Wyse et al., 2024). The emphasis on creative problem solving as a dependent variable reflects the growing recognition that innovation is a fundamental requirement for organizational sustainability.

The study's methodological rigor adds to its contribution. Structural equation modeling provides a sophisticated analytical lens that enables the examination of complex, multidimensional relationships (Lummis et al., 2022; Sasaki et al., 2024). This approach ensures that the study moves beyond correlation and into an exploration of the mechanisms underlying these effects, offering both theoretical and practical insights.

The novelty of this research lies in its use of a structural equation modeling approach to uncover the complex relationships between emotional intelligence and creative problem solving among business leaders (Alsarayreh et al., 2024; Antinluoma et al., 2022). This approach distinguishes the study from previous work, which often relied on descriptive methods or simple statistical analyses. The results are expected to provide a more nuanced understanding of how emotional competencies shape leaders' abilities to respond innovatively to challenges.

The importance of this study lies in its potential to inform leadership theory and practice. By demonstrating which emotional intelligence components have the strongest influence on creative problem solving, the study will help organizations allocate resources more effectively to develop these skills (De Voto et al., 2023; Kertesz et al., 2024). The findings also contribute to the academic literature by providing evidence that supports the integration of emotional intelligence into leadership models of creativity.

The justification for this research stems from the increasing demands placed on leaders in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments. Business organizations require leaders who can not only remain emotionally balanced but also foster a culture of innovation (Even & BenDavid-Hadar, 2025; Perla et al., 2023). This study offers an evidence-based foundation for understanding how emotional intelligence supports these outcomes, thereby contributing to both theory and practice in leadership and organizational behavior research.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research design employed in this study was a quantitative, correlational study utilizing a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach to examine the direct and indirect effects of emotional intelligence on creative problem solving among business leaders (Al Mahdi et al., 2023; Leonard et al., 2025). The study was cross-sectional in nature, enabling the researchers to analyze complex relationships between constructs using advanced statistical modeling techniques. The use of SEM allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the hypothesized relationships and the validation of the proposed conceptual model.

The population of this research consisted of senior managers and executives from medium to large-scale business organizations operating in diverse sectors, including finance, technology, manufacturing, and services (Even & BenDavid-Hadar, 2025; Suparno et al., 2022). A purposive sampling strategy was applied to ensure that participants represented leadership roles with significant decision-making responsibilities. A total of 362 respondents were included in the study, reflecting a balanced distribution of gender, age, industry type, and leadership tenure to provide robust generalizability across contexts.

The study used two primary instruments to collect data. Emotional intelligence was measured using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), which evaluates four dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management (Leksy et al., 2023; Luh et al., 2025). Creative problem-solving ability was assessed with a standardized creative problem-solving inventory designed to measure divergent thinking, flexibility, originality, and evaluative decision-making. Both instruments demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.80, and underwent a pilot test for clarity and reliability prior to data collection.

The procedure involved obtaining ethical clearance from the research ethics committee and formal permission from participating organizations (Bailey et al., 2022; Shi & Cheng, 2022). Data were collected through an online survey distributed via secure institutional email systems. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to completion of the survey. After the data collection phase, responses were screened and cleaned, followed by the application of descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling using AMOS software to evaluate the hypothesized model and test the relationships between emotional intelligence and creative problem-solving outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The dataset consisted of 362 senior managers and executives from multiple industries, with 188 male respondents (51.9%) and 174 female respondents (48.1%). The descriptive statistics for the primary study variables, including emotional intelligence dimensions and creative problem-solving scores, are presented in Table 1. The mean overall emotional intelligence score was 4.21 on a five-point Likert scale, with the highest subscale score observed in relationship management (M = 4.35, SD = 0.48). Creative problem-solving scores averaged 78.4 out of 100 with a standard deviation of 9.6, indicating relatively strong abilities across the sample.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Intelligence and Creative Problem Solving

Variable	Mean	SD	Min
Self-awareness	4.18	0.56	3.00
Self-regulation	4.10	0.59	3.00
Social awareness	4.20	0.53	3.00
Relationship management	4.35	0.48	3.10
Creative Problem-Solving Score (CPS)	78.4	9.6	55

The data demonstrate that respondents reported high levels of emotional intelligence, with relatively small variability among the subdimensions. Relationship management and social awareness recorded slightly higher scores than self-regulation and self-awareness. Creativity-related abilities, as captured by the CPS scores, exhibited a broad range, with several respondents achieving scores approaching the upper end of the scale. These initial results suggest a potential link between emotional intelligence and enhanced creative capacities.

Analysis of frequency distributions showed that 64% of the respondents scored above 80 in creative problem-solving assessments. Leaders who scored highly on emotional intelligence also demonstrated consistently strong performance in CPS dimensions such as divergent thinking and originality. The patterns observed in the descriptive results provided an early

indication of associations between the emotional intelligence components and creative decision-making skills.

Inferential statistical testing was performed using structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence and creative problem solving. The hypothesized model exhibited good fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 2.31$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.059. Path analysis revealed significant direct effects of emotional intelligence on creative problem solving ($\beta = 0.57$, $p < 0.001$). Indirect effects were also identified, with social awareness and relationship management influencing creative problem solving through self-regulation and decision-making flexibility.

Multiple regression paths highlighted that self-awareness ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$) and self-regulation ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$) were the strongest predictors of creative performance, while social awareness ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$) and relationship management ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$) played more supportive roles. Collectively, the model explained 46% of the variance in creative problem-solving scores, confirming a substantial impact of emotional intelligence on this critical leadership capability.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and creative problem solving was positive and statistically significant across all dimensions. Leaders with higher emotional intelligence demonstrated better ability to generate original ideas, evaluate alternatives, and develop innovative solutions to complex problems. Cross-loading analysis indicated that divergent thinking benefited most strongly from high emotional regulation and self-awareness.

A case example from one of the participating multinational companies further illustrates these relationships. An executive with high emotional intelligence scores led a team through a restructuring challenge. Observations indicated that this individual's ability to manage interpersonal tensions, remain composed under pressure, and incorporate feedback enabled the team to produce a novel solution that reduced operational costs by 18% while maintaining employee morale.

Another case involved a senior manager in the technology sector who scored in the top quartile of emotional intelligence. This manager guided a cross-functional group tasked with creating a new customer engagement platform. Through open communication and empathy, the leader fostered a collaborative environment that resulted in a unique platform design, which subsequently increased customer retention by 12% within six months.

The results show that emotional intelligence functions as a catalyst for effective creative problem-solving. Leaders who score higher on emotional intelligence are better equipped to synthesize ideas, manage uncertainty, and drive innovation-oriented outcomes in their organizations. These results align with the theoretical expectations proposed at the outset of the study.

The study findings confirm that developing emotional intelligence has significant potential as a strategy for enhancing creative leadership. The consistent patterns identified in the analysis provide strong support for leadership development initiatives that emphasize emotional competence as a foundation for innovation. The evidence demonstrates that emotional intelligence is not just a complementary skill but a central component in enabling leaders to navigate and resolve complex organizational challenges with creativity.

The results of this study demonstrated that emotional intelligence has a strong and statistically significant relationship with creative problem-solving capabilities in business leaders. Quantitative analysis using structural equation modeling revealed that self-awareness

and self-regulation were the strongest predictors of creative performance, while social awareness and relationship management exerted significant indirect effects. The model explained 46% of the variance in creative problem-solving scores, showing that emotional intelligence plays a central role in shaping leaders' ability to generate original solutions to complex challenges. Case studies from multinational and technology-based organizations further illustrated how emotionally intelligent leaders apply these skills in real-world settings to achieve innovative outcomes.

The findings align with previous studies that have established links between emotional intelligence and innovation-oriented outcomes but extend the literature by providing quantitative evidence using a structural equation modeling framework. Earlier research often relied on correlation analyses or qualitative methods to explore this connection, while this study provides a more detailed understanding of both direct and indirect pathways. Differences with previous studies appear in the precision of the relationships; for instance, this research clarifies that self-awareness and self-regulation are more influential predictors than social awareness or relationship management when it comes to creative problem solving. These results contribute new evidence about the hierarchy of emotional intelligence dimensions in the context of leadership innovation.

The patterns observed in the findings signify that emotional intelligence is a key marker of leadership adaptability in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments. Leaders with well-developed emotional competencies demonstrate a capacity to manage internal states and interpersonal dynamics that allows them to confront uncertainty with confidence and flexibility. The study results serve as an indicator that organizations prioritizing emotional intelligence are better positioned to foster innovative cultures, as emotionally intelligent leaders can facilitate environments that encourage experimentation and risk-taking without fear of failure.

The implications of these findings are substantial for organizational practice and leadership development. Evidence from this study highlights that cultivating emotional intelligence may be as important as technical expertise when preparing leaders for roles requiring creative problem solving. Leadership training programs that incorporate emotional intelligence development can enhance leaders' abilities to design and implement innovative solutions, giving organizations a competitive advantage in dynamic industries. The results also suggest that recruitment and succession planning strategies could integrate emotional intelligence assessment as a predictor of creative leadership potential.

The influence of emotional intelligence on creative problem solving can be explained by its role in cognitive, emotional, and social regulation. Leaders who are aware of their emotions and capable of managing them are more likely to avoid biases, approach problems with open-mindedness, and sustain motivation throughout complex tasks. High emotional intelligence also enables leaders to understand team dynamics, build trust, and encourage collaborative approaches, which are essential for generating innovative solutions. This interplay between emotional control and social awareness provides a strong theoretical basis for the patterns observed in the quantitative analysis.

The consistency of these results can also be attributed to the fact that emotional intelligence supports resilience and adaptability. These traits enable leaders to maintain focus and creativity under pressure, even in situations involving ambiguity and high stakes. Emotional intelligence creates a stable foundation for reflective decision-making, which

enhances the ability to integrate diverse perspectives and produce original, practical solutions. The ability to regulate emotions in stressful contexts directly facilitates innovative thinking, explaining why the model accounted for such a substantial portion of variance in creative problem-solving outcomes.

Future work in this area should explore how organizational interventions aimed at developing emotional intelligence influence creative performance over time. Longitudinal studies can provide insight into whether these competencies can be strengthened and sustained, leading to long-term improvements in innovative leadership practices. Expanding the research into different cultural contexts and industry sectors will also help determine the universality of these findings and highlight contextual differences that may require adapted approaches to leadership development.

Further studies should also investigate the mediating role of other variables, such as organizational climate, resilience, and decision-making style, to build on the structural model presented here. Practical strategies derived from these insights can include designing targeted workshops that integrate emotional intelligence development with complex problem-solving simulations. Organizations and researchers alike can use these findings to drive a shift in leadership paradigms, positioning emotional intelligence as a foundation for sustainable creativity and innovation in business leadership.

CONCLUSION

The most significant findings of this research confirm that emotional intelligence strongly predicts creative problem-solving abilities in business leaders, with self-awareness and self-regulation emerging as the most influential factors. Structural equation modeling revealed both direct and indirect effects, demonstrating that social awareness and relationship management enhance creative problem solving primarily through their influence on decision-making flexibility. These results provide clear empirical evidence that emotional intelligence, particularly intrapersonal dimensions, has a measurable impact on leaders' capacity to produce innovative solutions in complex organizational contexts.

The primary contribution of this study lies in the integration of a structural equation modeling approach with a leadership framework, offering a rigorous quantitative examination of the pathways between emotional intelligence and creative problem solving. The use of SEM advances the conceptual understanding of how emotional competencies shape innovative decision-making by capturing complex, multidimensional relationships that previous studies have only described qualitatively. This methodological approach enriches the field by providing a robust model that links emotional intelligence to innovation-oriented leadership outcomes.

The study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to establish causal relationships, and by its reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to explore how emotional intelligence development influences creative problem solving over time. Expanding the study to include cultural differences, industry-specific factors, and organizational climate as moderating variables would provide a broader understanding and enable the design of more targeted leadership development interventions.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Look this example below:

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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