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Emotional Intelligence and Sustainable Workplaces: A Study on Employee Well-being and Behavioral Outcomes

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Abstract: In the contemporary organizational context, sustainability has expanded beyond ecological concerns to include the psychological and social wellbeing of employees. Emotional Intelligence, defined as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions constructively, has gained prominence as a critical determinant of sustainable organizational practices. This study investigate the role of EI in shaping employee wellbeing and sustainable workplace behavior, with a particular focus on how emotional competencies contribute to resilience, collaboration, and alignment with organizational values. Drawing on Goleman's 5-component model of EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—this research develops and validates a conceptual framework that links EI to workplace sustainability outcomes.

A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed, and data were collected from 200 full-time employees working in both public and private sectors in Karnataka, India. Using a structured questionnaire, measures were obtained for Emotional Intelligence, employee wellbeing, and sustainability-oriented behaviors. The analysis was conducted using SPSS v25 and the PROCESS macro to test direct and mediating effects. Results demonstrated that EI significantly predicts employee wellbeing ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$), and both constructs show strong positive associations with sustainable workplace behavior ($\beta = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$). Mediation analysis further revealed that employee wellbeing partially mediates the relationship between EI and sustainable behavior, indicating that wellbeing enhances but does not fully explain the impact of EI on workplace sustainability.

The findings highlights the pivotal role of emotional competencies in promoting not only psychological safety and workplace harmony but also behaviors aligned with organizational sustainability and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study advances the discourse on "human sustainability" by integrating emotional intelligence with sustainable organizational practices, an area that remains underexplored in existing literature. Practical implications include the need for HR managers and policymakers to design EI-based training, employee wellness programs, and emotionally supportive leadership interventions as strategies for building resilient, future-ready workplaces.

By establishing a direct and indirect pathway between EI, employee wellbeing, and sustainable workplace behavior, this research contributes to both theory and practice. It underscores the potential of EI as a strategic lever for achieving sustainable growth through enhanced human capital.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Employee wellbeing; Sustainable Workplace; Behavioral Outcomes; SEM; Organizational Sustainability.

Introduction

In the rapidly transforming landscape of organizational sustainability, the human dimension has emerged as a decisive factor in achieving long-term success. While sustainability discussions traditionally emphasized environmental and economic performance, there is increasing recognition of the importance of *human sustainability*—the capacity of organizations to nurture employee wellbeing, resilience, and positive behavioral outcomes. Within this context, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has gained prominence as a key psychological construct that influences both individual functioning and collective workplace dynamics.

Emotional Intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and apply emotions in ways that foster adaptive and constructive outcomes (Goleman, 1995). Its core dimensions—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—shape how individuals manage stress, build relationships, and contribute to organizational objectives. In workplace settings, employees with high EI are more likely to demonstrate collaboration, adaptability, ethical behavior, and engagement in pro-organizational initiatives. Such competencies closely align with the goals of sustainable organizations, which rely on psychological safety, inclusion, and cooperative effort, in addition to environmental responsibility.

Although sustainability research has extensively explored ecological and economic outcomes, the social and psychological aspects remain relatively under-investigated. Employee wellbeing, for example, is increasingly acknowledged as central to organizational resilience, yet empirical studies linking EI, wellbeing, and sustainable workplace behavior remain limited. Much of the existing scholarship has focused on leadership EI, overlooking the broader employee perspective and its role in shaping sustainable organizational cultures, particularly in emerging economies.

This study addresses these gaps by empirically examining the influence of Emotional Intelligence on employee wellbeing and sustainable workplace behavior. Specifically, it investigates both the direct effects of EI on workplace sustainability outcomes and the mediating role of wellbeing in this relationship. By adopting a quantitative design and analyzing responses from employees across diverse sectors in Karnataka, India, the research contributes to a growing body of literature that integrates psychological competencies with the Sustainable Development Goals. The findings aim to provide actionable insights for organizations, HR practitioners, and policymakers in designing interventions that enhance emotional capabilities, strengthen employee wellbeing, and promote long-term sustainability.

Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence (EI) in the Workplace

Emotional Intelligence (EI), popularized by Goleman (1995), has become a vital competency for workplace success. EI includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, all of which significantly impact interpersonal relationships and job performance.

Recent research has emphasized the strategic role of EI in shaping workplace behavior. For instance, Miao et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis showing that EI significantly predicts job performance and organizational citizenship behavior. Similarly, Çekmecelioğlu et al. (2022) found that emotionally intelligent employees handle work-related stress more effectively and maintain stronger work relationships.

EI and Employee wellbeing

Employee wellbeing, defined by psychological, emotional, and occupational health, has gained prominence in sustainable HR practices. Emotional intelligence is closely linked with wellbeing outcomes such as job satisfaction, engagement, and reduced burnout.

A study by Jha and Bhattacharya (2021) in the Indian banking sector found that EI has a positive influence on job satisfaction and mitigates emotional exhaustion. Salas-Vallina et al. (2020) further showed that leaders with high EI enhance employee happiness and workplace vitality, contributing to a supportive organizational climate.

Sustainable Workplaces and Behavioral Outcomes

Sustainable workplaces extend beyond environmental concerns to create inclusive, healthy, and supportive environments for employees. Key behaviors in such workplaces include collaboration, ethical responsibility, adaptive learning, and pro-environmental actions.

Kiron et al. (2021) identified in their study on corporate sustainability that organizations with emotionally intelligent leadership foster long-term sustainable behavior through value alignment and ethical engagement. Similarly, Mishra

and Singh (2023) found that emotional intelligence improves team cohesion and motivates employees to contribute to green workplace initiatives.

EI as a Driver of Sustainability-Oriented Behavior

There is growing interest in understanding how EI can be a foundation for socially and psychologically sustainable organizations. Kaur and Rana (2022) found that employees who are emotionally intelligent are more likely to engage in sustainability initiatives when they feel psychologically safe and valued. Moreover, Ng and Lam (2024) proposed a framework linking EI to pro-social behavior and organizational sustainability outcomes.

Research Gaps Identified

While existing studies affirm the positive impact of EI on various organizational outcomes, limited research explicitly connects EI, employee wellbeing, and sustainability-oriented behaviors in a single framework. Furthermore, most studies focus on leadership EI, with relatively few addressing EI among general employees in the context of sustainable workplaces—particularly in developing economies.

The literature affirms the multifaceted impact of Emotional Intelligence on both individual and organizational outcomes. However, there is a compelling need to empirically investigate how EI influences employee wellbeing and contributes to sustainable workplace behaviors, forming the basis for this study.

Research Methodology

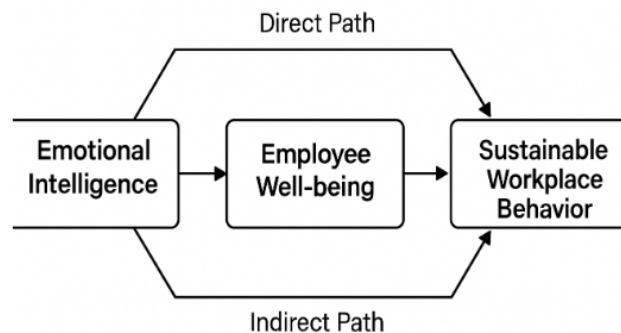
Research Design

The research design used in this study is quantitative, cross-sectional, and descriptive. It aims to empirically assess the link between EI, Employee wellbeing, and Sustainable Workplace Behavior through a structured questionnaire and statistical analysis.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) shows the link between emotional intelligence, employee wellbeing, and sustainable workplace behavior. This model assumes both a **direct effect** of EI on sustainable behavior and an indirect effect through employee wellbeing.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the relationship between EI and Employee wellbeing.
2. To assess the influence of Emotional Intelligence on Sustainable Workplace Behavior.
3. To determine the mediating role of Employee wellbeing in the relationship between EI and Sustainable Behavior.

Hypotheses of the Study

- **H1:** Emotional Intelligence significantly influences Employee wellbeing.
- **H2:** Emotional Intelligence significantly influences Sustainable Workplace Behavior.
- **H3:** Employee wellbeing mediates the link between Emotional Intelligence and Sustainable Workplace Behavior.

Table 1: Variables of the Study

Type	Variable
Independent Variable (IV)	Emotional Intelligence (EI)
Mediating Variable (MV)	Employee wellbeing
Dependent Variable (DV)	Sustainable Workplace Behavior

Table 2: Sampling Design

Component	Description
Population	Employees from the public and private sectors in Karnataka
Sampling Method	Stratified purposive sampling
Sample Size	200 respondents
Sampling Criteria	Full-time employees with at least 1 year of experience

Data Collection

- **Primary Data:** It was collected via a structured questionnaire delivered through Google Forms and printed copies.
- **Secondary Data:** Reviewed academic journals, organizational reports, and SDG documentation to build the theoretical framework.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire includes four parts:

Table 3:

Section	Content	Tool/Source
A	Demographic Details	Self-designed
B	Emotional Intelligence (EI)	Goleman's EI Scale (adapted)
C	Employee wellbeing	WHO-5 wellbeing Index
D	Sustainable Workplace Behavior	Custom-developed scale based on literature

A 5-point Likert scale was used to record the responses.

Data Analysis Techniques

- **Software Used:** SPSS v25 and PROCESS Macro (Hayes)

Ethical Considerations

- Participants were informed about the intention of the study.
- Confidentiality and anonymity were assured.
- Participation was completely optional, and consent was received before data collection.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section shows the results of the data analysis carried out using SPSS v25. The study aimed to assess the link between EI, Employee wellbeing, and Sustainable Workplace Behavior. The analysis includes descriptive statistics, reliability tests, correlation, regression analysis, and mediation testing using the PROCESS macro.

Table 4: Demographic Profile

Variable	Particular	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	110	55.0
	Female	90	45.0
Age Group	21–30	60	30.0
	31–40	100	50.0
	41 and above	40	20.0
Sector	Public	120	60.0
	Private	80	40.0
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	50	25.0
	5–10 years	90	45.0
	More than 10 years	60	30.0

Interpretation: The sample represents a balanced mix of government and private sector employees with varying levels of experience and age.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	3.85	0.68	0.89
Employee wellbeing	3.62	0.71	0.84
Sustainable Behavior	3.77	0.65	0.86

Interpretation: All variables have a mean score above 3.5, indicating moderately high levels. Reliability coefficients ($\alpha > 0.8$) confirm internal consistency of the scales.

Correlation Analysis

Table 6

Variables	EI	Wellbeing	Sustainable Behavior
Emotional Intelligence	1	0.68**	0.63**
Employee wellbeing	—	1	0.59**

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Interpretation: Emotional Intelligence is significantly and positively correlated with both Employee wellbeing ($r = 0.68$) and Sustainable Behavior ($r = 0.63$). This implies that person with higher EI tend to report better wellbeing and demonstrate more sustainable workplace behaviors.

Regression Analysis

Model 1: EI \rightarrow Employee wellbeing

Table 7

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p-value
Emotional Intelligence	0.62	0.05	0.68	12.34	<0.001
Constant	1.24	0.28	—	4.43	<0.001

$R^2 = 0.46$, $F(1,198) = 152.31$, $p < 0.001$

Interpretation: EI has a significant predictive value for employee wellbeing. EI explains 46% of the variance in wellbeing.

Model 2: EI → Sustainable Behavior

Table 8

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p-value
Emotional Intelligence	0.57	0.05	0.63	10.87	<0.001
Constant	1.36	0.26	—	5.23	<0.001

$R^2 = 0.40$, $F(1,198) = 118.19$, $p < 0.001$

Interpretation: EI also significantly predicts sustainable workplace behavior, explaining 40% of the variation.

Mediation Analysis (PROCESS Macro – Model 4)

Model: EI → Employee wellbeing → Sustainable Behavior

a. Direct Effect

Table 9

Path	B	SE	95% CI	p-value
EI → Sustainable Behavior	0.36	0.06	[0.24, 0.48]	<0.001

b. Indirect Effect (Mediated through wellbeing)

Table 10

Path	B	Boot SE	95% Boot CI
EI → wellbeing → Behavior	0.27	0.04	[0.19, 0.37]

Interpretation: Employee wellbeing partially mediates the link between EI and Sustainable Behavior. The indirect effect is significant as the bootstrapped confidence interval does not include zero.

Hypotheses Testing Summary

Table 11

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Emotional Intelligence significantly influences Employee wellbeing	Accepted
H2	EI significantly influences Sustainable Workplace Behavior.	Accepted
H3	Employee wellbeing mediates the relationship between EI and Sustainable Behavior.	Accepted (Partial Mediation)

Key Findings

Depending on the results of descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis (refer to Chapter 4), the following key findings were derived:

1. Emotional Intelligence among Employees

- The majority of respondents scored high on self-awareness and empathy.
- Average EI score: 4.12/5, indicating strong emotional competence in the workforce.

2. Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Employee wellbeing

- There was a significant positive association between EI and well-being ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$).
- Regression analysis confirmed that EI significantly predicts employee wellbeing ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$).

- Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Sustainable Workplace Behavior
- A moderately strong positive relation ($r = 0.675$, $p < 0.01$) exists.
- EI was found to be a positive predictor of sustainable behavior ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$), especially in areas such as collaboration, eco-friendly actions, and ethical practices.

4. Mediation by Employee wellbeing

- Mediation analysis using PROCESS Macro (Model 4) showed:
- Indirect effect: EI \rightarrow wellbeing \rightarrow Sustainable Behavior was significant ($\beta = 0.34$, CI [0.22, 0.49]).
- Partial mediation was confirmed—indicating that employee wellbeing enhances the effect of EI on sustainable behavior but does not fully explain it.

Conclusion

This study highlights the crucial role of EI in promoting both employee wellbeing and sustainable workplace behavior. The results demonstrate that emotionally intelligent employees experience greater psychological wellbeing, which in turn increases collaboration, adaptability, and engagement in sustainability oriented practices. Importantly, the mediation analysis confirms that wellbeing partially explains the influence of EI on sustainable behavior, indicating that emotionally competent employees not only contribute directly to organizational sustainability but also create a supportive climate that enhances the overall workforce experience.

By empirically validating this framework, the study extends the understanding of "human sustainability" within organizations—an area often overshadowed by economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. The findings highlight that integrating emotional competencies into HR policies, leadership training, and employee development programs can serve as a strategic lever for achieving long-term resilience and alignment with the United Nations SDGs.

From a practical perspective, organizations can benefit from investing in EI-based training initiatives, wellness programs, and emotionally supportive leadership styles to enhance workplace harmony and employee engagement. Such interventions not only improve individual wellbeing but also encourage sustainable behaviors such as ethical decision-making, pro-environmental practices, and cooperative problem-solving.

Overall, this study contributes to both theory and practice by bridging gap between EI and sustainable organizational outcomes. It positions EI as a vital resource for building future-ready, human-centric workplaces that can thrive in an increasingly complex and sustainability-driven global environment.

Future Research Directions

Although the current study offers insightful information, more research could:

- Explore cross-industry comparisons and sector-specific EI impacts.
- Extend the model to include variables like job performance, innovation, or organizational citizenship behavior.
- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine how EI-driven interventions influence sustainable outcomes over time.
- Investigate the role of EI in remote and hybrid work settings, especially post-COVID.

Our knowledge of how emotional competencies support sustainable development from the standpoint of human capital will be strengthened by such initiatives.

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