# COVID-19 and Work Engagement: Understanding the Nexus of Leaders Emotional Intelligence, Self-efficacy and Resilience in the Banking Sector of Bahrain

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## Abstract

The current study attempted to examine the association between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement, followed by the mediation of self-efficacy and resilience. Structural equation modeling using Smart PLS 3.0 was employed to examine these relationships amongst the employees of five major banks in Bahrain. The bootstrap results indicated the significance of leaders` emotional intelligence towards enhancing employees` work engagement. Accordingly, the study also found support for the mediation hypotheses as self-efficacy and resilience significantly mediated the association between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement. The results have asserted that critical times such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, can be responsively managed through leaders` emotional intelligence to enhance employee immersion, passion, vigor at work. The results have also asserted that leaders` emotional intelligence has a significant contribution towards boosting employees` psychological resourcefulness, thus making them high in efficacy and resilience, which further induces higher engagement levels.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, leadership, work engagement, self-efficacy, resilience

## 1. Introduction

The current COVID-19 Pandemic has hit global business markets as well as daily work activities. Therein, enterprises are experiencing unprecedented circumstances leading to severe challenges in doing business (Narula, 2020). Notably, this makes it difficult for enterprises to ensure that their employees can work effectively and tackle issues while maintaining higher levels of commitment, immersion and dedication with the work. These behaviors are some of the most crucial prospects for business performance and their survival in crucial times (Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). This, in the scholarly domain, is referred to as work engagement. Leaders typically have a major role to play in fostering employee behaviors and outcomes (Puni, Agyemang, & Asamoah, 2016); thus, their support and facilitation would be equally significant in critical times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, individuals require more emotional affiliation and support during the crisis period (Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011); thus, leaders` emotional intelligence could be instrumental in harnessing employees` work engagement. Nonetheless, due to the recency of the

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global pandemic, little is empirically known in this regard hence indicating a significant research gap.

Therefore, the present study attempts to investigate how leaders` emotional intelligence can be of value in furthering employees` work engagement during the current COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, since leaders` emotional intelligence is an intangible prospect (Neil, Wagstaff, Weller, & Lewis, 2016), does it influences directly or is linked to engagement through some other psychological factors such as efficacy and resilience that lead foster immersion, vigor and dedication in employees. Therefore, besides the direct link between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement, the current study also strives to examine if employee's self-efficacy beliefs and resilience can mediate the association during COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the current study serves to address key research gaps to help organizational scholars and practitioners manage and maintain employees` work engagement during times of crisis.

## 2. Literature Review:

### 2.1. Underpinning Theory

Conservation of resources theory (COR)(Hobfoll, 1989) is a one of the prominent theoretical assertion utilized to investigate the impact of various antecedents of work engagement by prominent studies in the recent past (Ahmed, Kura, Umrani, & Pahi, 2020; Ahmed, Umrani, Pahi, & Shah, 2017). Importantly, prior studies have deployed COR theory to explain leadership prospects towards work engagement (Wu & Lee, 2020). Accordingly, past studies also highlight the utilization of COR to test psychological resources (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). The COR theory suggests that individuals value resources as crucial to fostering their behaviors. The crux of the COR theory outlines that people as individuals are driven towards acquiring, securing and fostering resources, and these resources help them to avoid negative consequences. In line with this explanation, the current study speculates that leaders` emotional intelligence can be seen as an important resource for employees to help them boost their work engagement. Furthermore, this may also create further personal resources, such as efficacy and resilience, that further predict work engagement.

### 2.2. Work Engagement

The term work engagement that focuses on the modern trends in terms of positive psychology is well-defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). In simple words, it is a constructive, rewarding and affirmative state of mind towards job (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor means how much an employee/worker is energetic and flexible at the workplace. Dedication describes how much he/she is involved in his/her work and the extent to which he/she faces a sense of implication, passion, and interest. Absorption means that the employees focus on performing their tasks (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Workers having improved work engagement do better as they belong to optimistic interest in their work, good health condition, and are more productive (Bakker, 2011). Several studies have shown that employees become more productive when they are high in work engagement. They showcase more creativity (Toyama & Mauno, 2017) and mostly perform better than others (Salanova, Lorente, Chambel, & Martínez, 2011). Thus, organizations must ensure that their employees are engaged to get the nest results (Lai, Tang, Lu, Lee, & Lin, 2020).

The concept of work engagement was first used by Kahn (1990) to identify the extent to which the employees are psychologically present or absent at the workplace. Since then, the concept of engagement has attracted much scholarly attention (Ahmed, 2019; Bakytgul, Ahmed, & Kim, 2019). According to Kahn (1990), work engagement denotes to "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full performances" (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) is of the views that work engagement originates such factors as immediate and real-time service, identification of employee's involvement in their tasks, the recognition of his/her self presence, and efficient and effective performance. They are always ready to accept the new and novel challenges as they are physically and psychologically present at the workplace and perform a significant role in the accomplishment of their tasks.

As an example, the employees that exhibit a deep bonding with the work perform better than those with low levels of engagement. The lower engaged employees are not so efficient and productive. Highly engaged workers are more active and dedicated than those of low engaged workers. They can easily communicate their ideas and knowledge to others, want to share their skills and expertise, and always try their best to give maximum output through their positive and significant role (Kahn, 1990). Also, work engagement identifies how much the workers are willing to put their

commitment to the accomplishment of their tasks (Kahn, 1990).

According to eminent scholars, work engagement consists of three classes: mental & emotional meaningfulness, psychological security, and psychological accessibility. Mental and emotional meaningfulness means perceived return the employees expect as opposed to their full physical and mental devotion to their work (Kahn, 1990). When employees feel better and valuable as a result of their dedication and active participation in the accomplishment of their tasks, it leads to meaningfulness (Kahn, 1990). Psychological security means an environment where employees can freely express their ideas, where their self-image and respect is not damaged, where the working conditions and location is safe and not risky. Psychological security ensures improved productivity and efficiency (Kahn, 1990). Psychological availability means that the employees are efficient enough to handle any specific and unpredictable situation because of the resources possessed by them (Kahn, 1990). In any organization, employees have to face several challenges and difficulties, and their performance is profoundly affected by the presence of resources that they have or access. In the case of better resource availability and their effective utilization, they may be able to positively tackle the challenges and problems they may face during their work (Lai et al., 2020).

Many studies have evidenced that leadership styles or behavior serve as predecessors of work engagement. For instance, authentic leadership (Mehmood, Nawab, & Hamstra, 2016), transformational leadership (Salanova et al., 2011), and ethical leadership (Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2015). Additionally, a positive personality of a leader causes an increase in the engagement of workers in their role performance. Similarly, positive and improved employee performance can also be attained by enhancing job resources (Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020; Schaufeli, 2015).

## 2.3. Leaders` Emotional Intelligence

Scholars in the recent past have focused on and praised emotional intelligence (EI). According to them, EI is equally important to be a winner in a leadership role (Cherniss, 2001; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Emotional intelligence is mostly referred to as the ability to not only aware of their own emotions but also must be mindful of the feelings of others. It is the best way to understand other fellows. EI is a useful technique to control emotions (Petrides, 2009; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

George (2000) mourned that "leadership theory and research have not adequately considered how leaders' moods and emotions influence their effectiveness as leaders" (p. 1028). Walter, Humphrey, and Cole (2012)

argued that Emotional Intelligence (EI) releases the potential role of leaders. Previous studies have supported this contention that leaders showed a higher EI score than that of their followers (A. Siegling, Nielsen, & Petrides, 2014; A. B. Siegling, Sfeir, & Smyth, 2014). According to earlier studies, emotionally intelligent leaders are successful across different occupational entities (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Boyatzis, Brizz, & Godwin, 2011; George, 2000; Walter & Bruch, 2009). According to pertinent literature regarding effective leadership, EI is positively associated with the efficiency of leaders, such as transformational leadership. That is, the higher the EI, the higher the efficiency of the leaders (Walter, Cole, & Humphrey, 2011). Therefore higher levels of leaders` emotional intelligence often result in higher job satisfaction (Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2016). Furthermore, recent studies have evidence that leaders' EI plays a vital role in improving the behaviors of the personnel within the organization. Leaders' EI leads to work engagement and job satisfaction of employees through improving resilience, self-efficacy, adaptability, effectiveness, and quality performance (Guerrero-Barona, Rodríguez-Jiménez, & Chambel, 2020; Lai et al., 2020; Oliver, 2020).

## 2.4. Self-Efficacy (SE)

Self-Efficacy (SE) refers to an individual ability to have control on his behavior, tasks, performance, and efficiency. Higher the self-efficacy among the employees, the higher the chances of achieving the goals and objectives. It ensures the achievement of organizational goals and better self-controlling with respect to workers (Bandura, 1997). It also demonstrates how do the workers feel and think about the organization and how they can be motivated (Bandura, 1997). SE is also linked to work engagement (Prochazka, Gilova, & Vaculik, 2017). Earlier researches identified that transformational leadership (such as emotionally intelligent leaders) influences SE in three ways, as discussed by Bandura (1995). The first source of strong self-efficacy is mastership experience, which refers to a strong SE with the inclusion of experience along-with appropriate skills and expertise in a particular area Bandura (1995). The fundamental role of a transformational leader is that he/she always assigns the activities to their followers according to their specialized skills and experience so that they perform it comprehensively and get success. In this

way, positive feedback is provided to both the transformational leaders and their followers as a result of their success, ultimately leads towards the mastership experience.

Secondly, self-efficacy can be achieved with the help of vicarious experience. A vicarious experience posses a significant effect in certain situations where an individual observes other similar people who get success because of continuous efforts and physical exertion Bandura (1995). The major concern of transformational leaders is to have a strong belief in the organizational vision and to make continuous efforts in order to achieve it. The most dominant characteristics of transformational leaders are that they always guide through illustration; they also influence their followers to conduct new and novel approaches that they might have in their minds. Thirdly, social persuading is another way through which self-efficacy can be achieved. It refers that; employees can be convinced to improve their expertise. Through improved expertise, they may reach a higher degree of success and self-efficacy. Transformational leaders always ask their followers to believe in future success. In the case of intellectual stimulation, the leaders are supposed to make them understand that they (followers) must share their experiences, ideas and knowledge to overcome the problems that they face at the workplace. Under intellectual stimulation, the emotionally intelligent leaders always not only have trust in their subordinates but also encourage their confidence level.

Previous studies have established that SE is highly linked to work engagement (Carter, Nesbit, Badham, Parker, & Sung, 2018; Prochazka et al., 2017), and with individuals' emotional intelligence (EI) (Guerrero-Barona et al., 2020). Hence, it is suggested that leaders' emotional intelligence reinforces self-efficacy, which can, in turn, enhances followers' engagement. Likewise, it is assumed that the higher the leaders' EI, the higher will be self-efficacy and the employee's work engagement. The employees having higher SE are always ready to accept challenging tasks. They always do their tasks with full zeal and zest and achieve the organizational goals by tackling all the hurdles they may face at the workplace Bandura (1995). Such actions represent an advanced commitment from both the leaders and the followers.

### 2.5. Resilience

According to Jackson, Firtko, and Edenborough (2007), the growth of resilience in terms of notion can be traced back in the 1800s and continues today (Bande, Fernández-Ferrín, Varela, & Jaramillo, 2015). On the other hand, the majority of the studies conducted on the topic of resilience has focused on children and adults (Bonanno, 2004). In organizational literature, the familiarity with advantages of resilience for firms and workers has recently surfaced through researches on positive characters (Harvey, Blouin, & Stout, 2006), has defined that resilience is linked to employee performance within the organization (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Resilience refers to the individual's ability to bounce back from adversity, recover, to become stronger than before, and developing such skills as vocational, societal, communal and literary even in the presence of psychological anxiety and pressure (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). It is a proportion of mental and emotional resources (Luthans, Avey, & Patera, 2008). Resilience is directly related to such constructive variables as hope, positivity, and assurance (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). Resilience enables individuals to fight against continuously changing and challenging situations (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007). Concluding that, it is the ability to come out from challenging situations and how to gain success.

The concept of resilience can be understood through different approaches, while the current study considered resilience as a personality trait. Accordingly, it is an optimistic personality attribute that bases flexibility and adaptation (Connor & Davidson, 2003). It is a chain of personality traits that enables individuals to handle the stressful environment in a positive manner (Hoge, Austin, & Pollack, 2007). In short, resilience is positively linked with firms' success and well-being (P. Harms, Brady, Wood, & Silard, 2018), fulfillment with life, self-concept, and work engagement (Bajaj & Pande, 2016; Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2016; Sagone & De Caroli, 2014). Similarly, resilience is directly associated with personal expertise, elevated values and persistence; trust on oneself, both tolerance and acceptance of harmful effect, and reinforcement effects of pressure and anxiety; positive acceptance of change, and secure relationships; control; and spiritual influences (Connor & Davidson, 2003). When individuals are flexible and optimistic, it has a significant influence on organizational culture. It can bring either a positive or negative change depending on the type and working of the organization (Maulding, Peters, Roberts, Leonard, & Sparkman, 2012). Academic researchers believe that workers' emotional intelligence (EI) assist resilience in order to achieve better work engagement (Bande et al., 2015; Maulding et al., 2012; Schneider, Lyons, & Khazon, 2013; Shin & Park, 2013).

## 2.6. Leaders` Emotional Intelligence and Work Engagement

In organizations, leaders' have a direct influence on their subordinates' behaviors. It is because the subordinates get inspiration from their leaders, whereas leaders are supposed to regulate and monitor their performance and effectiveness (Lai et al., 2020). Therefore, it is called out that leaders' behavior may shape subordinate's behavior.

On the other hand, work engagement demonstrates a continual and comprehensive effective–cognitive situation that belongs to three scopes such as, the vigor (i.e., strength), dedication, and the absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Numerous previous studies have shown multiple optimistic effects of emotional intelligence (EI) on the employees' work engagement (Brunetto, Teo, Shacklock, & Farr-Wharton, 2012; Extremera, Mérida-López, Sánchez-Álvarez, & Quintana-Orts, 2018; Ravichandran, Arasu, & Kumar, 2011; Zhu, Liu, Guo, Zhao, & Lou, 2015). Moreover, with respect to the Job Demands-Resources Theory, personal resources are essential antecedents of work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Schaufeli et al., 2002). The current study explores leaders' EI as a personal resource that is responsible for the employees 'work engagement'. These engaged employees/workers could observe more optimistic feelings, which include pleasure, fulfillment, and passion. Several studies have demonstrated that work engagement is directly associated with positive and useful results (Caesens, Stinglhamber, & Luypaert, 2014). Work engagement is seen as a background of job satisfaction (Moura, Orgambidez, & Gonçalves, 2014). It has been proved through various studies that work engagement plays a role of arbitrator between personality characteristics and organizational outputs, i.e., employee's job performance, the extent to which they are satisfied with career, and the job itself (Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012; Jawahar & Liu, 2017; Ngo & Hui, 2018). Typically, the emotions of the leaders will have a great influence on the performance of employees at the workplace, including their job attitude and work engagement (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996)

While emotional intelligence (EI) is considered as "the ability to monitoring one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). EI is a sub-component of social intelligence and directly linked to transformational leadership behaviour (P. D. Harms & Credé, 2010; Katou, Budhwar, & Patel, 2020). A number of researchers have confirmed that there is a positive relationship between EI and employee's performance and behaviors (Lam & O'Higgins, 2012). Furthermore, it has been verified that transformational leaders motivate, uplift, and mentally inspire the workers, which confirms the existence of a positive relationship between transformational leadership and workers' behaviors (Katou et al., 2020). Therefore, both types of leaders, i.e. (the transformational and the emotionally intelligent one) make use of their encouraging expertise, motivational talent, academic motivation, and personalized concerns in order to bring a positive change in workers' targets and behavior (Pasha, Poister, Wright, & Thomas, 2017).

Recent studies (Chua & Ayoko, 2019; Ghadi, Fernando, & Caputi, 2013; Lai et al., 2020; Salanova et al., 2011; Vila-Vázquez, Castro-Casal, Álvarez-Pérez, & Río-Araújo, 2018) have also testified the existence of a positive relationship between transformational leadership style and work engagement in the organizational setting. While there are some studies that have identified the association between leaders' EI and different workers' behaviors in an organization. For example, Miao et al. (2016) carried out an in-depth analysis to describe the sound effects of leaders' EI (skills, self-report, and talent). They have also identified how the leaders' EI is associated with the job satisfaction of their co-workers and employees. The leaders' EI improves the employee's productivity and efficiency as they are given the tasks that best suit their skills and expertise. It also leads to improved behavior of employees within the organization. It also causes the employee's physical and mental health outcomes. This study has also evidenced the positive association between the emotional intelligence of the leaders and the job satisfaction level of employees. Similarly, an in-depth analysis conducted by Miao, Humphrey, and Qian (2018). The study defined the cultural influence on the relationship between the job satisfaction level of employees and the emotional intelligence of the leaders. The study concluded that higher the leaders' emotional intelligence, the higher the task performance of employees and ultimately, higher would be job satisfaction.

In recent times, Mukaihata, Fujimoto, and Greiner (2020) considered the factors that directly influence the work engagement among psychiatric nurses. The findings of the research have found an optimistic association between supervisors' emotional intelligence (EI) and the nurse's engagement. Likewise, Katou et al. (2020)studied the concurrent effect of social intelligence possessed by the leaders on the work engagement of Greek employees. The study concluded that

higher the social intelligence of the leaders, the higher would be the work engagement of the Greek employees. Aggarwal, Chand, Jhamb, and Mittal (2020) established a powerful association between member/leader exchange and work engagement.

Furthermore, D'Amico, Geraci, and Tarantino (2020) recently carried out a study on about 238 Italian school teachers and have examined the association between perceived EI, work engagement, burnout, and job satisfaction. The findings of their research identified that higher the emotional intelligence, higher would be the work engagement among the teachers. Zhu et al. (2015) also discovered that EI is directly associated with work engagement.

A review of the pertinent literature regarding organizational studies found that job satisfaction (as a construct) is studied more than any other job behavior (Schleicher, Hansen, & Fox, 2011). Therefore, EI studies should focus more on job satisfaction and job performance (Derue et al., 2011). Previous investigations (Aggarwal et al., 2020; D'Amico et al., 2020; Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020; Katou et al., 2020; Mukaihata et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2015) suggested that leaders having high emotional intelligence improve employees engagement with their work and make them more productive, challenging and professional. Therefore, this study proposes the given hypothesis:

**H1:** *There is a positive relationship between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement*

## 2.7. Mediation of Self-Efficacy:

According to Albert Bandura (1997, 1999) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), the behavior of the employees is an outcome of personal resources (e.g., the emotional intelligence of the leaders & self-efficacy), and motivation (e.g., engagement of employees towards their work). The current study declares leaders' EI as the significant personal resource which influences work engagement through self-efficacy. Since self-efficacy is a major characteristic at work, it enables the workers to enhance their work engagement as well as increases their confidence level of workers (Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009; Wang, Tsai, & Tsai, 2014). Previous studies recommended that an effective leadership approach can enhance self-efficacy (Wang et al., 2014).

Previous studies have shown that the workers who are certain that they can meet the demands of their assigned jobs across different working environments are best described as high in self-efficacy. They are the ones who believe in having better output as a result of their positive self-beliefs

(Barreiro & Treglown, 2020; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). The research findings recommend that emotion coping strategies can influence engagement levels (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). Guerrero-Barona et al. (2020) have investigated that the dimensions of emotional intelligence have a positive relationship with work engagements and self-efficacy. Moreover, past studies have examined self-efficacy as an intervening variable between the transformational style of leadership and different outcomes variables such as affective employees commitment (Bayraktar & Jiménez, 2020); knowledge-sharing ability (Le et al., 2018); innovative work behavior of employees (Afsar & Masood, 2018); work engagement of workers (Prochazka et al., 2017); change-oriented citizenship behavior (Kao, 2017); workers' performance at the workplace (Hannah, Schaubroeck, & Peng, 2016); workers creativity (Gong et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2014); employees proactive work behaviour (Strauss, Griffin, & Rafferty, 2009); the well-being of employees (Nielsen & Munir, 2009); and employees commitment (Pillai & Williams, 2004).

Accordingly, it is the leader who can boost up their follower's self-efficacy level, which is regarded as "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required in managing prospective situations" (Bandura, 1997). Numerous investigations indicated that self-efficacy intervened in the relationship between leadership style and worker engagement (Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020; Prochazka et al., 2017; Salanova et al., 2011; Tripiana & Llorens, 2015). Thuswe speculate that self-efficacy will mediate the association between emotional intelligence (possessed by the leaders) and employees` work engagement. The leaders' EI will ideally enhance employees` self-efficacy to ultimately harness work engagement. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H2:** *Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement*

## 2.8. Mediation of Resilience:

Emotional intelligence (EI) is an important component of personality that makes an effective leader. Leaders who have a high level of EI are considered more effective and efficient. Hence, leaders' EI is instrumental in predicting different behaviors and outcomes (Maulding et al., 2012). There is another view that presents EI as an attribute that roots the success of a leader. Further, EI is a skill that organizational leaders must possess to become unique and successful. It is also observed that employees working under emotionally intelligent

leaders achieve a high level of success within a short period (Farh, Seo, & Tesluk, 2012) and improved performance at the workplace (O'Boyle Jr, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011).

Similarly, resilience is also a personality trait that is connected to EI, as these are important factors to be adopted to overcome the varying obstacles and hardships at the workplace (Cleary, Visentin, West, Lopez, & Kornhaber, 2018). One major concern of resilience is how to fix and handle the varying difficulties and issues within the organization, how equilibrium is to be maintained, how to manage and retain the control over the organizational matters and how to handle conflict effectively and other external strains (Pines et al., 2014). Extant literature suggests that EI may encourage resilience (Bande et al., 2015; Maulding et al., 2012; Schneider et al., 2013). Several studies have explored EI and resilience association, focusing on service-based roles such as retail staff, healthcare professionals, and administrative staff since they directly handle patients. These professionals face situations of difficulty, stress, conflicts that often result in anxiety and burnout (Benson, Ploeg, & Brown, 2010; Cleary et al., 2018; Haik et al., 2017; Kornhaber & Wilson, 2011). Even after facing stressful situations, there are many individuals who get rid of such irritating and disturbing occurrences more quickly than others (Sarrionandia, Ramos-Díaz, & Fernández-Lasarte, 2018).

Pertinent literature has evidence that EI of leaders can predict resilience (Sarrionandia, Ramos-Díaz, & Fernández-Lasarte, 2018). The study of Schneider et al. (2013) has shown that EI assists in nurturing resilience, enabling an individual to handle uncertain events. The uncertain events might be challenges in terms of appraisals and it might also include some other functional challenges (Sarrionandia et al., 2018). Likewise, Magnano, Craparo, and Paolillo (2016) identified that the role of EI is very important in terms of resilience. Armstrong, Galligan, and Critchley (2011) showed that EI is closely linked to psychological resilience. They are of the view that individuals having higher EI is adaptive in stressful circumstances. Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, and Mayer (1999), verified that people having higher EI can perform better even in case of uncertainty and stress. They also claimed that they "accurately perceive and appraise their emotions, know-how and when to express their feelings, and can effectively regulate their mood states" (p. 161). Eventually,Cejudo, López-Delgado, and Rubio (2016) testified that individuals with higher EI exhibit a greater extent of resilience, which ultimately assists in employees` work engagement.

The current study offers comprehensive facts of the linkage between EI and resilience, and its contribution to the work engagement (Bajaj & Pande, 2016; Malik, Shahzad, & Raziq, 2020; Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2016; Sagone & De Caroli, 2014; Sarrionandia, Ramos-Díaz, & Fernández-Lasarte, 2018; Shin & Park, 2013). However, little evidence exists considering the simultaneous relationship between these variables. Sarrionandia et al. (2018) studied the interactions among E.I, resilience and perceived stress in the context of a cross-cultural country. The study consists of a sample of 696 students enrolled in undergraduate programs. The sample was taken from the two different universities in the US and Spain. The findings of the study suggest that emotionally intelligent and resilient students experienced lower stress. The research findings also indicate that resilience positively mediated between students' emotional intelligence and apparent stress. Likewise, Bajaj and Pande (2016) examined the intervening role of resilience in the influence of mindfulness on the life satisfaction and well-being of the people. Results from the sample of 327 undergraduate students found significant mediation of resilience.

Accordingly, there are limited studies regarding the mediating role of resilience in the association between leaders' EI and work engagement in organizational settings. It can be easily traced out that there are a few studies that identify the association among two out of three variables that have been discussed in this study. These include links between EI and resilience, EI and employees' work engagement, and between resilience and work engagement. Considering the above situation, thus, this study examines the simultaneous relationship between these three constructs (leaders' EI-resilience-work engagement). This research gap needs to be filled, especially considering the leaders' EI. Therefore, the following hypothesis is forwarded:

**H3:** *Resilience mediates the relationship between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement*

## 3. Methodology:

### 3.1. Instrumentation:

9-item UWES scale (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006), was adapted to test work engagement in the present study. Accordingly, a 15-item scale was used to examine leaders` emotional intelligence based on prior studies (Alzyoud, Ahmed, AlZgool, & Pahi, 2019) followed by a five-item scale for self-efficacy and a five-item scale for employee resilience from the PsyCap inventory by Luthans et al. (2006).

### 3.2. Sampling:

Five major banks in Bahrain were targeted in the present study. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed across the selected banks during April 2020 through using the email system via respective head offices of the selected banks. The data collection was carried out for a total of 4 months to ensure an objective response. This approach was termed to be most appropriate, keeping in view the restrictions and limited social interaction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therein, 351 questionnaires were obtained back out, of which 18 were discarded. Thus, 333 were used for the final data analysis and interpretation. Conclusively, the final response rate appears to be 83.25%.

### 3.4. Data Analysis:

Structural equation modeling using Smart PLS 3.0 was employed for the present study. Following the recommendations (Haier et al., 2017), a two-stage approach was used. In the first stage, the study examined the psychometric properties of the model.
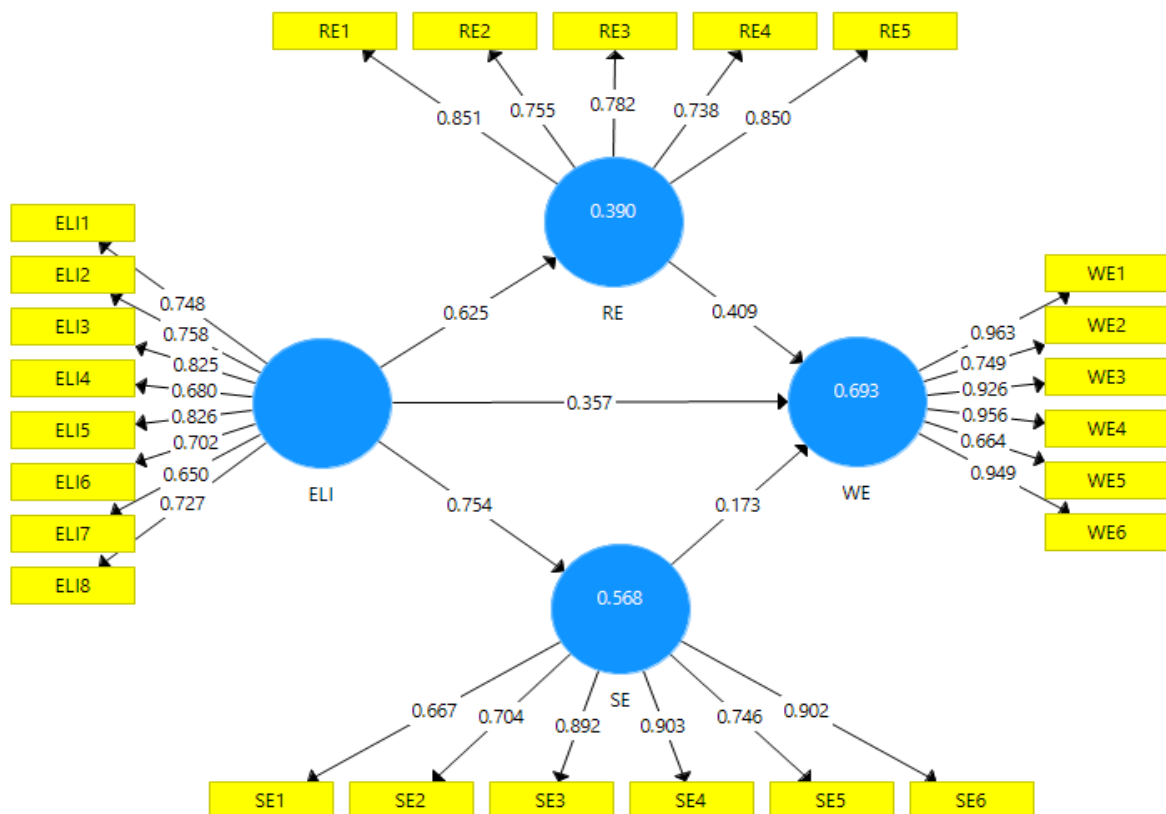


Figure 1. **Measurement Model**

*Table 1.* **Loadings, AVE, CR and R-square**

| Items | Loadings | AVE | CR | R-square |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Leader`s Emotional Intelligence | | **0.550** | **0.907** | |
| ELI1 | **0.748** | | | |
| ELI2 | **0.758** | | | |
| ELI3 | **0.825** | | | |
| ELI4 | **0.680** | | | |
| ELI5 | **0.826** | | | |
| ELI6 | **0.702** | | | |
| ELI7 | **0.650** | | | |
| ELI8 | **0.727** | | | |
| Resilience | | **0.635** | **0.896** | 0.390 |
| RE1 | **0.851** | | | |
| RE2 | **0.755** | | | |
| RE3 | **0.782** | | | |
| RE4 | **0.738** | | | |
| RE5 | **0.850** | | | |
| Self-Efficacy | | **0.654** | **0.918** | 0.568 |
| SE1 | **0.667** | | | |
| SE2 | **0.704** | | | |
| SE3 | **0.892** | | | |
| SE4 | **0.903** | | | |
| SE5 | **0.746** | | | |
| SE6 | **0.902** | | | |
| Work Engagement | | **0.767** | **0.951** | 0.693 |
| WE1 | **0.963** | | | |
| WE2 | **0.749** | | | |
| WE3 | **0.926** | | | |
| WE4 | **0.956** | | | |
| WE5 | **0.664** | | | |
| WE6 | **0.949** | | | |

The result of the measurement model detailed in Figure 1 and Table 1 provides individual item

loadings, AVE, and composite reliability scores followed by r-square. Based on the rule of thumb approach suggested by Hair Jr, Sarstedt, Ringle, and Gudergan (2017) and Bagozzi and Yi (1988), items with loadings 0.50 or above were retained. Therein, Table 1 and Figure 1 shows loadings for the retained items ranging between 0.550 and 0.767. Second, the composite reliability scores, as suggested by Hair Jr et al. (2017), were responsively achieved, the threshold of 0.70. Therein, the results of the measurement model show that composite reliability scores ranging between 0.896 and 0.951. Accordingly, AVE scores were also ensured to meet the threshold of 0.50 or above. Figure 1 and Table 1 show that the AVE scores range between 0.550 and 0.767. Conclusively, the psychometric properties of

the model were ascertained by confirming the internal consistency reliability, reliability, and convergent validity.

*Table 2:* **Discriminant Validity**

| CONSTRUCT | ELI | RE | SE | WE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ELI** | **0.762** | | | |
| **RE** | 0.625 | **0.797** | | |
| **SE** | 0.754 | 0.648 | **0.809** | |
| **WE** | 0.744 | 0.745 | 0.708 | **0.876** |

Note. Values in **BOLD** refer to square root of AVE scores

Furthermore, the study also followed the recommendations of Fornell and Larcker (1981) to examine the discriminant validity through assessing the square root of AVE scores for each of the constructs, which should be greater than the corrections among latent variables. Table 2 shows that square root scores highlighted in bold have resulted higher than the corresponding scores; thus, confirming discriminant validity.
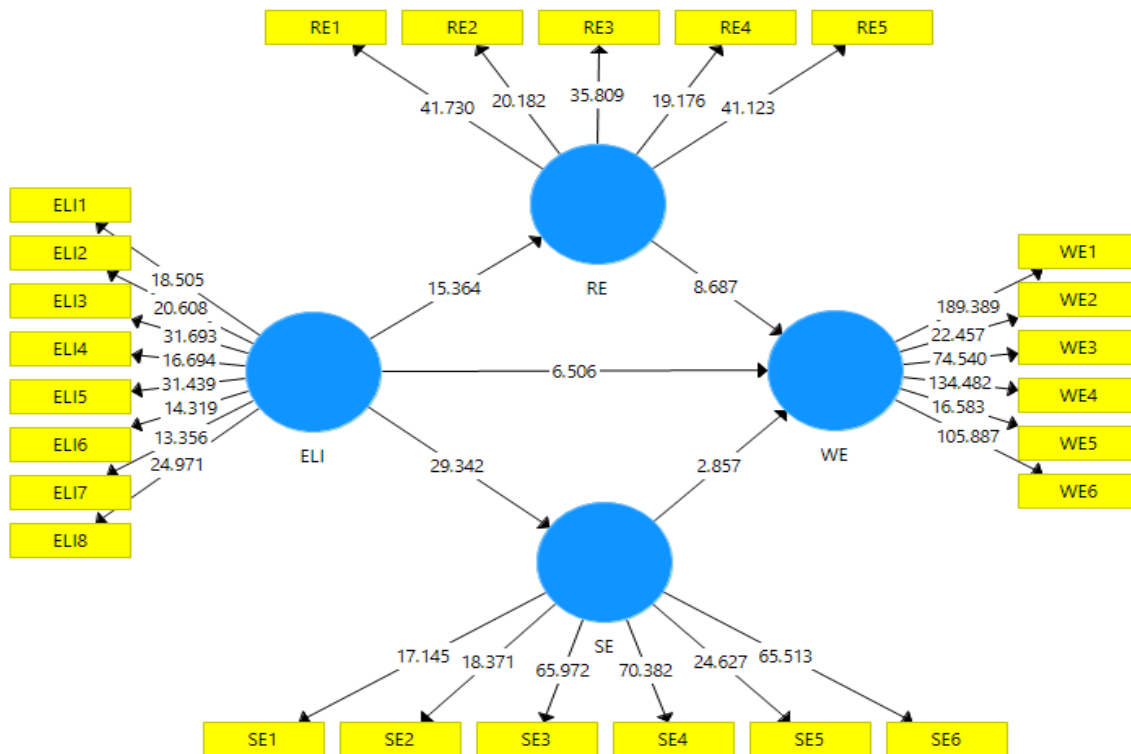
Figure 2. **Structural Model**

*Table 3.* **Result of Structural Modelling**

| Relationship | β | t-value | P-value | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ELI -> WE** | 0.357 | 6.506 | **0.000** | Supported |
| **ELI -> SE -> WE** | 0.131 | 2.796 | **0.003** | Supported |
| **ELI -> RE -> WE** | 0.256 | 7.023 | **0.000** | Supported |

Following the assessment of the psychometric properties, the current study tested the hypothesized relationships by deploying the bootstrapping approach. Results of the 5000 bootstraps concluded with a significant relationship between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement (β= 0.357, t=6.506, p<0.000), hence landing support for hypothesis 1.

Accordingly, the results also found support for the mediation self-efficacy in the relationship between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement (β= 0.131, t=2.796, p<0.000), hence confirming hypothesis 2. Lastly, the study also found empirical support for the mediation of resilience in the relationship between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement (β= 0.256, t=7.023, p<0.000), thus supporting hypothesis 3.

**4. Discussion**

The current study attempted to examine the role of leaders1 emotional intelligence towards harnessing employees` work engagement. The study also tested the mediation of self-efficacy and resilience in the relationship between leaders`

emotional intelligence and work engagement. The findings reported a significant relationship between leaders` emotional intelligence and employees` work engagement lands support to the scarce literature on this relationship (Aggarwal et al., 2020; D'Amico et al., 2020; Mukaihata et al., 2020). The findings hence educate that similar to other instances, leaders` emotional intelligence can be of equal prominence during crisis times such as COVID-19 pandemic to help employees maintain and enhance their work engagement. Based on the findings, the current asserts that leaders` have a greater role to play through their emotional quotient to ensure their employees are not just motivated but passionate, immersed and connected with their work particularly in the current pandemics. Accordingly, the mediation of self-efficacy in the relationship between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement is confirmed based on hints from prior literature (Kao, 2017; Le et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2014). This hence affirms the ability of emotion coping strategies towards predicting engagement

(Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). Accordingly, the findings suggest that leaders` empathizing attitude and expression of sympathy, trust, and gratitude can help employees enhance their self-belief to overcome challenges and achieve tasks and goals objectively, which further results in boosting their vigor and immersion, thus predicting work engagement. Leaders` emotional intelligence, therefore, can be seen as crucial in times of crisis like that of COVID-19 pandemic to enhance efficacy levels of employees and to facilitate them further their work engagement. In a similar vein, the significant mediation of resilience in the relationship between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement has addressed a major scholarly gap. The findings outline that leaders` intelligent way of expressing feelings, empathizing and comforting attitude can help employees boost their ability to face setbacks and adversity (Bajaj & Pande, 2016; Malik et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2016; Sagone & De Caroli, 2014; Sarrionandia et al., 2018), thus leading toward maintaining their work engagement. The finding indicates that leaders` emotional quotient can be instrumental in furthering resilience (Bande et al., 2015; Maulding et al., 2012), which then serves to energize employees to boost their immersion, dedication, and vigor; in other words boosting engagement (Cejudo et al., 2016).

### 4.1. Implications

Theoretically, the study forwards three important implications. The current study confirms the significance of leaders` emotional intelligence towards harnessing work engagement. Secondly, the findings have confirmed the significance of efficacy and resilience as the mediators in the leaders` emotional intelligence and engagement relationship. Third, as an overall study, the results have contributed towards the notable intervening effect of individual psychological capital towards harnessing engagement. These implications outline how engagement can be furthered through working on prospects that can help enhance employees` efficacy and resilient behaviors, such as the emotional intelligence of leaders. Practically, the findings also forward three implications. First, the study results imply that critical time such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, requires a lot of effort and support from leaders to help employees show better behaviors and outcomes. Therein, leaders` emotional intelligence can be a great asset to particularly for the banking sector employees. Second, the findings imply the need for furthering efficacy and resilience amongst employees and hence, looking for ways to do so. Training

interventions ma be considered by HR practitioners in the banking sector for both leaders and employees, respectively. Third, based on a more significant intervention of resilience, the findings imply that leaders' emotional quotient is critical for boosting employees' psychological defense mechanisms to face hardships and challenges at work during crisis period such as COVID-19 Pandemic to further increase their engagement levels.

### 4.2. Limitations and Scope for Future Studies:

The current study has three notable limitations. First, the research was designed with a cross-sectional approach. Therefore, future studies may consider testing a similar framework with a longitudinal approach. Accordingly, the present study sampled bank employees in Bahrain. Thus, scholars may consider looking at the significance of leaders` emotional intelligence and the mediation of efficacy and resilience towards furthering work engagement across other occupational sectors. In line with this, future authors may also consider investigating the interaction effect of different constructs through extending the model for a more scholarly enlightened investigation. Furthermore, future studies may also consider looking at the impact of different leadership prospects, such as leadership styles, to explore which ones could be of potential value in harnessing engagement in challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the current study also recommends future investigations to focus on organizational resources and see how they influence on work engagement.

### Conclusion:

In conclusion, the current study investigated how leaders` emotional intelligence can play an instrumental role in harnessing work engagement and found a significant association. The study also tested and reported significant mediation of employees' self-efficacy and resilience in the direct relationship between leaders` emotional intelligence and work engagement.

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