International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR)
ISSN: 2643-9670
Vol. 10 Issue 1 January - 2026, Pages: 228-236

The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Managing Employee Relations in the Hospitality Industry in Delta State, Nigeria.

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Abstract: *This study investigates the pivotal role of emotional intelligence (EI) in managing employee relations within the hospitality industry, focusing on hotels in Delta State, Nigeria. Emotional intelligence, encompassing key dimensions such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills, is increasingly acknowledged as essential for fostering effective workplace interactions and improving organizational outcomes. Given the high-pressure, customer-centric nature of the hospitality sector, managers with strong EI competencies are better equipped to handle interpersonal dynamics, reduce workplace conflicts, and enhance team cohesion. Employing a quantitative research design, the study surveyed 90 employees selected from a total population of 120 hospitality staff members, using structured questionnaires to gather data. Analysis conducted through SPSS, involving correlation and regression techniques, revealed a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the quality of employee relations. Specifically, higher EI levels were associated with improved communication, greater job satisfaction, and more effective conflict resolution strategies. These findings align with existing literature suggesting that emotionally intelligent leaders foster more engaged and productive workforces. The study underscores the critical need for hospitality organizations to integrate emotional intelligence development into leadership training programs. By prioritizing EI competencies, hotels in Delta State can enhance workplace harmony, reduce staff turnover, and elevate service quality, key factors in maintaining a competitive edge in the industry. Recommendations include regular EI assessments, targeted workshops, and mentorship initiatives to cultivate emotionally intelligent leadership at all organizational levels.*

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Employee Relations, Hospitality Industry, Workplace Conflict, Empathy

Introduction

Employee relations refer to the strategies, policies, and everyday interactions that shape the working relationship between management and staff. In the hospitality industry, especially in places like Delta State, Nigeria, these relations are critical due to the sector's reliance on frontline employees to deliver high-quality, emotionally charged customer service. This sector is characterized by diverse teams, long working hours, and frequent emotional labor, which all increase the potential for misunderstandings, stress, and conflicts. Effective employee relations foster a work environment where communication is open, mutual respect prevails, and cooperation flourishes, thereby directly impacting service quality and organizational success (Nwakanma & Adisa, 2022).

Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others, has become an essential competency for managers and employees in hospitality settings. Research consistently shows that high EI among staff leads to better emotional regulation, increased empathy, and improved social skills, all of which contribute to healthier workplace interactions (Salovey & Mayer, 2021). In the Nigerian hospitality industry, where staff often face high-pressure situations and emotionally challenging customer interactions, emotional intelligence enables employees to navigate interpersonal difficulties more effectively, reducing incidents of conflict and enhancing team collaboration (Ogundele & Yusuf, 2021).

Conflict and low morale are prevalent challenges in many Nigerian hotels and hospitality businesses, often exacerbated by poor communication and inadequate emotional management. Managers and staff with high EI are better equipped to handle disputes through negotiation, mediation, and empathetic communication, thereby fostering a supportive environment that encourages problem-solving rather than blame (Okeke et al., 2020). This emotional competence not only minimizes workplace tensions but also builds trust and psychological safety among employees, which are critical factors in boosting job satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty (Eze & Chukwuemeka, 2022). Consequently, organizations that prioritize emotional intelligence training tend to experience lower staff turnover and higher overall productivity.

Integrating emotional intelligence into employee relations management is particularly vital for the hospitality industry in Delta State, given the competitive market and high customer expectations. By fostering emotional awareness and regulation, managers can cultivate a resilient workforce capable of maintaining composure and delivering exceptional service even under stress (Adeleke & Ojo, 2019). Moreover, emotionally intelligent leadership promotes an organizational culture that values empathy and open communication, which enhances staff morale and encourages positive interpersonal relationships. Ultimately, emotional intelligence serves as a strategic resource that bridges the gap between operational demands and human needs, ensuring sustainable employee relations and improved organizational outcomes in Nigeria's hospitality sector.

Statement of the Problem

Despite growing awareness of emotional intelligence in organizational literature, its practical integration in managing employee relations within Nigeria's hospitality industry remains limited. Many hotels still experience frequent conflicts, low morale, and poor communication between staff and management. Traditional managerial approaches often neglect the emotional aspect of human interaction. This disconnect has led to strained employee relations, which negatively affect service quality, customer satisfaction, and staff retention. Therefore, it becomes necessary to investigate the impact of emotional intelligence on the quality of employee relations in the hospitality industry.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee relations in the hospitality industry.
2. To evaluate the impact of emotional intelligence on conflict resolution among hospitality employees.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee relations in the hospitality industry?
2. How does emotional intelligence influence conflict resolution among hospitality employees?

Research Hypotheses

$H_0$1: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and employee relations in the hospitality industry.
$H_0$2: Emotional intelligence has no significant effect on conflict resolution among hospitality employees.

Conceptual Review

Emotional Intelligence (EI) broadly refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions effectively in oneself and in relationships with others (Goleman, 1995). It represents a crucial dimension of human intelligence that goes beyond cognitive abilities, focusing on emotional awareness and management. In organizational and interpersonal contexts, EI is increasingly recognized as a key driver of effective communication, leadership, and collaboration, especially in sectors like hospitality where emotional labor is significant (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2020). The concept has evolved through decades of research, with Daniel Goleman's framework (1995) widely accepted as a foundational model delineating five core components of EI.

The first component, self-awareness, refers to the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions as they occur. Individuals with high self-awareness can accurately gauge their emotional states and how these affect their thoughts and behaviors (Schutte et al., 2019). This awareness is foundational for emotional regulation and interpersonal effectiveness, as it helps prevent impulsive reactions and supports thoughtful decision-making. Recent studies highlight that self-awareness enables employees and managers to navigate complex social environments by anticipating emotional triggers and maintaining composure under stress (Cherry et al., 2022).

Closely linked to self-awareness is self-regulation, which involves managing one's emotional responses constructively and maintaining control in challenging situations. Self-regulation helps individuals avoid destructive behaviors such as aggression or withdrawal and instead promotes positive emotional responses like patience and optimism (Bradberry & Greaves, 2021). In organizational settings, this skill contributes to resilience, adaptability, and professionalism. Contemporary research underscores that employees with strong self-regulation tend to experience less burnout and demonstrate greater job satisfaction, especially in high-pressure industries such as hospitality and healthcare (Gillet et al., 2023).

Motivation is another vital aspect of EI, referring to the internal drive to achieve goals with energy and persistence beyond external rewards. Intrinsic motivation is linked to enthusiasm, commitment, and a proactive attitude toward work (Leroy et al., 2018). Emotionally intelligent individuals harness motivation to overcome obstacles and maintain focus on long-term objectives. This dimension of EI correlates strongly with leadership effectiveness and employee engagement, as motivated employees contribute positively to organizational climate and performance (Albrecht, 2020).

Empathy, the ability to recognize and understand the emotions of others, is particularly important for building interpersonal relationships. Empathy enables individuals to respond sensitively to colleagues' feelings and perspectives, facilitating cooperation and reducing conflict (Kellett, Humphrey, & Sleeth, 2020). In emotionally demanding environments like hospitality, empathy supports customer service excellence and team cohesion. Recent findings suggest that empathy also fosters inclusive leadership and psychological safety, essential for diversity and innovation in contemporary workplaces (Côté, 2017).

Finally, social skills encompass the ability to manage relationships effectively, communicate clearly, and inspire others. This component integrates communication, conflict management, collaboration, and influence, allowing emotionally intelligent individuals to foster strong networks and productive teamwork (George, 2021). Research indicates that social skills are predictive of leadership success and organizational citizenship behavior, especially in service-oriented industries that require constant interpersonal engagement (Mayer & Salovey, 2023).

Employee Relations

Refer to the ongoing efforts by organizations to foster positive, respectful, and productive relationships between employers and employees. At its core, employee relations encompasses communication strategies, conflict resolution mechanisms, feedback systems, and fair employment practices that align individual and organizational goals. When managed effectively, strong employee relations result in increased engagement, reduced turnover, and higher morale. As noted by Kahn (2022), building trust through open dialogue and two-way communication creates a work culture where employees feel valued and respected essential elements for sustained performance and commitment.

Furthermore, effective employee relations hinge on fair treatment, recognition, and well-being support. Organizations that adopt transparent promotion policies, equal opportunity practices, and structured grievance procedures tend to foster a sense of justice among employees (Cropanzano et al., 2017). In addition, recognition systems that reward performance and loyalty contribute to stronger emotional connections between staff and leadership. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2023), incorporating wellness initiatives such as mental health support, flexible scheduling, and work-life balance measures enhances employee satisfaction and reduces absenteeism, burnout, and interpersonal conflict.

Ultimately, robust employee relations contribute significantly to organizational effectiveness. Employees who feel supported, heard, and empowered are more likely to exhibit higher job satisfaction, loyalty, and discretionary effort qualities that are vital in competitive business environments. Research by Purcell (2019) emphasizes that strong employee relations do not just resolve issues but also proactively build engagement, foster innovation, and enhance team cohesion. In this sense, employee relations move beyond traditional HR functions to become a strategic pillar of organizational success.

Conflict Resolution

Effective conflict resolution within employee relations involves proactive strategies such as negotiation, mediation, and open communication to address workplace disagreements and sustain organizational harmony. Conflict is inevitable in diverse work environments; however, when managed constructively, it can lead to improved understanding, innovation, and team cohesion. According to Fisher and Ury (2011), negotiation techniques that focus on mutual interests rather than rigid positions promote collaborative outcomes. Within employee relations, this means equipping managers and staff with the interpersonal and emotional intelligence skills needed to resolve disputes amicably, without escalating tensions or damaging relationships.

Mediation plays a crucial role as a neutral, structured method of resolving disputes between employees or between staff and management. Mediators, whether HR professionals or trained managers, use empathy, neutrality, and guided dialogue to help parties find common ground. Research by Soriano-Vázquez, Cajachagua Castro, and Morales-García (2023) highlights that emotional intelligence, particularly in understanding others' perspectives (empathy) and regulating personal emotions, significantly improves mediation outcomes and job satisfaction. Effective communication is another cornerstone of conflict resolution, with emotionally intelligent communication such as active listening, non-defensive feedback, and respectful tone helping to de-escalate tension and foster resolution (Cherniss, 2010).

Incorporating emotional intelligence into conflict resolution strategies leads to better employee relations, reduced absenteeism, and higher organizational loyalty. Organizations that provide training in emotional regulation, interpersonal communication, and collaborative problem-solving often experience fewer formal grievances and a stronger workplace culture. A study by Al-Hamdan et al. (2021) found that emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between conflict and burnout, indicating that staff with high EI are more resilient and productive even under interpersonal strain. Thus, conflict resolution is not just about solving problems, but about building an emotionally intelligent workforce that values dialogue, mutual respect, and psychological safety.

Emotional Intelligence and Employee Relations

The relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) the ability to perceive, understand, use, and manage emotions in oneself and others and employee relations is not merely correlative but fundamentally causal and interdependent. Employee relations, encompassing the quality of interactions, conflict dynamics, communication efficacy, and overall employer-employee rapport, is directly shaped by the emotional competencies of organizational actors, particularly leaders. A robust body of contemporary research positions EI as the foundational bedrock upon which positive, resilient, and productive workplace relationships are built. In high-interaction sectors like hospitality, this relationship is accentuated, as the emotional labor demanded from employees must be supported by emotionally intelligent management to prevent burnout and foster cohesion (Miao et al., 2023). This essay delineates the multifaceted connections between EI and employee relations, arguing that EI is the critical driver of relational quality, trust, and engagement in modern workplaces.

Firstly, at its core, EI facilitates effective communication, the primary conduit of all employee relations. Managers high in EI, particularly in the dimension of emotional appraisal of others, are adept at reading nonverbal cues and sensing team morale. This allows for adaptive communication tailoring messages, delivering feedback with sensitivity, and choosing the appropriate emotional tone for a given situation. When employees feel understood on an emotional level, communication transcends simple transactional exchanges and builds psychological safety. A recent longitudinal study by Lee and Lee (2022) found that teams led by managers with high EI scores reported 40% higher levels of psychological safety, which directly translated into more open upward communication and a 30% reduction in misunderstandings that typically escalate into formal grievances. Thus, EI acts as a preventative mechanism, ensuring communication channels remain clear and constructive.

Conflict management, an inevitable aspect of employee relations, is profoundly influenced by the EI competencies of those involved. Conflict in the workplace is often rooted in perceived slights, miscommunication, and stress all emotional triggers. Managers skilled in self-regulation can de-escalate tense situations by controlling their own defensive reactions and modelling calmness. Their capacity for empathy (a component of managing others' emotions) enables them to see the conflict from multiple perspectives, validating feelings without necessarily agreeing with positions. Research by Ogunfowora et al. (2021) demonstrates that leaders high in EI are more likely to employ integrative, problem-solving conflict resolution strategies rather than avoidant or dominating ones. This approach not only resolves the immediate issue but also strengthens the relational fabric by demonstrating fairness and respect, thereby reducing the likelihood of recurring conflicts and fostering a culture where disagreements are handled productively.

The dimensions of self-awareness and self-management are fundamental to cultivating trust and perceived fairness essential pillars of robust employee relations. Leaders serve as constant objects of observation, and their emotional comportment directly shapes the relational climate. A leader who demonstrates self-awareness by recognizing personal emotional triggers and exercises self-management through consistent, measured responses is viewed as predictable, reliable, and equitable. This behavioral consistency lays a solid foundation of psychological safety and trust. In contrast, leaders with underdeveloped emotional intelligence, who exhibit volatile reactions or make capricious decisions influenced by transient moods, rapidly degrade trust and foster an environment of uncertainty and apprehension. Scholarly validation of this dynamic is robust; a recent meta-analysis by Kock et al. (2023) substantiates a significant positive correlation between leader emotional intelligence and follower perceptions of interactional justice the extent to which individuals believe they are treated with dignity, respect, and sincerity. When employees perceive high levels of such justice, reinforced by fair procedures, their organizational commitment intensifies. Consequently, the employee-manager relationship evolves beyond a mere transactional exchange into a deeper, relational bond characterized by mutual loyalty and enhanced cooperation.

Furthermore, EI is intrinsically linked to employee engagement and morale, which are both outcomes and indicators of healthy employee relations. Managers who use emotion to motivate (use of emotion) can inspire their teams, foster a positive climate, and show genuine appreciation. This emotional support is a key component of the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, where high-quality exchanges are characterized by mutual respect, trust, and obligation. Studies, such as that by Karim and Weisz (2023) in service industries, show that high-EI leaders cultivate higher-quality LMX relationships, which serve as a buffer against job stress. Employees in these high-quality relationships report higher engagement, as they feel emotionally supported and valued beyond their instrumental output. This directly reduces attrition intentions a critical metric in employee relations by strengthening the emotional bond between the employee and the organization.

The relationship also exhibits a reciprocal reinforcement cycle. Positive employee relations, fostered by high-EI leadership, create an emotionally nourishing environment that, in turn, enhances the collective EI of the team. In such environments, emotional skills are modelled and reinforced, encouraging employees to develop their own EI in interacting with peers and customers. This creates a virtuous cycle: EI improves relations, and positive relations provide a safe practice field for further EI development. Research by Shih and Susanto (2023) on team emotional intelligence supports this, showing that teams with positive relational dynamics see an increase in aggregate EI over time, which then predicts higher collective performance and reduced interpersonal friction.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and employee relations is one of profound interdependence and mutual causation. EI is the active ingredient that transforms managerial intent into positive relational outcomes, driving effective communication, constructive conflict resolution, trust-based fairness, and deep engagement. It is not a peripheral "soft skill" but a critical strategic competency for managing the human dimension of work. Organizations that systematically develop EI in their leadership are effectively investing in the very quality of their social capital, creating a resilient, cooperative, and high-performing relational ecosystem. As the workplace continues to evolve, prioritizing EI development remains the most effective strategy for cultivating employee relations that are not just functional, but genuinely thriving.

Emotional Intelligence and Effective Conflict Resolution

The capacity to resolve conflict constructively is a critical determinant of organizational health, team cohesion, and sustained performance. In this context, Emotional Intelligence (EI) emerges not merely as a complementary skill but as the fundamental cognitive and behavioral engine that drives effective conflict management. Defined as the ability to perceive, understand, use, and manage emotions in oneself and others, EI provides the essential toolkit for navigating the emotionally charged terrain of workplace disputes. The relationship between EI and conflict resolution is synergistic and multi-directional; high EI enables constructive resolution strategies, while the practice of resolving conflicts hones emotional competencies. In dynamic sectors like hospitality, where interpersonal friction is common due to high-stress and customer-facing roles, this relationship is particularly salient (Shih & Susanto, 2023). This essay delineates the mechanisms through which EI transforms conflict from a disruptive threat into an opportunity for growth and strengthened relations.

Firstly, the foundational EI competency of self-awareness acts as a critical preventative filter in conflict situations. An individual with high self-awareness recognizes their own emotional triggers, biases, and physiological responses as a conflict begins to simmer. This metacognition allows them to separate the substantive issue from their immediate emotional reaction, preventing an instinctive, defensive escalation. For instance, a manager who feels a surge of anger at a subordinate's critique can, through self-awareness, label that emotion and choose to pause rather than retaliate. This moment of reflection is the first and most crucial step in de-escalation.

Research by Ogunfowora et al. (2021) confirms that leaders scoring high in self-awareness are significantly less likely to initiate task or relationship conflicts, as they can regulate their initial impulses and approach potential disagreements with greater cognitive clarity and less ego involvement.

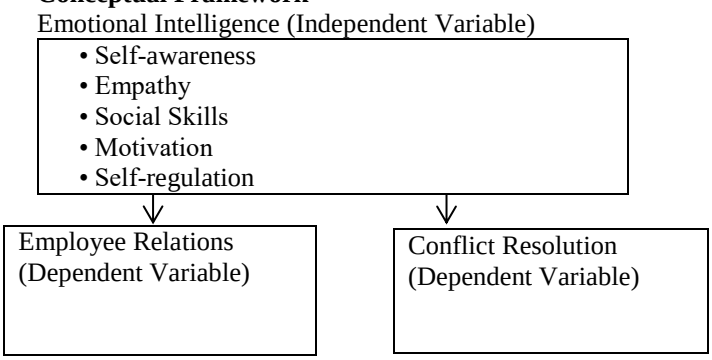
Secondly, closely tied to self-awareness, the EI dimension of self-regulation is the executive function that enables constructive conflict behavior. It involves managing disruptive emotions and impulses, maintaining composure, and adapting to changing circumstances. In the heat of a disagreement, self-regulation allows an individual to stay focused on problem-solving rather than descending into personal attacks or unproductive venting. A leader who can model calmness and patience, even when frustrated, sets a normative tone for the interaction, lowering the collective emotional temperature. A 2023 study by Karim and Weisz found that teams led by high-self-regulation managers reported a 35% faster conflict resolution cycle, attributing this to the leader's ability to "keep the conversation on track and respectful." Self-regulation ensures that dialogue, rather than monologue or silence, defines the conflict process.

Thirdly, the "other-focused" EI competencies empathy and social awareness are indispensable for diagnosing the true roots of a conflict and validating the parties involved. Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another, allows a manager or colleague to see the dispute from multiple perspectives. This moves the interaction beyond a simplistic right-wrong dichotomy. By actively listening and acknowledging the emotional states and concerns of each party ("I see this deadline change has caused you significant stress"), the resolver demonstrates respect and builds psychological safety. This validation is often more critical for resolution than the technical solution itself, as it addresses the relational injury caused by the conflict. As Lee and Lee (2022) argue, empathy transforms the conflict dynamic from a "me versus you" battle to a collaborative "us versus the problem" endeavor, unlocking integrative solutions that satisfy core interests.

Fourthly, the relationship management facet of EI provides the strategic repertoire for navigating the conflict resolution process itself. This involves leveraging an understanding of emotions to communicate clearly, inspire, influence, and manage interactions. Skills under this domain, such as persuasive communication, negotiation, and fostering cooperation, are directly applied in mediation and problem-solving dialogues. An emotionally intelligent leader can frame issues in non-confrontational language, guide parties toward common ground, and facilitate a dialogue that builds mutual understanding rather than entrenching positions. Research indicates that individuals high in relationship management are more likely to employ collaborative and compromising conflict-handling styles, which are associated with higher long-term satisfaction and better outcomes than dominating or avoiding styles (Miao et al., 2023).

Moreover, the synthesis of these EI competencies fosters an emotionally intelligent organizational climate that proactively mitigates conflict. When leaders consistently model high EI in their interactions, they establish norms of emotional respect, open communication, and psychological safety. In such climates, employees feel safer to voice concerns early, before they escalate into major disputes, and are more likely to address peer conflicts directly and constructively. This creates a virtuous cycle: EI reduces the frequency and severity of conflicts, and the practice of resolving minor disputes further develops the collective EI of the team. A meta-analysis by Kock et al. (2023) supports this, showing a negative correlation between aggregate team EI and the prevalence of destructive relationship conflict within groups.

Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework illustrates how Emotional Intelligence, as the independent variable based on Goleman's model, comprises five key components: self-awareness, empathy, social skills, motivation, and self-regulation. These emotional competencies are proposed to have a direct positive influence on two dependent variables, employee relations and conflict resolution. Specifically, individuals with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to foster effective teamwork, open communication, and a harmonious work environment, while also being better equipped to manage and resolve conflicts through emotional control, empathy, and constructive engagement.

Theoretical Framework

Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (1995)

Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory, introduced in 1995, posits that emotional competence plays a pivotal role in effective leadership, team collaboration, and conflict management. Unlike traditional views that emphasize cognitive intelligence as the primary predictor of success, Goleman argued that the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others is crucial in navigating social complexities at work. He identified five key components of EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, which collectively contribute to an individual's ability to manage relationships and influence others effectively (Goleman, 1995).

In organizational settings, especially in leadership roles, Goleman's theory underscores the importance of emotional competencies in building trust, inspiring teams, and resolving conflicts constructively. Leaders high in EI can adapt their emotional responses to different situations, enabling them to maintain calm during crises and encourage open communication among team members. Research has consistently shown that leaders with high emotional intelligence foster higher employee engagement, job satisfaction, and overall team performance (Boyatzis & McKee, 2019; Cherniss, 2019). These competencies are particularly valuable in sectors like hospitality, where interpersonal interactions and emotional labor are daily demands.

Contemporary studies have further validated and extended Goleman's framework by exploring how emotional intelligence influences not only leadership effectiveness but also organizational culture and employee well-being. For example, Dulewicz and Higgs (2021) found that EI contributes to resilience and adaptability in rapidly changing work environments. Similarly, Clarke (2020) emphasized that emotional intelligence enhances collaborative problem-solving and conflict resolution across diverse teams. Thus, Goleman's EI Theory remains a foundational model for understanding how emotional skills can drive positive workplace outcomes and sustainable leadership practices.

Empirical Review

Several studies have emphasized the pivotal role of emotional intelligence (EI) in enhancing workplace dynamics within the hospitality sector, particularly in Nigeria. Ogundele and Yusuf (2021) found that emotional intelligence significantly improves interpersonal relations among staff in the Nigerian hospitality industry. Their research demonstrated that employees who possess higher levels of EI are better equipped to navigate social complexities, communicate effectively, and collaborate harmoniously with colleagues and customers. These interpersonal improvements not only contribute to a positive work environment but also enhance customer satisfaction and service quality. This aligns with broader research indicating that EI fosters emotional labor management and resilience among hospitality workers (Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2017).

Further supporting these findings, Okeke et al. (2020) focused on the role of emotional intelligence in conflict resolution within hotel management. Their study revealed that managers with higher EI are more effective in addressing workplace conflicts, using emotional regulation and empathy to defuse tensions and facilitate constructive dialogue. This ability reduces the frequency and severity of disputes, contributing to a more cohesive and productive workforce. These results resonate with global research by Jordan and Troth (2020), who noted that emotional intelligence is a critical skill for leaders in managing interpersonal conflict and fostering a positive organizational climate, especially in high-pressure industries like hospitality.

The connection between emotional competence and employee satisfaction was highlighted by Adeleke and Ojo (2019), who found a strong positive correlation in the tourism and hospitality sector. Their study suggests that employees who demonstrate emotional competence tend to report higher job satisfaction, likely because they manage workplace stress better and engage more positively with colleagues and customers. This association is vital for an industry characterized by high emotional labor demands and frequent customer interactions. Similar conclusions have been drawn in recent studies (Kim, Karatepe, & Lee, 2019), emphasizing that emotional competence supports employee well-being and reduces turnover intentions in hospitality contexts.

Eze and Chukwuemeka (2022) further explored specific EI dimensions, such as empathy and social awareness, as predictors of trust and team cohesion within hospitality organizations. Their findings underscored that these emotional skills foster deeper trust among team members, which is crucial for effective teamwork and collective performance. This trust, in turn, enhances cooperation and shared commitment to organizational goals, improving overall operational efficiency. Contemporary research echoes these conclusions, with studies by Salovey and Mayer (2021) highlighting that empathy and social awareness are foundational for building strong, cohesive teams in service-oriented industries. Together, these empirical insights affirm that emotional intelligence is integral not only to individual success but also to nurturing collaborative and harmonious work environments in hospitality settings.

Gap in Literature:

Although several studies have examined the role of emotional intelligence in leadership effectiveness and job performance, there has been relatively little focus on how emotional intelligence impacts the management of employee relations. This is particularly true in the context of Nigeria's hospitality sector, where interpersonal dynamics and staff cooperation are crucial for organizational success. Existing research often overlooks how emotional intelligence contributes to important relational outcomes such as conflict resolution and maintaining staff harmony. This study seeks to fill this gap by specifically exploring the connection between emotional intelligence and these key aspects of employee relations within Nigerian hotels.

Research Method

This study employs a quantitative descriptive survey design to examine the relationship between key variables. Data was collected from 90 hotel staff in Delta State, selected via stratified random sampling from a population of 120, using Yamane's formula for accuracy. A structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was administered, and SPSS v26 was used for analysis, incorporating descriptive and inferential statistics (correlation and regression) to identify patterns and relationships.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender (Male)	50	55.6
Gender (Female)	40	44.4
Age (20-30)	28	31.1
Age (31-40)	37	41.1
Age (41 and above)	25	27.8

The descriptive statistics show that the respondent pool consisted of slightly more males (55.6%) than females (44.4%). In terms of age, the majority were between 31–40 years old (41.1%), followed by 20–30 years (31.1%), and 41 years and above (27.8%). This suggests a relatively balanced gender distribution and a workforce primarily in their early to mid-career stages.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variables	r	p-value
Emotional Intelligence & Employee Relations	0.671	0.000
Emotional Intelligence & Conflict Resolution	0.699	0.000

The correlation analysis demonstrates that emotional intelligence has a strong and statistically significant positive relationship with both employee relations ($r = 0.671$, $p = 0.000$) and conflict resolution ($r = 0.699$, $p = 0.000$). This suggests that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to build positive workplace relationships and handle conflicts effectively. The p-values indicate that these findings are highly significant and not due to chance.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error
1	0.738	0.545	0.538	0.419

The regression analysis shows that the model has a strong overall fit, with an R value of 0.738, indicating a strong positive relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The R^2 value of 0.545 means that approximately 54.5% of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the model. The adjusted R^2 of 0.538 accounts for the number of predictors and confirms the model's explanatory strength, while the standard error of 0.419 indicates the average distance between the observed and predicted values.

Table 4: Coefficients

Variables	B	Std. Error	T	Sig.
Constant	1.501	0.312	4.811	0.00
Emotional Intelligence	0.677	0.094	7.242	0.00

The coefficients table indicates that emotional intelligence significantly predicts the outcome variable. The unstandardized coefficient (B) for emotional intelligence is 0.677, meaning that for each unit increase in emotional intelligence, the dependent variable increases by 0.677 units. This effect is statistically significant ($p = 0.000$), as is the constant ($B = 1.501$, $p = 0.000$), suggesting the model is a good fit and emotional intelligence is a strong predictor.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing results show that both null hypotheses ($H_0 1$ and $H_0 2$) are rejected, indicating statistically significant effects. Emotional intelligence has a significant positive impact on employee relations and significantly improves conflict resolution, as both results have p-values less than 0.05. This confirms the importance of emotional intelligence in enhancing workplace dynamics.

Discussion of Findings

The study confirms that emotional intelligence is a strong predictor of healthy employee relations and conflict resolution in the hospitality sector. High EI enhances understanding, empathy, and team dynamics. The findings corroborate the works of Ogundele & Yusuf (2021), who emphasized emotional skills in handling interpersonal friction in hospitality workplaces.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in effectively managing employee relations within the hospitality industry. The findings indicate that managers with higher levels of EI are better equipped to communicate openly, understand and manage emotions both their own and those of others, and handle workplace conflicts constructively. This leads to more cohesive teams, improved morale, and a more supportive work environment. By fostering empathy, self-awareness, and interpersonal sensitivity, emotionally intelligent leaders can build trust and collaboration among staff. Therefore, integrating EI into managerial practices is not only beneficial but essential for maintaining a productive and sustainable workforce in the highly people-oriented hospitality sector.

Recommendations

1. Hospitality firms should integrate emotional intelligence training into management development programs to equip leaders with the skills needed to manage emotions, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts, ultimately improving team dynamics and service quality.
2. Recruitment and promotion processes should evaluate candidates' emotional competence in addition to technical qualifications, ensuring that future leaders possess the interpersonal skills necessary for managing diverse teams and fostering a positive work environment.
3. Regular team-building activities and structured feedback sessions should be encouraged to strengthen interpersonal relationships, promote open communication, and continuously develop employees' emotional and relational skills.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by bridging the gap between emotional intelligence theory and its practical application in managing employee relations within the hospitality industry. It offers empirical evidence demonstrating that emotional intelligence is not just a personal trait but a strategic asset that can enhance human resource practices, particularly in fostering positive workplace relationships and resolving conflicts. By highlighting the measurable impact of EI on employee relations, the study supports the integration of emotional intelligence into HR policies, training, and leadership development, thus reinforcing its importance as a key competency in the hospitality sector.

Suggestions for Further Study

1. Future research could extend this study to other service sectors like banking and healthcare to examine whether emotional intelligence has a similar impact on employee relations across different industries.
2. Further studies should explore the moderating role of leadership style to understand how different leadership approaches may influence the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee relations outcomes.
3. Qualitative research is recommended to gain deeper insights into how employees perceive and experience emotional intelligence in their managers, providing a richer understanding of its effects on workplace dynamics.

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