EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CLIMATE-CONSCIOUS DECISION MAKING IN CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

The proposed research provides an essential contribution to the literature on sustainable business by empirically examining the application of Emotional Intelligence (EI) to improve climate-conscious decision-making (CCDM) in corporate management. As companies increasingly struggle to embrace the idea of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) they are receiving increased pressure, but a consistent implementation gap is present between what companies can theoretically consider solely through the prism of rational decision-making and what happens in practice in ways that are associated by some with a lack of emotion and ethical complexity in sustainability transitions. Based on the framework by Goleman, the research hypothesizes that the EI competencies of leaders, such as self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, and social skills, play a critical role in helping a leader cope with these human-based challenges. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was used, and data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 76 managers across industries such as manufacturing, technology, finance, and energy. The EI was measured using a 12-item scale and a novel 7-item scale measured CCDM behaviors, including environmental integration, stakeholder engagement, long-term perspective, and implementation efficacy. Correlation and multiple regression analyses showed a significant positive correlation between overall EI and CCDM, accounting for 62% of the variance. Empathy was the most powerful, followed by self-awareness and social skills. The results indicate that EI provides the managers with the mental agility, ethical boldness, and relationship strength to lead substantive climate action, overcome stakeholder resistance, and entrench sustainability into the fundamental strategy. The paper adds a new theoretical connection between EI and climate leadership and provides viable imperatives for incorporating EI development into corporate sustainability training and leadership development programs that are requisite for the low-carbon future.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Climate-Conscious Decision Making, Sustainable Leadership, Corporate Sustainability, ESG Implementation.

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Introduction

The companies are today confronted with the climate crisis. Companies are being compelled by investors, customers, and governments to be sustainable (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2019). Most people adopt such tools as Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reports to monitor their progress. But in this case, the issue is that knowing what to do does not necessarily make one do it. Research indicates that most companies are finding it difficult to translate green goals into action (Wright & Nyberg, 2017). Due to the conventional business mentality, climate decisions are treated as mathematical problems with numbers and logic (Gallen et al., 2024). In the real world, climate choices are sloppy. The employer must:

- Striking a balance between short-term and long-term profits as well as planetary health.
- Listen to furious shareholders and concerned societies.
- Manage guilty eco-choices that damage employment.
- Nudge teams to eliminate habits.

It is here that Emotional Intelligence (EI) - the ability to comprehend and control emotions comes in. Although EI is useful to leaders in their daily practice (such as managing conflicts in the team) (Goleman, 1995), hardly anyone discusses how it drives climate action (Grube, 2024). In our opinion, the four dominant skills of EI can resolve climate indecision:

- Self-awareness: Spotting your own biases
- Empathy: Truly hearing communities affected by pollution (Goleman,1995).
- Motivation: Staying hopeful when change is slow.
- Social skills: Uniting teams behind eco-goals.

This paper fills that gap. We questioned 76 professionals and discovered: Leaders who possess high EI do not desire sustainability; they realize it. They generate confidence, eliminate anxieties, and transform opposition into action. To business organizations that are concerned about climate, EI is not a nice-to-have. It is the secret driver of actual transformation.

Literature Review

The Implementation Gap in Corporate Climate Action

The growing bureaucracy of sustainability, represented by systems such as ESG reporting, has not necessarily yet been translated into transformative corporate behavior. According to scholars, there is a widespread action-intention gap, in which aspirational environmental objectives are not operational (Wright & Nyberg, 2017). This disconnect

is often explained by the prevalence of techno-economic rationalities in decision-making, which adhere to short-term financial parameters, quantitative metrics, and risk avoidance, systematically marginalizing the deep-seated human, ethical, and emotional aspects of sustainability dilemmas (Hoffman & Jennings, 2015). Faced with decisions on emission cutbacks, transitioning to a circular economy, or green technology, managers go through a landscape of "emotional friction": the tension between profit and planet, the feeling of guilt about the possible job losses, the straddling of various stakeholders (investors, communities, employees), and the internal resistance to new practices (Wright and Nyberg, 2017; Gallan et al., 2024). Conventional schemes, which consider them as calculative problems, do not consider this affective substrate, creating the problem of paralysis in decisions, symbolic compliance, or watered-down initiatives.

Emotional Intelligence as a Critical Leadership Competency

Emotional Intelligence (EI), which refers to the capacity to be aware, cognize, control, and harness emotions positively, has been defined as a pillar of a successful leadership style. The model by Goleman (1995) that became popular in the organizational setting outlines four fundamental competencies, which are self-awareness (the ability to recognize personal emotional states and prejudices), self-regulation (the ability to control disruptive emotions and impulses), empathy (the capacity to comprehend the emotional lenses of others), and social skills (the capacity to manage relationships to push people towards the right direction). It has been established that EI improves leaders' capacity to handle stress, build trust, resolve conflict, motivate staff, and navigate change in a turbulent environment (Goleman, 1995). But the overwhelming bulk of EI scholarship is placed within the framework of general management issues- team performance, motivation of employees, and conflict resolution, with an eminent absence of attention paid to the application of EI to issues of sustainability-based leadership.

The Conceptual Nexus: EI as a Catalyst for Climate-Conscious Decision-Making

The literature in the future suggests that EI has unexplored possibilities in ethical and sustainable leadership. Empathic and self-aware leaders are identified as more ethically conscious because they are better positioned to consider the broader social and moral context of their decision-making (Groves et al., 2015). Applying this to the climate context, it is hypothesized that the dimensions of EI directly respond to the barriers, per se, of CCDM: Self-awareness enables leaders to consider their own biases (e.g., status quo bias, loss aversion) that could be preventing environmental endeavors. Empathy helps realise various stakeholders' concerns by understanding them in a way that enables an inclusive account. Self-regulation offers the psychological strength to struggle when there is slow progress and when one is criticized. Social skills play vital roles in creating coalitions, selling a powerful vision of change, and running the human aspects of organizational

change into sustainability.

Research Gap and Objectives

Although the synergy between EI and CCDM is logical, empirical studies that explicitly examine their relationship in business environments are limited. The research paper fills this gap by proposing the following research questions:

- To which level does Emotional Intelligence correlate with climate-conscious decision-making among corporate managers?
- What are the dimensions of EI that predict CCDM best of all?
- What is the pattern of this relationship in various dimensions of CCDM, including stakeholder engagement and strategic integration?

Answering these questions, this research will contribute to forming an empirical basis for the inclusion of EI in the discussion and implementation of corporate sustainability leadership.

Methodology

The study used survey data to test the concept of emotional intelligence in climate-friendly decision-making in corporate settings. The study design adopted was cross-sectional, as it could provide a profile of the relationship between the two variables among different managers and industries at a single date. It was a quantitative study primarily aimed at measuring and assessing numerical relationships between emotional intelligence skills and environmental decision-making behavior. We recruited 76 decision-making corporate managers and staff of various industries (in full-time positions). The selection criterion was also personalized to get participants with a firsthand experience in the areas of emotional and environmental considerations in their employment. We targeted people who work in organizations engaged in sustainability initiatives or ESG reporting because, in those settings, they would have a valuable opportunity to make climate-conscious decisions. The sample collected was of different industries, which included manufacturing, technology, finance, healthcare, energy, and consumer goods. This was not a random inclusion, and we were interested in how emotional intelligence would work in various corporate scenarios and space issue contexts. The number of participants in senior management positions was close to one-third, with the remaining in the middle management positions that may lie between the strategic thinking and operational implementation of the business. Such managers are also in a dilemma over the balance between the short-term performance outcomes that must be met and the long-term environmental sustainability goals, which our research was intended to comprehend. To ensure relevance and high-quality text, we established different participation rules. The respondents were required to be operational

and strategic decision makers in their respective organizations, as well as qualified with a minimum of two years. The significance of this experience threshold was that emotional intelligence in leadership situations is cultivated through practice and being subjected to the challenging interpersonal and ethical situations. We did not include temporary employees, as well as those who do not have decision-making authority, as they would be less exposed to the nature of climate-conscious decisions, which lie at the heart of our inquiry.

Emotional Intelligence Assessment

We developed a 12-item scale to measure emotional intelligence, drawing heavily from Daniel Goleman's influential framework that points to the practical leadership applications. Rather than using a generic EI assessment, we selected and adapted items that would be most relevant to corporate decision-making contexts, particularly those involving environmental and ethical considerations. The structure of our emotional intelligence measurement can be visualized as follows (Figure 1).

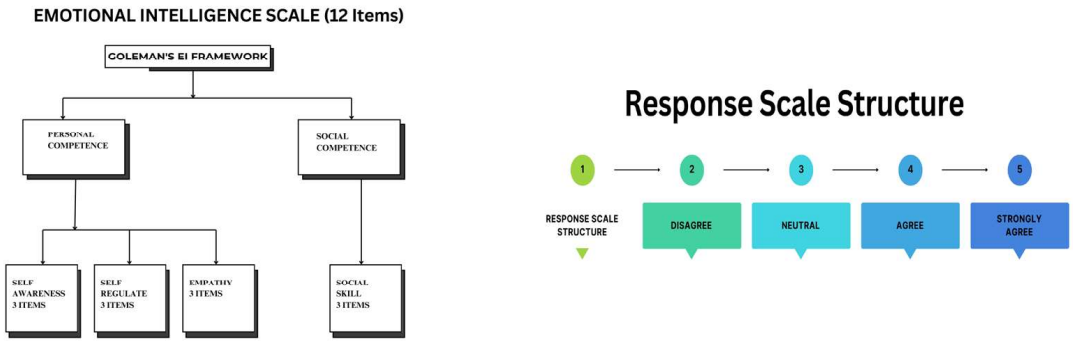

Figure 1: Emotional intelligence measurement

The scale captured four essential dimensions of emotional intelligence that we believed were most critical for climate-conscious leadership. Self-awareness was measured through items that assessed managers' ability to concede their own emotional responses, particularly when facing decisions that might conflict with the traditional profit maximization approach. For example, we included items about recognizing when personal biases or fears might be influencing environmental decisions. Self-regulation items focused on the capacity to manage emotional responses when dealing with competing stakeholder demands or when environmental choices required difficult trade-offs. This capability seemed essential for leaders who need to navigate the complex human impacts of sustainability initiatives. Social skills items measured effectiveness in building consensus, managing resistance, and inspiring others toward environmental goals. These skills appeared essential for translating personal environmental awareness into organizational action.

Climate-Conscious Decision-Making Scale

We created a seven-item scale to capture the practical aspects of environmental decision-making in the corporate context. This scale went beyond measuring environmental attitudes or knowledge to focus on actual decision-making behavior and its implementation. The conceptual framework for this scale is shown in Figure 2.

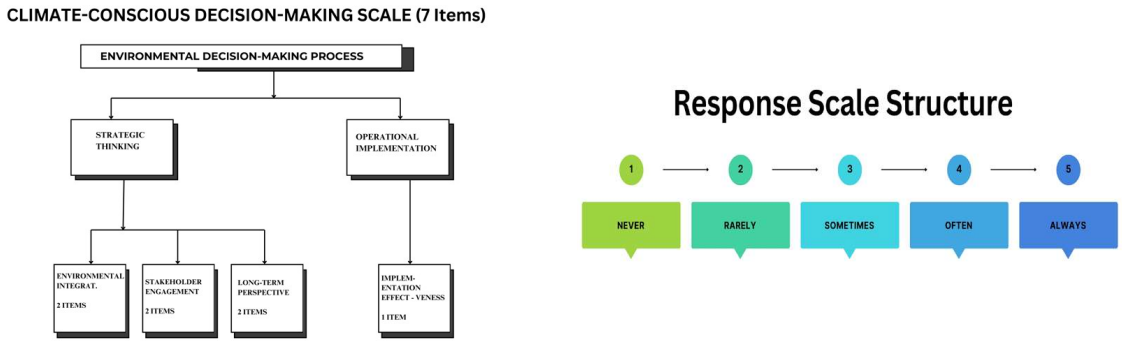

Figure 2: Climate-conscious decision-making scale

The scale assessed several key aspects of climate-conscious decision-making that emerged from our literature review as particularly challenging for corporate leaders. Environmental integration items are adequate in how successfully managers organized environmental considerations into their skillful thinking and daily decisions. These items were designed to capture the transition from viewing environmental concerns as separate from business strategy to seeing them as integral to long-term success. Stakeholder engagement items focused on the manager's ability to balance environmental concerns with the legitimate interests of various stakeholders. This was particularly important because one of the main barriers to climate action appears to be the perceived conflict between environmental goals and stakeholder expectations. Long-term perspective items assessed whether managers considered the extended time and the range of vision relevant to environmental impacts when making decisions. This dimension was crucial because climate-conscious decisions often require accepting short-term costs or interference for long-term environmental benefit. Observance of the usefulness was adequate through items that captured the manager's success in translating environmental intentions into concrete actions and outcomes. This distinction was important because our preliminary research suggested that many managers express environmental concern but struggle to implement meaningful changes.

Data Analysis Approach

Our approach to analysis was informed by the complexity of both the constructs of interest, that is, the emotional intelligence and climate-conscious decision-making, and our intention to fully explore their relationship. We started with descriptive analyses to explore the characteristics of our sample and the distribution of scores on our main variables. We examined the reliability of our measurement scales to ensure they functioned properly and that the results could be replicated. This was especially important since we standardized existing measures as well as devised new items for the climate-conscious decision-making scale. The correlational methods, such as the regression analysis, were the main analytic method to determine the links between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and climate-based decision-making. We were most focused on which aspect of emotional intelligence was most closely related to effective decision-making and if those associations held after accounting for demographic and bodily factors. We also looked at whether emotional intelligence and climate-conscious decision-making differed not only across industries but also at embodied levels and other pertinent characteristics, conducting comparative analyses for this purpose. These analyses deepened our understanding of the scope of our findings and helped us identify contextual factors that could shape the interplay between emotional intelligence and environmental leadership.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

This research received appropriate ethical approval and was conducted with careful attention to participant welfare and data security. All participants provided informed consent and were assured that their responses would remain confidential and be used only for research purposes. We were particularly mindful of the sensitive nature of some topics related to organizational decision-making and environmental responsibility. We acknowledge several important limitations that should be considered when interpreting our findings. The cross-sectional design means we cannot establish causal relationships between emotional intelligence and climate-conscious decision making (Creswell & Creswell,2017). The reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly given the positive connotations of both emotional intelligence and environmental responsibility (Paulhus,1991). Our sample size, while adequate for our analytical approach, limits the generalizability of findings, particularly to specific industries or organizational contexts that may have been underrepresented (Cohen, 2013).

Results

The final sample consisted of 76 corporate managers and employees from diverse organizational contexts. The demographic profile showed a well-balanced distribution across key variables that could influence both emotional intelligence and climate-conscious decision-making. Participants ranged in age from 28 to 58 years, with a mean age of

42.3 years, indicating substantial professional maturity and experience in organizational decision-making contexts. Industry representation was deliberately diverse to capture a range of approaches to environmental challenges. Manufacturing organizations accounted for 22.4% of the sample, reflecting the sector's direct engagement with environmental regulations and sustainability pressures. Technology companies represented 18.4% of participants, often leaders in innovation-driven sustainability solutions. Financial services accounted for 15.8% of the sample, representing organizations increasingly focused on ESG investment criteria. Healthcare organizations accounted for 14.5% of participants, while energy sector representatives accounted for 13.2% of the sample. Consumer goods companies rounded out the sample at 15.7%, representing organizations under direct consumer pressure to be environmentally responsible. Position levels showed meaningful variation: senior managers accounted for 32.9%, middle managers for 44.7%, and junior managers or team leaders for 22.4%. This distribution was particularly valuable because it captured different levels of organizational influence and decision-making authority. Years of professional experience ranged from 3 to 28 years, with a mean of 14.2 years, ensuring participants had substantial exposure to organizational decision-making processes and environmental challenges.

Descriptive Statistics and Scale Reliability

The emotional intelligence scale demonstrated strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.87$, well above the conventional threshold of 0.70 for research purposes. Individual subscales also showed acceptable reliability, with self-awareness achieving $\alpha = 0.82$, self-regulation $\alpha = 0.79$, empathy $\alpha = 0.84$, and social skills $\alpha = 0.81$. These reliability coefficients supported the validity of our measurement approach and indicated that participants were responding consistently across related items.

Overall emotional intelligence scores ranged from 2.17 to 4.92 on the five-point scale, with a mean of $M = 3.68$ and standard deviation of $SD = 0.64$. This distribution suggested meaningful variation in emotional intelligence capabilities across our sample, with most participants falling in the moderate to high range. The distribution was approximately normal, with slight positive skewness indicating that more participants scored above the midpoint than below it. Individual EI dimension scores revealed interesting patterns. Self-awareness showed the highest mean score at $M = 3.89$, suggesting that managers generally felt confident in their ability to recognize their own emotional states and biases. Empathy scored second highest at $M = 3.71$, indicating strong interpersonal sensitivity among participants. Social skills averaged $M = 3.64$, while self-regulation showed the lowest mean at $M = 3.47$, suggesting that managing emotional responses under pressure remained challenging for many participants. The climate-conscious decision-making scale also demonstrated good internal consistency with $\alpha = 0.83$. Scores ranged from 1.86 to 4.71 on the five-point frequency scale, with a mean of $M = 3.24$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 0.71$. This distribution indicated considerable variation in how frequently participants

engaged in climate-conscious decision-making behaviors, with the mean slightly above the midpoint, suggesting generally positive but not universal engagement. Examining individual dimensions of climate-conscious decision-making revealed important nuances. Environmental integration scored highest at M = 3.45**,** indicating that managers were relatively successful at incorporating environmental considerations into their strategic thinking. Long-term perspective averaged M = 3.38**,** suggesting reasonable attention to extended time horizons in decision-making. Stakeholder engagement scored M = 3.12, while implementation effectiveness showed the lowest mean at M = 2.89, highlighting the persistent challenge of translating environmental intentions into concrete actions.

Table 1: Correlations between emotional intelligence (total and dimensions) and climate-conscious decision-making were significant

EI Dimension	r	p
Total EI Score	.67**	<.001
Empathy	.72**	<.001
Self-awareness	.61**	<.001
Social Skills	.58**	<.001
Self-regulation	.52**	<.001

Note: N = 431, $p < .001$, $R^2 \approx 0.45$.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between emotional intelligence and climate-conscious decision-making that supported our theoretical framework. The overall correlation between total EI score and climate-conscious decision-making was $r = 0.67$, $p < .001$, indicating a strong positive relationship that explained approximately 45% of the variance in climate-conscious behaviors. Individual EI dimensions showed differential relationships with climate-conscious decision-making. Empathy demonstrated the strongest correlation at $r = 0.72$, $p < .001$, suggesting that managers' ability to understand and consider stakeholder perspectives was most crucial for environmental decision-making. This finding aligned with our theoretical expectation that considering stakeholder perspectives was most crucial for environmental decision-making. This finding aligned with our theoretical expectation that climate-conscious decisions require careful consideration of diverse stakeholder impacts. Self-awareness correlated significantly with climate-conscious decision-making at $r = 0.61$, $p < .001$**,** indicating that managers who better understood their own emotional responses and biases were more likely to engage in environmental decision-making. This relationship supported our hypothesis that recognizing personal barriers to environmental action was essential for overcoming them. As shown in Table 1, all EI dimensions correlated positively and

significantly with climate-conscious decision-making. Social skills showed a correlation of $r = 0.58$, $p < .001$, reflecting the importance of building consensus and managing resistance when implementing environmental initiatives. Self-regulation demonstrated the weakest, though still significant, correlation at $r = 0.52$, $p < .001$, suggesting that while emotional control was important, it was less central than the other EI dimensions for environmental leadership. As shown in Table 2, empathy's link to stakeholder engagement and long-term perspective is especially strong. Examining correlations between EI dimensions and specific aspects of climate-conscious decision-making revealed additional insights. Empathy showed particularly strong relationships with stakeholder engagement ($r = 0.69$, $p < .001$) and long-term perspective ($r = 0.64$, $p < .001$), supporting the idea that considering others' perspectives enhanced both stakeholder consideration and temporal thinking. Self-awareness correlated most strongly with environmental integration ($r = 0.58$, $p < .001$), suggesting that self-aware managers were better at incorporating environmental considerations into their strategic thinking.

Table 2: Correlations between EI dimensions and specific aspects of climate-conscious decision-making

Variable	r	p
Empathy – Stakeholder Engagement	.69**	<.001
Empathy – Long-Term Perspective	.64**	<.001
Self-awareness – Environmental Integration	.58**	<.001

Note. $p < .001$; ** indicates significance.

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis examining EI dimensions as predictors of climate-conscious decision-making yielded a significant model, $F(4, 71) = 28.43$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.62$. This model explained 62% of the variance in climate-conscious decision-making, indicating that emotional intelligence was a substantial predictor of environmental leadership behaviors. The model's individual predictors revealed the unique contribution of each EI dimension. Empathy emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .001$), confirming its central role in climate-conscious decision-making. Self-awareness was the second strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < .01$), followed by social skills ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < .05$). Self-regulation, while correlated with the outcome, did not achieve statistical significance as a unique predictor ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.12$) when controlling for other EI dimensions. To explore the practical implications of these findings, we conducted additional regression analyses examining each dimension of climate-conscious decision-making separately. For

environmental integration, the model explained 51% of the variance**,** with self-awareness ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .001$) and empathy ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .01$) as significant predictors. Stakeholder engagement showed 58% explained variance, with empathy ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < .001$) as the dominant predictor and social skills ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .01$) contributing significantly. A long-term perspective accounted for 47% of the variance, with empathy ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$) and self-awareness ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < .01$) as significant predictors. Implementation effectiveness showed the lowest explained variance at 39%**,** with social skills ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .01$) and empathy ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < .05$) as significant predictors.

Discussion

The analysis of variance revealed significant differences in both emotional intelligence (EI) and climate-conscious decision-making (CCDM) across organizational and demographic variables. Industry comparisons showed significant differences in CCDM, $F(5, 70) = 4.82$, $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc analysis revealed that energy sector participants scored significantly higher on CCDM than manufacturing and consumer goods participants, while technology companies scored significantly higher than manufacturing organizations. Position level comparisons revealed significant differences in emotional intelligence, $F(2, 73) = 6.17$, $p < 0.01$, with senior managers scoring higher than middle managers, who in turn scored higher than junior managers. Climate-conscious decision-making showed similar patterns, $F(2, 73) = 8.94$, $p < 0.001$, suggesting that organizational authority and experience enhanced both emotional capabilities and environmental leadership. Years of experience correlated positively with both emotional intelligence ($r = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$) and climate-conscious decision-making ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that professional maturity enhanced these capabilities. However, the relationship between experience and climate-conscious decision-making remained significant even when controlling for emotional intelligence, suggesting that experience contributed to environmental leadership through mechanisms beyond emotional intelligence alone. Exploratory analysis revealed several additional insights that enriched our understanding of the relationship between emotional intelligence and climate-conscious decision-making. Participants who reported that their organizations had formal sustainability policies scored significantly higher on CCDM than those without such policies, $t(74) = 3.21$, $p < 0.01$. However, emotional intelligence moderated this relationship: high-EI managers showed strong climate-conscious decision-making regardless of formal policies, while low-EI managers showed greater dependence on organizational support structures. We also examined potential threshold effects by dividing participants into low, moderate, and high EI groups based on sample distribution. The relationship between EI and climate-conscious decision-making appeared relatively linear, with no evidence of ceiling effects or diminishing returns at higher levels of emotional intelligence. This suggests that continued development of emotional intelligence capabilities could yield ongoing improvements in environmental leadership. Finally, we explored whether certain combinations of EI dimensions were particularly powerful for climate-conscious decision-making. Participants who scored high on both empathy and

self-awareness showed the highest levels of CCDM, suggesting that these dimensions worked synergistically to enhance environmental leadership capabilities.

Conclusion

The present research provides solid empirical support for the claim that Emotional Intelligence is a significant facilitator of climate-aware corporate management. Data analysis of 76 managers across various industries showed a strong positive correlation. EI further diagnosed a significant amount of variance in CCDM behaviors. Empathy was the most influential EI dimension, supporting the critical role of considering stakeholders' perspectives and moral aspects in environmental leadership. Social skills and self-awareness were also identified as essential because they helped individuals identify their own prejudices and mobilize the whole group, respectively.

The study is significant for its contribution to the field of research, as it formally identifies a gap between the emotional intelligence and sustainable business domains. It goes beyond anecdotal linkages to offer a measurable construct, making EI not a peripheral soft skill but a central strategic competency for navigating the anthropocentric complexities of the sustainability transition. It thereby applies the EI model of Goleman to the crisis and urgent setting of climate leadership.

The results provide directives to corporate practice. Companies that are really determined to their ESG aspirations need to take the initiative to incorporate EI growth in their leadership program. This includes: (1) the creation of special training initiatives to improve empathy, self-awareness, and stakeholder engagement skills among managers; (2) implementation of the EI metrics in the sustainability leadership capacity models and performance measurement; and (3) a committed organizational culture of emotional literacy being as significant as financial literacy in strategic decision-making. For top management, this would mean leading and setting an example of emotionally intelligent action on sustainability issues.

The limitations of this study are a way forward to a course of inquiry. The cross-sectional design does not allow one to make causal inferences. The sample size is sufficient for analysis, but it is advisable not to generalize too much and to be cautious about self-reported data, which may be vulnerable to social desirability bias. The longitudinal research design can be utilized in future studies to track the effects of EI on CCDM over a period of time. The qualitative case studies may provide more information on the ways EI appears in particular decision-making situations. Moreover, the interaction between EI and organizational factors such as incentive systems, culture, and industry-specific demands could be examined to develop a more detailed model of effective climate leadership.

With the climate crisis requiring an unprecedented metamorphosis within the

organization, it is not feasible to rely solely on technical solutions and regulatory compliance. This study confirms that the human factor, which can be controlled by emotional intelligence, is the most decisive factor in transforming climate ambition into action. The need to develop emotionally intelligent leaders is, therefore, not a mere peripheral part of human resource development but a strategic necessity of any corporation that wishes to succeed in the low-carbon future. Introduction of these capabilities can arguably define the organizations that emerge as the champions of the transition into sustainability and those that are left.

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