

Harnessing emotional intelligence for resilient leadership in human resources staff: A case of one state university in Masvingo Province

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Abstract

The study explores the role of emotional intelligence in fostering resilience among employees in the human resources department. The purpose of the study was to understand how emotional intelligence contributed to human resources manager's resilience in the human resources department especially during turbulent times. A case study research design was employed. The study was guided by an interpretivist philosophy. The study used a qualitative study on ten (10) members of staff at different managerial level in the human resources department who were purposively sampled. The study was based on the following objectives:-to examine how emotional intelligence contributes to resilience in leadership within human resources (HR) department in a university set up.; to identify challenges faced by human resources (HR) leadership in applying emotional intelligence in their day to day practices and to recommend strategies for enhancing emotional intelligence to foster resilient and effective human resources (HR) leadership in the university context. The study was guided by emotional intelligence theory. The study established that human resources managers with high emotional intelligence demonstrated adaptability in responding to challenges. The study found that emotional intelligence helped human resources managers to build strong relationship with staff, fostering a supportive work environment. The study also revealed that human resources managers with high emotional intelligence effectively managed to resolve conflict in the department. The study concluded that emotional intelligence was a critical component of

resilience leadership in human resources department, enabling human resources managers to navigate turbulent times effectively. Based on the findings, the study recommended that human resources departments should incorporate emotional intelligence assessment in its recruitment for various university positions. The study recommended that human resources managers to undergo emotional intelligence training to develop social skills and introduce mentorship programmes to support them.

Key words: Emotional Intelligence, Human Resources, Leadership, Managers, Resilient.

Introduction and Background

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is generally understood as the ability to notice, understand, manage, and control one's emotions, as well as those of others (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The term was first introduced in the 1990s by researchers John Mayer and Peter Salovey, but it gained popularity through psychologist Daniel Goleman. Recent studies highlight the important role of emotional intelligence in HR leadership. Emotional intelligence (EI) helps leaders deal with complex interpersonal situations, boost employee engagement and make better decisions in organisations (Bhat and Chahal, 2024). Key emotional intelligence (EI) skills, which include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, can be used by HR leaders or managers to make good decisions, improve communication, and resolve conflicts in organizations (Singh and Prakash, 2024).

Current global trends show that emotional intelligence (EI) is increasingly recognized as a key skill in Human Resource (HR) departments worldwide. Emotional intelligence (EI) has become essential for strong and effective leadership (Pudasaini Pramila, 2025). Recent studies highlight that emotional intelligence (EI) provides HR leaders with crucial skills like self-awareness, empathy, motivation, and social skills. These skills are vital for managing complex interpersonal relationships (Rahul, 2024). Additionally, employers around the world predict that emotional intelligence (EI) will continue to be important for successful HR management as workplaces adopt flexible work models that emphasize the human resource aspect. Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a major role in fostering employee engagement and creating resilient teams in the workplace as the work environment evolves (Boas & Morin, 2019).

Globally, the shift toward hybrid work environments and a greater focus on diversity and inclusion has increased the need for emotional intelligence among HR leaders. In this context,

emotional intelligence (EI) is considered crucial for handling workplace challenges, improving conflict resolution, making strategic decisions, and responding to change effectively.

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become an important part of how resilient and successful human resources departments are in organizations. Recent research and reviewed papers show that companies around the world are investing in emotional intelligence by offering training programs for HR professionals as a key focus (Krishnga and Awang, 2025). This aims to encourage people-centered leadership and ongoing organisational performance (Bhat and Chahal, 2024). This training helps HR create positive workplace cultures, lower employee turnover, and connect HR strategies with broader business goals. Choudbury (2024) suggests that focusing on emotional intelligence (EI) also meets the varied needs of today's HR workforces. It promotes adaptability, trust, and teamwork in diverse and more digital environments.

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become a key factor in promoting emotional well-being and creating effective coping strategies for resilient leadership in human resources departments (Maharaj and Ramsaroop, 2024). Resilient leaders are better prepared to face challenges with a positive outlook. A study by Abudu (2024) in Ghana on educational leadership showed that emotional intelligence is the hallmark of effective leadership. It encourages resilience and inspires commitment, turning setbacks into opportunities for growth. Similarly, research in South Africa by Makhanya (2024) indicates that emotional intelligence is now a central part of leadership development programmes in human resources departments. These programmes aim to improve employee retention, engagement and change management effectiveness. Resilient leaders excel at managing crises and adjusting to new situations. They inspire and motivate their employees, which leads to high morale (Singh and Prakash, 2024). Leadership resilience is not a new idea, but it has gained attention in recent years as emotional intelligence (EI) becomes essential for distinguishing effective leaders. Developing emotional intelligence (EI) and leadership resilience is now a vital skill set for leaders to succeed in an ever-changing business landscape (Sharma, 2024).

In today's fast-changing workplace, strong leadership in human resources (HR) is crucial for boosting employee engagement, organizational growth, and resilience (Reyes, & Prado, 2025). The shifting landscape of HR management, especially in universities, requires leaders who can handle complicated interpersonal relationships while considering both organizational goals and employee well-being. Despite this growing awareness, the use of emotional intelligence (EI)

in HR leadership, particularly in university settings like those in Masvingo Province, is still not widely studied.

In Zimbabwe, organizations are looking for ways to improve performance, build resilience, and achieve lasting success in a challenging economic landscape. The country's economic environment can be unpredictable, causing stress and uncertainty among employees. Those with high emotional intelligence (EI) are better able to manage their emotions and keep a positive attitude even in difficult times (Muchechetera, Ganesh, and Karambwe, 2014). Chirasha et al. (2018) studied the Gweru and Kwekwe City Councils and found that emotional intelligence is becoming a key factor for individuals in the workplace. Empathy and social skills lead to clear communication which reduces misunderstandings and creates a more inclusive and cohesive team environment.

Additionally, the economic challenges in Zimbabwe put pressure not just on employees but also on leaders who have to make important decisions quickly. Resilient leadership is essential for maintaining productivity and morale during tough periods (Muchechetera, 2022). In today's fast-changing work environment, strong HR leadership is crucial for encouraging employee engagement and supporting organizational growth and resilience (Reyes, & Prado, 2025). The fast-paced nature of HR management, particularly in universities, requires leaders who can handle complex interpersonal relationships while keeping employee well-being in focus. Despite the growing awareness of its importance, the use of emotional intelligence in HR leadership especially in universities like those in Masvingo Province has not been deeply explored. This research aims to leverage emotional intelligence (EI) core skills in resilient leaders to help them address conflicts and crises that arise in their departments.

Statement of the Problem

In Zimbabwe's state universities, human resources (HR) departments face various challenges. These include increasing workforce diversity, rapid technological changes and higher employee expectations. It has been noted that HR leaders often struggle to manage these issues. This situation highlights the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) in helping HR leaders handle interpersonal relationships effectively. Despite the existing knowledge about emotional intelligence (EI) there is a gap in the research concerning resilient leadership in Zimbabwe's state universities. HR managers need to understand emotional intelligence (EI) to resolve workplace conflicts and make decisions that support departmental and organizational performance. Preliminary observations and studies show that many HR leaders have difficulty

applying emotional intelligence principles due to limited training and organizational culture. These challenges limit the potential for resilient leadership, which can respond positively to stress and change. This ultimately impacts the effectiveness of HR functions in organisations. Therefore, it is crucial to explore how emotional intelligence (EI) influences leadership resilience in university settings and develop ways to leverage emotional intelligence skills.

Research Objectives

- To examine how emotional intelligence contributes to resilience in leadership within human resources (HR) department in a university set up.
- To identify challenges faced by human resources (HR) leadership in applying emotional intelligence in their day to day practices.
- To recommend strategies for enhancing emotional intelligence to foster resilient and effective human resources (HR) leadership in the university context.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory, by Salovey and Mayer (1990), which is still very important in current research and practice in human resource management and leadership. Emotional intelligence theory suggests that people differ in their ability to understand, use, and manage their own emotions and those of others (Krishnga and Awang, 2025). This ability includes both cognitive and emotional processes that highlight the link between emotions and intellect. According to Goleman (1998), emotional intelligence includes a set of skills and abilities centered on four areas: self-awareness, self-regulation, relationship management, and social awareness. Understanding emotional intelligence (EI) helps HR leaders to connect operational goals with human needs by building trust and teamwork in the workplace.

The study draws on established emotional intelligence (EI) models, such as Goleman's Mixed Model, which emphasises self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management as key aspects of effective leadership behaviour (Sharma, 2024). The research also follows Mayer and Salovey's Ability Model, which focuses on emotion perception, integration, understanding, and regulation skills (Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, 2004). Using these frameworks allows the study to thoroughly examine how the emotional intelligence (EI) skills outlined by Goleman (1998) can help HR leaders in universities manage organisational crises in difficult situations.

In addition, recent research supports the idea that emotional intelligence theory provides a strong foundation for studying effective HR leadership in higher education institutions (Mrisho and Mseti, 2024). Overall, emotional intelligence theory is important for maintaining effective and resilient human resource leadership, even in challenging environments, provided leaders understand its key skills (Boyatzis, 2021). When HR leaders possess high emotional intelligence, they can build resilient teams that adapt well to change and foster inclusive workplaces (Shandilya and Bansal, 2025). This will improve employee motivation and retention in various organisations. The core emotional intelligence (EI) skills self-awareness, self-regulation, relationship management, and social awareness help the research explore how resilient leadership can be developed within university human resources departments.

Literature Review

Emotional intelligence in strengthening leadership resilience

Emotional intelligence (EI) is essential for strengthening leadership resilience. It allows leaders to manage their own emotions and respond with understanding to others. Leaders gain skills like self-awareness, emotional regulation, and social understanding (Krishnan, & Awang, 2025). These skills are vital for handling challenges and staying calm during tough times. Sharma (2020) studied emotional intelligence in crisis leadership. He found that leaders with high emotional intelligence had a positive impact on employee morale and organizational resilience. By showing empathy, being self-aware, and communicating effectively, emotionally intelligent leaders reduced the negative effects of crises (Mrisho and Mseti, 2024). They built a supportive environment that strengthened collective resilience and helped organizations adapt in the long run.

Another mixed study conducted by Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez (2023) revealed that emotionally intelligent leaders can control their own emotions and the emotions of their staff. This skill enhances the ability to resolve conflicts, make decisions and build trust. They create an atmosphere of psychological safety in their organizations through their empathy, making them part of a resilient leader in complex organizations. Research by Salameh-Ayanian, Tamer, and Jabbour Al Maalouf, (2025), looked at the direct effects of emotional intelligence on organisational resilience in the Jordanian manufacturing sector. The study found that all aspects of emotional intelligence self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management significantly improve resilience outcomes. It also showed that transformational

leadership is a key factor that enhances this relationship. This highlights the interplay between leadership style and emotional skills in building resilience.

Shandilya and Bansal (2025) stated that leadership resilience relies heavily on emotional intelligence, especially the ability to handle stress, stay calm under pressure, and foster empathy in teams. Their practical insights suggest that leaders who develop these emotional intelligence skills are more likely to adapt to change, motivate employees, and sustain productivity during uncertain times. An extensive literature review by Boyatzis and McKee (2023) combined data from over 100 peer-reviewed articles. They concluded that emotionally intelligent leaders consistently produce better results in team cohesion, motivation, and performance, largely because of their resilience. The review confirmed that emotional intelligence helps foster adaptive leadership behaviours needed for overcoming organisational challenges and maintaining long-term success.

Challenges faced by human resources leaders in applying emotional intelligence

Human Resources leaders face several challenges in applying emotional intelligence in their roles. These challenges affect their ability to lead effectively and create positive work environments. One problem identified by Erasmus and Oosthuysen, (2025), is the issue of managing emotional labour. Managing their emotions and reacting to employee needs can be challenging, which may result in emotional exhaustion or burnout if not properly managed, so HR leaders must control their emotions while reacting to employee needs. A further challenge highlighted by Boyatzis and McKee (2023) is the lack of uniformity in how emotional intelligence skills are being used by the various groups of people within the team, particularly in multicultural teams. Emotion expressions and norms may differ widely and make it more difficult for leaders to accurately process and respond to emotional signals. Mandal et al. (2022) found that HR managers are often put under pressure to engage in operational tasks but not emotional and relational work in organisations due to competing demands. This diminishes the utilization of emotional intelligence in daily activities and conflict handling. Furthermore, the absence of a formal programme on emotional intelligence and inadequate organisational support hinder the development of HR leaders, and their use of emotional intelligence (Chen and Guo, 2020). Many don't have the skills to deal with intricate interpersonal dynamics. Finally, Kim (2024) emphasized the importance of organizational culture and change resistance as one of the constraints for HR leaders to effectively apply emotional intelligence. This is especially the case in traditional hierarchical structures where it is not encouraged to express emotions openly. These challenges indicate that some of the challenges that prevent HR professionals from effectively applying their

emotional intelligence in practice include emotional strain, cultural diversity, competing priorities, inadequate training and organisational constraints.

Strategies for enhancing emotional intelligence to foster resilient HR leadership

Improving emotional intelligence is vital for building strong and effective human resources (HR) leadership. Emotional intelligence (EI) offers the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills needed to handle complex workplace dynamics and boost employee engagement. A study by Salameh-Ayanian, Tamer, and Jabbour Al Maalouf, (2025).stresses the importance of formal EI training programmes. These programmes focus on developing self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and relationship management as key strategies for nurturing emotionally intelligent HR leaders. They typically include workshops, coaching, and reflective practices aimed at enhancing leaders' emotional resilience and flexible decision-making.

Similarly, Erasmus and Oosthuysen, (2025) found that integrating emotional intelligence (EI) development into continuous leadership training contributes to HR leaders' stress management and team cohesion, thereby enhancing the organization's adaptability. Another significant technique suggested by Boyatzis and McKee (2023) is mindfulness and resilience exercises. These exercises will enable HR leaders to keep their emotions in check in times of pressure and improve their responses to crisis situations. Attah, Ogwuche, and Aliyu (2024) also supports creating workplace cultures that value psychological safety, where emotional expression is welcomed. This allows HR leaders to practice and strengthen their EI skills during real-time interactions. Additionally, Mandal et al. (2022) highlight the need to integrate emotional intelligence (EI) competencies into performance management and recruitment processes. This ensures that selecting and evaluating HR leaders consistently reflects their EI skills, which are linked to effective leadership outcomes. These combined strategies not only enhance the effectiveness of individual leaders but also contribute to healthier and more adaptable workplace environments that maintain resilience over time.

Methodology

The research design employed in the study was a case study design underpinned by an interpretivist research philosophy. A case study research design focused on understanding the subjective experiences and meanings HR staff assigned to their realities concerning emotional intelligence and resilience within social contexts (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that such a design facilitates deep exploration of complex

psychological and social processes that quantitative methods alone cannot capture. The study purposively selected 10 HR staff members from a total population of 20 to ensure diverse managerial perspectives related to emotional intelligence and resilience were represented. This is supported by Johnson and Christensen (2024) who indicated that purposive sampling was essential for qualitative studies seeking nuanced understanding from carefully selected participants who have unique knowledge about the study. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and discussions, allowing the investigation of how emotional intelligence manifested in real-world HR settings and helped individuals manage stress, adapt to change, and maintain strong leadership performance (Creswell, 2021). To address the methodological insufficiency in the initial description, the study rigorously processed data by transcribing interviews verbatim followed by thematic coding, guided by qualitative data analysis frameworks (Yin, 2018). The coding was iterative and conducted with the aim to identify key patterns, themes, and relationships related to emotional intelligence skills and resilience strategies. Hirose and Creswell (2023) asserted that, coding ensured transparent data handling, enhanced reliability, and provided rich, contextualized insights grounded in empirical evidence from a single case study especially in the case of HR department at a state university. This design and analytic rigor enhanced the study's validity and relevance to the Zimbabwean higher education context.

Findings

The study identified four key themes about how emotional intelligence (EI) affects HR managers' leadership effectiveness, resilience, adaptability, and team collaboration. The responses emphasize the important role of EI in handling workplace emotions, resolving conflicts, and encouraging empathetic leadership.

Self-Awareness and Self- Regulation

HR managers emphasized the importance of being aware of their own emotions to maintain calm and objectivity during stressful situations. This self-awareness helps them regulate emotions to focus on problem-solving rather than reacting impulsively. For example, Respondent 1 had this to say:-

"Being aware of my own emotions helps me recognize and understand what I am feeling right now. This awareness prevents emotional overwhelm. It allows me to pause and respond thoughtfully instead of reacting impulsively to stress. It brings a sense of calm that helps me stay clear-headed and make

better decisions in tough situations. Being aware of my own emotions helps me recognize and understand what I am feeling right now. This awareness prevents emotional overwhelm. It allows me to pause and respond thoughtfully instead of reacting impulsively to stress. It brings a sense of calm that helps me stay clear-headed and make better decisions in tough situations''.

Respondent 5 opined that:

‘Emotional self-regulation is important because it helps me manage my feelings so they don’t interfere with my work. By controlling my emotional responses, I can focus on the facts and goals of the situation instead of getting side-tracked by personal biases or frustrations. This skill allows me to stay objective and fair when dealing with sensitive or challenging personnel issues. It also helps create a calm and respectful environment during tough conversations’’.

Empathy and Team Collaboration

Another major theme relates to empathy as a foundation for building resilience and collaboration within HR teams. Managers described how understanding and adjusting to others’ emotions strengthens teamwork and helps prevent conflicts from escalating. Respondent 10 had this to say:

‘ ‘Emotional self-regulation is important because it helps me manage my feelings so they don’t interfere with my professional responsibilities. Promoting empathy within the department allows team members to understand and appreciate each other’s feelings and perspectives. This builds stronger connections among individuals. When everyone understands each other, it creates a supportive environment where people feel valued and motivated. Encouraging empathy helps the team develop resilience. This resilience enables them to handle changes and challenges more effectively. It also fosters collaboration, allowing people to work together more smoothly toward common goals. By controlling my emotional responses, I can stay focused on the facts and the objectives of the situation instead of getting side-tracked by personal biases or frustrations. This skill helps me remain objective and fair when addressing sensitive or difficult personnel issues. It also contributes to a calm and respectful atmosphere during tough conversations’’.

Another Respondent 5 added that:-

‘Promoting empathy throughout the department encourages team members to genuinely listen to and respect each other’s emotions and viewpoints. This deeper understanding strengthens

interpersonal relationships and builds trust among colleagues. Through fostering empathy, the workplace becomes more supportive, where everyone feels acknowledged and motivated to contribute their best''.

Furthermore, Respondent 6 stressed that:-

"When I actively listen to my staff, I give them my full attention, which shows that their thoughts and feelings are important to me. Acknowledging their emotions helps create a safe space where they feel understood and respected. This approach strengthens trust and encourages open communication within the team. As a result, staff members feel valued and supported, which boosts their confidence and motivation''.

Emotional Awareness and Conflict Resolution

HR leaders are able to sense unspoken or emerging emotional issues, allowing them to act early and manage disputes patiently and effectively. Emotional intelligence supports timely intervention and dispute resolution, which enhances organizational stability. Supporting this Respondent 8 highlighted that:

"I have learned to recognize early signs of stress in my team members, such as changes in behaviour or mood and identifying these indicators promptly, I can address issues before they become more serious and affect overall performance. This proactive approach helps me provide timely support and resources to those who need it. It also prevents conflicts or misunderstandings from escalating within the team''.

Respondent 7 also indicated that:

"Effectively resolving disputes involves taking the time to listen carefully to all parties involved, which requires a great deal of patience. Emotional awareness helps me understand the underlying feelings and concerns that may be driving the conflict. As a result recognising these emotions, I can respond with empathy and avoid escalating tensions. This thoughtful approach fosters open dialogue and encourages cooperation between conflicting parties''.

Moreover, Respondent 9 observed that:

"Leaders who possess high emotional intelligence are attuned to subtle cues, such as body language and tone of voice, that reveal unspoken concerns or tensions. This sensitivity allows them to detect potential problems before they fully emerge or disrupt the team by addressing

these issues proactively, they can prevent misunderstandings and conflicts from escalating. This foresight fosters a more open and trusting work environment. As a result, teams feel supported and challenges are managed more effectively before they impact performance''

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

HR managers emphasised that emotional intelligence is vital for effective leadership, enabling them to stay calm and objective in challenging situations. They highlight empathy and adaptive communication as key emotional intelligence skills that improve teamwork and build resilience. These strategies foster trust, effective conflict resolution, and stronger relationships within the department, enhancing overall leadership success.

Respondent .3 had this to say:-

"Adjusting my responses based on others' emotions has greatly improved teamwork in our department. Emotional intelligence training must be tailored to fit the socio-economic and cultural realities of Zimbabwean universities to be truly effective''.

Respondent .2 opined that: _

"I believe that understanding my emotions allows me to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively in challenging situations. The need for emotional intelligence training that considers our local context is essential for meaningful leadership development''

In addition Respondent .4 indicated that:-

""Recognizing how emotions impact decision-making has been vital in my role. I make a conscious effort to remain balanced and objective, especially in difficult personnel issues''.

These themes highlight the important role emotional intelligence plays in effective HR leadership. By being emotionally intelligent, HR leaders can improve their personal resilience. This helps them stay calm and focused during tough or stressful situations. Emotional intelligence also helps create a supportive team environment where staff feel understood, valued, and motivated to work together. This sense of support builds trust and encourages open communication, which are essential for good teamwork. Moreover, emotional intelligence allows HR leaders to spot and tackle workplace issues before they get worse. This proactive approach helps prevent conflicts and supports a positive organizational culture. Leaders who use emotional intelligence can better manage change and guide their teams through uncertainty.

These attributes improve decision-making and contribute to the overall success of HR. Emotional intelligence is not just a personal trait; it is a key leadership asset that strengthens both individuals and teams

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of emotional intelligence (EI) in enhancing leadership resilience, especially within the context of Zimbabwean universities. The themes of self-awareness, empathy, proactive problem-solving, and the challenges in applying EI principles resonate deeply with existing literature, suggesting that EI is not merely an abstract concept but a vital skill set that can significantly impact organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. The theme of self-awareness and self-regulation, as highlighted by participants (R.1, R.5), aligns with the work of Boyatzis and McKee (2023), who emphasize that leaders with high EI can manage their emotions and foster emotional unity within teams. This ability is particularly important in high-pressure environments, where the capacity to remain composed can directly influence decision-making and team morale. The findings suggest that ignoring EI in leadership development could lead to increased emotional exhaustion, diminished trust, and a lack of cohesion among team members, ultimately undermining organizational performance.

Moreover, research indicates that leaders who lack emotional separation skills struggle with effective leadership (Mahapa & Chirasha, 2012). This gap in EI application can be especially detrimental in contexts characterised by economic instability and cultural complexities. Without EI, leaders may fail to recognize and address underlying stressors, as a result leaders should show empathy and team collaboration. Leaders who actively practice empathy not only enhance trust but also motivate their teams, which is vital for long-term success. Ignoring this aspect could result in silos within teams, decreased collaboration, and ultimately, poor organizational outcomes (R10, R5, R6). Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez, (2023) indicated that emotionally intelligent leaders could manage both their own emotions and those of their employees. This ability improves conflict resolution, decision-making, and trust-building. Their empathy fosters inclusive environments that ensure psychological safety, which is a key part of resilient leadership in complicated organizations.

The challenges faced by HR leaders in applying EI principles, as discussed in the findings, highlight the necessity for organizational support and structured training programs (R.5, R.2). This reflects broader trends in the literature, which indicate that while EI is acknowledged as

essential, its practical implementation often falters due to a lack of training and institutional commitment (Chirasha, 2012; Mafuta, 2018). In a Zimbabwean context, where hierarchical structures may limit open emotional expression, the absence of EI can exacerbate tensions and hinder effective communication (R8,R7,R9). Boyatzis and McKee (2023) noted that HR managers should use mindfulness and resilience-building exercises. These exercises help HR managers maintain emotional balance in high-pressure situations and enhance their ability to respond effectively during crises.

Lastly, the need for contextualized EI development (R.4, R.3) cannot be overstated. The findings reveal that EI training must be tailored to fit the socio-economic and cultural realities of Zimbabwean universities. This involves recognizing local challenges such as economic constraints and cultural norms that may inhibit the application of EI principles. As highlighted in the literature, existing EI training programs often lack the necessary adaptation to be effective in diverse environments (Mandal et al., 2022). Therefore, by addressing these contextual factors, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of EI implementation in Zimbabwe's higher education sector. It highlights the importance of designing culturally sensitive interventions that not only focus on individual competencies but also consider external challenges that may impede the effective application of EI.

Conclusion

This study concludes that emotional intelligence (EI) is a key part of strong and effective leadership in human resource departments. Therefore, by encouraging self-awareness, empathy, and emotional control, human resources (HR) managers can better handle workplace challenges, solve conflicts positively, and create supportive environments that boost employee well-being and improve organisational performance. The insights from the human resources (HR) managers interviewed match well with existing research that highlights emotional intelligence as a major factor in adaptive leadership and organisational strength. This connection emphasises the need to actively develop and integrate emotional intelligence skills into human resources (HR) leadership practices. This focus helps HR managers deal with periods of change and uncertainty confidently while maintaining workforce unity, involvement, and productivity. The study confirms that emotional intelligence (EI) is essential for resilient leadership, helping human resources (HR) managers lead effectively in difficult and changing situations.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations aim to strengthen emotional intelligence skills among human resources (HR) leaders and improve organisational resilience:

- The study suggested that human resources departments should include emotional intelligence assessment in their recruitment for various university positions.
- The study suggested that human resources managers as leaders in the department should go through emotional intelligence training to develop social skills and introduce mentorship program to support them.
- The study suggested that universities should create and integrate emotional intelligence development programmes specifically designed for human resources (HR) professionals to improve self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation skills.
- The study suggested that organizational leaders should create environments where open emotional expression is encouraged and valued. This will allow HR managers and staff to communicate emotions constructively without fearing judgment or backlash.
- The study suggested that HR departments should hold regular reflective sessions or coaching opportunities to help manager's process emotional experiences, build resilience and adjust leadership styles as workplace dynamics change.
- The study suggested that universities encourage human resources (HR) leaders to set up systems for early detection of emotional distress among employees. This will enable timely interventions to reduce conflict and support well-being.

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