

The Moderating Effect of Gender on Leaders' Emotional Intelligence and Workplace Engagement of Employees: in Amhara State Civil Service Bureaus, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study assesses the moderating effect of gender on leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' engagement in Amhara State Civil Service Bureaus in Ethiopia. Leaders' emotional intelligence construct measured in self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, social awareness, and relationship management. Employee engagement construct measured through cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions. The researcher used a correlational research design method. The data were collected from 358 sample respondents by using stratified random sampling technique from 22 Amhara Regional State civil service bureaus. To analyze the data Structural equation model (SEM) was used. The result shown that employee engagement dimensions: cognitive, physical, and emotional engagement significantly and positively practiced at low level. In the same way, leaders' emotional intelligence dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, motivation, and relationship- management were positively and significantly practiced at low level. The structural equation model result shown that gender significantly moderates the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' engagement. The findings of this study have practical, policy, and theoretical implications. Practical implications, the Amhara state civil service bureaus understand the importance of leaders' emotional intelligences to enhance employees' engagement and should consider gender for leadership development programs. Policy implication, policy makers should give attention for females and include gender sensitivity policy in leadership development program. For theoretical literature, this study contributes to leaders, researchers, policy makers, and human resource managers to get evidence in the relationship between gender, leaders' emotional intelligence, and employee engagement for future studies.

Keywords

Emotional intelligence, Employee, engagement, Gender, Leadership

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Introduction

Workplace engagement is an indispensable aspect of any organization today (Sharma & Rajput, 2021). In the contemporary, turbulent, dynamic, and competitive world, employee engagement has become a key factor in organizational effectiveness. Moreover, Shailashri (2018) suggested

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to employee engagement is a key determinant factors for organizational performance. Engagement also affects employees' participation, efficiency, effectiveness, organizational goal, and organizational images.

The problem of the day is not in the keeping of talented individuals but in their total involvement, in the grabbing of their minds and hearts throughout their careers and work (Shailashri, 2018). In this respect, Makhanu et al. (2018) noted that there is currently a larger gap in employee engagement in organizations. According to Makhanu et al. (2018), employee disengagement is mainly caused by poor leadership support, low leaders' emotional intelligence, low motivation, ineffective communication, and inadequate opportunities for employee development.

Employee engagement is affected by different factors. According to Amah (2023), the main factors affecting employee engagement is leaders' emotional intelligence in the workplace. Emotionally intelligent leaders boost employees' moral engagement by encouraging their relationships, support employees, show empathy, and understand employees' feelings (Veshne & Munshi, 2020). According to Goleman (2013), leaders' emotional intelligence is very important for employees' engagement to achieve organizational goals. In this regard, Neupane (2021) stated that emotional intelligence skill is necessary for every human being, but it is very crucial for leadership positions.

According to Golman (2001) both Intelligent Quotient (IQ) **and Emotional Quotient (EQ) are very necessary for leaders and employees.** Intelligence Quotient (IQ) means employees cognitive abilities, like: learning, thinking, memorizing, reasoning, solve problems, and understanding complex ideas. This skill is more important for academics and technical experts. Emotional Quotient (EQ) means the ability to **aware, understand, manage, and use emotions properly to achieve his goals and organizational goals.** Both are important very important, but in leadership positions EQ is more important than IQ. Leadership mainly involves influencing people, managing emotions, understanding employees' feelings, motivate teams, and build good relationships and trust rather than only solving technical problems.

In this regard, Lehto (2021) argued that there was a positive relationship between the emotional intelligence of leaders and the workplace engagement of employees. Likewise, Karamustafa and Kunday (2018) concluded that emotional intelligence has a positive correlation with employee engagement in the workplace. Leaders with high emotional intelligence perform well and positively shape the behavior of employees in order to achieve organizational goals.

Gender plays a moderating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement, their relationship may different between male and female employees (Karamustafa & Kunday, 2018). Similarly, Marcus et al. (2017) claimed that gender affects employee engagement. They asserted that there is an work engagement difference between male and female employees. In this regard, female employees are more engaged than male employees within the organization.

According to Shukla et al., (2015) stated that gender moderates the correlation between emotional intelligence and employee engagement. They argued that gender affects employees' workplace engagement. Male and female employees are differing in their emotional experiences, workplace engagement, and relationship. They claimed that female employees are more engaged in their work than male employees. Similarly, Abeje and Narayan (2015) stated that in the Amhara State civil service bureaus employee engagement is a major challenge. In this regard, Amha and Brhane (2020) claimed that in Ethiopian civil service context realities shown that employees developed weak work culture, show low commitment, non-responsiveness, increase corruption, and increase employee turnover.

In this regard, Abebe (2020) claimed that employee engagement in the Amhara State civil service bureaus faced challenges due to low motivation, low leadership commitments, lack of training opportunity, low salary and compensation. These different problems affected employees engagement in the Amhara State civil service bureaus. In this respect, different previous researchers conducted like: Birhane (2016), Demissie and Gajendran (2016), and Shailashri (2018) they argued that employee engagement is a series problem in the civil service bureaus. Thus, the researcher addresses these gaps related to gender, leaders' emotional intelligence, and employee engagement.

First, literature gaps, prior researcher were conducted in Western contexts focused on the linkage between emotional intelligence and employee engagement alone (Amah, 2023; George et al., 2022; Karamustafa, 2018; Lehto, 2021) not connected with gender. Furthermore, some prior studies in Ethiopian context has conducted emotional intelligence, organizational performance, and employee engagement a lone (Abebe, 2020; Wonda, 2024). This study explores the moderating role of genders on leaders' emotional intelligence and employee engagement in the Amhara State's civil service bureaus, Ethiopia.

Second, model and instrument gaps, past researchers used, vague and unclear dimensions and instruments to measure emotional intelligence, and it is not locally validated in the Amhara state civil service bureaus. Thus, to solve these problems, this study adopts contextually appropriate models and instruments in the Ethiopian context and Amhara State civil service bureaus to measure leaders' emotional intelligence and employee engagement.

Third, concerning practical gaps, past studies focused on explored employee engagement and performance but did not connect with gender and leaders' emotional intelligence for example (Abebe, 2020; Abeje & Narayan, 2015; Amha, 2023). But this study focuses on gender moderates leaders' emotional intelligence and employee engagement. Therefore, it gives insights for policymakers and organizational leaders gender sensitivity in Ethiopia's and Amhara State civil service bureaus. These problems calls and triggers the researcher to conduct research on the Amhara State Civil Service Bureaus, Ethiopia. Accordingly, the researcher puts forward the following research questions: (A) What is the level of employees' workplace engagement in the Amhara State civil service bureaus? (B) What is the level of leaders' emotional intelligence in the Amhara State civil service bureaus? And (C) Does gender moderate the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' workplace engagement?

Literature Review

Concept of Employee Engagement

The idea of employee engagement was first appeared in Kahn (1990). Employee engagement, according to Kahn (1990), is the process by which individuals in an organization perform their tasks in ways that foster relationships with others and express themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically. He argued that three psychological conditions, physical, emotional, and cognitive, are essential for employees to become fully engaged in their work. Furthermore, De Silva and Iddagoda (2021) define engagement as the degree to which employees give attention and fully immersed the work activities. Employee engagement involves the active involvement of emotional, physical, and cognitive energies in performing work tasks (Suehs, 2015).

In this regard, Bakker and Demerouti, (2008) defines employee engagement, employees are actively participated in cognitive, physical and emotional in their job. They further stated that there are different strategies used for enhancing employees' engagement in the workplace. The following strategies are important improving leaders' emotional intelligence, provide training, coaching and mentoring, develop employees moral, create recognizing and rewarding system, support employees' in physical, mental, and emotionally, understand employees' feelings, create conducive environment, and offering fair salary, compensation, and benefits (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

In general, the researcher concluded that employee engagement is the active involvement of employees within emotionally, cognitively, and physically in their work activities. The researcher understands that employees need conducive and safe environments to invest their time, energy, and knowledge in their workplace. Scholars further explain engagement as employees' deep focus, active participation, and immersion in work activities, which significantly contribute to organizational effectiveness, productivity, and workplace well-being.

Concept of Leaders' Emotional Intelligence

Nowadays, organizations and researchers give considerable attention to emotional intelligence as a result of organizational success (Stein et al., 2009). Whereas, the concept of emotional intelligence in organizations is relatively novel in the Ethiopian context and warrants further investigation to understand better its effects on individual and organizational performance (Solomon, 2024). Several scholars, such as Bar-On (1997), Goleman (1999), Mayer et al. (2000), and Salovey and Mayer (2000), have provided definitions of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to aware, manage emotions, empathize, and build relations to achieve organizational goals.

Different studies indicated that emotions influence behavior, motivation, and performance in organizations (Onabote, 2021). Therefore, emotional intelligence contributes to productivity, innovation, and effective workplace relationships (Kanas, 2020). Studies also indicate that emotional intelligence enhances job performance and workplace relationships (Jibril, 2021).

Leaders have high emotionally intelligent, perform better and exhibit stronger teamwork, decision-making, and flexibility (Yohannes & Lemma, 2021).

In this context, Stein et al., (2009), noted that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in influencing organizational performance and accomplishing organizational goals. They suggested that emotional intelligence skills rather than technical skills are essential for leadership positions since leaders possessing high emotional intelligence can understand and control their emotions, identify the emotions of the employees, communicate effectively, make good decisions in stressful situations and establish positive working climate. In the same vein, Goleman (1999) asserts that an emotionally intelligent leader can better understand and tap into employees' emotions, motivate them, and improve organizational performance.

Similarly, Wang and Hu, (2025) argued that emotional intelligence is a vital leadership skill that influences leaders' ability to know their own emotions, regulate emotions, empathize others feelings, motivate ours and others at work. Wang and Hu (2025) also emphasized that emotional intelligence can be strengthened through several developmental strategies. These strategies include understand our emotions, regulate our emotions, empathize, develop social skills, encouraging continuous learning and coaching, practicing positive thinking, strengthening self-motivation, and building positive interpersonal relationships.

Conceptualization of Gender as a Moderating Variable on Leaders' Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement

The moderating role of gender on the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement can be theorized using Social Role Theory, developed by Alice Eagly (1987). Social role theory states that societies have their own social expectations, cultures, and norms to give men and women activities that affect their emotional expressions, interpersonal interactions, relationships, and workplace engagements. The theory argued that women are generally socialized to be more emotionally intelligent, empathetic, supportive, and build good relationship than men. However, men are commonly socialized to be confident, independent, and task-oriented.

Based on the theory, gender affects leaders' emotional intelligence and employee engagement in the workplace. The Theory suggests that gender shape employees' emotional reactions, perceptions, communication, commitment, and their levels of engagement at work. Therefore, the researcher understands that gender can be a moderating role in the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and employee engagement.

In addition, Thory (2013) stated that emotional intelligence is constructed from societies and affected by gender role in the workplace. The theory emphasized that men and women think, understand, emphasize, express their emotions differently due to organizational and societal gender norms. These different social norms can affect workplace attitudes, perceptions, and engagement in their workplace. Similarly, Karamustafa and Kunday (2018) supported that gender as a moderating variable in the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement. They noted that male and female employees are different in their emotional

perceptions, commitments, behaviors, interpersonal relationships, and workplace engagement. Therefore, gender affects leaders' emotional intelligence and employee engagement in the workplace.

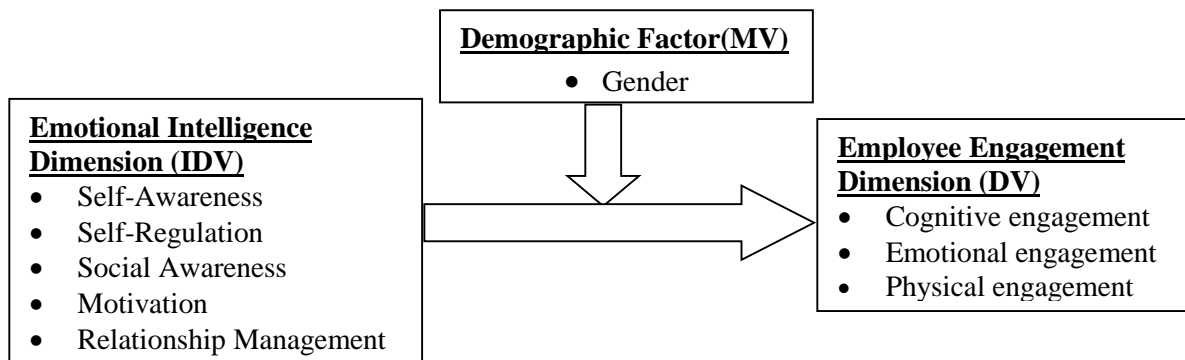
The Relationship between gender, leaders' emotional intelligence, and employee engagement.

Employee workplace engagement is an inseparable aspect of any organization in the modern world (Sharma & Rajput, 2021). The literature indicates that several factors may contribute to leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' work engagement in the civil service bureau (Tensay & Singh, 2020). In this regard, different scholars identify different factors that affect employee work engagement and leaders' emotional intelligence in public organizations. Previous studies by Sharma and Rajput (2021) argued that gender affects positively and significantly for employees work engagement.

Thory (2013) argued that gender moderates the linkage between emotional intelligence and employee engagement at the workplace. Furthermore, she noted that women employees have developed more social skills, commitments', and empathy in the workplace. Conversely, Zhou and Wang, (2025) argued that male employees have more confidence, emotional control, and independence they influence their relationships and performance in the workplace.

In addition, Zheng et al. (2022) also noted that gender significantly and positively moderates the linkage between emotional intelligence and employee work engagement in the workplace. They argued that female employees are shown more positive effects than male employees. This gender difference implies that civil service bureaus can design strategies to enhance employees in the workplace to achieve organizational goals

In this regard, leaders' emotional intelligence and work engagement, as moderators of gender, have been previously studied in Western countries. However, in the Amhara Region, the link between emotional intelligence, work engagement, and gender has not yet been well studied, and there is limited research evidence. Thus, in this study, the researcher seeks to fill gaps in leaders' emotional intelligence, work engagement, and gender-related variables in employee engagement in the Amhara Region Civil Service Bureaus. Therefore, the researcher developed the following conceptual frameworks.



Sources: - *Golman (1999) and Kahn (1990).*

Research Design and Methods

Research Paradigm and Approach

The researcher employed a correlational survey research design to investigate the moderating effect of gender on leader's emotional intelligence and employee's workplace engagement in the Amhara state public service bureaus in Ethiopia. The correlational survey research design was the most appropriate design for this study due to the fact that the researcher was able to assess the relationship between the three variables, gender, leaders' emotional intelligence, and employee engagement.

Based on this reason, a correlational survey research design was used. The researcher used descriptive analysis to assess employees' engagement practices in the work place. Similarly, leaders' emotional intelligence practice was assessed by using descriptive analysis. The researcher used a correlational research design to assess the relationship between gender, leaders' emotional intelligence, and employee engagement. According to Creswell (2015) a correlational research design enables a researcher to determine the direction and strength of relationships among the variables under study.

Population and Sample

This study assesses the moderating role of gender on leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' engagement in the Amhara state civil service bureaus. In the Amhara Regional state, there are 22 government civil service bureaus have been worked at regional level. This study included only 22 government civil service bureaus at regional level, not included zone level, worda level and other nongovernmental offices. As a result, the study's target population and participants are all twenty-two government civil service bureaus at regional level. Based on the Amhara region Civil Service bureau second quarter report from 2024, In this 22 bureaus employees working a total of 3,458 employees, including directors, team leaders, and experts.

In this study, stratified random sampling was used to select participants from the total population to ensure adequate representation from each group including gender, position, educational level, and work experience. First, the researcher identified the target bureaus and then employees were categorized based on position, gender, educational level, and work experience. After that, stratified random sampling with proportional allocation method was employed to ensure proportional representation of directors, team leaders, experts, males and females. In addition, the researcher considered positions, educational level, and work experiences across all bureaus in the study population. The researcher believes that stratified random sampling method gives equal chance for all employees in the study area.

According to Cohen et al. (2007) claimed that there are different formulas to determine sample size, one of the most common formulas is Yamane's (1967) formula: $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$. In this study, Yamane's (1967) formula was used to calculate the sample size of employees. The main reason that researchers used this formula is simplicity; it accommodates an unknown population size; it is widely accepted and used by prior researchers; it is suitable for this research

study design; and it is a popular and practical choice for researchers when determining the appropriate sample size for this study.

Based on Yamane's formula: $n = N/(1+N(e)^2)$, $n = 3458 / (1+3458 (0.05)^2) = 358$. Where n = sample size, N = population, and e = error tolerance (0.05). To determine stratified subgroup sample size $(p) = \text{sample size } (t) / \text{entire population } (T)$. $P = 358/3458 = 0.103 = 10.3\%$. Then, to determine each sample group, multiply by 0.103 or (10.3%). Therefore, the final sample of the study consisted of 358 employees selected from the 22 civil service bureaus.

Instrumentation

In this study, the researcher used both primary and secondary data sources to achieve research objectives. The primary data were collected from employees', directors, and team leaders' to measure leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' workplace engagement. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Secondary data is very important to support primary sources. Therefore, this study used secondary sources, including documents, minutes, reports, and various journals.

The work engagement instrument was used to examine employees' work engagement in cognitive, emotional, and physical domains. The instrument has 15 items adapted from Kahn (1990). The instrument has 15 questions across three engagement dimensions: physical (5), emotional (5), and cognitive (5). Each dimension is rated using a five-point Likert scale with 1= meaning none of them, 2= Few of them, 3= some of them, 4= Most of them, 5= All of them.

A pilot study employed 30 respondents and found alpha coefficients of .92, .88, and .91 for physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement, respectively. It showed that the items were reasonably trustworthy. In this regard, Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that an alpha coefficient between 0.70 and 0.79 is considered reliable.

Leaders' emotional intelligence measured 60-item scale adapted from Goleman (1999). The emotional intelligence dimension measures the emotional intelligence of bureau heads, who are assigned by the president of the state of Amhara to lead regional bureaus. The instrument consists of 60 questions and five dimensions: self-awareness (10), self-management (10), social awareness (10), motivation (10), and relationship management (10). The items in each dimension are assessed on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 = never and 5 = always. It is scaled as never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), and always (5).

A pilot study used 30 respondents and found alpha coefficients of .78, .94, .93, .92, and .94 for self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, motivation, and relationship management, respectively. It indicated that the items were reasonably reliable. In this regard, Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that an alpha coefficient between 0.70 and 0.79 is considered reliable.

Data Analysis

Before data analysis, the researcher coded data and underwent data cleaning. The researcher conducted pre-data analysis techniques, including checking for non-engaged responses, missing values, multivariate outliers, and multivariate assumptions. The demographic features of the

participants were computed as descriptive statistics. A one-sample t-test was computed to assess employee engagement and leaders' emotional intelligence. Because a one sample t-test determines the mean scores for employee engagement and leaders' emotional intelligence practices and indicating their level within the study population.

Moreover, a structural equation model (SEM) analysis was used to assess the moderating role of gender on leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' workplace engagement. SEM enables simultaneous analysis of complex relationships among latent variables. The analysis was performed using AMOS, widely used software for structural model estimation and model fit assessment.

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell (2012) research ethics refers to a moral principle and governed by guidelines during data collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data. In this study, the researchers follow ethical issues and adhere to established codes of ethics throughout the research process.

Accordingly, the researcher anticipated potential ethical issues and adhered to established codes of ethics throughout the research process. Hence, before to data collection we asked a data collection permission letter. Then, a letter of permission was obtained from Amhara Region State University. Before collected data participants were clearly informed about the study's purpose, duration, and procedures. Informed consent was secured, ensuring that participation was voluntary and based on adequate understanding. Finally, the researchers maintained participants' confidentiality and ensured the confidentiality of all collected data. These builds trust with participants and researchers to achieve the research objectives.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Information of Respondents

In this study, of the 368 distributed surveys, 358 were returned, yielding a response rate of 97.3%. During data screening, 10 questionnaires were excluded for careless or incomplete responses. Consequently, data from 358 participants were included in the final analysis.

The data in Table 1 reveals, 62% of employees were male, and 38% were female. Regarding educational qualifications, 7.3% held a diploma, 33.7% had a second degree, and 59% held a first degree. Regarding work experience, 19% had 1–10 years of service, 50.3% had 11–20 years, and 30.7% had more than 20 years.

Table1: Respondents' Demographic Characteristics both Leaders' and employees'

No	Category	Characteristics	Frequency	Response Rate %
1	Gender	Male	221	61.7
		Female	137	38.3
		Total	358	100.0
2	Educational Level	Diploma	26	7.3
		First Degree	211	59.0
		Second Degree	121	33.7
		Total	358	100.0
3	Work Experience	1-10 years	68	19
		11-20 years	180	50.3
		>20 years	110	30.7
		Total	358	100.0

Source: Survey Data, 2025

The Status of Employee Engagement Practices

As indicated in Table 2, employee engagement dimensions were practiced at varying levels. All employees' engagement dimensions were practiced at a below-average level (3.00). The cognitive engagement ($M = 2.794$, $SD = .6093$, $t = -6.384$, $df = 357$, $P < .05$), physical engagement ($M = 2.765$, $SD = .6268$, $t = -7.082$, $df = 357$, $P < .05$), and emotional engagement ($M = 2.783$, $SD = .6116$, $t = -6.688$, $df = 357$, $P < .05$) significantly practiced below average level (3.00). The findings show that employees' cognitive, physical, and emotional engagement levels were significantly below the average scores (3.00). This indicates that employees are not actively involved mentally, physically, and emotionally in their work.

Table 2. Employees' Workplace Engagement (EWE) Practices

Engagement dimension	N	Mean	SD	Test Value = 3				
				t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Effect Size
Cognitive	358	2.794	.609	-6.384	357	.000	.206	.337
Emotional	358	2.783	.612	-6.688	357	.000	.216	.353
Physical	358	2.765	.627	-7.082	357	.000	.235	.374

Source: Survey Data, 2025

To assess the effect size, Cohen's d (1998) is recommended; effect sizes are interpreted as large ($d = 0.80$), medium ($d = 0.50$), or small ($d = 0.20$). As a result, the effect size analysis showed that among the employees' workplace engagement components, cognitive engagement ($d = 0.337$) exhibited a medium effect, suggesting a moderate practical impact. Emotional engagement ($d = 0.353$) and physical engagement ($d = 0.374$) demonstrated medium effects, indicating a practical moderating effect among the components. In general, the status of

employees' workplace engagement practices showed that all dimensions of workplace engagement were practiced at below-average levels in the Amhara State civil service bureaus. This implies that employees in the Amhara State civil service bureaus were not fully engaged in their work, which may reduce their motivation, commitment, and work performance.

The Status of Leaders' Emotional Intelligence Practices

As shown in Table 3, the status of leaders' emotional intelligence practices, self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, motivation, and relationship management were practiced below the average mean score of 3.00. Self-awareness ($M = 2.788$, $SD = 0.689$, $t = -7.061$, $df = 357$, $p < .05$), self-regulation ($M = 2.612$, $SD = 0.615$, $t = -6.866$, $df = 357$, $p < .05$), motivation ($M = 2.5506$, $SD = 0.509$, $t = -3.095$, $df = 357$, $p < .05$), social awareness ($M = 2.634$, $SD = 0.656$, $t = -5.042$, $df = 357$, $p < .05$), and relationship management ($M = 2.630$, $SD = 0.526$, $t = -2.918$, $df = 357$, $p < .05$) practiced significantly below average level mean respectively. This implies that leaders in the Amhara State civil service bureaus demonstrated low levels of emotional intelligence across all dimensions, which may negatively affect employee relationships, motivation, and workplace engagement.

To assess the effect size, the researcher used Cohen's d , following Cohen's (1998) guidelines. As recommended by Cohen, the effect sizes can be interpreted as large ($d = 0.80$), medium ($d = 0.50$), and small ($d = 0.20$). The effect size analysis result indicated that among the emotional intelligence dimensions, motivation ($d = 0.882$) exhibited a large effect, showing a strong practical impact. Self-regulation ($d = 0.630$) and relationship management ($d = 0.702$) show medium to large effects, where as social awareness ($d = 0.558$) suggested a medium effect. Self-awareness ($d = 0.307$) show a small to medium effect, demonstrating the weakest practical impact among the dimensions.

This shows that motivation had the highest practical influence among the emotional intelligence components, whereas self-awareness had the lowest. In general, the findings indicated that the components of emotional intelligence varied in their practical impact on the study results.

Table 3: Leaders' Emotional Intelligence (EI) Practices

EI Dimension	N	Mean	SD	Test Value = 3				
				T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Effect size
Self-awareness	358	2.788	.689	-7.061*	357	.000	.211	.307
Self-regulation	358	2.612	.615	-6.866*	357	.000	.388	.630
Social-awareness	358	2.634	.656	-5.042*	357	.000	.366	.558
Motivation	358	2.550	.509	-3.095*	357	.000	.449	.882
Relationship-management	358	2.630	.526	-2.918*	357	.000	.369	.702

Source: Survey Data, 2025

The Moderating Role of Gender on Leaders' Emotional Intelligence and Employees' Workplace Engagement

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to investigate the moderating role of gender on leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' workplace engagement. The dimensions of leaders' emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, self-motivation, and relationship management) and workplace engagement dimension (cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement). The standardized beta coefficients (β) were used to determine both the strength and direction of the moderating effects. Gender was found to be a positive strengthener for the effect of a specific EI dimension on workplace engagement (beta coefficient is positive) or a negative strengthener (beta coefficient is negative). A non-significant coefficient also indicates that gender does not moderate the effect of leaders' emotional intelligence on employees' workplace engagement.

Findings indicated that gender positively and significantly moderated the effect of self-awareness on cognitive and emotional engagement among male employees. For male employees, the effects of self-awareness on cognitive engagement ($\beta = .232, p < .001$) and on emotional engagement ($\beta = .232, p < .001$) were both positively moderated. There was no significant interaction between gender and self-awareness regarding the level of physical engagement among male employees ($\beta = .132, p = .265$). The moderating effect was statistically significant and positive among female employees; however, the opposite was true for male employees. The effect of self-awareness on cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement was positively and significantly moderated by gender among female employees ($\beta = .610, p < .001$; $\beta = .339, p = .008$; and $\beta = .154, p = .008$, respectively). The findings showed that the positive moderation effect of gender was significant, especially for female employees, with self-awareness positively moderating cognitive and emotional engagement.

The effect of self-management on workplace engagement was different for men and women, and was positive for both. For male employees only, gender was found to positively and significantly moderate the effect of self-management on emotional engagement ($\beta = .204, p = .025$). However, the effect of self-management on cognitive engagement ($\beta = .075, p = .331$) and physical engagement ($\beta = .053, p = .458$) among male employees did not differ significantly. On the other hand, for female employees, gender positively and significantly moderates the effect of self-management on emotional engagement ($\beta = .500, p = .043$) and on physical engagement ($\beta = .591, p = .039$). However, there was no moderation effect of gender on the relationship between self-management and cognitive engagement among female workers ($\beta = .133, p = .455$). Thus, the positive moderating effect of gender was more pronounced for self-management's effect on workplace engagement among female employees than among male employees.

However, for both men and women, social awareness did not significantly moderate workplace engagement. The coefficient values indicated that there was a weak positive effect of social awareness on cognitive engagement ($\beta = .080, p = .592$), emotional engagement ($\beta = .318, p = .102$), and physical engagement ($\beta = .090, p = .522$) among male employees, but the effects were not significant. In contrast, the effect of social awareness on cognitive engagement was not

significant for females ($\beta = .161, p = .515$). In addition, weak negative and non-significant moderating effects were noted for the effect of social awareness on emotional engagement ($\beta = -.045, p = .842$) and on physical engagement ($\beta = -.005, p = .985$). The results showed that gender does not appear to be a significant moderator of the relationship between social awareness and work engagement.

In addition, significant gender-by-self-motivation interaction effects were found in the workplace engagement. Gender positively and significantly moderated the effect of self-motivation on cognitive engagement ($\beta = .468, p < .001$), emotional engagement ($\beta = .691, p < .001$), and physical engagement ($\beta = .314, p < .001$) among female employees. For male employees, gender did not significantly moderate the effect of self-motivation on cognitive engagement ($\beta = .077, p = .728$), emotional engagement ($\beta = .245, p = .308$), or physical engagement ($\beta = .314, p = .270$). However, the coefficients suggest weak positive effects. The results suggest that the moderating effect of gender on the effect of self-motivation on workplace engagement was observed only among female employees.

Furthermore, gender significantly and positively moderated the effect of relationship management on the overall dimension of workplace engagement for both males and females, with differences in the magnitude of the moderation by gender. Among male workers, gender moderated the relationship between relationship management and cognitive engagement ($\beta = .427, p < .001$), emotional engagement ($\beta = .176, p = .003$), and physical engagement ($\beta = .408, p < .001$). The effects of relationship management on cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement were significantly more positive for female employees ($\beta = .753, p < .001$; $\beta = .733, p < .001$; and $\beta = 1.014, p < .001$, respectively). The results showed a significant difference between female and male employees in terms of the positive moderating role of gender.

The overall results indicated that gender significantly moderates the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' workplace engagement. Specifically, the moderating effect of gender was mostly positive and stronger among female employees than among male employees across most dimensions of emotional intelligence, particularly in self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, and relationship management. The gender moderation of the effect of social awareness on workplace engagement was very weak and insignificant, with only a few negative effects observed. The study therefore revealed that a critical role for gender in the effect of leaders' EI on employees' workplace engagement, as female employees exhibit a stronger positive moderating effect than male employees.

Table 3: Regression weights for the moderating effect of gender on the effect of emotional intelligence on employees' workplace engagement

Dependent Variable		Independent Variable	Male β	Male p-value	Female β	Female p-value	Moderation pattern
Cognitive engagement	<---	Self-awareness	.232	***	.610	***	Both significant (female stronger)
Emotional engagement	<---	Self-awareness	.232	***	.339	.008	Both significant (male stronger)
Physical engagement	<---	Self-awareness	.132	.265	.154	.008	Female only (significant, weaker)
Cognitive engagement	<---	Self-management	.075	.331	.133	.455	Neither significant
Emotional engagement	<---	Self-management	.204	.025	.500	.043	Both significant (male stronger)
Physical engagement	<---	Self-management	.053	.458	.591	.039	Female only
Emotional engagement	<---	Social-awareness	.318	.102	-.045	.842	Neither significant
Cognitive engagement	<---	Social-awareness	.080	.592	.161	.515	Neither significant
Physical engagement	<---	Social-awareness	.090	.522	-.005	.985	Neither significant
Emotional engagement	<---	Self-motivation	.245	.308	.691	***	Female only
Cognitive engagement	<---	Self-motivation	.077	.728	.468	***	Female only
Physical engagement	<---	Self-motivation	.314	.270	.500	***	Female only
Physical engagement	<---	Relationship management	.408	***	1.014	***	Both significant (female stronger)
Emotional engagement	<---	Relationship management	.176	.003	.733	***	Both significant (female stronger)
Cognitive engagement	<---	Relationship management	.427	***	.753	***	Both significant (female stronger)

Note: *** $p < .001$

Source: survey data, 2025

Discussion

The current study was designed to assess the moderating effect of gender on leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' workplace engagement. The study found that employees exhibited low workplace engagement in the Amhara State Civil Service Bureaus in Ethiopia, with an

overall mean score of 2.78. The analysis of employee's workplace engagement dimensions shown that cognitive engagement ($M = 2.79$), physical engagement ($M = 2.77$), and emotional engagement ($M = 2.78$) were practiced below the benchmark mean of 3.00. Therefore, this result indicated that employees demonstrated low workplace engagement practices.

The primary cause of low levels of employee engagement in Ethiopian civil service bureaus is low salaries, inadequate benefits, low motivation, lack of respect, limited leadership support, bureaucracy, lack of empowerment, low participation, lack of capacity development, and poor human resource practices, which reduce employees' physical, emotional, and cognitive attachment to their work (Engidaw, 2021).

In line with this finding, earlier researchers have also reported that low levels of workplace engagement are prevalent in the Ethiopian civil service sector. Employee engagement in the Ethiopian public sector is low (Maru & Singh, 2020; Engidaw, 2021). Similarly, Gede and Huluka (2024) reported that employee engagement in Ethiopian public universities is low. International studies also support low levels of employee engagement in civil service bureaus (Kisi, 2024).

The study further indicated that leaders demonstrated a low level of emotional intelligence practices in the Amhara state civil service bureaus in Ethiopia, with an average mean score of 2.64. Analysis of the specific dimensions of emotional intelligence indicated the following mean scores: self-awareness ($M = 2.79$), self-regulation ($M = 2.61$), social awareness ($M = 2.63$), motivation ($M = 2.55$), and relationship management ($M = 2.63$). This implies that leaders in the Amhara State civil service bureaus demonstrated low levels of emotional intelligence across all measured dimensions. This finding is consistent with Asmamaw and Semela (2023), the findings revealed that leaders' emotional intelligence positively affects employee engagement; its level of practice in organizations remains low. Similarly, Andargie et al. (2025) revealed that emotional intelligence among health care leaders was practiced at a low level.

To investigate the moderating role of gender in the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' engagement SEM was employed. The results indicated that gender significantly moderates the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and employee engagement differently for male and female employees.

The SEM model result explained 27% of the variance in employees' workplace engagement ($R^2 = .273$). This result indicated that the effect of leaders' emotional intelligence on employees' engagement varies by gender, the findings observed stronger in female employees compared to male employees. In general, based on the findings the researcher understands that that gender moderates the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' workplace engagement.

In line with this finding, the researcher's no found peer-reviewed studies in Ethiopian contexts explicitly gender moderates the correlation between emotional intelligence and employees' engagement. However, in western countries other studies provide supporting evidence like Karamustafa and Kunday (2018) reported that there is a positive relationship between emotional

intelligence and employee engagement and suggested that this relationship varies by demographic characteristics, such as gender.

In the same vein, Uslu (2020) noted that gender significantly affects emotional intelligence and female employees showing stronger than male employees. In addition, Amissah-Wilson and Segbenya (2025) studies indicated that emotional intelligence positively affects employee performance and gender moderates this relationship by changing the strength of the effect in Ghana.

Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study found that employees' engagement in the Amhara State civil service bureaus practiced at low levels. Employees' engagement dimensions cognitively, emotionally, and physically were below the reference mean value of 3.00. This shows that employees' engagement dimensions between employees in the Amhara State civil service bureaus in Ethiopia are low level. Hence, these results indicated that in the Amhara state civil service bureaus, it needs strong interventions and designed new strategies to enhance employees' workplace engagement.

Similarly, leaders' emotional intelligence practices in the Amhara State civil service bureaus study also indicated that a low level practices. Hence, the researcher concluded that in the Amhara state civil service bureaus leaders are practiced weak emotionally intelligent abilities. This low level of leaders' emotional intelligence abilities directly affects employees' engagement in cognitively, emotionally, and physically in the Amhara state civil service bureaus.

The structural equation model (SEM) results indicated that gender plays an important moderating role in the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' engagement in the Amhara state civil service bureaus. Specifically, leaders' emotional intelligence has a strong positive effect on female employees' engagement than on male employees'. In general, the researcher concluded that gender moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and employees' engagement and there is a gender differences between male employees and female employees in the Amhara State civil service bureaus.

Implications of the study

Based on the findings, this study has practical implications, policy implications, and theoretical implications.

Practical implications, the findings indicated that gender moderates significantly the correlation between leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' workplace engagement. Therefore, gender and leaders' emotional intelligence should be a key focus area in leadership development programs and give attention to gender differences in employee responses.

Policy Implication, the study indicated that gender significantly moderates the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and employee engagement in the Amhara state civil

service bureaus. Therefore, policymakers should consider gender issues into leadership development strategies, recruitment, selection, and promotion to enhance employee workplace engagement across both male and female employees.

Theoretical implication, this study contributes to the literature on the relationship between gender, leaders' emotional intelligence, and employee engagement. Hence, it provides a clearer theoretical evidence for leaders, researchers, employees, policy makers, and human resource managers in the relationship between gender, leaders' emotional intelligence, and employee engagement for future studies.

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