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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A KEY FACTOR OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN CONDITIONS OF UNCERTAINTY

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ЕМОЦІЙНИЙ ІНТЕЛЕКТ ЯК КЛЮЧОВИЙ ФАКТОР ЕФЕКТИВНОГО ЛІДЕРСТВА В УМОВАХ НЕВИЗНАЧЕНОСТІ

The article presents a comprehensive study of emotional intelligence (EI) as a strategic factor for effective leadership in conditions of systemic uncertainty. The author argues that traditional management models based on rigid hierarchy and linear planning are proving ineffective under the pressure of global crises, including pandemics, geopolitical conflicts, and rapid technological shifts. The paper provides

a detailed analysis of the transformation of challenges from the VUCA paradigm (Volatility, Uncertainty) to the BANI model (Brittleness, Anxiety), where EI is transformed from a supplementary "soft skill" into a core competency essential for the strategic survival of organizations. The neurocognitive foundations of leader self-regulation are investigated, specifically the mechanism for preventing "amygdala hijack," which enables leaders to maintain rationality through cognitive reframing and mindfulness practices.

Special attention is paid to the leader's role as a "sense-maker" and an architect of psychological safety. Based on Amy Edmondson's research, it is proven that high levels of empathetic leadership are the primary predictors of team performance and innovation. The article identifies four key strategies for building team resilience within the JD-R model: boundary modeling, empathetic listening, granting autonomy, and promoting restorative experiences. Concrete cases of the economic impact of EI are presented, ranging from \$3 million in annual savings for the US Air Force to a 12% increase in productivity at Sanofi-Aventis.

Simultaneously, the work critically examines the "dark side" of EI, including the risks of manipulation by individuals with "Dark Triad" traits and the "Awestruck Effect," which can suppress subordinates' critical thinking. In the context of artificial intelligence development, the demand for socio-emotional skills is projected to grow by 22–26% by 2030. It is concluded that the leader of the future acts as an "emotional orchestrator" whose humanity and ethical self-awareness become the organization's most scarce and valuable assets. The results form an integrated framework for adaptive leadership capable of navigating complexity with clarity and trust.

Статтю присвячено комплексному дослідженню емоційного інтелекту (EI) як стратегічного чинника ефективного лідерства в умовах системної невизначеності. Автор обґрунтовує, що традиційні моделі управління, засновані на жорсткій ієрархії та лінійному плануванні, втрачають ефективність під тиском глобальних криз — пандемій, геополітичних конфліктів та

технологічних стрибків. У роботі детально проаналізовано трансформацію викликів від парадигми VUCA (нестабільність, невизначеність) до моделі BANI (крихкість, тривожність), де EI перетворюється з додаткової «м'якої навички» на ключову компетенцію для стратегічного виживання організацій. Досліджено нейрокогнітивні засади саморегуляції лідера, зокрема механізм запобігання «амигдалярному захопленню», що дозволяє зберігати раціональність через когнітивний рефреймінг та практики майндфулнесу.

Особливу увагу приділено ролі лідера як «творця сенсів» та архітектора психологічної безпеки. На основі аналізу концепцій Емі Едмондсон доведено, що високий рівень емпатичного лідерства є головним предиктором командної результативності та інноваційності. У статті виокремлено чотири стратегії побудови резильєнтності команд у межах моделі JD-R: моделювання кордонів, емпатичне слухання, надання автономії та впровадження відновлювальних практик. Наведено конкретні кейси економічного впливу EI: від економії 3 млн дол. США у ВПС США до зростання продуктивності на 12% у Sanofi-Aventis.

Водночас у роботі критично розглянуто «темний бік» EI, зокрема ризики маніпуляцій з боку представників «Темної тріади» та ефект «заціпеніння від благоговіння», що може пригнічувати критичне мислення підлеглих. У контексті розвитку штучного інтелекту прогнозується зростання попиту на соціально-емоційні навички на 22–26% до 2030 року. Зроблено висновок, що лідер майбутнього діє як «емоційний оркестратор», чия людяність та етичне самоусвідомлення стають найбільш дефіцитним і цінним активом організації.

Keywords: *emotional intelligence, leadership, uncertainty, VUCA, BANI, psychological safety, resilience, team management, self-regulation, organizational behavior.*

Ключові слова: *емоційний інтелект, лідерство, невизначеність, VUCA, BANI, психологічна безпека, резильєнтність, управління командами, саморегуляція, організаційна поведінка.*

Problem statement. The global instability of recent years — the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, accelerating technological change, and the climate crisis — has fundamentally changed the conditions in which organizations operate. Traditional management models based on linear planning and rigid hierarchy are proving ineffective in an environment where unpredictability is the norm, not the exception. Modern management faces a fundamental question: what personal and professional competence of a leader is key to ensuring the stability of an organization in conditions of systemic uncertainty?

The existing practice of training leaders continues to focus mainly on the development of analytical and technical competencies, underestimating the role of emotional regulation, empathy, and the ability to manage one's own psycho-emotional states. Meanwhile, research in the field of organizational psychology and neuroscience convincingly demonstrates that it is emotional intelligence (EI) that determines a leader's ability to maintain team effectiveness, make quality decisions, and create a culture of psychological safety—a condition without which innovation and adaptation in crisis conditions are impossible. However, the mechanisms of EI's influence on leadership effectiveness in conditions of uncertainty remain insufficiently researched in Ukrainian scientific discourse, which determines the relevance of this work.

Analysis of recent research and publications

The concept of emotional intelligence originates in the works of P. Salovey and J. Mayer [1], who defined EI as the ability to perceive, use, understand and regulate emotions. The widespread use of the concept in a managerial context is associated with D. Goleman's monograph "Emotional Intelligence" [2], which established a direct correlation between the level of EI of a leader and the effectiveness of the organization. In subsequent works, it was substantiated that a leadership style based on emotional competence is a key factor in the formation of organizational climate and team productivity.

Among modern studies, work in the context of crisis management deserves special attention. A meta-analysis by M. Khosravi et al. [3] covered 214 primary studies and confirmed: leaders with high EI demonstrate statistically significantly higher indicators of team resilience in stressful conditions. Edmonson's study [4] found that psychological safety — a direct consequence of empathetic leadership — is the main predictor of team effectiveness in difficult operational conditions. In the Ukrainian scientific literature, the issue of EI in the context of leadership was studied by O. Babchynska and O. Lozovsky [5], who analyzed the theoretical foundations and practical aspects of the influence of emotional competence on management results in modern Ukrainian organizations.

At the same time, the issues of systemic mechanisms of the influence of EI on decision-making in VUCA/BANI environments, neurocognitive foundations of leader self-regulation during crises, as well as the risks of manipulative use of emotional competences remain insufficiently developed in the scientific literature. It is these gaps that determined the direction of this study.

Research Objective

The purpose of the article is a comprehensive study of emotional intelligence as a strategic factor of effective leadership in conditions of uncertainty: revealing the mechanisms of its influence on decision-making, the formation of psychological safety and resilience of teams, as well as determining the limits and risks of the application of emotional competencies in modern management.

Presentation of the main material.

The modern era of global turbulence has posed challenges to the institution of leadership that cannot be solved solely within the framework of traditional rational paradigms. In conditions where stability becomes the exception and uncertainty is a fundamental characteristic of the business landscape, emotional intelligence (EI) is transformed from an additional “soft skill” to a core competency that determines the strategic survival of organizations [6]. Scientific research and practical cases of recent

decades demonstrate that leaders with a high level of emotional competence not only provide 20% higher productivity of their teams, but also act as emotional anchors during crises, preventing destructive processes of burnout and disorientation. This report offers an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms of influence of emotional intelligence on leadership effectiveness, using modern theoretical analysis tools, such as VUCA, BANI, Cynefin frameworks and the Heifetz adaptive leadership model.

The evolution of the concept of emotional intelligence in organizational psychology has gone from a general definition of “the ability to be aware of one’s own emotions” to complex multifactorial models focused on specific business outcomes.

Table 1 presents the use of the term “emotional intelligence” by various sources.

Table 1. Use of the term “emotional intelligence” by various sources of use

Analysis parameter	Scientific literature	Corporate publications (Forbes, HBR)	Lifestyle media / Blogs
The main function of EI	Information processing	Increasing profits / efficiency	Improving relationships / quality of life
Object of attention	Mechanisms of the brain, psyche	Managers and leaders	Особистість, дитина, партнер
Personality, child, partner	Aptitude tests (MSCEIT)	Self-reports (EQ-i)	Intuitive feeling ("I feel")
Frequency of use	Stable, moderate	High as a marker of professionalism	Very high, often blurred

Source: compiled by the authors based on [1-5]

Summarizing the data of the comparative analysis, we can conclude that the perception of emotional intelligence radically depends on the scope of its application. For the business environment, EI increasingly acts not as a theoretical ability, but as a convertible soft skill, directly related to productivity and leadership potential. The table clearly demonstrates the transition from "understanding emotions" as a process to "managing emotions" as a resource. This confirms the high demand for the concept in management practice, despite significant differences in assessment methods compared to

the academic environment. To understand why emotional intelligence is gaining critical importance today, it is worth considering the nature of modern uncertainty. Organizational behavior researchers describe the current environment with the acronym VUCA - Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity. In such a world, algorithms and procedures do not provide answers to the questions that arise every day. In recent years, a more radical BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible) model has emerged, which better describes the psychological state of society in the era of polycrisis [7].

A generalized change in approaches to understanding challenges is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Challenges Transformation: From VUCA to BANI

Element VUCA	EI leader response	Element BANI	EI leader response
Volatility	Vision and rapid adaptation	Brittle	Resilience and building resilience
Uncertainty	Understanding and collecting data	Anxious	Empathy, psychological safety and awareness
Complexity	Clarity and systems thinking	Nonlinear	Contextuality and adaptability
Ambiguity	Agility and openness to ideas	Incomprehensible	Transparency, intuition and communication of senses

Source: compiled by the authors based on [7]

The transition to the BANI paradigm emphasizes that modern uncertainty is no longer simply a lack of information — it has become a source of existential anxiety. In the BANI world, systems do not just change (Volatility), they become brittle (Brittle) and can suddenly collapse, as happened with global logistics during the pandemic. This requires the leader not only cognitive flexibility, but also “deliberate calm” — a state of internal stability that allows not to react impulsively to nonlinear changes [8].

Anxiety in the BANI model is a reflection of a lack of trust in the future. When events become incomprehensible (Incomprehensible), people feel helpless. An emotionally intelligent leader in such a context acts as a “sense-maker”. He does not try to provide false assurances, as this undermines trust in the long term, but instead acknowledges the complexity of the situation, while demonstrating confidence in the team’s ability to learn and adapt.

In times of uncertainty, the greatest risk to an organization is employee silence. Research by Amy Edmondson and McKinsey shows that psychological safety—the belief that mistakes or questions will not be punished—is a key predictor of team performance in complex contexts [9].

The mechanisms by which a leader creates psychological safety are presented in Figure 1. Psychological safety does not mean “being nice” or lowering standards. On the contrary, combining high psychological safety with high standards creates a “zone of learning and high performance.” Without safety, people are in an “anxiety zone,” where their cognitive resources are spent on self-defense rather than innovation.

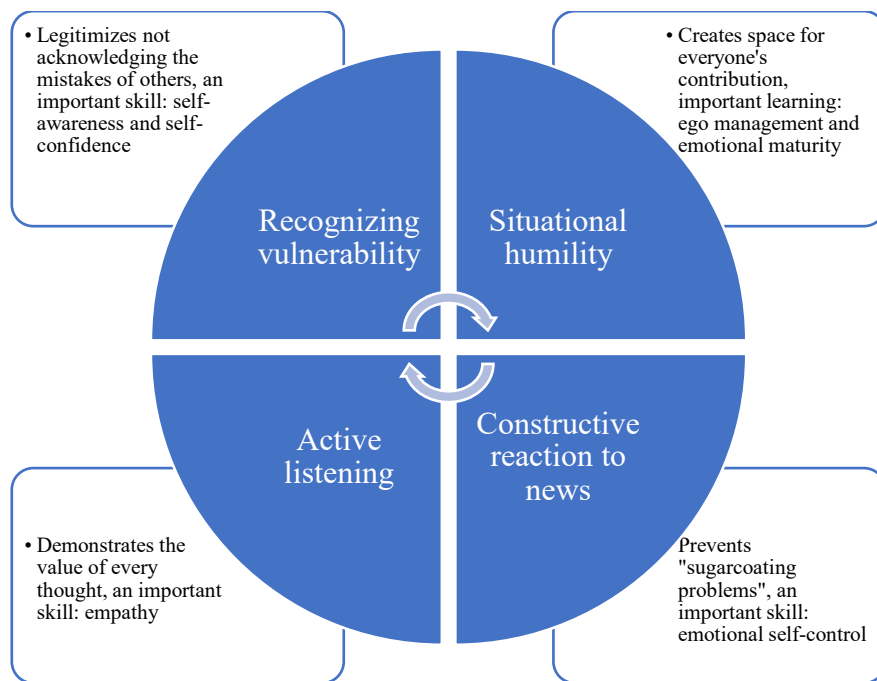


Fig. 1. Mechanisms for creating psychological safety by a leader

Source: compiled by the authors based on [5,6,9]

Situational humility. Leaders with high EQ abandon the illusion of omnipotence. In times of uncertainty, they openly admit what they don't know and share uncertainty with their team without burdening them with anxiety. Such transparency paradoxically builds trust, because people feel the truth better than they hear words.

Active listening as a strategy. When familiar sources of information are no longer reliable, leaders with high EQ turn to those who are closer to reality — their team, customers, partners. Their ability to truly listen — not for the sake of being heard, but for the sake of understanding — becomes a competitive advantage in decision-making.

Recognition of vulnerability. Neuroscience research shows that when a leader experiences uncontrollable fear, he literally “infects” those around him with it through mirror neurons. Self-regulation — a key component of EQ — allows a leader to feel anxiety without transmitting it destructively to others. This is not a mask of dispassion, but a conscious management of emotional impact.

Responding constructively to news. Uncertainty creates pressure for quick, categorical decisions. An emotionally intelligent leader is able to distinguish between when speed is truly needed and when patience is. He understands how his own emotions can distort judgment and builds decision-making processes that take this risk into account.

Research confirms that emotional intelligence is not just a “nice-to-have” but a critical factor in financial success, especially during economic downturns [6]. Table 3 presents the economic or operational impact of emotional intelligence management in various industries.

Table 3. Effects of Emotional Intelligence Management

Company / Organization	Economic or operational effect
US Air Force	Using EQ-i to select recruiters saved \$3 million annually and tripled the accuracy of success predictions
FedEx Express	The LEAD1 program led to an 8-11% increase in leadership competencies. 72% of participants showed significant improvement in decision-making
L'Oreal	Salespeople selected based on emotional competence sold \$91,370 more per year than their counterparts
Sanofi-Aventis	Managers with higher EI increased their teams' productivity by 12% after training
Manufacturing sector	EI supervisor training led to a 50% reduction in injuries and a reduction in complaints from 15 to 3 per year

Source: compiled by the authors based on [11,12]

The neurological basis of emotional intelligence explains why it becomes so important in times of uncertainty. When a person is faced with a sudden threat (whether it is a physical danger or a critical remark in a meeting), the amygdala, the emotional center of the brain, can take over before the prefrontal cortex (the rational center) has time to analyze the situation [11]. This state of “amygdala hijack” causes the leader to act according to basic animal patterns: fight, flight, or freeze. In a business setting, this manifests itself as shouting at subordinates, avoiding decision-making, or micromanaging in an attempt to regain the illusion of control. Emotional intelligence allows a leader to recognize the physical signals of this state (rapid heartbeat, clenched jaw) and apply self-regulation techniques (such as pausing for breath or cognitive reframing) to return control to the rational brain [12].

It would be a mistake to view emotional intelligence as an exclusively positive tool. There is a significant amount of research on the “dark side” of EI, when emotional skills are used for manipulation.

People with the “Dark Triad” traits—Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism—often have high levels of EI but low levels of empathy. This allows them to be “emotional predators” in organizations [13].

Machiavellians use their knowledge of others’ emotions to covertly undermine colleagues and strategically deceive, which gradually destroys trust in the team and creates an atmosphere of paranoia. Leaders with severe psychopathy are able to maintain complete control over their own emotions while resorting to intimidation and harsh pressure tactics - the result is psychological terror and mass firing of the most talented employees. Finally, narcissism manifests itself in a flawless first impression: charm and flattery create the image of an ideal leader, which, however, is not backed by any real support - and the team's disappointment becomes only a matter of time.

The “Awestruck Effect” is particularly dangerous. A study by the University of Cambridge found that when a leader delivers an emotionally charged, inspiring

speech, the audience tends to analyze the content of the message less and remember it less. This is a tool that demagogues skillfully use to distract from the lack of a real strategy. A truly ethical leader uses EI not to “turn off” the brains of subordinates, but to “turn on” their involvement and commitment to shared values.

In conditions of prolonged uncertainty, burnout becomes not a personal problem for the employee, but a systemic threat to the business. The emotional intelligence of the leader allows you to move from treating the symptoms to transforming the environment.

According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model [10], burnout occurs due to an imbalance between the demands of the job and the available resources. The emotional intelligence of the leader is a key “resource” that helps to mitigate the impact of high demands.

Researchers identify four key strategies through which a leader with developed emotional intelligence purposefully builds the resilience of his team.

The first - boundary modeling - is based on self-regulation: the leader demonstrates by personal example that the regime of constant availability and work without limits is not the norm, and does not transmit such expectations to subordinates. The practical result is a decrease in the level of chronic stress in the team.

The second strategy - empathetic listening - is implemented through social awareness: the leader recognizes the feelings of employees, without resorting to reflexive attempts to immediately "fix" the situation. The very fact that a person was heard and did not devalue his experiences significantly increases individual psychological resilience.

The third strategy, granting autonomy, is based on trust: consciously reducing control in complex and ambiguous situations returns team members a sense of their own agency. This is a direct counterpoint to learned helplessness, a state in which people stop believing in their ability to influence the outcome.

Finally, the promotion of “restorative experiences” involves relationship management: the leader consciously creates rituals of rest and informal communication, creating conditions for replenishing the team’s emotional and cognitive resources.

Of particular interest is the finding that leaders with high EI are able to distinguish “healthy stress” (eustress), which motivates and develops, from “toxic stress” (distress), which destroys. They do not try to remove all stress from the organization (which is impossible in conditions of uncertainty), but instead create conditions for full recovery after intense periods of work.

With the development of artificial intelligence, the role of emotional competence will only increase. McKinsey, Gartner, and IBM [9] predict that by 2030, the demand for socioemotional skills in the US and Europe will grow by 22–26%, while the demand for routine cognitive skills will decline.

Artificial intelligence can analyze data faster than humans, predict trends, and even recognize emotions from facial expressions (for example, through AI-based MSCEIT-2 systems). However, AI does not have “human situationality.” It cannot:

- restore trust after a failed decision;

- provide authentic and ethical leadership that is based on one’s own values and experience of living difficulties;

- provide support in moments of deep existential fear of the future for employees.

The leader of 2030 will use AI as a powerful analysis tool (for example, to simulate scenarios in the Complex domain according to Cynefin), but will retain the role of emotional orchestrator.

For a long time, there was a myth that emotional intelligence was an innate trait: either you have it or you don’t. Modern neuroscience and psychology refute this belief. The human brain retains neuroplasticity — the ability to change — throughout life, and EQ competencies are amenable to purposeful development.

Self-awareness practices include daily reflective writing, working with a mentor or coach, and regularly collecting feedback from your team. Self-regulation is developed through mindfulness practices, cognitive reappraisal techniques, and physiological stress management practices. Empathy is developed through intentional immersion in the perspective of another: one-on-one meetings where you ask not about the task, but about the person's state.

Fundamentally important: developing EQ is not a one-time project, but an ongoing practice. Organizations that invest in emotional intelligence development programs for leaders demonstrate more sustainable results in times of crisis and higher employee engagement in the long term.

A Six Seconds study found a disturbing trend: after the pandemic, the level of emotional intelligence on a global scale began to decline, which scientists have called the "Emotional Recession." This depletion of emotional resources makes organizations less adaptive precisely when they need it most. In this context, leaders who consciously develop their EI gain an even greater competitive advantage because they are able to fill this vacuum of empathy and confidence.

Emotional intelligence in professional leadership is not a soft skill — it is a strategic competency that directly shapes organizational performance, innovation capacity, and team resilience. The five recommendations outlined above form an integrated framework for conscious, adaptive leadership in conditions of complexity and uncertainty.

The practice of "getting on the balcony" enables leaders to pause automatic reactions and respond with intention. Investing in psychological safety creates the foundational infrastructure within which teams dare to experiment and learn from failure. Applying the Cynefin framework allows leaders to match their emotional engagement and communication style to the demands of each specific context, avoiding the trap of one-size-fits-all command-and-control approaches.

Critically, emotional intelligence must be anchored in ethics and self-awareness to remain a force for genuine connection rather than devolving into manipulation. Finally, sustainable leadership demands active attention to the replenishment of the team's emotional resources — because resilience is not simply endured, it is cultivated.

Leaders who internalize these principles do not merely manage crises — they build organizations capable of navigating uncertainty with clarity, trust, and shared purpose.

Conclusions

The results of the study suggest that emotional intelligence is not just an auxiliary factor, but a strategic foundation for effective leadership in uncertain times. In the world of BANI and Cynefin, leadership becomes the art of managing paradoxes: being vulnerable but confident; maintaining control but giving autonomy; using AI but remaining human.

Emotional intelligence does not soften leadership, but sharpens it: it allows you to make tough decisions while preserving the human dignity of all involved, to lead people through fear without resorting to manipulation, to build trust, which is the only true capital of an organization in an era of uncertainty.

A leader who understands himself and others has no illusions about the complexity of his task. But it is precisely this clarity - without self-deception and without the paralysis of fear - that makes leadership possible in the most difficult times. Humanity in this context is not weakness. It is the sharpest weapon in a leader's arsenal.

Emotional intelligence is not a state, but a dynamic ability that can and must be developed. In a world where data is becoming ubiquitous and technology is becoming standard, a leader's humanity becomes their most scarce and valuable asset.

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