



# The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Facility Management Leadership: A Comparative Analysis Across Organizational Levels

Juliana Somuah<sup>1</sup>, Rebecca Kassa<sup>2</sup>, Jake Smithwick<sup>1</sup>, Brian Lines<sup>2</sup>, and Kenneth Sullivan<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>University of North Carolina at Charlotte, <sup>2</sup>University of Kansas, <sup>3</sup>Arizona State University

Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays a pivotal role in leadership effectiveness within Facility management (FM), shaping decision-making, team dynamics, and overall organizational performance. This study investigates the influence of EI competencies such as self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Using EI assessments, data were collected from FM professionals across senior executives (n=69) and entry-level managers (n=34). The study evaluates how these EI competencies vary with the two job levels. The findings reveal that senior executives demonstrated significantly higher levels of EI, particularly in areas like social awareness, relationship management and overall EQ, compared to their entry-level counterparts. Despite the critical importance of EI for leadership in FM, the study identifies a gap in formal training and development programs designed to cultivate EI. Current practices do not sufficiently focus on the deliberate enhancement of these competencies.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Facility Management, Leadership, Professional Development, Organizational Performance

## Introduction

The concept of EI was first introduced into psychological discourse over two decades ago and has since gained widespread recognition among researchers and professionals (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In the early 2000s, Mayer et al. (2011) described EI as an individual's ability to understand and manage their emotions in relation to their cognitive abilities. Today, EI is widely valued in organizations for its role in fostering strong interpersonal relationships, which enable employees to achieve personal and organizational goals. Moreover, EI is a critical determinant of an individual's success within an organization, ultimately contributing to overall corporate performance (Adnan & Abdullah, 2022).

In the field of FM, a profession heavily focused on interactions with vendors, clients, and contractors, EI is vital for effectively managing tasks and relationships (Somuah et al., 2024). The FM industry is structured across three levels: entry-level, mid-level, and senior-level management, each requiring facility managers to engage with various stakeholders (Call & Smithwick, 2023). While the industry has traditionally emphasized technical expertise, the increasing complexity of FM now demands

strong interpersonal skills, including EI, to navigate leadership challenges, communication issues, and conflict resolution which is a grappling challenge in the industry.

Despite the acknowledged importance of EI, its role across the different job levels in FM remains underexplored. Particularly in the U.S., more focus has been given to technical capabilities, leaving a gap in understanding how EI can influence leadership effectiveness and team cohesion. Therefore, the study seeks to answer the research question, “how do EI traits differ between senior executives and entry-level managers within the FM industry, and what implications do these differences have for leadership development?” Investigating how EI develops through mentoring and formal training programs can offer new insights into cultivating emotionally intelligent leaders in the FM sector.

This study seeks to evaluate EI traits across different job levels within U.S. FM, focusing on three key components: self-management (SM), an individual's ability to use EI to remain adaptive and steer their behaviors in a favorable way; social awareness (SOA), the ability to perceive and understand the emotions of others and gain deeper insight into their emotional state; and relationship management (RA), the capacity to effectively manage interactions by being attuned to both personal and others' emotions (Ashton & Lee, 2009). Additionally, the study aims to provide insights into how these EI traits can be cultivated to improve leadership, team collaboration, and overall organizational success.

### Literature Review

In today's dynamic environment, management is conducted amidst rapid changes and unexpected challenges, where traditional methods and pre-defined solutions often fall short. As a result, management skills have become increasingly unpredictable, complex, and demanding (Śmieja et al., 2014). This ongoing uncertainty is present across all organizational levels, prompting a need to understand why, despite having the necessary expertise, these challenges persist. While technical skills remain vital to any industry as foundational pillars for expertise, Goleman (2021) once remarked, “to be successful in life, it takes more than just being smart.” Supporting this, both Atalah (2014) and Maali, et al. (2022) underscored the role of personality traits in influencing job performance in the construction industry. Personality attributes such as EI, diligence, gentleness, and prudence are critical contributors to success in any workplace where individuals are applying their technical skills. Somuah et al. (2024) found that an individual's core character is largely shaped by their inherent personality traits. Therefore, EI is an essential trait that the FM sector needs to identify and nurture in its workforce.

The concept of EI emerged through a series of studies in the early 1990s (Bar-On, 2004) which traced its development and led to the creation of various performance tests designed to measure it as an ability construct. Since then, EI has been described in many ways across various industries and has proven adaptable to a wide range of contexts, including FM. EI can be seen as two key components: emotions, which are reactions to actual or perceived interactions, and intelligence, which involves the capacity to reason logically and make sound judgments (Mayer et al., 2011). Other scholars have expanded EI to include a range of dispositional traits, such as happiness, self-esteem, optimism, and self-regulation, rather than viewing it solely as an ability-based construct (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Therefore, EI reflects a fundamental aspect of human behavior that is distinct from intellectual ability.

Within organizations, EI is the ability of individuals to regulate and manage their emotions while fostering positive interactions that strengthen relationships and help achieve common goals (Adnan & Abdullah, 2022). For facility managers at all levels to experience a positive work environment and achieve commitment from employees, attention to emotional well-being is critical. The importance of

EI has been recognized in various fields, such as healthcare, where higher EI levels have been linked to better awareness of mental and physical processes, which in turn improves clinical outcomes (Mayer et al., 2008).

In the construction industry, job levels play a significant role in EI. Ogundare et al. (2023) found that leaders in specialized fields exhibited an overall EI that was 4% higher than general contractors, suggesting that EI is crucial for transitions between job levels. Similarly, procurement professionals demonstrated 7% higher social awareness compared to facility managers, an EI trait crucial for career progression (Somuah et al., 2024). Additionally, project managers with high EI were consistently ranked as top performers, exhibiting strong leadership and communication skills (Maali et al., 2022).

To assess EI, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) expert scoring system, introduced by Mayer et al. (2004) has been widely adopted. Additionally, the EI Appraisal developed by Bradberry & Greaves (2009) is another tool used to measure EI skills. For this study, the broader Human Dimension assessment, a multidimensional tool incorporating an EI component, will be utilized. This assessment emphasizes two primary traits: personal competence and social competence. Personal competence is reflected in self-management, while social competence encompasses relationship management and social awareness.

### **Research Method**

This study focused on two key job levels within the FM industry: entry-level facility managers and senior executives. These levels were chosen to explore the development of EI as facility managers advance in their careers. Entry-level managers are typically responsible for operational tasks and direct interactions with vendors and clients, while senior executives oversee strategic leadership and organizational decision-making. Entry-level managers, typically holding titles such as Facility Coordinator or Assistant Manager, possess 1 to 5 years of professional experience, whereas senior executives, including roles like Director, Vice President, or Chief Facilities Officer, generally bring an average of 15 or more years of expertise to their positions. They encompass a range of sectors such as healthcare, corporate, and education. Progression to senior-level roles is determined by experience, leadership capabilities, and the complexity of responsibilities managed.

This study adapted the EI assessment, selected for its scientific rigor and wide application in current literature. This assessment is frequently used in studies relating to job performance, spanning large-scale research that includes hundreds of thousands of individuals from a variety of industries (Cheah, 2020). The assessment measures key EI traits, including self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, which are crucial for effective leadership in FM. Overall EQ encompasses self-management, as well as social awareness and relationship management.

- **Self-Management (SM):** An individual's ability to utilize emotional awareness to stay flexible and direct their behavior in a constructive way.
- **Social Awareness (SOA):** An individual's capacity to recognize emotions in others and genuinely comprehend their condition, while effectively managing relationships.
- **Relationship Management (RA):** An individual's ability to skillfully handle interactions by being aware of both their own emotions and the emotions of those around them.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Participants comprised FM professionals from medium to large firms across the United States, including senior executives averaging over 15 years of experience and entry-level managers with 1 to

5 years. They encompass a range of sectors such as healthcare, corporate, and education. This diverse sampling aimed to capture variations in EI traits across organizational levels. In total, 34 entry-level facility managers and 69 senior executives participated in the study, as shown in Table 1. The sample size was determined based on the availability of participants within the time constraints of the study. While the sample is relatively small, it aligns with the exploratory nature of the research. Participation was entirely voluntary, with respondents assured anonymity to protect their privacy. To further ensure ethical compliance, all participants were provided with an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved consent form before completing the assessments.

A web-based EI assessment survey was distributed to participants for completion. The survey consists of 27 closed-ended questions asking them for their level of agreement and disagreement to specific behaviors. The questions were phrased on a 10-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree," 5 as "neutral," and 10 representing "strongly agree." These ratings measure participants' capacity to recognize, regulate, and manage their own emotions, as well as those of others.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized for data analysis. Descriptive statistics methods were applied to examine the central tendency, dispersion, and overall structure of the sample data. Additionally, an Independent T-test was performed to identify any statistically significant differences in EI measures between entry level and senior executives. This approach helped to explore variations across job levels and provide insights into EI traits among facility managers.

Table 1

<i>Number of Respondents</i>	
<b>Job Levels</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Entry Level Managers	34
Senior Executives	69
Total	103

### **Results and Findings**

Sample descriptive statistics were calculated to identify the central tendency, dispersion, and general structure of the study data. The descriptive statistics evaluated the mean, standard deviation, range, skewness, and kurtosis of each measure. Normal and Detrended Quantile-Quantile (Q-Q) Plots were checked and revealed that the data was approximately normally distributed. Additionally, Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met. The independent t-test was selected because the data met the assumptions of normality (verified through Q-Q plots) and homogeneity of variances (verified through Levene's test). The t-test is appropriate for comparing means between two independent groups when assumptions are met. Given these results, the independent t-test was performed with a 90% confidence interval (CI) to assess whether there were mean differences in EI between the two job level groups.

Table 2

*Significant Mean Differences Between Senior Executives and Entry Level Managers*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Lower Bound</b>	<b>Upper bound</b>	<b>Percentage Difference</b>
Self-Management	4.81	2.66	0.10	10.09	0.48	7%
Social Awareness	4.62	2.44	0.06	9.49	0.25	7%
Relationship Management	6.32	2.31	<0.01	10.92	1.71	8%
Overall EQ	3.77	1.39	<0.01	6.53	1.01	5%

The summarized outcomes of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

*Senior Executives Higher Mean EI Scores*

Senior executives exhibited higher mean scores across all EI factors compared to entry-level facility managers. While self-management showed marginal differences ( $p = 0.10$ ), social awareness ( $p = 0.06$ ), relationship management, and overall EQ demonstrated statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.01$ ). Senior executives exhibited an 8% higher trait in relationship management and a 5% higher Overall EQ, indicating that EI competencies, particularly in social awareness, relationship management and Overall EQ are more developed at senior job levels.

*Entry Level Lower Mean EI Scores*

Entry-level facility managers consistently exhibited lower mean EI scores compared to senior executives, particularly in social awareness, relationship management and Overall EQ. These findings suggest that EI plays a significant role in advancing senior leadership roles in FM, with senior executives demonstrating stronger EI traits that are critical for effective leadership.

**Discussion**

The findings from this study reveal significant differences in EI between entry-level facility managers and senior executives, particularly in social awareness, relationship management and Overall EQ. The higher scores demonstrated by senior executives suggest that EI, especially in managing relationships and navigating interpersonal dynamics, becomes more refined and critical at higher levels of leadership. This aligns with existing literature that highlights the increasing importance of EI as individuals advance in their careers, particularly in roles requiring greater leadership responsibilities (Goleman, 2021; Boyatzis & Sala, 2004).

One of the most significant differences observed was in relationship management, where senior executives scored 8% higher than their entry-level counterparts. This finding emphasizes the role of relationship management in leadership effectiveness, as it is vital for managing complex stakeholder relationships, team dynamics, and conflict resolution, core elements of senior-level FM (Call & Smithwick, 2023). As facility managers move into senior roles, their ability to foster strong relationships, both within and outside the organization, becomes increasingly critical for organizational success. This result supports Boyatzis & Sala (2004), who argue that emotional competencies, such as relationship management, are key drivers of effective leadership.

The significant difference in Overall EQ, with senior executives scoring 5% higher than entry-level managers, further underscores the necessity of EI in higher leadership roles. EI has been linked to better decision-making, improved team dynamics, and enhanced organizational performance (Adnan & Abdullah, 2022). Facility managers who exhibit higher EI are better equipped to handle the complexity of their roles, particularly in dealing with personnel issues and organizational challenges that require emotional awareness and regulation. These findings align with Mayer et al. (2011), who noted that individuals with higher EI tend to demonstrate better leadership abilities, especially in dynamic environments like FM.

Senior executives show stronger social awareness, as indicated by a 7% increase compared to entry-level managers, owing mostly to their responsibilities requiring strategic leadership and constant interaction with a diverse variety of stakeholders. Their tasks include managing complicated interpersonal connections both inside and externally with clients, vendors, and contractors. Social awareness, a critical part of EI, enables leaders to perceive and comprehend the feelings of others. This is crucial for managing big teams, resolving disagreements, and developing healthy connections within the organization. Goleman (1995) highlights that social awareness is essential for effective leadership, as it allows executives to comprehend team dynamics, anticipate reactions, and lead with EI. This skill is critical in interpreting and responding to others' emotions, particularly when managing teams and engaging diverse stakeholders (Somuah et al., 2024). Additionally, research by Petrides & Furnham (2001) supports the idea that greater social awareness enhances interpersonal effectiveness in leadership roles.

While self-management is not statistically significant, the trends observed suggest that this EI trait still develops as facility managers progress in their careers. These results indicate that EI should be considered an essential component of leadership development in the FM industry. Current training and development programs may not sufficiently address the cultivation of EI traits, especially for entry-level managers who aspire to transition into senior roles. Implementing formal EI training and mentoring programs could help bridge this gap, enhancing leadership effectiveness and improving overall organizational outcomes. This supports the view of Goleman (1995), who argued that while technical skills and IQ are necessary, EI is a key factor that differentiates successful leaders.

### **Conclusions**

The findings from this study highlight the critical role EI plays in FM leadership, particularly as individuals advance to senior roles. Senior executives demonstrated significantly higher EI scores than their entry-level counterparts, especially in areas such as relationship management, social awareness, and Overall EQ. These competencies are essential for effective leadership, as they enable senior facility managers to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, manage stakeholder relationships, and foster positive team environments. The 8% higher score in relationship management and 5% higher overall EQ exhibited by senior executives underscores the importance of EI in managing large teams, resolving conflicts, and driving organizational success. These results are consistent with existing literature, which suggests that EI becomes increasingly critical for leaders as they take on greater responsibilities and face more complex organizational challenges.

Moreover, the study suggests that while self-management was not statistically significant, it may still develop as facility managers progress in their careers, indicating the potential for growth in EI competencies over time. This underscores the need for the FM industry to integrate EI-focused leadership development programs, particularly for entry-level managers aspiring to transition into

senior roles. By incorporating formal EI training and mentoring programs, organizations can better equip their managers with the EI skills necessary for leadership effectiveness.

### **Limitations and recommendations**

The sample size was relatively small, particularly for entry-level managers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings across the entire FM industry. A larger sample could provide more robust insights into how EI competencies vary across different job levels. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported measures of EI, which may be subject to bias, as participants could have overestimated or underestimated their abilities.

Future research should consider incorporating objective measures of EI to gain a more comprehensive understanding of these competencies. Also, the cross-sectional nature of the study, which only provides a snapshot of the relationship between EI and leadership effectiveness at one point in time. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the FM industry integrates EI development into leadership training programs, particularly for entry-level managers. These programs should focus on cultivating key EI traits such as self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Mentoring programs could be an effective approach to enhancing EI, as they allow experienced leaders to share their EI skills with less experienced managers. Furthermore, future research should expand the scope of EI studies in the FM sector by including larger and more diverse samples across different regions. Longitudinal research should also be conducted to explore how EI evolves throughout a facility manager's career and how training interventions can impact leadership effectiveness. By prioritizing the development of EI in leadership, FM organizations can foster more effective leaders and improve overall organizational performance.

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