



Can emotional intelligence offset the negative effects of policy complexity on employee retention? An empirical investigation

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Abstract

Employee retention has become a significant issue for firms functioning in increasingly dynamic and regulated economic contexts. Intricate organizational policies, processes, and compliance mandates can engender uncertainty, tension, and discontent among employees, thereby elevating turnover intentions and diminishing organizational commitment. Simultaneously, emotional intelligence has been acknowledged as a crucial psychological asset that empowers people to navigate workplace obstacles proficiently. This study examines whether emotional intelligence can alleviate the negative impacts of policy complexity on employee retention. The study employs a quantitative methodology and gathers primary data from 120 individuals across several sectors, including education, information technology, finance, healthcare, and manufacturing. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale to assess policy complexity, emotional intelligence, and staff retention. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were utilized to investigate the relationships among the variables. The findings indicate that policy complexity adversely affects employee retention, suggesting that individuals confronted with intricate policies are more inclined to contemplate departing from their firms. Conversely, emotional intelligence exhibits a substantial positive correlation with employee retention, indicating that emotionally intelligent people exhibit enhanced resilience and adaptation in demanding work settings. Moreover, moderation analysis reveals that emotional intelligence mitigates the adverse effect of policy complexity on employee retention. Individuals possessing elevated emotional intelligence exhibit superior capabilities in navigating ambiguity, managing stress, and sustaining favorable dispositions toward their businesses, even amidst intricate policy frameworks. This study enhances the existing literature on employee retention by emphasizing the protective function of emotional intelligence within organizational contexts. Organizations should invest in emotional intelligence training, leadership development efforts, and employee well-being techniques to improve retention outcomes. The study suggests that emotional intelligence is a significant organizational asset that can mitigate the adverse impacts of policy complexity and promote a more dedicated and stable staff.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, policy complexity, employee retention, turnover intention, human resource management, organizational commitment

Introduction

Employee retention has emerged as a paramount concern for modern enterprises. In a period marked by swift technological progress, globalization, heightened rivalry, and evolving workforce expectations, firms must design effective methods to retain skilled personnel. Elevated staff turnover not only escalates recruitment and training expenses but also undermines corporate productivity, knowledge retention, and overall effectiveness. Thus, comprehending the determinants of employee retention has emerged as a significant focus for both scholars and professionals.

A salient aspect garnering heightened scrutiny in organizational studies is policy complexity. Organizations create rules and processes to guarantee uniformity, compliance, equity, and operational efficiency. These rules regulate multiple facets of corporate operations, encompassing employee behavior, performance evaluation, remuneration, workplace safety, information security, and adherence to regulations. Although policies are crucial for sustaining organizational order, excessive complexity in their design and implementation may lead to unforeseen effects for personnel.

Policy complexity denotes the extent to which organizational rules, procedures, and guidelines are seen as challenging to comprehend, interpret, and execute. Intricate regulations frequently entail numerous approval levels, comprehensive paperwork prerequisites, unclear terminology, and regular amendments. Employees may find it challenging to understand these policies, resulting in frustration, ambiguity, and diminished job satisfaction. Such issues can adversely impact employee engagement and elevate inclinations to depart from the firm.

The contemporary workplace has become more regulated, leading to the proliferation of organizational regulations and compliance mandates. Industries like healthcare, finance, education, and manufacturing often function under rigorous regulatory frameworks that require comprehensive organizational policies. While these regulations aim to mitigate risk and promote responsibility, employees frequently view them as bureaucratic impediments that obstruct productivity and innovation. Consequently, policy complexity may lead to emotional fatigue, occupational stress, and diminished organizational commitment.

Employee retention denotes an organization's capacity to maintain its workers over a designated timeframe. Retention is affected by various elements, including as remuneration,

professional development prospects, corporate culture, leadership efficacy, work-life equilibrium, and employee contentment. Psychological elements have recently emerged as significant predictors of employee retention. Emotional intelligence has emerged as a notably influential dimension among these elements.

Emotional intelligence denotes the capacity to identify, comprehend, regulate, and adeptly manage both personal emotions and those of others. The notion gained significance through Daniel Goleman's work, which posited that emotional intelligence is crucial for both personal and professional achievement. Individuals possessing elevated emotional intelligence demonstrate enhanced self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, motivation, and social competencies. These qualities empower professionals to adeptly address workplace difficulties and sustain strong interpersonal interactions.

In organizational contexts, emotional intelligence correlates with various beneficial outcomes, such as increased job performance, greater leadership efficacy, enhanced teamwork, less workplace stress, and elevated job satisfaction. Individuals with elevated emotional intelligence are typically more adept at navigating uncertainty and ambiguity. They can modulate adverse emotions, sustain resilience in challenging circumstances, and adapt more efficiently to organizational transformations. Thus, emotional intelligence may function as a safeguard against workplace pressures, including policy complexity.

The correlation between policy complexity and staff retention can be elucidated using organizational stress theories. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) paradigm posits that high job demands induce strain and diminish employee well-being, while personal and organizational resources facilitate coping with these demands. Policy complexity is a job demand since it necessitates employees to exert extra cognitive and emotional effort to comprehend and adhere to organizational protocols. Emotional intelligence serves as a personal asset that improves an individual's ability to manage working issues.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) hypothesis elucidates the interrelationship among these variables. The notion posits that individuals endeavor to get and maintain valued resources. Employees may feel resource depletion from heightened stress and uncertainty when faced with intricate policies. Emotional intelligence allows employees to navigate these problems efficiently, so preserving psychological resources and diminishing the probability of turnover intentions.

Prior research has shown that intricate organizational frameworks and bureaucratic processes frequently diminish employee satisfaction and elevate turnover intentions. Extensive research has demonstrated a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and certain employee outcomes, such as commitment and retention. Nevertheless, scant empirical research has particularly investigated whether emotional intelligence can mitigate the adverse consequences of policy complexity on employee retention. The existing gap in the literature underpins the current study.

Comprehending the regulating function of emotional intelligence is crucial in modern businesses where policy intricacy is frequently inevitable. Regulatory mandates, technology frameworks, and corporate governance often demand comprehensive policies. Instead of completely

removing policy complexity, firms could gain by enhancing employees' emotional intelligence to foster adaptability and resilience.

This study aims to examine the correlation between policy complexity, emotional intelligence, and employee retention across several sectors. This study investigates the role of emotional intelligence in mitigating the adverse effects of policy complexity on retention, hence enhancing the existing literature on human resource management and organizational behavior. The results are anticipated to offer significant insights for managers aiming to formulate successful retention strategies in more intricate organizational contexts.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the influence of policy intricacy on staff retention.
- To examine if emotional intelligence alleviates the adverse impacts of policy complexity on staff retention.

Research Hypotheses

H₁: Policy complexity significantly and negatively influences employee retention.

H₂: Leader emotional intelligence significantly and positively influences employee retention.

H₃: Leader emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between policy complexity and employee retention such that the negative impact of policy complexity on employee retention becomes weaker when leader emotional intelligence is high.

Literature Review

Ashraf and Siddiqui (2020) examined the correlation between employee engagement and employee retention. Their research revealed that engaged individuals have elevated levels of commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational loyalty. The study highlighted that psychological capital and employee well-being substantially influence retention outcomes. The results indicate that firms prioritizing supportive work conditions encounter reduced turnover rates. The study emphasized that retention is influenced not just by financial incentives but also by employees' emotional and psychological commitment to the firm. These findings establish a basis for comprehending the determinants that affect employee retention in modern companies.

Aman-Ullah *et al.* (2022) investigated occupational safety and staff retention within the healthcare industry. Their findings indicated that organizational rules and work processes substantially affect individuals' intentions to stay with their company. The research indicated that convoluted and inadequately conveyed policies elevate employee tension and discontent, therefore diminishing retention rates. The researchers contended that firms have to streamline policy execution and enhance communication systems to cultivate a healthy work environment. Their research underscores that policy-related factors significantly influence employee retention decisions.

Coronado-Maldonado and Benitez-Marquez (2023) performed an extensive review of emotional intelligence, leadership, and workplace results. Their research found that emotional intelligence markedly enhances leadership

efficacy, employee cooperation, and organizational performance. Individuals with elevated emotional intelligence, including both employees and leaders, exhibited superior stress management skills and enhanced interpersonal interactions. The authors highlighted that emotional intelligence enhances organizational resilience, particularly in unpredictable and complicated contexts. Their findings suggest that emotional intelligence is a crucial asset that empowers employees to manage workplace issues efficiently.

Jefveleon *et al.* (2024) examined the impact of emotional intelligence and social intelligence on employee retention within Malaysia's ICT sector. The study, utilizing data from 170 employees, concluded that emotional intelligence significantly affects employee engagement, hence improving employee retention. The findings indicated that people with high emotional intelligence exhibit enhanced workplace relationships, increased adaptability, and elevated organizational commitment. Employee engagement was determined to be a complete mediator between emotional intelligence and retention. The findings demonstrate the strategic value of emotional intelligence in minimizing employee turnover and enhancing workforce stability.

Salameh-Ayanian (2025) investigated the significance of emotional intelligence in managers amid organizational upheaval and economic instability. The study indicated that emotionally intelligent managers positively influence employee performance and workplace stability through competences such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills. The results indicate that emotional intelligence is especially crucial in demanding organizational settings when individuals face stress and ambiguity. The research indicated that emotionally intelligent leadership enhances employee confidence, engagement, and retention.

Gosling (2025) examined the correlation between emotional intelligence and employee retention. The research contended that leaders with elevated emotional intelligence foster supportive work cultures in which people feel appreciated, respected, and comprehended. Such cultures cultivate enhanced emotional attachment and organizational commitment, resulting in less turnover intentions. The results demonstrate that emotional intelligence improves communication quality, conflict resolution, and employee satisfaction, hence enhancing retention outcomes. The research highlighted that emotional intelligence ought to be seen as a strategic human resource asset for the retention of skilled individuals.

Gerhardt *et al.* (2025) ^[5] performed a meta-analytic evaluation investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership outcomes. Their research indicated that emotional intelligence correlates positively with leadership effectiveness, employee well-being, constructive workplace relationships, and organizational performance. Leaders possessing elevated emotional intelligence were shown to resolve workplace problems more efficiently and foster pleasant emotional environments that promote employee commitment. The research indicated that emotional intelligence influences both relational and task-oriented leadership results, ultimately improving employee retention and workplace satisfaction.

HR.com Research Report (2025^[6]–2026) The State of Employee Retention Report emphasized that employee

retention continues to be a major concern for firms worldwide. The report identified organizational support, employee engagement, leadership quality, and workplace culture as primary factors influencing retention. It highlighted that employees are progressively pursuing supportive and emotionally intelligent environments that ensure psychological safety and facilitate professional development. The survey indicates that firms that engage in employee development and emotional well-being are more effective in retaining qualified personnel.

Sharma and Kumar (2026) investigated the influence of leaders' emotional intelligence on staff engagement and retention. The study, utilizing a sample of 250 employees from various organizational levels, revealed that leaders' self-awareness, empathy, and motivation substantially impact employee engagement and retention. Employees who regarded their bosses as emotionally savvy indicated elevated commitment levels and diminished turnover intentions. The researchers determined that emotional intelligence is an essential leadership attribute for sustaining workforce stability and organizational efficacy.

Cross-Cultural Leadership Research (2024) ^[12] A cross-cultural study of emotional intelligence in leadership explored its impact on employee engagement and retention within various corporate settings. The research indicated that leaders with emotional intelligence foster cultures defined by trust, motivation, and collaboration. Such workplaces markedly improve employee retention irrespective of cultural disparities. The authors determined that emotional intelligence is a vital organizational competency that fosters employee engagement and sustained workforce commitment in more international environments.

Research Gap

The literature study indicates that extensive research has been undertaken on emotional intelligence, employee engagement, leadership efficacy, and staff retention. Recent research has repeatedly shown that emotional intelligence significantly affects employee attitudes, workplace relationships, engagement, and retention. Research has also highlighted organizational procedures and workplace circumstances as critical factors influencing employee retention.

Nevertheless, empirical research particularly investigating the correlation between policy complexity and staff retention is exceedingly few. Moreover, current research has predominantly examined the direct impact of emotional intelligence on retention, neglecting its possible function as a moderating variable. A significant gap exists in research regarding the potential of emotional intelligence to alleviate the adverse effects of intricate organizational policies on employee retention.

This study aims to address the gap by empirically analysing the influence of policy complexity on employee retention and exploring whether emotional intelligence acts as a mitigating factor that lessens the negative effects of policy complexity on employees' intentions to stay with their organizations.

Conceptual Framework

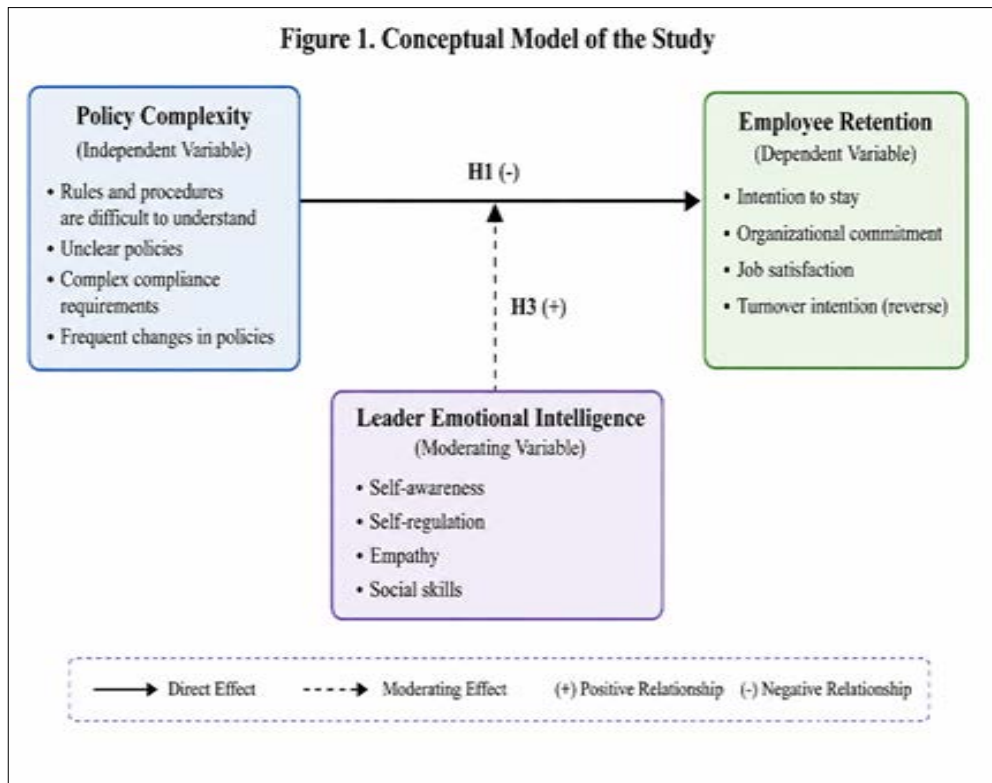


Fig 1: Conceptual Model of the study

The framework is grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, suggesting that leader emotional intelligence acts as a valuable organizational resource that buffers the adverse effects of complex policies on employees.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative and descriptive research design to examine the impact of policy complexity on employee retention and to assess the moderating role of emotional intelligence. The study relied on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to employees working in different sectors.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised employees from the Education, Banking, Information Technology, Healthcare, and Manufacturing sectors.

A sample of 500 employees was selected using convenience sampling due to accessibility and time constraints.

Sector-wise Distribution

Table 1: Sector-wise Distribution of Respondents

Sector	Frequency	Percentage
Education	110	22.0
IT	105	21.0
Banking	95	19.0
Healthcare	90	18.0
Manufacturing	100	20.0
Total	500	100

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert Scale was used:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Statistical Tools Used

- Cronbach's Alpha
- Descriptive Statistics
- Pearson Correlation
- Multiple Regression Analysis

Results and Analysis

Reliability Analysis

Table 2: Reliability Analysis of Study Variables

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)
Policy Complexity	5	0.861	0.878
Leader Emotional Intelligence	10	0.924	0.931
Employee Retention	6	0.889	0.901

Cronbach's Alpha values are above 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency and reliability.

Table 3: Convergent Validity

Construct	AVE
Policy Complexity	0.618
Leader Emotional Intelligence	0.684
Employee Retention	0.641

AVE values exceeded 0.50, establishing convergent validity.

Table 4: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Test	Value
KMO Measure	0.921
Bartlett's Chi-square	5238.451
df	210
Sig.	0.000

The KMO value exceeded 0.90, indicating excellent sampling adequacy.

Discriminant validity was assessed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and all constructs met the required threshold.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender

Table 5: Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	290	58.0
Female	210	42.0
Total	500	100

The findings indicate that male respondents constituted 58.0% of the total sample, whereas female respondents accounted for 42.0%. This distribution demonstrates adequate representation of both genders, thereby ensuring diversity in the sample.

Age Group

Table 6: Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
21–30 Years	180	36.0
31–40 Years	160	32.0
41–50 Years	95	19.0
Above 50 Years	65	13.0
Total	500	100

The majority of respondents (36.0%) belonged to the age group of 21–30 years, followed by 31–40 years (32.0%). This indicates that the sample predominantly consisted of young and middle-aged employees actively participating in organizational activities.

Reliability Analysis

Table 7: Reliability Statistics

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Policy Complexity	5	0.861
Leader Emotional Intelligence	10	0.924
Employee Retention	6	0.889

Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold value of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and reliability of the measurement instrument. Leader Emotional Intelligence recorded the highest reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.924$),

suggesting excellent consistency among the measurement items.

Validity Assessment

Table 8: Convergent Validity

Construct	AVE	Composite Reliability
Policy Complexity	0.618	0.878
Leader Emotional Intelligence	0.684	0.931
Employee Retention	0.641	0.901

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceeded the threshold value of 0.50, thereby confirming convergent validity. Furthermore, Composite Reliability values were above 0.70, establishing satisfactory construct reliability.

Table 9: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Test	Value
KMO Measure	0.921
Bartlett's Chi-square	5238.451
df	210
Sig.	0.000

The KMO value of 0.921 indicates excellent sampling adequacy. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming that the dataset was suitable for factor analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Policy Complexity	3.89	0.73
Leader Emotional Intelligence	4.07	0.69
Employee Retention	3.76	0.71

The results indicate that respondents perceived organizational policies as moderately complex (Mean = 3.89). Leader Emotional Intelligence recorded the highest mean score (Mean = 4.07), suggesting that respondents generally perceived their leaders as emotionally intelligent. Employee Retention demonstrated a relatively high mean value (Mean = 3.76), indicating favorable retention intentions among employees.

Correlation Analysis

Table 11: Correlation Matrix

Variables	PC	LEI	ER
Policy Complexity (PC)	1		
Leader Emotional Intelligence (LEI)	-0.318**	1	
Employee Retention (ER)	-0.563**	0.672**	1

$p < 0.01$

The findings reveal that Policy Complexity has a significant negative relationship with Employee Retention ($r = -0.563$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that increased policy complexity reduces employees' intention to remain within the organization.

Leader Emotional Intelligence exhibited a significant positive relationship with Employee Retention ($r = 0.672$, p

< 0.01), indicating that emotionally intelligent leaders enhance employees' commitment and retention. Furthermore, Leader Emotional Intelligence was negatively associated with Policy Complexity ($r = -0.318$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that emotionally intelligent leaders may reduce employees' negative perceptions regarding policy complexity.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 12: Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
0.758	0.575	0.571	0.384

The model explains approximately 57.5% of the variation in Employee Retention, indicating strong explanatory power.

Table 13: ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	96.41	2	48.205	223.47	0.000
Residual	71.08	497	0.143		
Total	167.49	499			

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 223.47$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that Policy Complexity and Leader Emotional Intelligence significantly predict Employee Retention.

Table 14: Regression Coefficients

Predictor	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Policy Complexity	-0.417	-9.482	0.000
Leader Emotional Intelligence	0.536	11.874	0.000

Policy Complexity significantly and negatively influences Employee Retention ($\beta = -0.417$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, Hypothesis H1 is supported. Leader Emotional Intelligence significantly and positively influences Employee Retention ($\beta = 0.536$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, Hypothesis H2 is supported.

Moderation Analysis

Table 15: Moderation Analysis

Variable	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Policy Complexity	-0.368	-8.411	0.000
Leader Emotional Intelligence	0.491	10.286	0.000
PC × LEI	0.287	5.718	0.000

The interaction effect between Policy Complexity and Leader Emotional Intelligence was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms that Leader Emotional Intelligence moderates the relationship between Policy Complexity and Employee Retention.

Discussion

This study analyzed the effect of policy complexity on staff retention and explored the moderating influence of Leader Emotional Intelligence (LEI) in this context. The results indicated that policy complexity adversely impacts employee retention, hence corroborating Hypothesis H1. Employees who view organizational policies as excessively complex, bureaucratic, and continuously evolving are more prone to experience irritation, uncertainty, and work-related stress, hence diminishing their intention to stay with the

business. This discovery aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) paradigm, which posits that high job demands negatively impact employee well-being and organizational commitment.

The research also revealed that Leader Emotional Intelligence has a substantial beneficial impact on employee retention, hence corroborating Hypothesis H2. Leaders with elevated emotional intelligence foster supportive work cultures marked by empathy, effective communication, trust, and psychological safety. Such leaders possess a heightened ability to comprehend employees' emotional requirements, resolve workplace problems, and inspire people throughout difficult organizational circumstances. As a result, employees under emotionally intelligent leaders have enhanced organizational commitment and increased intents to remain with the organization. These findings align with prior research highlighting the essential function of emotional intelligence in improving employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention.

Conclusion

This study significantly contributes by validating the moderating function of Leader Emotional Intelligence. The moderation study demonstrated that Leader Emotional Intelligence considerably mitigates the adverse association between policy complexity and staff retention, hence corroborating Hypothesis H3. Employees under the supervision of emotionally intelligent leaders encounter diminished negative impacts from intricate organizational policies, since these leaders offer direction, emotional support, and clarification of policies. This discovery corroborates the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which asserts that individual and organizational resources assist employees in managing workplace pressures. Consequently, Leader Emotional Intelligence functions as a vital organizational asset that alleviates the adverse effects of policy complexity. This study finds that policy complexity considerably diminishes employee retention, but Leader Emotional Intelligence favorably influences employees' intention to remain in firms. The results confirm that Leader Emotional Intelligence serves as a protective factor, mitigating the adverse impacts of policy complexity on employee retention. Organizations functioning in progressively regulated and policy-oriented contexts must not only streamline regulations but also prioritize the cultivation of emotionally savvy leaders. Leadership development programs emphasizing empathy, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills can significantly enhance employee commitment and workforce stability. Leader Emotional Intelligence serves as a strategic organizational asset that enhances staff retention and fosters long-term organizational efficacy in intricate workplace settings.

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