

Unveiling the Power of Emotional Intelligence: A Dynamic Exploration of Its Impact on Proactive Decision-Making

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Abstract

In this multifaceted, dynamic business world, leadership success and effective decision-making are highly dependent on understanding and controlling emotional intelligence (EI). In this multifaceted world of work, the integration and strategic use of emotional intelligence (EI) drives change and facilitates proactive and effective decision-making. The study aims to examine the direction and degree of relationship that exists between EI and proactive decision-making using one of the public service institutions in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Customs Authority. The study uses a quantitative and correlational design utilizing a structured survey administered to a randomly selected sample of 156 employees. The study applied statistical analysis techniques, including correlation and stepwise regression analysis, to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between EI and proactive decision-making. Research has examined how and in what direction EI competencies (emotion perception, regulation, and utilization) influence features of proactive decision-making. The result accentuates that Emotional intelligence emerges as a critical driver, accounting for a substantial proportion of the observed differences in individuals' ability to make proactive decisions. Grounding on the findings, the study highlights the necessity of integrating EI training programs into organizational development strategies to enhance employees' decision-making capabilities, adaptability, and resilience in dynamic workplace environments.

Keywords:

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Proactive Decision-Making;
Leadership;
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1- Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a main gear in the modern workplace, proving itself to be more than just a slogan. Among various industries, leaders and teams with strong EI consistently outperform their peers not just in productivity but also in creativity and resilience. The cutting-edge work of Salovey & Meyer [1] and Goleman [2] first defined EI as the ability to identify emotions in oneself and others and use this understanding to guide thinking and behavior. However, as varied research has shown how leaders equipped with EI navigate high-pressure decisions: remaining in the spotlight, defying workplace pressures, and transforming emotional insights into strategic advantages, its real-world impact has become undeniable [3, 4].

Today, forward-thinking organizations treat EI not as a soft skill, but as the backbone of effective leadership and collaborative success. Emotional intelligence is linked to various aspects of professional and personal success, and it is recognized as a key driver of organizational effectiveness [5, 6]. Proactive decision-making involves anticipating future challenges, seizing opportunities, and initiating action to shape the course of events, reflecting a forward-thinking and strategic approach to problem-solving [7]. According to Crant [8], proactive behavior is essential in dynamic and

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uncertain work environments, where the ability to anticipate and initiate action offers a competitive advantage. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage uncertainty, communicate effectively, and motivate employees to embrace organizational changes [9].

Although extensive research has examined the connection between EI and leadership, job performance, and organizational success, there is a noticeable gap in research specifically linking EI to proactive decision-making. While a considerable body of research highlights the role of emotional intelligence in fostering interpersonal skills, resolving conflicts, and enhancing team cohesion [10, 11], fewer studies have specifically investigated how EI influences decision-making processes, particularly in anticipating challenges and engaging in proactive actions. The role of EI in decision-making extends beyond emotional regulation to shaping cognitive approaches that facilitate strategic foresight and adaptability in uncertain environments.

Proactive decision-making, as conceptualized by Parker & Collins [7], is vital in leadership and organizational performance. Despite its significance, existing literature has given limited attention to the psychological and emotional factors that underpin proactive behavior. Given that emotional intelligence encompasses self-awareness, emotion regulation, and empathy attributes that fundamentally shape individuals' abilities to foresee risks and seize opportunities, it becomes crucial to explore their contribution to proactive decision-making in unpredictable organizational contexts [6, 12]. Different scholars in the who explored about EI have hinted that the higher the levels of emotional intelligence (EI) are more likely lead individuals to engage in proactive behaviors, enabling them to navigate complex organizational environments, manage stress effectively, and foster innovation within their institutions [13].

However, while the relationship between EI and leadership effectiveness has been widely sightseen, its role in shaping proactive decision-making remains an area requiring further empirical investigation. Besides, the relationship between emotional intelligence and proactive decision-making subject to cultural influences. EI is not a universally standardized concept; rather, it is shaped by the cultural and organizational context in which it is applied. A substantial portion of research in the area of EI is rooted in Western perspectives, where leadership is often framed within an individualistic paradigm, limiting the direct transferability of these findings to collectivist societies such as Ethiopia. The social and Cultural factors influence how emotions are interpreted, regulated, and utilized in decision-making process. In hierarchical workplace structures (common in many developing economies), leadership effectiveness tends to be associated with collective decision-making, maintaining social harmony, and adherence to authority structures [14-16]. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the role of EI in proactive decision-making within the Ethiopian public sector, limiting the scope to the Ethiopian customs authority, considering the contextual differences that might shape leadership and strategic decision-making processes.

The study aims to provide robust results and seeks to bridge the gap between EI and proactive decision-making, providing both theoretical insights and practical implications for leadership and organizational success in different societal environments. Besides, the study expands the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the connection between EI and proactive decision-making, relying on an environment where there is a dearth of studies on the topic. The findings will contribute to the understanding of how organizations can incorporate EI into leadership training programs to encourage proactive workplace behavior.

1-1- Research Objectives and Research Questions

The main objectives of the study are presented below:

- To examine how emotional intelligence enhances leaders' ability to anticipate future challenges and opportunities, thereby improving their proactive decision-making skills.
- To analyze how key EI competencies—such as Emotion perception, emotional regulation and Used of Emotion contribute to individuals' ability to initiate and manage change in the decision-making process.

To address these gaps, this study seeks to answer the following key research questions:

- What role do EI competencies play in facilitating change-oriented decision-making behaviors?
- How does emotional intelligence empower leaders to drive proactive decision-making through self-motivation and initiative?

2- Theoretical Framework

This study is situated within Meyer & Salovey's [17] model of emotional intelligence and Parker & Collins [7] framework of proactive behavior, both of which provide complementary perspectives on how emotional intelligence (EI) influences proactive decision-making. These theories help to explain the cognitive and behavioral strategies that drive individuals to engage in proactive, strategic, and self-motivated decision-making in organizational settings.

Meyer & Salovey [17] posited emotional intelligence as a set of cognitive skills that enable individuals to process and apply emotional information in decision-making. Their model divides emotional intelligence into three main components: perceiving emotions, Use of information to make a decision and regulating emotions. The model outlines that emotionally intelligent individuals are believed to be conscious and better at managing stress, interpreting emotional

prompts, and integrating emotions into the process of decision-making, eventually enhancing the quality and timeliness of their choices [3, 5]. Apart from self-regulation, EI also allows individuals to influence the emotional climate of their teams, which plays a crucial role in leadership and strategic decision-making [10].

Supplementing the above perspective, Parker & Collins's [7] proactive behavior framework underscores three main dimensions that describe proactive workplace behaviors; anticipatory behavior, change-oriented behavior, and self-initiated action. Putting the meaning for each dimension, anticipatory behavior refers to the ability to recognize and prepare for future challenges, while change-oriented behavior comprises actively seeking enhancements to existing processes. Self-initiated behavior, in contrast, emphasizes independent decision-making without the need for external motivation [7, 18]. These features are particularly useful in dynamic organizational environments where flexibility and strategic foresight are essential.

The study put an effort into integrating those two theoretical perspectives, seeking to examine how emotional intelligence facilitates proactive decision-making. The prevalence of higher EI among Leaders and employees allows for better anticipation of challenges, effective management of workplace emotions, and the initiation of strategic actions that contribute to improved organizational performance [6, 9]. Understanding the relationship between EI and proactive behavior provides valuable insights into how organizations can develop emotionally intelligent leadership models that foster adaptability, resilience, and innovation.

2-1- Study Theoretical Framework

The framework shows patterns and the direction of relationships supposed to be measured (see Figure 1). It illustrates the cumulative impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on employees' proactive decision-making behavior, while also portraying the distinct influence of each EI dimension on proactive decision-making.

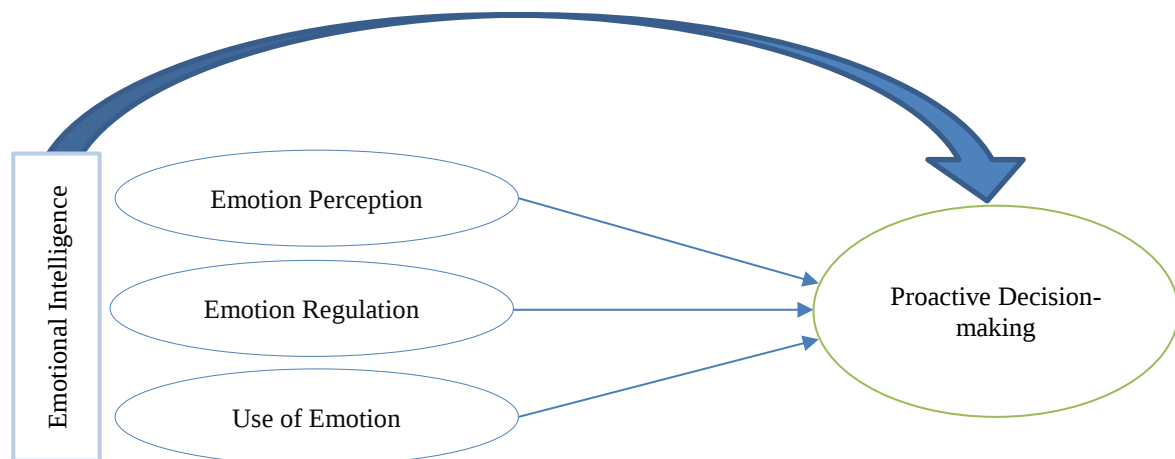


Figure 1. Study Framework

2-2- Significance of the Study

Realizing the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in framing proactive decision-making is critical to taming leadership effectiveness in today's rapidly evolving workplace. Leaders with strong emotional intelligence skills are better equipped to navigate challenges, manage emotions under stress, and make informed strategic decisions, ultimately helping organizations to cope preemptively with uncertainty and complexity [5, 10].

The findings of the study significantly contribute to organizational policymakers, leadership training programs, and decision-making bodies. By demonstrating how EI enhances proactive workplace behaviors, the study delivers empirical evidence that can inform leadership development initiatives. Organizations that focus and prioritize EI training and development programs can promote leaders who are more proficient at anticipating challenges, nurturing resilience, and instigating strategic change [6, 9]. Mounting the attributes of EI at all organizational levels contributes to greater adaptability, improved employee engagement, and stronger decision-making cultures.

From a theoretical and empirical perspective, the study adds to existing literature by examining how EI competencies contribute to proactive behaviors. The exploration enriches academic discussions while providing practical recommendations for leadership effectiveness and organizational adaptation.

3- Research Methodology

3-1- Research Design

This study employs a quantitative correlational research design to examine the association between emotional intelligence (EI) and proactive decision-making. Applying a correlational technique allows for identifying the strength

and direction of associations between study variables, enabling an empirical understanding of the study objective [19]. The choice and implementation of a correlational design aligns with previous research that has investigated the role of EI in leadership, workplace adaptability, and decision-making effectiveness [6, 10].

Cross-sectional surveys were employed to collect data from employees at the Ethiopian Customs Authority (ECA) branch in Addis Ababa. The method allows for the efficient assessment of existing patterns and relationships between EI and proactive decision-making [20]. Evaluating EI systematically, the study utilized a validated psychometric scale [7, 17].

3-2- Sampling and Data Collection

5-2-1- Sampling

To obtain the necessary data from the targeted employees, the researchers made a great effort to include individuals in diverse job roles, from frontline officers to managerial staff. A stratified sampling strategy was used to ensure the selected sample was statistically significant and representative of a broad workforce. The study had a sample size of 156 respondents from a total population of approximately 1,500 employees, determined according to Krejcie & Morgan's [21] formula. This sample size provides a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, ensuring the statistical reliability of the findings [19]. Ensuring representation across different job levels, the study used a stratified random sampling technique [20].

5-2-2- Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was formulated to obtain the required data. The questionnaire consists of two primary sections, the Emotional Intelligence and Proactive Decision-Making scales. Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) was used to assess the EI dimensions (EI competencies) included in the study. The competencies are described as perceiving one's emotions (Self-emotion appraisal), Use of emotion (leveraging emotions in decision-making) and Emotion regulation (controlling and managing emotions effectively). Adopting such a scale is widely validated and recommended in EI research, making it appropriate research tool in assessing employees' emotional intelligence levels [22]. To evaluate participants' proactivity in decision-making, the scale adopted from Bateman & Crant [23], which allows for measuring cumulatively the anticipatory, change-driven, and self-initiated decision-making behaviors. This scale was selected because it aligns with the Parker & Collins [7] proactive behavior framework discussed in the theoretical foundation.

The questionnaire was administered through self-report surveys, distributed both physically and electronically (Google Forms) to maximize response rates and accommodate respondents' convenience.

3-3- Method of Data Analysis

After completing the data collection process, the gathered data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A series of statistical techniques was applied to examine relationships, measure variability, and identify key predictors of proactive decision-making. In the analysis, the authors reported descriptive Statistics, Mean standard deviation, and frequency distributions to summarize demographic characteristics and participants' scores on EI and proactive decision-making measures. In confirming the magnitude and direction of the relationship, Multiple Linear Regression and correlational (Pearson correlation coefficient) analysis have been implemented, respectively. A regression model was performed to determine which specific EI dimensions serve as significant predictors of proactive decision-making behaviors. In the result, the ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) outcome has been presented to assess the overall significance of the regression model.

3-4- Validity and Reliability

To ensure measurement accuracy and consistency, the study assessed both the reliability and validity of the instruments used. In affirming the reliability and measuring the internal consistency of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was used. In maintaining the content validity and the question, clarity and compatibility with the study area, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in the field and a person who understands the societal structure and culture of the respondent's environment. In supporting the content clarity, wording, and appropriateness of the survey, a pilot study was conducted with 30 employees.

4- Literature Review

4-1- The Concept of Emotional Intelligence

The Meaning and Evolution of Emotional Intelligence:

Emotions play an integral role in shaping workplace interactions, decision-making, and leadership effectiveness. The contemporary studies in organizational behavior and psychology put Emotional intelligence among the prime list of

thematic areas for investigation. Introduced by Salovey & Meyer [1], emotional intelligence is explained as the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to distinguish between them, and to use the information gained to guide one's thinking and actions. In their seminal work, they emphasized the cognitive processing of emotional information and its impact on social interactions and problem solving.

Goleman [2], who extended emotional intelligence beyond Cognitive processing to include competencies like empathy, motivation, and social skills, further popularized the concept. The model stresses the role of EI in the makeover of leadership and workplace success, uncovering that it may be more vital than customary cognitive intelligence (IQ) in realizing achievement in a variety of professional domains. His work has inspired extensive curiosity in the theme of emotional intelligence and its application to team dynamics, leadership, and performance management. Besides the above studies, research such as Aghdasi et al. [24] unfolded the concern about the function and influence of emotional intelligence in shaping job satisfaction and organizational commitment, both of which are closely and directly linked to an employee's capacity to make proactive decisions.

Theoretical Models:

The study of emotional intelligence is grounded in three key models. One of these is the Ability Model by Mayer and Salovey, which defines emotional intelligence as a set of abilities related to the accurate assessment and expression of emotions, the efficient control of emotions in both oneself and others, and the application of emotions to improve cognitive functions [17]. Perceiving emotions, utilizing emotions to facilitate thinking, understanding emotions, and regulating emotions are its four main branches. This model emphasizes that EI is an ability distinct from other personality traits or cognitive skills.

Another significant model is the model presented by Goleman's mixed model. His model integrates emotional intelligence with other emotional and social competencies. In his framework, he embraces the five main elements of emotional intelligence: motivation, self-regulation, self-awareness, empathy, and social skills [2]. This extensive view of EI connects personal competence with social awareness, reflecting its practical implications for leadership and interpersonal effectiveness. EI backs leadership effectiveness by assisting individuals in balancing both cognitive and emotional processes, which ultimately leverage emotional intelligence, enhancing Preemptive decision-making, strategic foresight, problem-solving abilities, and organizational adaptability [25].

Bar-On & Parker [26] also proposed a model that contributed to the development of the concept. He devised a model of emotional-social intelligence that lays emphasis on the momentousness of emotional and social skills necessary for adaptive behavior. The model identifies skills such as managing stress, building relationships, and solving problems, all of which are essential for enhancing emotional and social well-being.

Even though these models differ in their focus point, emotional intelligence comprises the ability to identify, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others, which is indispensable for attaining success in numerous areas of life, especially in the workplace.

EI eminence in the Workplace:

Goleman boldly stated in his research that EI disrupts the traditional way of working and it is vivid to witness changes in organizational outcomes that influence organizational aspects such as teamwork, job satisfaction, and leadership. Leaders with robust emotional intelligence excel in motivating their teams and fostering positive relationships [2]. Because emotionally intelligent people are master handed at perceiving their internal emotional state, dealing with their emotional states, and responding empathetically to others.

Various studies in the area of EI attested to its role in metamorphosing job performances, exclusively in roles that require high levels of interaction, to mention some areas such as customer service, healthcare, and management [3]. Better decision-making under pressure, enhanced teamwork, and conflict resolution have all been associated with emotional intelligence [4]. The findings and conclusions in the area italicized the importance of emotional intelligence in ensuring not only individual performance but also organizational efficiency, as emotionally intelligent employees can foster a work environment conducive to productivity and creativity. The elevated level of Emotional intelligence causes a corresponding change that drives positive performance outcomes in workplace settings [27].

4-2- Proactive Decision-Making Features

Meaning and Dimensions of Proactive Decision-Making:

According to Parker & Collins [7], proactive decision-making involves anticipating future challenges, opportunities, and changes, and actively taking steps to influence outcomes, rather than merely reacting to external pressures. This concept extends beyond simple problem-solving, requiring individuals to engage in forward-thinking and self-initiated action that influences the direction of events. Proactive decision-makers typically focus on long-term outcomes and engage in behaviors that anticipate potential risks or opportunities. Crant [8] suggests that proactive behavior in organizations is closely linked to the ability to foresee and respond to challenges ahead of time, enabling organizations to maintain a competitive edge.

Parker & Collins [7] have put forward three fundamental dimensions of proactive decision-making. One of the dimensions identified as 'anticipatory' involves foreseeing future trends, challenges, or changes and preparing for them in advance. Leaders with such proactive decision-making skills are often capable of envisaging industry shifts or organizational needs, permitting them to remain agile and responsive in dynamic environments.

The other most outstanding proposed aspect of proactive decision-making is the "Change-Oriented" nature, which highlights the proactive steps taken to initiate change at any level, whether within the organization, team, or individual. This characteristic of proactive decision-making accentuates the significance of not waiting for directives or orders but, in its place, pronounces seeking opportunities to improve or innovate. They inscribed the last dimension as 'Self-Initiated,' which emphasizes the autonomous nature of proactive behavior, where individuals independently take actions for themselves that are aligned with broader organizational goals, even in the absence of immediate guidance or support.

4-3- The Role of Proactive Decision-Making in Organizations

In the dynamic and ever-changing business world, proactive decision-making has become a vital driver of organizational success. Companies that promote a proactive approach are more agile, resilient, and positioned to stay ahead of the competition [23]. Whenever someone in the marketplace engages in proactive behavior in their daily routine, it is common to see changes in employees and leaders who exhibit such behavior. These people are more likely to anticipate changes in market conditions and technological advancements. Besides, it shifts in customer preferences and gives them the advantage of acting before problems arise.

Leaders who excel in proactive decision-making can identify and seize growth opportunities, manage risks effectively, and inspire others to adopt a forward-thinking mindset [18]. Moreover, proactive decision-making is also associated with better organizational outcomes, such as increased rates of innovation, enhanced teamwork, and improved performance in times of uncertainty.

4-4- How Emotional Intelligence affects Decision-Making?

The Cognitive and Emotional Aspects of Decision-Making:

Decision-making is fundamentally a complex process that involves the combination of both cognitive and emotional components. Customary decision-making models, such as rational choice theory, assume that individuals make decisions based solely on logic and reason [28]. However, research in psychology and behavioral economics has shown that emotions are a major factor influencing decision-making processes [29]. Emotional intelligence, which includes the ability to identify, interpret, and manage emotions, allows employees to better manage the emotional traits of decision-making.

Any individual or group equipped with high emotional intelligence are more skilled at recognizing the counter-effect of how their emotions and the emotions of others affect their decision-making. Recognition and Awareness of self-esteem and its counterproductive effects allow one to make decisions that are more thoughtful by controlling emotional influences and considering the emotional impact on others in the decision-making process. They are more likely to remain calm under pressure, think clearly in stressful situations, and make balanced decisions considering emotional and rational factors. For example, emotionally intelligent leaders can use their understanding of team morale and individual motivation to make decisions that not only improve organizational outcomes, but also advance employee satisfaction [5].

4-5- Proactive Behaviour and Emotional Intelligence

Connecting Emotional Intelligence to Proactive Behaviour:

Studies reveal that EI significantly contributes to fostering proactive behavior in organizational environments. An individual with high emotional intelligence is more capable of managing their emotions effectually. The Pervasiveness of such qualities allows one to stay motivated, engage in proactive behavior and recognize opportunities even in difficult situations. Grant & Ashford [18] articulated proactive behavior as self-directed action aimed at anticipating or initiating change rather than reacting to external demands.

Research validates that emotionally intelligent individuals are more proficient at perceiving the emotional climate of their work environment, which enables them to anticipate potential challenges or opportunities for improvement [5]. For instance, an emotionally intelligent employee notices signs of low morale in their team and proactively recommends strategies to mend communication or increase team engagement. This type of behavior reflects the anticipatory and change-oriented elements of proactive decision-making.

Moreover, Carmeli et al. [30] and his research colleagues discovered that EI has a positive correlation with proactive behavior, as individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to have greater confidence in their ability to handle change. They tend to approach potential problems with a solution-oriented mindset, enabling them to take initiative

without waiting for external prompts. This aligns with the self-initiated dimension of proactive behavior, as emotionally intelligent individuals often take the lead in addressing organizational issues before they escalate.

4-6- Emotion Regulation and Proactive Decision-Making

A key component of emotional intelligence, emotion regulation, plays a crucial role in proactive decision-making. It involves an individual's ability to manage their emotional responses in a way that facilitates positive outcomes [31]. Leaders with strong emotion regulation skills can maintain composure during stressful situations, allowing them to focus on long-term strategies and make forward-thinking decisions, even in high-pressure environments. Having the capability to manage and regulate emotions effectively is more likely to initiate process improvements [32].

For example, a leader managing a crisis in an organization may experience heightened emotions, such as anxiety or frustration. However, if they possess high emotional intelligence, they can regulate these emotions, avoid rash decisions, and focus on solutions that will mitigate future risks. This type of proactive decision-making relies on emotional intelligence to navigate both immediate emotional reactions and long-term planning.

A study by Bar-On & Parker [26] found that leaders capable of regulating their emotions are less prone to situations that bring overwhelming emotional challenges and are more likely to adopt proactive decision-making strategies. As an alternative to reacting to problems impulsively, they are able to step back, assess the situation as a whole, and anticipate future challenges or opportunities.

4-7- Use of Emotion in Proactive Decision-Making

Emotional Intelligence (EI) implicitly influences organizational decision-making processes, principally in managerial and leadership contexts. Numerous studies investigated the connection between EI and the decision-making process and highlighted the great role of the integration in influencing leadership effectiveness [33]. Studies suggest that enhancing EI through targeted training programs can improve individuals' decision-making abilities [34]. The study made by Alharbi & Alnoor [35] about the role of EI on managerial decision-making revealed the importance of EI features in navigating complex organizational scenarios and achieving effective decision outcomes.

4-8- Proactivity, Emotional Intelligence, and Self-Efficacy

Enquiries in the subject area have shown that self-efficacy (the belief in one's ability to succeed in particular situations) acts as a mediator between emotional intelligence and proactive behavior. Individuals with high self-efficacy are more inclined to take initiative and persist through challenges [36], traits that are vital for proactive decision-making. Emotional intelligence enhances self-efficacy by enabling individuals to manage stress better, build resilience, and foster greater confidence in their capabilities.

The concept presented by Carmeli [6] further strengthens and provides a firm example, stating that individuals with virtuous emotional intelligence are more likely to be able to control complex organizational activities and take the necessary steps to initiate change. This sense of self-confidence reinforces proactive behaviors, as individuals who believe in their ability to make a difference are more tending to take proactive steps and cultivate innovation within their organizations. Emotional intelligence, mediated through work locus of control, contributes to improved mental health and organizational citizenship behaviors among employees [16].

4-9- The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

Emotional Intelligence Predicting Leadership Success:

Many studies have highlighted emotional intelligence as a crucial factor in effective leadership. Studies have shown that emotional intelligence can outline and shape leadership effectiveness across professional fields by enhancing adaptability and strategic thinking [37]. Goleman [10] asserts that leaders with strong emotional intelligence are capable of controlling both their own emotions and those of others around them. Hence, emotional intelligence distinguishes great leaders from those who are merely competent. This skill promotes better communication, stronger relationships, and more cohesive teams, all of which are essential for effective leadership.

Leaders who are equipped with strong EI features reveal greater empathy and possess an exceptional ability to inspire and energize their teams, especially in times of change or uncertainty. As George [5] suggests that leaders with EI promote a positive emotional atmosphere within their environment, boosting employee performance and engagement. By understanding and regulating their emotions, they remain composed under pressure, make sound decisions, and inspire their team members to follow suit. Emotional intelligence mediates leadership behaviors, linking follower traits like regulatory focus to effective leadership [38].

Furthermore, Humphrey [12] proclaimed that leaders who are equipped with emotional intelligence are better at conflict resolution and negotiation, as they can accurately assess the emotional dynamics of a situation and address

underlying emotional tensions. This skill is crucial in leadership roles that require managing diverse teams, resolving workplace conflicts, and leading organizations through transformational changes. According to Bratton et al. [39], emotional intelligence significantly improves self-awareness accuracy, which is essential for effective leadership and decision-making.

4-10-Anecdotes of EI and Transformational Leadership

Emotional intelligence is strongly associated with transformational leadership, which implicates inspiring and motivating others, encouraging innovation, and leading organizational change. Emotional intelligence plays a significant role in moderating conflict resolution strategies, which enhances organizational citizenship behaviors [40].

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that elevates and aligns followers' goals with the organization's mission and vision [41]. EI is essential for transformational leadership because it not only enhances followers' vision alignment and existential purpose, but also enables leaders to create emotional connections with their followers, build trust, and foster commitment to shared goals. Research by Barling et al. [9] suggests that leaders with emotional intelligence are more likely to exhibit transformational behaviors such as providing personal support, conveying a compelling vision, and fostering a shared sense of purpose. These leaders are better able to manage change and uncertainty by addressing the emotional needs of their team while facilitating growth within the organization.

Transformational leadership is characteristically forward-thinking and proactive, focusing on identifying opportunities for innovation and steering organizations toward sustainable success. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to anticipate challenging situations. A leader's ability to navigate complex emotional issues is essential for proactive decision-making in coping with change and motivating their teams to embrace new initiatives. Leadership practices that promote a positive emotional climate are closely linked to improved organizational performance [42].

Such a leadership style is integrally faceted by evolving thought, anticipation and proactivity, clutching opportunities for innovation and navigating organizations toward sustainable success. The work environment led by leaders with high emotional intelligence can be very dynamic and flexible to change. Those leaders can anticipate impairments and navigate the complex emotional issues necessary to make proactive decisions to cope with change and inspire their teams to embrace new initiatives.

4-11-Emotional Intelligence Vs Cross-Cultural Leadership

The global business arena is becoming increasingly complex and intensely entangled with various strategic issues, requiring leaders with emotional intelligence to anticipate the situation and make proactive decisions to unknot the tie. In the existing businesses, leaders are increasingly operating in diverse cultural contexts, making emotional intelligence indispensable in spanning cultural variances. Researchers like Gelfand et al. [43] claim that emotional intelligence leaders are more capable of steering cross-cultural challenges, as they possess the empathy, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability necessary to lead successfully in wide-ranging and diverse contexts. A meta-analysis study conducted by Schlaerth et al. [44] sums up that emotional intelligence is crucial for leaders to settle conflicts constructively among teams. Emotional intelligence enables leaders involved in diverse environments to understand and respect cultural differences, adapt their leadership style accordingly, and create an inclusive environment where all employees are valued and empowered. Operating in a diverse environment makes leaders culturally intelligent, which is essential for global leadership success [15]. Leaders who possess high emotional intelligence are more likely to succeed in cross-cultural contexts because they can perceive and manage the emotional and cultural nuances that influence team dynamics, communication, and decision-making. Blattner & Bacigalupo [45] assert that emotional intelligence augments executive leadership by improving team dynamics and fostering effective organizational development strategies.

4-12-Connection Between EI and Organizational Outcomes

The Role of EI on Organizational Performance:

The link between EI and organizational performance has been well documented in the literature. Emotionally intelligent leaders and employees contribute to a productive, optimistic work environment, which encourages greater levels of teamwork, creativity & innovation, and the whole productivity. According to Cherniss [46] assertion, organizations which are staffed with emotional intelligence are better equipped to adapt to change, manage conflict, and retain talent, all of which contribute to long-term success. Research shows that emotionally intelligent negotiators elicit positive moods in their counterparts, which leads to better negotiation outcomes and increases trust and understanding in negotiations that enhance outcomes for all [47, 48].

Organizations that prioritize EI in cultivating leadership and workplace norms & culture often benefit from reduced turnover rates, heightened employee engagement, and greater job satisfaction. The study of Ashkanasy & Daus [49] suggests that individuals with high emotional intelligence exhibit greater resilience when confronted with challenges,

which improves their ability to perform under pressure and contributes to the organization's overall performance. Furthermore, Schutte & Loi [50] demonstrate the role of emotional intelligence in a flourishing workplace, enhancing organizational resilience and individual creativity and innovation.

5- Data Analysis and Interpretation

The age distribution suggests that most respondents belong to a relatively young workforce. The job position variable reflects that a large portion of the sample consists of operational staff and middle management, providing a balanced perspective on decision-making processes. The years of work experience mean (2.2115) implies that the majority of respondents have between 6 and 10 years of professional experience, an important factor in their ability to make proactive decisions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic Statistics

		Age	Gender	Job Position	Years of Work Experience	Educational Background
N	Valid	156	156	156	156	156
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	2.1731	1.3718	1.3077	2.2115	1.8782
	Std. Deviation	0.94469	0.48484	0.54020	0.97060	0.65592

The descriptive statistics in the above Table 2 indicate that participants demonstrate moderately high levels of emotional intelligence, with an overall mean score of 4.3242, reflecting strong EI capabilities across the sample. Among the key EI dimensions, perceiving emotions scored highest ($M = 4.1330$), suggesting that employees possess a solid awareness of their own and others' emotional states. Meanwhile, emotion regulation ($M = 4.0753$) and use of emotion in decision-making ($M = 3.9151$) were slightly lower, implying that while individuals effectively manage their emotions, there is potential for growth in leveraging emotions to guide workplace decisions.

Table 2. Key Variables Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceiving Emotions	156	2.00	5.00	4.1330	0.77221
Emotion Regulation	156	3.00	5.00	4.0753	0.69237
Use of Emotion in Decision-Making	156	2.00	5.00	3.9151	0.71589
Emotional Intelligence	156	3.00	5.00	4.3242	0.86405
Proactive Decision-Making	156	2.00	5.00	4.3554	0.80929
Valid N (listwise)	156				

In parallel, proactive decision-making received a robust mean score of 4.3554, reinforcing the idea that employees frequently engage in forward-thinking, self-initiated, and change-driven behaviors. This aligns with the hypothesis that higher emotional intelligence correlates with greater proactivity in decision-making.

Additionally, the standard deviation values (ranging from 0.69 to 0.86) reveal moderate variability in responses. While most participants exhibit strong emotional intelligence and proactive tendencies, these variations suggest individual differences in how employees perceive, regulate, and apply emotions as well as in their decision-making approaches. These insights highlight opportunities for targeted training to further enhance emotional competencies and proactive behaviors in the workplace.

Table 3 clearly portrays that all EI dimensions are significantly correlated with proactive decision-making ($p < 0.01$), confirming that employees with higher emotional intelligence tend to engage in more proactive decision-making behaviors. Overall emotional intelligence ($r = 0.684$) shows the strongest correlation, reinforcing its central role in shaping proactive workplace behaviors.

Table 3. Correlation Statistics

		Perceiving Emotions	Emotion Regulation	Use of Emotion in Decision-Making	Emotional Intelligence
Proactive Decision-Making	Pearson Correlation	0.363**	0.457**	0.516**	0.684**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	156	156	156	156

Among the individual dimensions, the Use of emotion in decision-making ($r = 0.516$) has the highest correlation, suggesting that employees who effectively apply emotions in decision-making are more proactive. Emotion regulation ($r = 0.457$) is also strongly correlated, implying that employees who can manage their emotions well are better at making forward-thinking decisions. Perceiving emotions ($r = 0.363$) has the weakest correlation, but is still statistically significant, indicating that recognizing emotions is important but less predictive of proactive decision-making compared to other dimensions.

The model explains 55.6% ($R^2 = 0.556$) of the variance in proactive decision-making, indicating that EI is a strong predictor. The Durbin-Watson statistic (1.173) suggests that no serious autocorrelation issues exist in the model, ensuring reliable predictions (Table 4).

Table 4. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	0.745 ^a	0.556	0.544	3.02978	0.556	47.185	4	151	0.000	0.173

a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Intelligence, Emotion Regulation, Perceiving Emotions, Use of Emotion in Decision-Making.

b. Dependent Variable: Proactive Decision-Making.

The ANOVA results confirm that the regression model is statistically significant ($p = 0.000$). The F-value (47.19) further supports the conclusion that EI significantly predicts proactive decision-making (Table 5).

Table 5. ANOVA

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1732.569	4	433.142	47.185	0.000 ^b
	Residual	1386.117	151	9.180		
	Total	3118.686	155			

a. Dependent Variable: Proactive Decision-Making

b. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Intelligence, Emotion Regulation, Perceiving Emotions, Use of Emotion in Decision-Making

Overall emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.609$, $p = 0.000$) has the strongest predictive power, supporting its role as the key determinant of proactive decision-making. Among EI dimensions, Emotion regulation ($\beta = 0.561$, $p = 0.000$) is the most influential, indicating that leaders who can control emotions effectively are better at making proactive choices. Perceiving emotions ($\beta = 0.511$, $p = 0.001$) and the use of emotion in decision-making ($\beta = 0.474$, $p = 0.031$) are also significant, but slightly weaker predictors (Table 6).

Table 6. Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	54.355		4.531	0.000		
	Perceiving Emotions	0.575	0.169	0.511	0.001	0.930	1.075
	Emotion Regulation	0.681	0.190	0.561	0.000	0.938	1.066
	Use of Emotion in Decision-Making	0.486	0.177	0.474	0.031	0.913	1.095
	Emotional Intelligence	0.611	0.067	0.609	0.000	0.820	1.220

a. Dependent Variable: Proactive Decision-Making

Table 7 shows all eigenvalues are relatively large (ranging from 2.806 to 4.991), with none close to zero, the values are well above the threshold (< 0.1) indicating no multicollinearity. The Condition Index values range from 1.000 to 15.086, with no extreme values (> 30 suggests collinearity). The variance proportions are mostly near zero (≤ 0.01) suggesting no single predictor shares a large proportion of variance with others, which means each variable contributes independently to the model.

Table 7. Collinearity Diagnostics

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions				
				(Constant)	Perceiving Emotions	Emotion Regulation	Use of Emotion in Decision-Making	Emotional Intelligence
1	1	4.991	1.000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	2	2.006	15.086	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	3	3.722	12.412	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00
	4	2.806	8.176	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00
	5	3.001	13.104	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01

a. Dependent Variable: Proactive Decision-Making

Table 8 indicates reliability scores exceed 0.70, confirming strong internal consistency.

Table 8. Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Emotion Perception	0.764	4
Emotion Regulation	0.876	4
Use of Emotion in Decision-Making	0.789	4
Proactive Decision-Making	0.883	9

6- Discussion

The findings of this study reaffirm the significant role of emotional intelligence (EI) in shaping proactive decision-making within organizational settings. The statistical analysis establishes a strong and positive correlation between EI and proactive decision-making, indicating that individuals with higher EI are more likely to anticipate challenges, take initiative, and engage in proactive thinking and decision-making processes. This aligns with Mayer & Salovey's [17] Emotional Intelligence Model, which posits that emotionally intelligent individuals effectively perceive, regulate, and apply emotions to facilitate cognitive processes, including decision-making. In validating the role of EI in the organization, Haider et al. [25] reinforce the necessity of its implementation in cultivating decision-making, workplace leadership and strategic planning. Organizations that would like to improve decision-making outcomes should invest in EI training programs to nurture emotionally intelligent leaders who can anticipate challenges and mirror proactive behaviors.

The regression analysis further demonstrates that EI is a strong predictor of proactive decision-making, accounting for a significant portion of the variance observed. Employees who exhibit higher levels of emotion regulation, self-awareness, and emotional utilization tend to make more strategic decisions, reinforcing the proactive behavior framework proposed by Parker & Collins [7]. This model identifies proactive behavior as a self-initiated, future-oriented action that contributes to organizational effectiveness. The findings indicate that emotionally intelligent individuals naturally engage in such behaviors, as they can better assess situations, regulate emotional impulses, and implement strategic initiatives. Managing emotions effectively leads to improved decision-making processes. Elevated levels of EI enable individuals to comprehend emotions and leverage them for sound decision-making [25].

These results are consistent with existing literature. Bilal et al. [51] found that leaders with high EI not only exhibit proactive decision-making themselves but also encourage proactive behavior among employees. Similarly, Siebert et al. [13] highlight that EI empowers leaders to anticipate future challenges and foster a work environment conducive to strategic decision-making. Schutte et al. [52] also emphasized the evolving role of EI, underscoring its influence on organizational decision-making, adaptability, and performance.

The study also supports Lindebaum & Cartwright's [53] assertion that EI plays a dual role in leadership—enhancing both decision-making and interpersonal relationships. Leaders who possess strong EI skills can regulate emotions effectively, fostering a balanced and constructive decision-making process. Additionally, Sayegha et al. [54] highlight the importance of EI in managerial decision-making during crises, suggesting that emotionally intelligent individuals are better equipped to handle high-pressure situations and make intuitive yet rational decisions.

Beyond leadership implications, the findings reinforce the strategic value of EI in workforce development. Organizations that invest in EI training programs can cultivate employees who are more proactive, adaptable, and capable of making forward-thinking decisions. Lucas et al. [55] emphasize that emotionally intelligent leaders empower their teams, improving workplace performance and organizational efficiency. Rego et al. [11] further confirm that EI enhances employee creativity and innovation, reinforcing its relevance in dynamic and competitive work environments.

Recent research continues to validate the findings that EI contributes significantly to resilience, adaptability, and leadership effectiveness in unpredictable work environments. A study by Antonelli et al. [56] found that emotion regulation is critical for high-stakes decision-making, enhancing leaders' ability to manage crises effectively. Another study by Rajendra [57] highlighted that EI is a fundamental driver of proactive decision-making, and proactive employees with high EI tend to perform better under pressure, making them valuable assets in fast-changing industries.

7- Conclusion

This study provides strong empirical evidence that emotional intelligence (EI) plays a critical role in shaping proactive decision-making. The statistical results demonstrate that EI dimensions (perceiving emotions, regulating emotions, and using emotions in decision-making) are significantly correlated with proactive decision-making behaviors. Among these, emotion regulation emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that individuals who effectively manage their emotions are more likely to engage in preemptive solutions and change-oriented behaviors. The study promotes the theoretical framework of Mayer & Salovey [17], reinforcing the argument that emotionally intelligent individuals integrate cognitive and emotional information to make more informed, rational, and anticipatory decisions. The findings further reaffirm proactive behavior theories by Parker & Collins [7], signifying that individuals with high EI participate more frequently in anticipatory, self-initiated, and change-driven workplace behaviors.

Furthermore, the study highlights the practical significance of emotional intelligence in organizational settings, particularly in dynamic and high-pressure environments like the Ethiopian Customs Authority. Employees with higher EI were found to be better equipped to recognize challenges, regulate emotions under pressure, and proactively address workplace issues before they escalate. In conclusion, organizations that invest in developing employees' emotional intelligence can expect enhanced decision-making processes.

7-1- Practical Implications

Given the study's findings, the following recommendations are suggested to enhance emotional intelligence development and proactive decision-making in organizations. The consideration of suggestions may help an organization leverage emotional intelligence as a strategic asset, enabling employees and leaders to navigate complexity, anticipate challenges, and make proactive, high-impact decisions that contribute to long-term organizational success.

- Organizations should integrate EI into leadership development and training programs to enhance proactive decision-making capabilities. Since EI has been shown to significantly predict proactive decision-making, equipping employees with emotion regulation, perception, and utilization skills can foster a more adaptive, resilient, and strategic workforce.
- Create a workplace environment that encourages proactive behavior. Establishing a culture of anticipatory and self-initiated decision-making can drive innovative and agile preemptive decisions.
- The HR could benefit from introducing EI-driven protocols in Hiring and promotion that may allow tapping emotional intelligence competencies during recruitment and performance evaluations.
- Future research should explore how EI interacts with other organizational variables, such as job satisfaction, workplace stress, and leadership styles. While this study established a strong link between EI and proactive decision-making, additional research using longitudinal and experimental methods can further clarify causal relationships and identify strategies for maximizing the benefits of EI in different professional settings.

7-2- Limitations of the Study

While this research provides valuable insights, addressing its limitations through future studies with larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and multi-source assessments will further strengthen our understanding of how EI influences proactive decision-making in different organizational contexts. Future researchers would benefit if they consider the following point in their study, which would allow a comprehensive understanding of the role of EI in predicting proactive behaviors.

- The correlational research design limits the ability to establish causality, meaning that while EI is strongly associated with proactive decision-making, other factors may also contribute to this relationship. Future research should consider longitudinal or experimental studies to assess causal effects more rigorously.
- The study was conducted within a single organization which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other sectors or industries. A larger, more diverse sample across multiple organizations would enhance external validity and allow for cross-sector comparisons.
- The study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias, as participants might have overestimated their emotional intelligence and proactive behaviors. Future studies should incorporate multi-source assessments, such as supervisor or peer evaluations, to enhance objectivity.
- Finally, while the statistical models used were robust, the study did not explicitly control for potential confounding variables such as job satisfaction, work experience, stress levels, or personality traits, which may also influence proactive decision-making. Future research should employ more comprehensive statistical controls.

8- Declarations

8-1- Author Contributions

Conceptualization, E.D.D.; methodology, E.D.D.; software, E.D.D.; validation, E.D.D.; formal analysis, E.D.D.; investigation, E.D.D.; resources, E.D.D. and E.M.; data curation, E.D.D.; writing—original draft preparation, E.D.D.; writing—review and editing, E.D.D. and E.M.; visualization, E.D.D.; supervision, E.M.; project administration, E.D.D. and E.M.; funding acquisition, E.D.D. and E.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

8-2- Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

8-3- Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

8-4- Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

8-5- Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

8-6- Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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Appendix I

Informed Consent

The following research questions are devised to collect data for the study titled “*Unveiling the Power of Emotional Intelligence: A Dynamic Exploration of its Impact on Proactive Decision-Making*”. I cordially request to answer the questions. Completing a survey, which will take approximately 20 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without consequences. There are no anticipated risks, and while there may be no direct personal benefit, your responses will contribute to academic research. With the consent given by answering this survey, your participation and all data collected will remain confidential and solely for research purposes. I appreciate that you have read and understood this information and voluntarily agree to participate.

Research Questionnaire

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. **Age:** Under 25 ☐ 23-24 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55 and above ☐
2. **Gender:** Male ☐ Female ☐
3. **Job Position:** Operational Staff ☐ Middle Manager ☐ Senior Manager ☐
4. **Years of Work Experience:** < 1 year ☐ 1–5 years ☐ 6–10 years ☐ 11+ years ☐
5. **Educational Background:** Diploma ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ PhD ☐

Emotional Intelligence

Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statements:

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Perceiving Emotions

7. I have a good understanding of my own emotions.
8. I can recognize my emotions as I experience them.
9. I know why I feel the way I do.
10. I can accurately describe my emotions when I feel them.

Emotion Regulation (Managing Emotions)

19. I stay calm when faced with difficult situations.
20. I can control my emotions when making important decisions.
21. I manage my emotions effectively in stressful workplace situations.
22. When I am frustrated at work, I can shift my focus to remain productive.

Use of Emotion in Decision-Making

15. My emotions help me make better decisions at work.
16. I can use my emotions to improve problem solving.
17. I consider emotions when making decisions.
18. I adjust my decision-making strategy based on my emotions.

Section 3: Proactive Decision-Making

Using the same 1–5 scale, please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:

23. I try to predict future challenges before they happen.
24. I gather information to anticipate possible workplace issues.
25. I take actions to prevent potential problems before they arise.
26. I take the initiative to improve my work processes.
27. I actively seek better ways of doing things in my organization.
28. I challenge outdated work procedures and suggest improvements.
29. I make important workplace decisions without needing explicit instructions.
30. I take responsibility for decisions that affect my team.
31. Even without encouragement, I take proactive steps to solve workplace challenges