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Research Article

Management Through the Emotional Lens: Employee Perceptions in Merchandising Businesses

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the level of emotional intelligence demonstrated by management of merchandising businesses in Molave, Zamboanga del Sur, as perceived by employees. It focused on four dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills. A descriptive-quantitative research design was employed, with 170 employees from 26 merchandising businesses participating through total population sampling. Data were gathered using an adapted and modified questionnaire based on Singh's (2004) measure of emotional intelligence and were analyzed using weighted means. The findings showed that management demonstrated a generally high level of emotional intelligence across the four dimensions. Motivation received the highest grand mean of 3.29 and was interpreted as strongly agree, indicating very high emotional intelligence in this dimension. Self-awareness obtained 3.24, social skills 3.20, and empathy 3.15, all interpreted as agree. Although empathy remained within the high level, it received the lowest assessment, particularly in carefully listening to employees' concerns. The findings highlight the value of strengthening empathy, active listening, responsiveness, and supportive communication in management practices. The study suggests that merchandising businesses may use emotional-intelligence enhancement activities, feedback sessions, team-building, and leadership development to strengthen employee-management relationships and workplace effectiveness.

Keywords: *Emotional intelligence, Employee perceptions, Management, Merchandising businesses, Workplace relationships*

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Introduction

In the merchandising businesses examined in Molave, emotional intelligence is not an abstract leadership quality; it is reflected in the way managers speak with employees, respond to concerns, make decisions, and handle pressure during ordinary work. Because employees and managers often interact directly, small differences in tone, attentiveness, and responsiveness can shape how workplace relationships are experienced. Emotional intelligence therefore provides a useful lens for examining management behavior in this setting. Roy (2023) discussed the role of emotional intelligence in interpersonal emotion regulation, while Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez (2023) synthesized evidence linking emotional intelligence with leadership and work-team functioning.

For this study, the employee perspective is particularly important. Managers may view their own communication and leadership practices positively, but employees experience those practices through everyday instructions, feedback, support, and conflict situations. The literature suggests that emotional competencies can influence these interactions. London et al. (2022) emphasized the developmental value of self-awareness and receptiveness to feedback, while Rodrigues et al. (2024) connected perceived leadership effectiveness and emotional intelligence with employee satisfaction. These studies provide a basis for examining how management behavior is actually perceived by employees in a smaller, localized business environment.

Goleman's framework identifies self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills as major components of emotional intelligence. The present study assessed four dimensions—self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills—because these were considered more observable through employee ratings. Self-regulation was not included because it involves internal emotional processes that employees may not be able to directly assess. This delimitation also keeps the analysis focused on behaviors that employees encounter in their day-to-day interaction with management.

The local merchandising context gives these dimensions a practical meaning. Employees in small establishments may deal with customer requests, sales targets, inventory concerns, time-sensitive tasks, and immediate managerial decisions within the same workday. Such conditions can make clear communication and emotional responsiveness especially relevant. Initial observations and interviews conducted by the researchers in merchandising establishments in Molave also identified concerns involving stressful interactions, harsh communication, workplace tension, and difficulty expressing concerns. These observations helped establish the need to examine management's emotional intelligence from the employee viewpoint.

Although emotional intelligence has been widely discussed in leadership and organizational research, the researchers found less attention to how employees in small-scale merchandising establishments in Molave perceive these management behaviors. Much of the literature cited in the study addresses broader organizational or corporate settings. Examining a localized group of businesses allows the present study to focus on the everyday interaction between employees and managers rather than assuming that findings from large organizations automatically apply to smaller establishments.

Within this context, the study determined the level of management's emotional intelligence in terms of self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills and identified the dimension with the lowest employee assessment. The purpose was not to label managers as emotionally intelligent or otherwise, but to identify patterns in employee perceptions that can inform management development, communication practices, and employee-management relationships.

Literature Review

Emotional intelligence has been examined as a leadership and interpersonal competency because workplace management involves more than assigning tasks and monitoring performance. Salovey and Mayer (1990) introduced emotional intelligence as a capacity involving emotional information, while Goleman (1995) later brought the concept into wider leadership

and professional discussions. Recent studies continue to connect emotional intelligence with leadership and work-team outcomes. Bahshwan (2024) discussed its role in leadership effectiveness, and Rodrigues et al. (2024) found that perceived leadership effectiveness and emotional intelligence are associated with employee satisfaction. For the present study, these perspectives are useful because the unit of observation is management behavior as experienced by employees.

Self-awareness concerns recognizing one's emotions, strengths, limitations, and effects on others. This dimension matters in management because awareness can influence how leaders receive feedback and adjust their behavior. Santana-Martins et al. (2022) linked employees' emotional awareness with organizational commitment, while Jelača et al. (2022) identified managers' emotional competencies as relevant to organizational performance. London et al. (2022) further described self-awareness as a process that can support self- and interpersonal growth. Together, these studies suggest that employee perceptions of managerial self-awareness may reflect not only what managers know about themselves but also how open they appear to feedback and improvement.

Motivation refers to the internal drive to pursue goals, persist through setbacks, and sustain effort. In a merchandising workplace, these qualities can be visible through persistence, initiative, goal setting, and the way managers encourage employees to contribute. Forson et al. (2021) highlighted the relationship between employee motivation and performance, while Sulyantie and Gani (2023) examined emotional intelligence, work motivation, engagement, and performance. Thus, the present study treats motivation as a management behavior that may be observed through both task persistence and the encouragement of employee participation.

Empathy concerns how managers recognize, understand, and respond to employees' feelings and needs. The literature suggests that empathy is closely connected with interpersonal relationships and supportive communication. Xu et al. (2022) examined how entrepreneurs' empathy relates to employees' emotional experiences, while Brower (2022) discussed empathy as an important leadership

skill. Prasetyo et al. (2023) likewise found that communication and empathy-related practices are associated with employee performance. These perspectives are particularly relevant to the present study because employees' perceptions of empathy may be shaped by simple but consequential workplace behaviors—whether managers listen, approach employees when support is needed, and respond respectfully when concerns are raised.

Social skills involve communication, cooperation, relationship building, and the management of interpersonal situations. Dimitriadis and Koning (2022) provided evidence that social skills can contribute to business performance, while Raharjo and Aisyah (2025) examined the connection between emotional intelligence, leadership, and conflict-management skills. Tanwar (2024) also emphasized social skills in leadership communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution. In a merchandising setting where employees and managers work in close proximity, these skills may become particularly visible through instructions, teamwork, and responses to disagreements.

Taken together, the literature indicates that the four dimensions examined in this study are interconnected rather than isolated traits. Self-awareness can shape receptiveness to feedback; motivation can influence persistence and employee participation; empathy can affect how concerns are heard and addressed; and social skills can support communication and conflict management. The present study contributes a localized employee perspective by examining these dimensions in small-scale merchandising businesses in Molave, Zamboanga del Sur.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-quantitative research design. The design was appropriate because the purpose was to describe the existing level of emotional intelligence demonstrated by management based on numerical ratings provided by employees. The study did not use correlational or inferential analysis because it did not seek to determine relationships, causes, or predictive effects among variables.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted among merchandising businesses in Molave, Zamboanga del Sur. Twenty-six (26) merchandising establishments were included, with a total of one hundred seventy (170) employees serving as respondents. Total population sampling was employed to include the available workforce of the selected establishments and to maximize representation of employees within the identified businesses.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a modified version of Singh's (2004) measure of emotional intelligence. The adapted instrument focused on four dimensions: self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The items were contextualized to reflect management and employee interactions in merchandising businesses, including handling feedback, working under pressure, communicating with employees, providing support, and resolving workplace conflicts. Respondents rated the statements using a four-point Likert scale: 4—Strongly Agree, 3—Agree, 2—Disagree, and 1—Strongly Disagree.

Validity and Reliability

The adapted questionnaire was reviewed and revised with the assistance of research and subject experts. A pilot test involving 30 indi-

viduals with characteristics similar to the target respondents but outside the actual study population was conducted to assess internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.774 for self-awareness, 0.806 for motivation, 0.821 for empathy, and 0.806 for social skills, indicating acceptable to good internal consistency for the four dimensions.

Data Gathering and Analysis

After securing the necessary permission, the researchers administered the questionnaire to the respondents. Participation was voluntary, and respondents' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. The gathered responses were summarized using weighted means. The grand mean for each emotional-intelligence dimension was used to determine the overall assessment. A mean of 3 represented Agree and a mean of 4 represented Strongly Agree; the corresponding interpretation followed the four-point response scale used in the study.

Results and Discussion

The findings present employees' assessments of management's emotional intelligence in four dimensions: self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The results indicate that all four dimensions were positively assessed, although the strength of the assessments varied.

Table 1. Summary of Employees' Responses on Management's Emotional Intelligence

Variable	Grand Mean	Interpretation
Self-awareness	3.24	Agree
Motivation	3.29	Strongly Agree
Empathy	3.15	Agree
Social skills	3.20	Agree

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness obtained a grand mean of 3.24, interpreted as Agree, indicating a high level of emotional intelligence in this dimension. Among the indicators, the highest mean of 3.34 showed that employees strongly agreed that management is aware of its strengths and weaknesses and works on improving them. This was followed by confidence in decisions while remaining willing to consider helpful advice, with a mean of 3.31, and clearly identifying and acknowledging feelings during work

situations, with a mean of 3.27. The lowest mean, 3.13, was recorded for being open to feedback from employees to improve performance.

The findings suggest that employees generally perceive management as capable of recognizing personal strengths, weaknesses, feelings, and the effects of these on workplace interactions. At the same time, openness to employee feedback received the lowest rating within the dimension, suggesting an area that could be strengthened. This observation is

consistent with London et al. (2022), who emphasized that self-awareness supports openness to feedback and interpersonal development. Santana-Martins et al. (2022) and Jelača et al. (2022) likewise underscored the importance of emotional awareness in organizational and managerial effectiveness.

Motivation

Motivation received the highest grand mean among the four dimensions at 3.29, interpreted as Strongly Agree. The highest individual mean was 3.36 for management's persistence in completing tasks even under pressure or setbacks. Management's ability to set challenging goals and work toward them obtained 3.33, while taking initiative to identify new business opportunities obtained 3.29. The lowest mean of 3.18 concerned encouraging employees to contribute ideas and participate in projects.

The result indicates that management was particularly strong in persistence, goal orientation, initiative, and maintaining effort under difficult conditions. However, the relatively lower assessment for encouraging employee participation suggests that motivational practices could be made more inclusive by giving employees greater opportunities to contribute ideas. Sulyantie and Gani (2023) emphasized the connection of emotional intelligence and motivation with employee engagement and performance. Escosora and Guhao (2023) similarly highlighted the capacity of motivated leaders to inspire employees and pursue organizational goals.

Empathy

Empathy obtained a grand mean of 3.15, interpreted as Agree, making it the lowest-rated of the four emotional-intelligence dimensions, although it remained within the high level described by the study. The highest mean of 3.26 indicated strong agreement that management works comfortably with employees from different backgrounds. Management's understanding of employee and customer needs obtained 3.21, while taking initiative to approach employees to provide support or guidance obtained 3.10. The lowest mean of 3.06 was for listening carefully to employees to understand their concerns.

The result indicates that management was generally perceived as empathetic, but careful listening to employees' concerns was the clearest area for improvement, receiving the lowest indicator mean of 3.06. This result deserves attention because listening is the point at which empathy becomes observable in an everyday management interaction. In a merchandising environment, employees may have to respond quickly to customers, attend to sales or operational requirements, and manage several tasks within limited periods. Under these conditions, managers may also be focused on keeping operations moving, which can unintentionally reduce the time available for extended conversations with employees. This interpretation does not establish that operational pressure caused the lower rating; rather, it provides a plausible workplace context for understanding why active listening may be more difficult to demonstrate consistently.

Xu et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of understanding employees' emotional states, while Brower (2022) described empathy as central to positive workplace relationships. Prasetyo et al. (2023) further associated communication and empathy with employee performance. In light of these findings, the lower listening score suggests a concrete management-development opportunity: managers can schedule brief but regular feedback conversations, use active-listening practices such as clarifying and summarizing employee concerns, and follow up on issues raised. These practices are consistent with the study's recommendations for regular feedback sessions and supportive communication and may help make empathy more visible in day-to-day operations.

Social Skills

Social skills obtained a grand mean of 3.20, interpreted as Agree, indicating a high level of emotional intelligence in this dimension. The highest mean of 3.27 showed strong agreement that management communicates instructions and messages clearly to employees. Encouraging collaboration and building team commitment obtained 3.23, while motivating employees to participate in teamwork obtained 3.21. The lowest mean of 3.11 concerned resolving

conflicts among team members calmly and fairly.

The findings suggest that management generally demonstrates effective interpersonal communication and collaboration, while conflict handling remains an area for continued development. Clear communication is an important part of effective management because employees need understandable directions and respectful interaction. Raharjo and Aisyah (2025) associated emotional intelligence with communication, teamwork, and conflict-management skills, while Tanwar (2024) emphasized social skills as a component of leadership communication and organizational cohesion.

Overall Assessment

Overall, the findings show that management of the merchandising businesses demonstrated a generally high level of emotional intelligence as perceived by employees. Motivation ranked first with a grand mean of 3.29, followed by self-awareness at 3.24, social skills at 3.20, and empathy at 3.15. The pattern indicates that management's strongest perceived emotional-intelligence behavior was related to persistence and goal-directed motivation, whereas the comparatively weakest area was empathy, particularly careful listening to employee concerns.

The results are consistent with literature emphasizing the role of emotional intelligence in leadership, employee relationships, and workplace functioning. Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez (2023) described emotional intelligence as relevant to leadership and team performance, while Goleman and Cherniss (2024) emphasized emotional intelligence as an important element of effective leadership. Rodrigues et al. (2024) also highlighted the relevance of perceived leadership effectiveness and emotional intelligence to employee satisfaction. In the local merchandising context, the findings reinforce the importance of maintaining not only task-oriented management but also emotionally responsive relationships with employees.

Conclusion

The study concludes that management of merchandising businesses in Molave, Zamboanga del Sur demonstrated a generally high

level of emotional intelligence as perceived by employees. Motivation was the strongest dimension, reflecting persistence, goal orientation, and initiative. Self-awareness and social skills were also positively assessed, showing perceived strengths in recognizing personal behavior, communicating with employees, encouraging teamwork, and maintaining workplace interaction. Empathy received the lowest assessment, although it remained positively rated, indicating that management may benefit from greater attention to employees' concerns, active listening, and emotional responsiveness.

The findings suggest that emotional intelligence is an important consideration in maintaining healthy employee-management relationships and a productive workplace environment. Strengthening empathy-related practices may complement the existing strengths of management and support better communication, workplace harmony, employee satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness.

Recommendations

1. Merchandising business managers may consider implementing an emotional-intelligence enhancement program that includes specific activities for developing empathy and related interpersonal competencies.
2. Managers and supervisors should practice effective, respectful communication and provide supportive responses to employees to reduce miscommunication and workplace conflict.
3. Management may establish regular meetings or feedback sessions where employees can express concerns, offer suggestions, and discuss workplace issues in a safe and constructive manner.
4. Merchandising businesses may conduct team-building activities, leadership workshops, and workplace orientation sessions to strengthen respect, teamwork, communication, and professionalism.
5. Future researchers may replicate the study in other types of businesses or locations and examine additional variables such as employee satisfaction, leadership behavior, employee engagement, and workplace performance.

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