The influence of emotional intelligence and personal styles of dealing with conflict on strategic decisions

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Abstract

Purpose – Organizations seek to achieve the best results for their strategic decisions by increasing the effectiveness of the vertical and horizontal interconnection. This leads to an efficient and effective flow of information when making decisions (from the bottom-up) and information related to those decisions when starting to implement them on the ground (from Top-down). Thus, the article aims that, it requires managers at all levels to practice relational leadership skills, the most important of which is dealing with emotions (through emotional intelligence (EI)) and conflicts (through personal styles).

Design/methodology/approach – In this paper the views of 324 managers were surveyed in several small and medium-sized companies in Saudi Arabia. The respondents were selected randomly.

Findings – A direct positive effect of EI, patterns of cooperation and comprehension to deal with conflict was found on the results of strategic decisions and indirectly through relational leadership.

Research limitations/implications – This paper is restricted to the relevant literature on the influence of EI and personal styles of dealing with conflict on strategic decisions.

Practical implications – As part of the practical implication and managerial decision, policymakers should note that intelligence directly impacts strategic decisions.

Originality/value – This is one of the few studies that focused on the level of EI when choosing managers for organizational units and divisions.

Keywords Conflict, Emotional intelligence, Influence, Personal styles, Strategic decisions

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Decisions are taken every day, whether by business organizations, governmental organizations or individuals, and the main elements of these decisions are the goals of their makers, the information available about them and the potential alternatives to them, and the results of those decisions are vital to organizational success (MacCann *et al.*, 2020). Organizations' face many challenges, such as (creating an organizational culture, creating effective work teams, dealing with change, reducing conflict, dealing with emotions, stimulating creativity and combating organizational stagnation) (Mattingly and Kraiger, 2019). To face these challenges requires making strategic decisions that achieve high results. It should be noted that decision-making is the primary activity of managers and their role in the success of those decisions and achieving the planned results; and for the importance of

studying decisions in terms of behavior (Goleman and Boyatzis, 2017). This makes the ability of managers to create and maintain leadership decisions strong and have a direct impact on the effectiveness of both the decision environment and the level and intensity of circumstantial change and then greatly influence the outcome of decisions. Since effective leadership is based on the ability to initiate, develop and maintain positive working relationships with others (O'Connor et al., 2019), the personal, social and political dimensions combined show and develop the acquisition of relational leadership skills.

Hence, dealing with emotions within the organizational context (through the level of emotional intelligence (EI)) and conflicts (by dealing with them appropriately) are two of the most important factors affecting relational leadership effectiveness. Several capabilities include awareness, ability to understand self, emotions, management and control, integrity, conscience, initiative, social awareness, and social skills in communication, cooperation, and relationship building (Miao et al., 2017). It is of particular importance to leaders and managers by assisting them in understanding and good communication with others. It also helps them maintain their enthusiasm, increase confidence and communicate with the vision of working individuals that will direct them towards work and organizational goals. Dealing with conflicts in cooperative modes affects the effectiveness of leaders' relationships with others (Hodzic et al., 2018). Accordingly, managers who exercise relational leadership (which among its factors are dealing with emotions and conflict) will improve the outcomes of strategic decisions by formulating a social-relational framework (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2018). Therefore, the current study will aim to know the direct impact of EI and personal patterns of conflict management on strategic decisions.

2. Literature review
2.1 Emotional intelligence
"Emotional intelligence" was discussed by philosophers through the search for the relationship between thought and emotions at least two thousand years ago through the Greeks and Romans' belief that emotion (not excessive) is of great use to rational thought (Shekar and Suganthi, 2015; Khosravi et al., 2020). Aqqad et al. (2019) affirmed that EI could improve job performance and yield positive results. Emotions usually arise for individuals through a response to an internal or external event, whether negative or positive. The concepts of emotions and mood are closely related. Still, emotions are shorter and more intense than mood and are expressed as a reaction immediate, as for the mood, it is a continuous mental process in most cases, the causes of which are ambiguous (Mehta, 2016). The organized response to emotions is like the adaptive process that leads to the transformation of self and social interaction into enriching the experience through which it provides emotional information. As for intelligence, that is defined as a group of mental abilities related to analysis and abstract thinking, or the distinction between right and wrong, or the ability to act. Purposefully, rationally, and interacting effectively with the person's environment, provide cognitive information. Therefore, using knowledge to distinguish between emotions to guide thinking and actions is called EI (Grubb et al., 2018; Boz and Koc, 2019; Khosravi et al., 2020), as the emotional processes that accompany cognitive processes facilitate Access, understanding and acceptance of imparted knowledge.

It is also known that people are busy day after day in a continuous effort to achieve a balance between emotions and knowledge, whether by cultural or personal mechanisms. Therefore, individuals who possess this ability can be distinguished from those around them through their high levels of physical and mental health as well as their better integration in Social and occupational environment. This is what psychologists have called EI (Ramesh and Ravi, 2017). Therefore, understanding and studying EI as a science with its three pillars (theory, measurement and application) may allow individuals to learn emotional skills as an

integrative process that enables individuals to confront the myths and myths associated with the concept and scientific facts through training to be able to live a fulfilling and productive life (Edgeman and Rodgers, 1999). The importance of EI for managers gives them confidence and realism in realizing the challenges. As a result, they will constantly develop and improve their work's quality, quantity, speed and ability, which can be evident from their results. In particular, they need high emotional competence because they represent the organization. They interact with the largest number of individuals inside and outside the organization (Samawi *et al.*, 2018).

EI has a primary intervention in the workplace through knowledge of what to do and special expertise in developing leadership skills. Thus, knowledge and resources precede that intervention. Most of the studies that have examined the EI of leaders or managers have relied on the Goleman's dimensions of EI(self-awareness, self-regulation, self-management, motivation, self-motivation and social awareness "empathy", social skill "relationship management" (Alsayyed *et al.*, 2020). In addition, there is evidence that these dimensions may be the best predictor of driving performance. This rationale is consistent with the current study and for the popularity and comprehensiveness of this model in measuring EI in all fields. Thus, it is considered as mixed models (Metaxas *et al.*, 2019). The current study will use these dimensions to measure EI.

2.2 Personal styles to handling conflict

Conflict can be defined as a competition or difference between individuals due to conflicting needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals, or when one side perceives a threat from the other side in something that concerns the first party (Emmons and King, 1988). It is real or perceived perceptions of individual or group emotions and behaviors in the contexts and backgrounds in which the conflict is occurring and which can be preceded or concurrent with it (i.e. at the actual moment of the conflict) (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001). The conflict is inevitable as it occurs at all levels, and its consequences may escalate and lead to negative results, or be resolved positively, which leads to satisfaction. With this, it is not necessary that all conflicts be resolved. Whether verbal or non-verbal (communicative behavior) or both, the conflict is usually between at least two parties. Individuals can take steps to contain it and manage it constructively (Cutler and Campbell-Meiklejohn, 2019).

Whetten and Cameron clarified four main points related to the concept of conflict, namely: (1) Conflict between individuals in organizations is inevitable, (2) Conflicts over issues or facts that enhance managerial practice, (3) Despite the intellectual acceptance of the value of a conflict, there is a tendency to avoid this and (4) the main key to increasing the level of individual satisfaction in conflict is to become adept at managing all forms of personal (productive and non-productive) conflicts (Schneider and Leyer, 2019), although personal or emotional conflicts (Non-functional) are often negative and should be avoided. However, it is important to define conflict and maintain a certain level of it for each organizational level or specific function through the promotion of education. They are organizational and structural interventions in conflict (Köseoglu *et al.*, 2018). The previous literature agrees on five personal styles to deal with conflict (cooperation, compromise, assimilation, competition and avoidance). Therefore, this study will use these dimensions.

2.3 Strategic decisions

Decision-making is vital to organizational success, whether for individuals or private and governmental organizations. The main elements of these decisions are the decision maker's goals, available information and potential alternatives (Lobo *et al.*, 2020). The strategic decisions (administrative and operational) are characterized by their great importance to the organizations and the relevance of their results to risks and changes that have a wide impact.

It is worth noting that not all strategic decisions are as big as some expect, but rather that they are taken regularly, which creates significant effects on all parties and parties within the organizational context of organizations (Meissner and Wulf, 2017). Decision-making is the primary activity of managers. Although managers sometimes make bad decisions and because making the right decisions is the main engine of their work, they may not be implemented as originally laid, which may negatively reflect their results (Ahsan, 2020). Therefore, set three points that managers must understand in the decision-making process that contribute to obtaining the results of high-quality strategic decisions and as planned, namely: (1) understanding the processes of generating decision inputs, (2) understanding cultural factors related to the decision and (3) understanding the dimensions of effective decision-making (Navarro et al., 2018).

The results of the desired strategic decisions are the ones that determine the method or method of making them (rational or intuitive) (Liu et al., 2019). The intuitive approach is useful when the results are required for organizations operating in an unstable environment. The rational approach is an effective method when the desired results are for organizations operating in a relatively stable environment. In addition, the results of strategic decisions will determine organizational effectiveness based on a set of variables that affect it (Huang and Rust, 2021). Such as conflict with a cognitive dimension that has a positive effect in improving decision outcomes, inclusiveness of leaders as well as organizational learning. There are two main types of learning in organizations related to the outcome of decisions. The first is incremental learning. It is also called knowledge exploitation. The second is radical learning, or what is called knowledge exploration. These two types of learning and the strategic decision-making process (SDMP) will affect its results. When managers use the first type of learning based on the analytical rather than the intuitive aspect of the process, this will improve the results of the decisions and vice versa (Marrin, 2017). The consensus among senior management team members in the SDMP also impacts the results of strategic decisions. There is lack of consensus on understanding and accepting decisions will reduce the likelihood of commitment and successful implementation (Nash and Hann, 2020). Therefore, organizations seeking good performance work to make the best and optimal decisions effectively and efficiently. It is necessary to build a consensus to facilitate their implementation and thus obtain the desired results. However, because senior management teams face a set of determinants and limited resources when making decisions, the results of those decisions cannot be inferred from the organization's performance. However, organizational performance depends mainly on those results in addition to other environmental variables and sometimes luck (Gao et al., 2018).

2.4 The relationship between emotional intelligence and strategic decisions

Decision-making is a task that rests with all managers at all levels, which requires them to understand the factors affecting those decisions to reach the best decision (Abuzaid et al., 2019). Although the data and tools needed to make good strategic decisions that contribute to the supremacy of organizations are available to managers, some strategic decisions are of poor quality or speed due to the absence of mutual relationships that contribute to understanding the mutual influences between the basic concepts. The SDMP and contextual variables influence its outcomes (Bedford et al., 2019). EI is one of the important variables for senior management teams (Ahsan, 2020). Therefore, people who possess EI and emotional capacity at a high level better understand the events surrounding them. The ability to isolate anxiety that has nothing to do with decisions and the application of EI during participation in decision-making will result in more commitment to decisions (Ahsan, 2020).

Also, emotional maturity helps to use mental patterns effectively to accommodate the demands of the chaos imposed by the SDMP in organizations. In contrast, the lack of EI

contributes to the failure of strategic decisions (Metaxas *et al.*, 2019). Studies have indicated a statistically significant relationship between the application of EI and the results of strategic decisions. This is because EI can enhance strategic decisions and increase their quality at the individual and collective level through the ability to evaluate potential outcomes and emotional reactions to decisions that enable decision-makers to predict the feelings of those affected by decisions; thus, increasing the likelihood of more positive decision outcomes (Cutler and Campbell-Meiklejohn, 2019). These environmental necessities, the motivation to determine attitudes and behaviors of individuals in the organization; meaning that these events are some of the outcomes of decisions. Several studies have been concluded on the effect of the level of EI on the outcomes of strategic decisions (Liu *et al.*, 2019), and based on that, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H1. There is a relationship between EI and strategic decisions.

H2. There is a relationship between self-awareness and strategic decisions.

H3. There is a relationship between self-regulation and strategic decisions.

H4. There is a relationship between motivation and strategic decisions.

H5. There is a relationship between social awareness and strategic decisions.

H6. There is a relationship between social skills and strategic decisions.

2.5 The relationship between personal styles to handling conflict and strategic decisions
Good conflict management improves the outcomes of strategic decisions that affect the entire organization (Abuzaid *et al.*, 2019). Rapid, integrated and effective decisions require resolving conflicts positively, and the more active conflict resolution, the faster the strategic decisions (Bedford *et al.*, 2019). Likewise, the results of strategic decisions are determined by the performance of their implementation, which is likely to occur in the context of the conflict. The outcome of that conflict may improve the results of strategic decisions or vice versa, depending on managers' knowledge of how to use it in a positive aspect (Navarro *et al.*, 2018). This is determined by personal patterns of dealing with conflict in the organizational context, which impact the effectiveness of individual or organizational performance (Schneider and Leyer, 2019). Conflicts result from complications and pressures during strategic decision-making, which requires dealing with them properly to maintain a certain level of conflict and improve strategic decisions' results (Hodzic *et al.*, 2018). This is through having effective conflict management to improve the results of strategic decisions. Effective conflict management leads to obtaining the results of strategic decisions. In the end, both (Bedford *et al.*, 2019) concluded that there is a positive relationship between cooperative patterns of dealing with conflict (cooperation, bargaining and assimilation) and the results of strategic decisions, and negative for competitive patterns and lack of participation (competition, avoidance). This reinforces the study's hypothesis:

H7. There is a relationship between personal styles to handling conflict and strategic decisions.

H8. There is a relationship between collaborating and strategic decisions.

H9. There is a relationship between compromising and strategic decisions.

H10. There is a relationship between accommodating and strategic decisions.

H11. There is a relationship between competing and strategic decisions.

H12. There is a relationship between avoiding and strategic decisions.

3. Methodology

The study sample was chosen from department managers in small and medium-sized companies, most of who work within the middle management level. The justification for choosing these managers is based on the nature of the work of small and medium-sized companies. As this work will result in interactions and differences of views about the role of each organizational unit with others within Saudi Arabia, the emergence of the need to know their level of EI and their patterns of dealing with conflicts and differences and to reveal the nature of their relational leadership style and know the extent to which all this affects the results of the strategic decisions were considered. And the importance of knowing the level of EI and personal patterns to deal with conflict and the nature of relational leadership that will determine the effectiveness of transferring data and information in its actual reality (during the decision-making process) from the middle management to the higher management that will take strategic decisions (making decisions) were considered. In addition to the effectiveness of transferring data and information related to the decisions taken by the higher management to those who will implement them in actual reality (middle management) and to know the impact of all this on the results of those decisions. The study sample consisted of 324 managers from the study population of 1,200 individuals. The 20 items were used to measure EI, according to Saad *et al.* (2020). At the same time, personal styles were measured to deal with the conflict using 20 items (Farooqi *et al.*, 2014). Finally, according to Shepherd (2014), strategic decisions were measured using 12 items.

4. Result and analysis

The current study relied on several ready-made measures used previously in previous studies, what helped obtain a high level of reliability and validity, as presented in Table 1. This is in line with Ebekozien *et al.* (2019, 2020, 2021). The authors' validity and internal consistency of the initial questionnaire were ascertained by conducting a pilot study; to analyze the stability of the final study scale, which focuses on measuring the consistency and consistency of the elements that make up that scale. To know the stability of the paragraph and its relevance to what it seeks, the scale aims to measure what it is designed for (Ong and Puteh, 2017). Initially, the reliability of the final questionnaire was tested to measure the extent of the correlation of each paragraph of the questionnaire with the total correlation of all the paragraphs. Table 1 shows the paragraph correlation coefficients for the data collection tool, considering the paragraph that correlates with the total scale correlation of 0.40 or more, an acceptable paragraph. In statistical analysis, it is reliable.

Table 1 shows that the variables and paragraphs of the study are characterized by reliability and validity because the values of the variables were high. Whereas all the factor loading values exceeded 0.50, and the values of the average variance extracted was exceeded 0.50, while Cronbach's alpha reliability and composite reliability were more than 0.70 (see Tables 2 and 3).

The basis of the statistical analysis is the descriptive analysis, as the descriptive statistics summarize the sample responses to infer them about the characteristics of the study population. The descriptive statistics produce indicators from the primary data. It is the paving step for the inferential statistics that are concerned with generalizing the conclusions resulting from the responses of the study sample towards the paragraphs of the study variables. About the arithmetic mean of the sample's response level towards the paragraphs and dimensions of the scale. The mathematical circles were high, indicating the interest of small and medium-sized companies in the quality of strategic decisions in Saudi Arabia. Most of the correlation coefficient between the three variables had a high positive correlation with a significant level of 0.01.

Variables	Items	Factor loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach's α
Emotional intelligence	It1	0.754	0.643	0.880	0.892
	It2	0.693			
	It3	0.950			
	It4	0.793			
	It5	0.904			
	It6	0.773			
	It7	0.781			
	It8	0.803			
	It9	0.894			
	It10	0.755			
	It11	0.765			
	It12	0.786			
	It13	0.887			
	It14	0.901			
	It15	0.713			
	It16	0.742			
	It17	0.866			
	It18	0.960			
	It19	0.884			
	It20	0.773			
Personal styles	Oc1	0.783	0.648	0.808	0.912
	Oc2	0.793			
	Oc3	0.709			
	Oc4	0.745			
	Oc5	0.964			
	Oc6	0.670			
	Oc7	0.702			
	Oc8	0.788			
	Oc9	0.904			
	Oc10	0.885			
	Oc11	0.833			
	Oc12	0.943			
	Oc13	0.873			
	Oc14	0.867			
	Oc15	0.966			
	Oc16	0.973			
	Oc17	0.777			
	Oc18	0.768			
	Oc19	0.709			
	Oc20	0.799			
Strategic decisions	Os1	0.768	0.657	0.877	0.904
	Os2	0.994			
	Os3	0.724			
	Os4	0.746			
	Os5	0.783			
	Os6	0.920			
	Os7	0.746			
	Os8	0.849			
	Os9	0.763			
	Os10	0.885			
	Os11	0.785			
	Os12	0.772			

Table 1.
Validity and reliability

Based on what was mentioned in the above table, we reach to accept all the hypotheses for the study. It is evident that EI directly impacts the results of strategic decisions, leading to acceptance of the first hypothesis. At the same time, there is a direct impact of personal patterns of dealing with the conflict on the results of strategic decisions. This indicates acceptance of the second hypothesis.

5. Discussions and managerial implication

The results showed that EI directly positively impacts strategic decisions. Findings agree with Grubb *et al.* (2018), Aqqad *et al.* (2019) and Khosravi *et al.* (2020). Aqqad *et al.* (2019) recommended promoting EI among employees to improve their job performance. Khosravi *et al.* (2020) found that EI positively impacts performance. As for the dimensions of EI, the assumptions that indicate a direct and positive influence relationship between the two dimensions (self-awareness and self-regulation) and the results of strategic decisions have been rejected. While the hypotheses that indicate the existence of a direct and positive impact relationship between the two dimensions (motivation and social awareness) and the results of strategic decisions were accepted. It also rejected the assumptions that indicate a direct and positive impact relationship between social skills and the results of strategic decisions (except after commitment). Thus, it generally appears that EI, especially in its dimensions (motivation, awareness and social), provides a great explanation for the differences in strategic decisions in small and medium enterprises.

The results showed no direct positive impact relationship between personal styles of dealing with conflict and the results of strategic decisions. It is apparent that the influence of negative personal styles of dealing with conflict has prevailed over the results of strategic decisions from managers' point of view in the study sample. Findings agree with Cuellar-Molina *et al.* (2019). The authors found that operators of firms need to obtain guidance on which emotional competencies. This would enhance decision-maker's emotional competencies. It reject the sub-hypotheses of the five types with the dimensions of the results of strategic decisions (except for the pattern of cooperation on the quality of the

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3
1- Emotional intelligence	3.45	0.956	1		
2- Personal styles	3.75	0.905	0.467**	1	
3- Strategic decisions	3.24	0.995	0.794**	0.754**	1
Source:***Significant at 0.01 (1-tailed), **Significant at 0.1 (1-tailed)					

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics and the correlation between variables

	Hypotheses	β	S.E.	C.R.	p	Results
H1	Emotional intelligence → Strategic decisions	0.134	0.02	3.872	0.05	Supported
H2	Self-awareness → Strategic decisions	0.296	0.03	2.456	0.05	Supported
H3	Self-regulation → Strategic decisions	0.109	0.02	5.246	0.05	Supported
H4	Motivation → Strategic decisions	0.116	0.02	7.864	0.05	Supported
H5	Social awareness → Strategic decisions	0.185	0.04	4.098	0.05	Supported
H6	Social skills → Strategic decisions	0.209	0.04	3.600	0.05	Supported
H7	Personal styles → Strategic decisions	0.235	0.25	3.245	0.05	Supported
H8	Collaborating → Strategic decisions	0.106	0.02	2.487	0.05	Supported
H9	Compromising → Strategic decisions	0.186	0.02	2.096	0.05	Supported
H10	Accommodating → Strategic decisions	0.105	0.01	2.126	0.05	Supported
H11	Competing → Strategic decisions	0.743	0.02	7.448	0.05	Supported
H12	Avoiding → Strategic decisions	0.262	0.05	5.100	0.05	Supported

Table 3.
Hypothesis testing

decision, the success of implementation, the speed of decision-making, the pattern of assimilation on the quality of the decision, the success of implementation and commitment). This is consistent with the indications and evidence obtained by the researcher from conducting personal interviews with a group of managers. This affirms that dealing with conflicts with the pattern of competition that is used through the imposition of power, influence and hegemony or by possessing information or organizational resources between the directors of departments and organizational units leads to negative results for strategic decisions, as it is considered an indication of oppressive, authoritarian, official and highly centralized organizations. Findings agree with Khosravi *et al.* (2020). It was found that trust moderates the negative relationship between relationship conflict and project performance. In addition, it will add distrust and emotional disharmony to future dealings between managers.

As part of the implications, EI could be considered as a requirement in hiring and promoting employees for effective strategy decision-making (Rezvani *et al.*, 2019). The benefits of EI as a basic skill for managerial staff in conflict management and decision-making cannot be over-emphasized. The latter authors opined that EI could positively influence trust within the team members. This is one of the major variables that can mitigate conflict within a team. The findings from this paper will have significant practical implications for decision managers and team leaders. Leaders are expected to understand how to reduce negative and destructive actions from conflict. The outcome will yield success and improved productivity.

6. Conclusion

The importance of EI for managers in strategic decisions cannot be over-emphasized. In summary, the study reveals that a direct positive effect of EI, patterns of cooperation and comprehension to deal with conflict was found on the results of strategic decisions and indirectly through relational leadership. Thus, it is necessary to focus on people with a high EI level when choosing them as managers of organizational units and divisions. In the selection, consideration should be given to those characterized by complementary and interconnected roles with other units and departments. This is because it will contribute to the fulfillment of roles that require joint efforts and cooperation among them. This can be determined either through self-tests that are set for them, or by observing and studying their behavior in their previous workplace, or any other way to ensure that the candidate has high EI skills (as well as cognitive and technical intelligence skills), and then Ensure that the nominated manager has the ability to deal positively with human resources (emotions, conflicts, problems and disagreements, etc), in addition to possessing the ability to deal positively with material resources (machines, devices, machines, etc.). Findings show that managers' dealing with the conflicts that occur between them negatively affects the results of the strategic decisions taken by the ministry. This calls for standing on that aspect, and trying to understand its causes and providing training and development programs that contribute to changing the way they deal with each other when conflicts occur. This is in addition to encouraging and urging the directors of departments and organizational units to deal with the conflicts that occur between them cooperatively. It could be handled through integration in sorting and discussing points of disagreement. The outcome will yield common solutions for the public interest. Managers should also be urged to distance themselves from competitive patterns through domination and domination, or by using the personal relationships of one party to overpower the other, or by being preoccupied with diminishing or diminishing the other.

Also, managers must be prompted to face any differences or conflicts with other managers and discuss them and not to leave them or to postpone the search for solutions to them because this will negatively affect the performance of the departments or directorates or the ministry as

revealed. The importance of EI in the effectiveness of leadership practices for managers, particularly the social skills that help them to manage effective and positive relationships with each other cannot be over-emphasized. There is a need to inform all managers that the main point in preparing successful leaders is their possession or training to acquire social skills. Examples of such skills include mentoring and motivation through a persuasive vision, effective discussion and persuasion methods, the skills to stimulate the capabilities of others through feedback and guidance, and relationship management and use in mobilizing efforts. In a positive direction, resolving differences and conflicts, and cooperating. Managers' possession of skills that help them recognize and organize their emotions and explain and understand the emotions of others, without using all of this to achieve what they seek through their social skills, is not sufficient to make them effective leaders.

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