

The Mediating Role of Strength-Based Leadership in the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Employee Performance in Kuwait's Oil and Gas Sector

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the potential mediating role of strength-based leadership (SBL) in the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and employee performance (EP) within Kuwait's oil and gas sector. The research evaluates whether emotionally intelligent leadership directly enhances employee performance or does so indirectly through strength-based leadership behaviors. A quantitative research design was utilized, drawing on survey data from 75 employees and managers across major oil and gas organizations in Kuwait. Emotional intelligence was measured using the dimensions of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, while employee performance was assessed through indicators of productivity, engagement, commitment, and innovativeness. The results indicate a significant positive relationship between strength-based leadership and employee performance. The findings support an indirect mediating role of strength-based leadership. However, the direct relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance was negative and statistically nonsignificant, indicating that emotional intelligence alone may not directly improve performance outcomes unless expressed through strength-based leadership behaviors. This study advances leadership literature by proposing an integrated framework that clarifies how emotional competencies are operationalized through leadership practices in high-pressure organizational environments. The practical implications underscore the necessity of incorporating emotional intelligence and strength-based leadership into leadership development initiatives within Kuwait's oil and gas sector.

1. Introduction

Leadership has long been recognized as a central factor in organizational effectiveness and employee outcomes. Existing leadership literature has examined leadership from multiple perspectives, including traits, behaviors, influence processes, and interpersonal relationships (Bennis, 1959; Stogdill, 1974; Yukl, 2011). In organizational settings, attention has

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increasingly focused on the personal capabilities and leadership behaviors that contribute to employee performance and workplace effectiveness.

One capability that has received considerable scholarly attention is emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to recognize, regulate, and effectively manage emotions in oneself and others. Emotional intelligence is commonly associated with dimensions such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Mayer et al., 2004; Wong & Law, 2002). Previous studies have linked emotionally intelligent leadership to improved communication, employee engagement, and positive workplace relationships.

However, findings on the direct relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance remain inconsistent, suggesting that emotional intelligence alone may not be sufficient to generate sustained performance outcomes. This limitation highlights the importance of leadership behaviors that translate emotional capabilities into practical managerial actions. In this regard, strength-based leadership (SBL) has emerged as a promising but underexplored leadership approach. Strength-based leadership focuses on identifying, developing, and utilizing employee strengths to enhance motivation, engagement, and performance. Unlike traditional leadership approaches that emphasize correcting weaknesses, SBL prioritizes leveraging individual capabilities to improve organizational effectiveness. Despite its conceptual relevance, limited empirical research has examined strength-based leadership as a mechanism through which emotional intelligence influences employee performance. The GCC organizational environment, particularly within project-oriented and energy-related sectors, has undergone increasing emphasis on adaptive leadership, workforce engagement, and employee development practices. These organizational shifts have heightened the relevance of emotional intelligence and strength-based leadership in influencing employee performance within contemporary workplaces.

The importance of examining these relationships is particularly evident within Kuwait's oil and gas sector, which operates in a highly regulated, high-pressure, and strategically significant environment. Leadership effectiveness in such contexts requires not only technical expertise but also the ability to manage interpersonal relationships and sustain employee engagement. Nevertheless, leadership research within GCC and oil-sector contexts remains limited, with much of the existing literature focusing primarily on Western organizational settings.

As a result, this study investigates whether strength-based leadership plays a potential mediating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance in Kuwait's oil and gas sector. The study specifically investigates whether strength-based leadership is associated with improved employee performance and whether it serves as an indirect mechanism linking emotional intelligence to performance outcomes. By combining emotional intelligence and strength-based leadership into a unified paradigm, this study adds to the leadership literature by describing how emotional competencies are converted into performance-enhancing leadership behaviors in high-demand organizational settings. The findings have practical implications for leadership development activities targeted at increasing employee engagement, productivity, and organizational effectiveness in Kuwait's oil and gas sector.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Leadership in the GCC and Kuwaiti Context

Leadership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has increasingly attracted academic attention due to the region's distinct economic structure, cultural norms, and reliance on natural resources. Despite early studies frequently using Western leadership models in GCC contexts,

the reliability of these models remains unclear due to differences in power distance, collectivism, and organizational hierarchies (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004).

Smith et al. (2006) argue that leadership approaches in Arab settings need to incorporate cultural and institutional experiences to be effective, rather than relying solely on leadership frameworks. In this regional context, Kuwait stands out as a unique case. Being one of the world's leading oil-producing nations, Kuwait's economy and organizational structures are heavily structured by the oil and gas sector. Taqi (2020) investigates the premise that leadership in Kuwait's oil and gas business is not well understood, particularly at the middle and frontline management levels. The study identifies crucial leadership abilities, including communication, decision-making, technical proficiency, and change management, which are often not applied, by referencing known qualitative data from team leaders.

Furthermore, results show that no single leadership paradigm adequately considers the different developmental needs of leaders, underscoring the importance of context-sensitive leadership techniques. Data show a deliberate distance between senior management and workers in Kuwait's oil industry, despite ongoing leadership development programs. According to Taqi (2020), various leadership programs are outdated and fail to keep pace with rapid technological and workforce changes, particularly among young professionals. This disengagement underscores the need for flexible, employee-focused leadership solutions that enhance engagement and performance in high-pressure, dynamic circumstances.

2.2. Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Outcomes

Emotional intelligence is commonly defined as the ability to identify, manage, and successfully use emotions in oneself and others, with significant consequences for leadership behaviors and employee outcomes (Mayer et al., 2004). According to Wong and Law (2002), emotional intelligence influences leadership performance by enhancing interpersonal understanding, emotional regulation, and employee relationships in organizational settings. It is a behavioral mechanism that enables leaders to manage interpersonal relationships, respond adaptively to stressors, and create supportive, productive work environments in leadership contexts.

Empirical research from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) underlines the importance of emotional intelligence in organizational contexts. In their study of private-sector organizations in Bahrain, Abdulla et al. (2020) found a strong relationship among managers' emotional intelligence, specifically self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and social skills, and employee engagement. Their findings show that emotionally intelligent leadership accounts for a considerable share of the variation in employee outcomes, with self-awareness the strongest predictor.

Nonetheless, these findings support the importance of emotional intelligence; earlier research has focused on its direct impact on employee attitudes such as engagement and motivation. Less effort has been devoted to understanding how emotional intelligence manifests in tangible performance outcomes, particularly in operationally challenging industries such as oil and gas. Furthermore, established studies typically focus on leadership behaviors involving emotional intelligence, thereby limiting theoretical explanations of how emotional intelligence influences employee performance.

2.3. Strength-Based Leadership and Employee Performance

Strength-based leadership is rooted in positive organizational scholarship and focuses on leveraging individual and team strengths to increase performance, motivation, and well-being. Instead of focusing on weaknesses, strength-based leaders recognize individuals' unique strengths and distribute responsibilities accordingly, instilling confidence and a sense of

continuous commitment. According to Cooperrider and McQuaid (2012), high-performing teams are formed by strategically balancing collective talents, allowing employees to perform at their best. In the oil and gas business, where performance expectations are high and operational risks are significant, leadership styles that complement employees' psychological and professional strengths are essential.

According to Ogwus (2022), strength-based leadership is especially beneficial in relationship management within oil-related businesses because it increases trust, empowerment, and dedication. Leaders can improve individual and team performance by assigning responsibilities based on talents and providing strengths-based feedback. Leadership research has increasingly focused on the mechanisms by which leadership behaviors affect organizational and personnel performance outcomes (Bono & Judge, 2004).

Effective leadership has repeatedly been linked to higher employee engagement, organizational commitment, and workplace performance, especially in project-oriented organizations (Ginnett et al., 2014). Employees are critical to organizational effectiveness, making leadership practices that promote motivation, interpersonal growth, and collaboration especially crucial in dynamic industries like oil and gas (Kehoe & Wright, 2013).

Leadership effectiveness has grown in importance in the UAE and GCC as organizations adjust to technological innovation, workforce diversification, and organizational transformation. A study of middle-management personnel at the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company found that transformational leadership was strongly positively associated with organizational culture using PLS-SEM analysis. The findings emphasized the relevance of adaptive, employee-centered leadership methods to enhancing organizational effectiveness in the oil and gas industry.

Additional regional studies have also emphasized the necessity of adaptive leadership methods in maintaining organizational change and performance across GCC industries. Leadership techniques that prioritize communication, employee development, innovation, and interpersonal support have been linked to increased organizational adaptation and workplace success in quickly changing Gulf organizational environments. These findings emphasize the importance of studying emotional intelligence and strength-based leadership as interrelated behavioral drivers of employee performance in UAE organizational settings.

Despite its importance, empirical research on strength-based leadership is rare, particularly in the oil industry and Middle Eastern contexts. Most leadership studies in the region continue to focus on transformational or transactional models, leaving strength-based leadership underexplored as a strategy for improving performance.

2.4. Integrating Emotional Intelligence and Strength-Based Leadership

Even though emotional intelligence equips leaders to understand and manage emotions, it does not necessarily determine how they apply these talents in everyday managerial operations. Strength-based leadership provides a behavior-based framework through which emotionally intelligent leaders may translate emotional awareness into behaviors that promote staff performance. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are more likely to recognize individual differences, respond sensitively to employee needs, and foster supportive workplace environments, all of which are essential components of a strengths-based leadership strategy.

In Kuwait's oil and gas industry, where hierarchical structures and operational pressures are common, applying emotional intelligence and strength-based leadership could help maintain staff performance. Nonetheless, the literature has not fully investigated the combined impact of emotional intelligence and strength-based leadership on employee performance in this

environment. This gap underscores the importance of empirical research on the relevance of emotional intelligence and on how it manifests in leadership behaviors that enhance performance.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study used a quantitative cross-sectional research methodology to investigate the role of strength-based leadership as a mediator between emotional intelligence and employee performance in Kuwait's oil and gas sector. A survey-based technique was deemed appropriate because it enabled the investigation of correlations among leadership behaviors, emotional competencies, and employee performance outcomes in organizational settings. The study's conceptual framework argued that emotional intelligence has an indirect influence on employee performance through strength-based leadership behaviors. The target market included managers and personnel from Kuwait's major oil and gas businesses, including Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), and Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC). Given the strategic importance of these organizations, managerial and non-managerial perspectives were seen as critical to understanding leadership-performance dynamics.

A stratified convenience sample strategy was used to achieve adequate representation across all organizational levels while accounting for practical constraints related to data collection and accessibility. To understand disparities in leadership viewpoints and performance experiences, job roles were stratified, and convenience sampling was utilized due to limited access to entire staff rosters and organizational secrecy. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed, and 75 valid responses were selected for further study. The sample size meets the minimum requirements for mediation analysis in exploratory organizational research (e.g., Hayes, 2018; Cohen, 1992) and aligns with methodological guidelines for investigating relational constructs such as emotional intelligence, leadership behaviors, and employee performance.

Between July 15 and July 30, 2024, data were collected via an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. To reduce response bias and promote honest reporting, participants were given the option of remaining anonymous. Follow-up reminders were issued to increase response rates, and ethical considerations, such as confidentiality and informed consent, were upheld throughout the data-gathering process. The survey instrument included measures of emotional intelligence, strength-based leadership, and staff performance, with all features rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Emotional intelligence was assessed across five dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, in line with existing emotional intelligence frameworks. Strength-based leadership was assessed by asking employees about their perceptions of a leader's attention to recognizing, developing, and utilizing individual capabilities in the workplace. Employee performance was measured using four indicators: productivity, engagement, dedication, and innovativeness, which reflect task-related and behavioral characteristics relevant to high-demand industrial situations.

A statistical analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among emotional intelligence, strength-based leadership, and employee performance. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions, followed by reliability and validity tests to assess the adequacy of the measurement scales. In addition, inferential studies were used to evaluate the proposed relationships, including mediation analyses to assess

whether strength-based leadership functions as an intervening mechanism in the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance.

Various indicators were combined to improve methodological accuracy. Stratified recruiting helped to improve representativeness across organizational functions, whilst anonymous data gathering reduced social desirability bias. While the sector-specific focus and sample size limit the generalizability of the findings beyond Kuwait's oil and gas industry, the methodological approaches provide a valid and reliable foundation for investigating leadership dynamics in an economically critical and organizationally complex setting.

3.2. Common Method Bias

Because the study was based on self-reported data collected via a single survey instrument, procedural and statistical remedies were implemented to limit potential common method variance (CMV). Respondents were promised anonymity and confidentiality during the procedure to reduce socially desirable responses and evaluative concerns. Participation was voluntary, and survey items were designed to prevent response pattern bias.

Harman's single-factor test was used to assess whether a single factor accounted for most of the covariance among the study variables. The findings showed that no single factor explained most of the variance, implying that common method bias was unlikely to have a significant impact on the findings; thus, future studies may use additional procedural and statistical remedies, such as marker variables or latent common method factor approaches, to improve validity assessment.

3.3. Measurement Instruments

The researchers used previously validated measurement scales adapted from current organizational leadership and emotional intelligence literature.

3.3.1. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence was measured using dimensions adapted from Wong and Law (2002), including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Sample items included:

- “I have a good understanding of my emotions.”
- “I can regulate my emotions effectively.”

3.3.2. Strength-Based Leadership

Strength-based leadership was assessed through employees' perceptions of leaders' ability to recognize, develop, and utilize employee strengths.

Sample items included:

- “My leader recognizes my strengths.”
- “My leader encourages employees to apply their strengths at work.”

3.3.3. Employee Performance

Employee performance was measured using indicators related to productivity, engagement, commitment, and innovativeness.

Sample items included:

- “I consistently meet performance expectations.”
- “I complete assigned responsibilities effectively.”

All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

3.4. Reliability and Validity

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess construct reliability and validity, as well as composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted. The reliability results showed satisfactory internal consistency across all research components. Convergent validity was validated by AVE values that exceeded the specified standards, whilst discriminant validity was assessed using established measurement methods. Harman's single-factor test revealed that the first factor accounted for 46.8% of the variance, which was less than the recommended 50% threshold, indicating that common technique bias was not a major concern. Additionally, multicollinearity diagnostics were performed before the regression analysis. Tolerance values exceeded the suggested level of .20, while variance inflation factor (VIF) values remained less than 5, indicating no significant multicollinearity among the predictor variables.

3.5. Sample and Generalizability Limitations

The study used a convenience sample of 75 respondents from Kuwait's oil and gas sector. Although the sample size is consistent with recommendations for exploratory organizational research and mediation analysis, caution should be given when extrapolating the findings beyond the examined context. The findings should be viewed as context-specific and exploratory.

4. Results

4.1. Summary Statistics of Performance Items

Participants completed the six-item Performance Scale regarding their perception of their own performance on the job. The mean and standard deviation for this scale are reported in Table 1. The distribution for this scale was negatively skewed (see Figure 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Performance and Strengths Leadership Scales

	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Performance	75	0	25.280	3.958	8.000	30.000
Strength Leadership	75	0	14.880	2.964	7.000	20.000

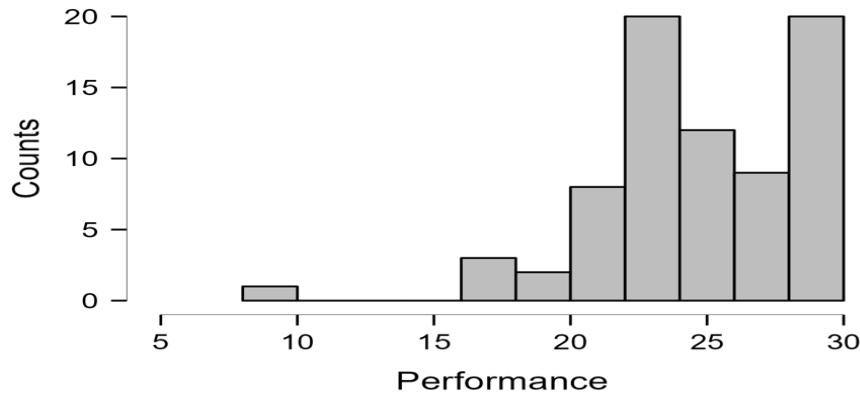


Figure 1. Histogram of Performance of Scale

Linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of emotional intelligence and strengths-based leadership on employee performance. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2,72) = 10.10$, $p < .001$, explaining 21.9% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = .219$, Adjusted $R^2 = .197$). Strengths-based leadership significantly predicted employee performance ($\beta = .669$, $p = .002$), whereas emotional intelligence demonstrated a negative but statistically nonsignificant effect ($\beta = -.251$, $p = .234$) (Table 3).

Table 2. Model Summary - EP_MEAN

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE	R ² Change	df1	df2	p
M ₀	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.660	0.000	0	74	
M ₁	0.468	0.219	0.197	0.591	0.219	2	72	< .001

Note. M₁ includes EI_MEAN, SBL_MEAN

Table 3. Coefficients

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M ₀	Intercept	4.213	0.076		55.32	< .001		
M ₁	Intercept	2.680	0.353		7.592	< .001		
	EIMEAN	-0.210	0.175	-0.251	-1.201	.234	0.248	4.034
	SBLMEAN	0.596	0.186	0.669	3.198	.002	0.248	4.034

Table 4. Performance Scale Reliability Statistics

Estimate	Cronbach's α
Point estimate	0.928
95% CI lower bound	0.898

Estimate	Cronbach's α
95% CI upper bound	0.951

4.2. Strengths-Based Leadership Scale Statistics

Finally, the Strengths-Based Leadership Scale had good reliability ($\alpha = 0.79$; see Table 5) and was roughly normally distributed (see Figure 2).

Table 5. Strengths Based Leadership Scale Reliability Statistics

Estimate	Cronbach's α
Point estimate	0.787
95% CI lower bound	0.695
95% CI upper bound	0.855

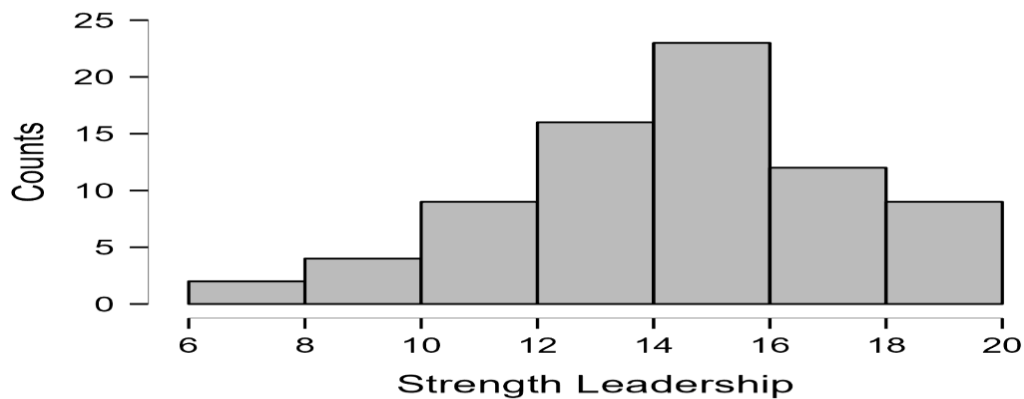


Figure 2. Histogram for Strengths-Based Leadership Scale Scores

4.3. Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was further evaluated with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) techniques. Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and the Fornell-Larcker criterion were used to assess construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, respectively.

The results showed that all variables had acceptable construct reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above the required threshold of 0.70. Convergent validity was also proven, with all AVE values exceeding the minimum acceptable level of 0.50. Discriminant validity was determined using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Although Emotional Intelligence and Strength-Based Leadership shared a strong conceptual link, the conceptions were retained for their theoretical distinctiveness and significance in the context of organizational leadership.

H1: Strength-based leadership is significantly and positively correlated with Employee performance. There was a significant positive relationship between supervisor strength-based leadership scores and employee performance scores, $r(73) = .45, p < .001$. Employees who rated their supervisor higher on strength-based leadership tended to rate themselves higher on performance. This was the strongest correlation with employee performance.

The strength-based leadership scale was highly correlated with each emotional intelligence subscale ($r = 0.74$ to 0.80) and with the overall emotional intelligence score ($r = 0.73, p < .001$). See Table 9 for all correlations.

H2: Strength-based leadership style potentially mediates the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Employee Performance. A mediation analysis was conducted in JASP with Emotional Intelligence as the predictor, Strength-based Leadership as the potential mediator, and Employee Performance as the outcome variable. The confidence intervals were calculated through the bias-corrected bootstrap (van Kesteren, 2020). The direct effect of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on Employee Performance is -0.074 , which is not statistically significant ($p = 0.22$). The 95% confidence interval $[-0.193$ to $0.026]$ includes zero, further confirming that there is no significant direct effect (see Table 10).

Table 6. Standardized Factor Loadings

Construct	Number of Items Retained	Range Loadings
EI	16	0.776 – 0.897
EP	6	0.906 – 0.971
SBL	3	0.587 – 0.906

Table 7. CFA/CR/AVE

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
EI	0.957	0.957	0.585
EP	0.930	0.930	0.691
SBL	0.808	0.839	0.622

Table 8. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	EI	EP	SBL
EI	0.765		
EP	0.352	0.831	
SBL	0.982	0.441	0.789

The results indicate a strong relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Strength-Based Leadership, suggesting conceptual proximity between the constructs within the workplace leadership context. This relationship is theoretically consistent with the integrated nature of emotionally intelligent leadership behaviors and strength-based managerial practices

Table 9. Pearson's Correlations for All Variables in the Study

Variable		EI Empathy	EI Self Awareness	EI Social Skills	EI Self-Regulation	Emotional Intelligence Total	Performance	Strength Leadership
1. EI Empathy	Pearson's r	—						
	p-value	—						
2. EI Self Awareness	Pearson's r	0.862	**	—				
	p-value	< .001	—					

Variable		EI Empathy		EI Self Awareness		EI Social Skills		EI Self-Regulation		Emotional Intelligence Total		Performance		Strength Leadership	
3. EI Social Skills	Pearson's r	0.818	**	0.791	**	—									
	p-value	< .001		< .001		—									
4. EI Self-Regulation	Pearson's r	0.612	**	0.632	**	0.730	**	—							
	p-value	< .001		< .001		< .001		—							
5. Emotional Intelligence Total	Pearson's r	0.915	**	0.913	**	0.932	**	0.830	**	—					
	p-value	< .001		< .001		< .001		< .001		—					
6. Performance	Pearson's r	0.276	*	0.317	**	0.282	*	0.307	**	0.329	**	—			
	p-value	0.017		0.006		0.014		0.007		0.004		—			
7. Strength Leadership	Pearson's r	0.783	**	0.801	**	0.788	**	0.742	**	0.867	**	0.451	***	—	
	p-value	< .001		< .001		< .001		< .001		< .001		< .001		—	
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001															

Table 10. Direct Effects Between Emotional Intelligence and Employee Performance

						95% Confidence Interval	
		Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	Lower	Upper
Emotional Intelligence	→Performance	-0.074	0.061	-1.226	0.220	-0.193	0.026
Note. Delta method standard errors, bias-corrected percentile bootstrap confidence intervals, ML estimator.							

The potential mediation pathway (EI → Strength-Based Leadership → Performance) has a significant estimate of 0.172, $p = 0.001$. The 95% confidence interval [0.065 to 0.295] does not include zero, also indicating that the indirect effect is significant. The findings suggest that strength-based leadership functions as an indirect intervening mechanism linking emotional intelligence and employee performance. (see Table 11).

Table 11. Indirect Effects Between Strength-Based Leadership and Employee Performance

									95% Confidence Interval	
					Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	Lower	Upper
Emotional Intelligence	→	Strength Leadership	→	Performance	0.172	0.054	3.190	0.001	0.065	0.295
<i>Note.</i> Delta method standard errors, bias-corrected percentile bootstrap confidence intervals, ML estimator.										

There is a significant total effect of Emotional Intelligence on Performance (0.097, $p = 0.003$). The 95% confidence interval [0.014 to 0.202] does not include zero, further confirming that Emotional Intelligence has a significant total effect on Performance, but this effect occurs through Strength-Based Leadership rather than directly (See Table 12).

Table 12. Total Effects Between Emotional Intelligence and Employee Performance

							95% Confidence Interval	
			Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	Lower	Upper
Emotional Intelligence	→	Performance	0.097	0.032	3.016	0.003	0.014	0.202
<i>Note.</i> Delta method standard errors, bias-corrected percentile bootstrap confidence intervals, ML estimator.								

A summary of the pathway and path coefficients for the potential mediation model is shown in Table 13 and Figure 3.

Table 13. Path Coefficients for Potential Mediation Model

							95% Confidence Interval	
			Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	Lower	Upper
Strength Leadership	→	Performance	0.893	0.274	3.264	0.001	0.330	1.457
Emotional Intelligence	→	Performance	-0.074	0.061	-1.226	0.220	-0.193	0.026
Emotional Intelligence	→	Strength Leadership	0.192	0.013	15.085	< .001	0.170	0.215
<i>Note.</i> Delta method standard errors, bias-corrected percentile bootstrap confidence intervals, ML estimator.								

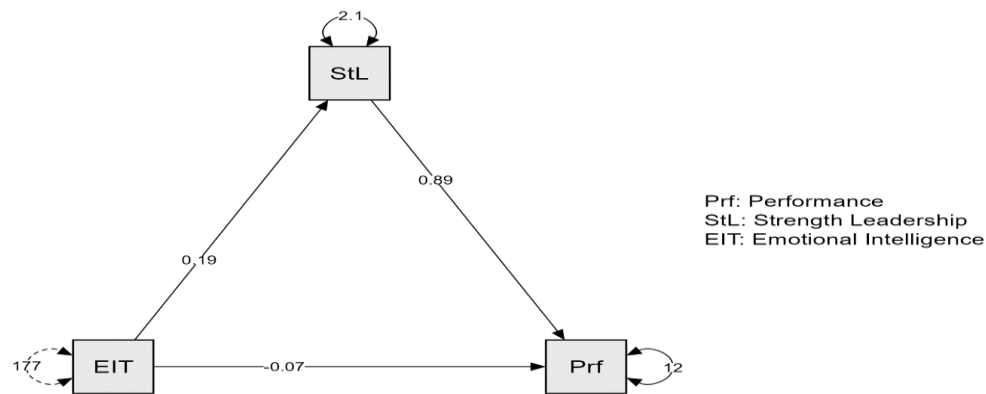


Figure 3. Path Plot for Potential Mediation Analysis

The findings indicate that emotional intelligence does not demonstrate a statistically significant direct relationship with employee performance. However, emotional intelligence significantly predicts strength-based leadership behaviors, which in turn positively influence employee performance. These results suggest that emotional intelligence may enhance employee performance indirectly through leadership behaviors that recognize and develop employee strengths. These findings suggest that the influence of Emotional Intelligence on Employee Performance operates primarily through Strength-Based Leadership behaviors. That is, Emotional Intelligence contributes to better performance only when Strength-Based Leadership is present. What do these results mean practically? Simply having high Emotional Intelligence **does not directly** improve performance. However, leaders with high Emotional Intelligence are more likely to adopt Strength-Based Leadership styles, which, in turn, lead to better employee performance. Organizations should focus on developing Strength-Based Leadership among emotionally intelligent leaders **to maximize performance**.

5. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to determine whether strength-based leadership mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance within Kuwait's oil and gas industry. Mediation analysis revealed an unexpected result: emotional intelligence showed a negative, though not statistically significant, direct association with employee performance. These findings indicate that emotional intelligence alone may not consistently enhance performance outcomes in high-pressure organizational contexts. Rather, emotional competencies are more influential when enacted through formal leadership behaviors that identify, align, and develop employee strengths.

Although emotionally intelligent leaders possess the intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies required for effective leadership, these abilities must be translated into specific managerial actions to influence employee outcomes. Strength-based leadership functions as a critical behavioral strategy in this context, enabling leaders to operationalize emotional intelligence by identifying, developing, and leveraging employees' strengths.

The function of strength-based leadership aligns with established leadership theory, which posits that personal characteristics shape leadership behaviors and, consequently, employee outcomes. This study conceptualizes emotional intelligence as a foundational trait that enhances a leader's capacity to engage in strength-based behaviors, such as providing strengths-focused feedback, aligning tasks with individual capabilities, and fostering a collaborative work environment. These behaviors are identified as key drivers of improved employee performance.

This conclusion is particularly significant within Kuwait's oil and gas industry, where hierarchical structures, operational pressures, and workforce diversity require leadership strategies that foster engagement, trust, and sustained productivity. As noted in previous studies, strength-based leadership may reduce the perceived gap between management and employees, thereby enhancing performance outcomes in high-demand environments.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the leadership literature by clarifying the mechanism through which emotional intelligence influences employee performance. Rather than positioning emotional intelligence as a direct predictor of success, the study highlights the significance of leadership behaviors as mediating factors. This process-oriented explanation addresses gaps in previous research and extends established leadership models by integrating emotional intelligence and strength-based leadership into a unified explanatory framework. Although the study focuses on Kuwait's oil and gas sector, the proposed paradigm may be applicable in other organizational contexts where leadership effectiveness and employee performance are essential. Industries characterized by high-pressure environments, interdependence, and complex human interactions may benefit from leadership strategies that integrate emotional competencies with strength-based approaches. However, further research is necessary to assess the applicability of this framework across different sectors and cultural contexts to enhance its generalizability.

Several limitations should be considered when evaluating the study's conclusions. First, the study used self-reported survey data from a single source, which may have included common method bias despite statistical checks. Second, the study did not account for demographic or organizational factors, such as tenure, job level, or organizational experience, that could influence employee performance. Furthermore, the relatively small convenience sample ($N = 75$) may limit the applicability of the findings to larger organizational contexts.

Future research should employ larger, more diverse samples and additional control variables to enhance external validity and the robustness of findings. Moreover, the strong association between emotional intelligence and strength-based leadership indicates conceptual overlap and potential multicollinearity. Although indirect effects were identified, alternative structural models and competing mediation pathways were not examined. Consequently, the mediation findings should be interpreted with caution rather than as definitive causal evidence. While the constructs were maintained for theoretical purposes, future studies may benefit from more precise measurement boundaries to improve discriminant validity.

6. Practical Implications

The study's findings have several practical implications for organizations operating in high-pressure, performance-driven environments, such as the oil and gas sector. Leadership development programs should incorporate emotional intelligence training that emphasizes self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and relationship management. Enhancing these competencies enables leaders to better understand employees and respond effectively to both interpersonal and operational challenges.

Organizations are also encouraged to integrate strength-based leadership principles into leadership training programs. Leaders should be trained to identify employees' capabilities and purposefully leverage these strengths in task allocation, feedback, and team development. Embedding strength-based leadership practices into daily management routines facilitates translating emotional intelligence into leadership behaviors that directly influence staff performance.

Performance management systems should extend beyond output-focused evaluation criteria to include indicators of employee performance and the effective use of individual strengths. This approach aligns performance assessment with leadership behaviors that foster sustained productivity rather than prioritizing short-term results.

Organizational culture is critical to cultivating emotionally intelligent, strength-based leaders. Organizations should promote cultures that prioritize emotional awareness, constructive feedback, and recognition of individual contributions. Establishing such an environment encourages leadership behaviors that enhance trust, motivation, and employee commitment.

Lastly, emotional intelligence and strength-based leadership competencies should be incorporated into recruitment, promotion, and succession planning processes. Selecting and advancing leaders with emotional awareness and a strengths-oriented mindset aligns leadership styles with organizational performance objectives, thereby reinforcing long-term strategic sustainability.

7. Translating Theory into Practice

The theoretical framework presented in this study outlines how emotional intelligence influences employee performance through strength-based leadership behaviors. Emotional intelligence enhances a leader's awareness of their own emotional states and the needs of their staff, thereby laying the foundation for effective leadership. Strength-based leadership functions as the behavioral mechanism that translates emotional awareness into practice, enabling leaders to implement strategies that identify, cultivate, and utilize employee strengths. Consequently, employees demonstrate increased motivation, engagement, and role clarity, which contribute to improved performance outcomes. This approach may be operationalized through leadership development programs that foster emotional intelligence and encourage the adoption of strength-based leadership behaviors, ultimately resulting in measurable improvements in employee performance indicators.

8. Conclusion

This study proposes and empirically examines an integrated leadership framework that delineates the interaction between emotional intelligence and strength-based leadership in shaping employee performance within Kuwait's oil and gas sector. The results demonstrate that emotional intelligence constitutes a critical leadership competency, while strength-based leadership enhances its impact by facilitating the enactment of behaviors that improve performance. By categorizing emotional intelligence into specific dimensions and employee performance into measurable outcomes, the study introduces an operational and theoretically grounded model for leadership development and organizational advancement. The evidence indicates that emotionally intelligent leadership alone is insufficient to enhance performance unless it is combined with leadership strategies that actively identify and leverage employee strengths. Furthermore, the findings suggest that strength-based leadership may mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance.

This distinction helps to clarify inconsistencies identified in prior research and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of leadership effectiveness in high-demand organizational environments.

9. Recommendations and Future Research

Organizations should invest in leadership development initiatives that integrate emotional intelligence training with strength-based leadership strategies. This integration enables leaders

to translate emotional awareness into managerial actions that improve staff engagement and performance. Human resource policies should include strengths-based evaluations and feedback mechanisms to support role alignment and ongoing professional development.

To maintain effectiveness, organizations should use staff surveys, performance metrics, and leadership feedback systems to monitor outcomes associated with emotionally intelligent and strength-based leadership approaches. Although this study provides valuable insights, it also highlights areas for future research. The unexpected and negative direct relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance observed in this study warrants further investigation.

Although the study identified significant indirect relationships consistent with mediation, it did not examine alternative structural models or competing mediation pathways. Consequently, the findings provide indicative rather than definitive evidence of mediation. Future research could enhance these results by conducting comparative model testing and exploring alternative causal structures in various organizational contexts.

Future research could utilize longitudinal designs to examine causal relationships and investigate additional mediators or moderators, including organizational culture, employee well-being, and job design. Comparative analyses of alternative structural and mediation models across various industries and cultural contexts may further strengthen the generalizability and robustness of these findings.

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