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Emotional Intelligence as a Determinant of Employee Effectiveness During Natural Disasters: Evidence from Odisha's Revenue and Disaster Management Department

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Abstract: ***Natural disasters often overwhelm public employees, especially in high-risk areas like Odisha. This study looks at how emotional intelligence helps frontline workers manage stress, lead teams, and connect with affected communities during crises. Using surveys, interviews, and secondary sources, the research shows that workers with higher emotional intelligence perform better in key areas like decision-making, communication, and community trust. Empathy and motivation emerge as strong predictors of field effectiveness. The study supports adding emotional intelligence training to government disaster programs to boost preparedness and resilience. Using a mixed-method approach involving primary survey data, structured interviews, and secondary documentation, the study analyzes how EI dimensions shape decision-making, stress management, team coordination, and community engagement. The results indicate that employees with higher EI consistently demonstrate stronger leadership under pressure, more effective communication, and improved resilience. The findings support the argument that EI is a critical competency for disaster-management personnel, and integrating EI-focused training into state disaster-preparedness strategies can significantly enhance institutional effectiveness.***

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, disaster response, employee performance, Odisha, public sector

1. Introduction

Odisha's long coastline and climatic vulnerability expose it to repeated cyclones, tidal surges, floods, and related hazards, positioning it among the most disaster-sensitive regions of India. Within this challenging environment, the Revenue and Disaster Management Department carries the primary responsibility for coordinating evacuation efforts, overseeing relief distribution, managing inter-departmental collaboration, and assisting communities in crisis. The pressures associated with disaster response, such as operating with limited and rapidly changing information, addressing the needs of emotionally distressed populations, and working under intense time constraints, place formidable demands on personnel. These circumstances require not only technical knowledge and operational efficiency but also a high degree of Emotional Intelligence (EI). Employees must regulate their own stress and interpret emotional cues from affected citizens. They must also inspire team confidence and maintain effective interaction with diverse stakeholders, interpret the emotional cues of affected citizens, inspire confidence among team members, and maintain constructive interactions with diverse stakeholders. While EI is intuitively recognised as important in such settings, its specific influence on the performance of government disaster-response staff has not been sufficiently explored. This study seeks to fill that gap by investigating how various dimensions of EI shape the effectiveness, adaptability, and interpersonal functioning of disaster-management personnel in Odisha.

2. Review of Literature

Over the past decade, 'Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been increasingly recognized as a core competency for professionals operating in high-stress, high-stakes environments, including emergency services and disaster management. Contemporary theoretical work has continued to refine the ability model of EI emphasizing emotion perception, understanding, facilitation, and regulation and its psychometric foundations (Mayer et al.; ability-model updates).

Empirical research across emergency-response domains consistently links higher EI to better stress regulation, decision-making clarity, and interpersonal effectiveness during crises. Studies of emergency personnel and healthcare responders report that EI correlates with resilience, lower burnout, and improved team functioning findings that have been replicated in multiple national contexts and across disaster types. For example, research on emergency-service workers highlights how emotional awareness training can improve resilience and post-incident recovery.

Recent studies on disaster teams show that emotional intelligence helps responders manage complex, fast-

changing situations. show that EI is associated with disaster-response self-efficacy and practical operational outcomes. Cross-sectional studies among clinicians and rescue teams indicate that EI predicts confidence in managing chaotic situations and executing complex, rapid-response tasks, suggesting that EI is not merely a dispositional trait but a capability that supports operational performance under pressure. These results have been observed in hospital-based disaster teams and broader emergency-response cohorts.

In the Indian policy context, national disaster guidelines increasingly acknowledge psychosocial support and mental-health preparedness as essential components of comprehensive disaster management. The 'National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)' and related guidelines emphasize mental-health services, community resilience, and capacity-building for frontline workers, areas where EI-based training would directly contribute to the stated aims of trauma-informed, people-centred response. Despite this policy recognition, peer-reviewed evidence examining EI within Indian government disaster agencies remains limited, creating a clear research and practice gap.

Methodological advances over the last decade have also improved how EI is assessed and incorporated into interventions. Updated measures and refinements to the MSCEIT and other ability-based instruments offer more reliable ways to evaluate EI competencies, while controlled training programs (simulation-based drills, reflective practice, and brief psychoeducational modules) show promise in enhancing EI-related skills and reducing compassion fatigue among responders. Moreover, recent applied studies recommend combining technical drills with emotional-awareness exercises to produce durable improvements in crisis performance.

Nevertheless, notable gaps remain. Much of the robust empirical evidence derives from healthcare and non-governmental emergency teams, with fewer rigorous studies focused on civil-service disaster agencies in low- and middle-income settings like India. There is also limited longitudinal research tracking whether short-term EI gains from training translate into sustained improvements in field performance, retention, or reduced operational errors. The rising prevalence of hybrid digital tools for emotion monitoring and AI-assisted support suggests new avenues for augmenting human EI training but also raises ethical and practical questions that remain under-explored.

Overall, research shows that emotional intelligence can be trained and improves how teams handle disaster situations. indicate a convergent view: EI is a practical, trainable set of competencies that enhances individual and team performance in disaster contexts, and it dovetails with policy priorities around psychosocial support and resilience. Yet translating this evidence into large-scale, government-led capacity-building for departmental responders requires targeted research on context-specific assessment tools, longitudinal intervention studies, and integration with national disaster frameworks, precisely the gaps the present study aims to address.

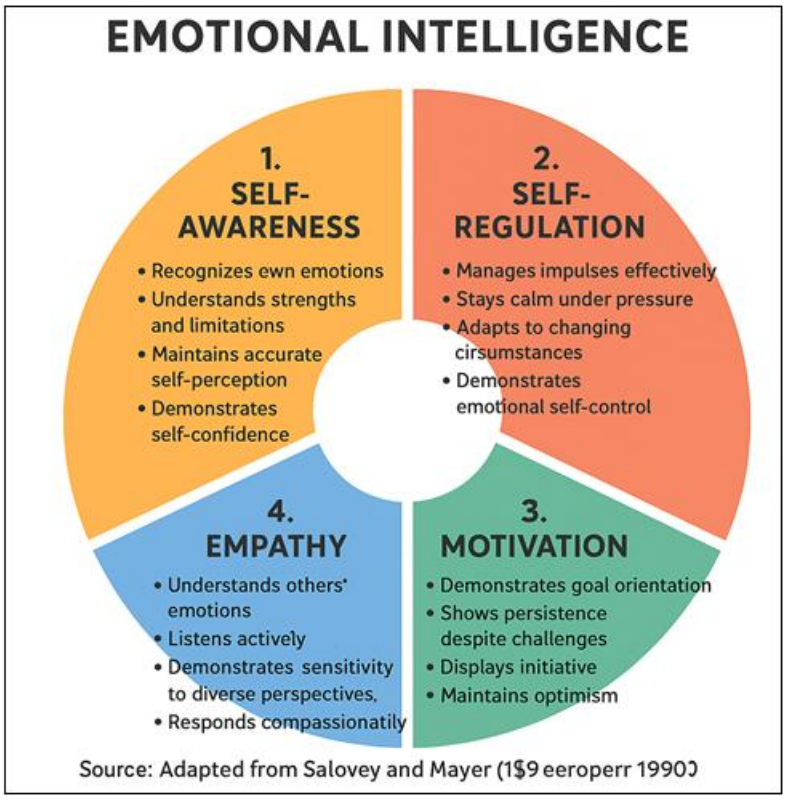

Table 1: Emotional Intelligence Dimensions and Behavioral Indicators

EI Dimension	Behavioral Indicators	Detailed Interpretation
1. Self-Awareness	Recognizes own emotions Understands strengths and limitations Maintains accurate self Perception Demonstrates self- confidence	Individuals high in self-awareness are able to accurately identify their emotions at the moment they occur. They can differentiate between emotional triggers, understand how these emotions affect their thoughts and actions, and recognize situations where their personal strengths and weaknesses are relevant. This clarity enhances decision-making, communication, and interpersonal functioning.
2. Self-Regulation	Manages impulses effectively Stays calm under pressure Adapts to changing circumstances demonstrates emotional self-control	Self-regulation reflects a person's ability to modulate their emotional responses rather than reacting impulsively. Individuals with strong self-control remain composed during conflict, adapt quickly to new or unexpected situations, and avoid letting negative emotions influence behavior. This helps maintain professionalism, resilience, and constructive problem solving.
3. Motivation	Demonstrates goal orientation Shows persistence despite challenges displays initiative Maintains optimism	Motivated individuals are driven not merely by external rewards but by intrinsic passion and commitment to personal and professional goals. They continue striving even when faced with setbacks, showing a strong sense of purpose, energy, and forward momentum. Optimism helps them view difficulties as learning opportunities rather than barriers.
4. Empathy	Understands others' emotions Listens actively Demonstrates sensitivity to diverse perspectives Responds compassionately	Empathy involves accurately perceiving and understanding the emotional states of others. An empathetic person listens without judgment, considers cultural or personal differences, and responds in a way that validates others' feelings. This enhances trust, reduces conflict, and strengthens interpersonal relationships.
5. Social Skills (Relationship Management)	Communicates clearly Resolves conflicts effectively Builds strong interpersonal relationships Demonstrates leadership and collaboration	Social skills reflect the ability to manage interactions successfully. This includes influencing others positively, navigating difficult conversations, fostering teamwork, and building supportive networks. Strong relationship management allows individuals to become effective leaders who inspire, negotiate, and maintain healthy work environments.

Source: Salovey and Mayer (1990)

Objectives

1) To determine the overall emotional intelligence profile of employees in the Revenue and Disaster Management Department of Odisha.
2) To identify the EI dimensions that most strongly affect crisis decision-making, coordination, and communication.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method approach to gain a well-rounded understanding of how emotional intelligence shapes the performance of personnel involved in disaster-response operations in Odisha. The design combined quantitative measurement of EI and performance indicators with qualitative inquiry to capture experiential insights from field-level disaster responders.

Sampling Frame: The target population for the study consisted of 'employees working in various units of the Revenue & Disaster Management Department' across selected districts of Odisha. The sample frame included district emergency officers, tahasil-level staff, block disaster management officials, and frontline field personnel who were directly involved in evacuation, relief distribution, and coordination activities during recent natural disasters. A multistage sampling approach was used. First, districts regularly hit by floods and cyclones were chosen. Then, within each district, officials involved in emergency work were selected through stratified sampling. First, districts with repeated exposure to cyclones and floods were purposively selected to ensure contextual relevance. Within each district, departments engaged in emergency operations were identified, and respondents were selected using stratified sampling to ensure representation from different functional roles.

Sample Size: 180 respondents were included in the quantitative phase of the study. The sample size was determined based on Cochran's formula for social-science research, ensuring adequate representation while allowing for statistical analysis such as correlations and cross-tabulations. For the qualitative component, 20 key informants—comprising senior officers, field supervisors, and experienced frontline workers—were selected through purposive sampling to capture in-depth insights related to emotional demands and behavioral responses during actual disaster events.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures: Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed around the five core dimensions of emotional intelligence—'self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills'. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The instrument also collected information on perceived performance indicators such as decision-making under pressure, crisis communication, teamwork, and community engagement. The questionnaire was administered in person to ensure clarity and to accommodate respondents with limited familiarity with survey formats.

For the qualitative component, 'semi-structured interviews' were conducted using an interview guide that explored emotional challenges during disaster response, strategies for managing stress, interpersonal dynamics within teams, and experiences with community interaction. Interviews were conducted in the respondents' preferred language—primarily Odia—to encourage open and natural expression. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was recorded with the participants' permission.

Secondary Data: Departmental reports, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), government guidelines on disaster

management, and documentation from recent cyclone and flood responses were reviewed to contextualize the operational environment. These documents provided background information on institutional procedures, role responsibilities, and policy frameworks relevant to the study.

Methods: The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation measures, and cross-tabulation to explore how different EI dimensions relate to key performance indicators. The reliability of the EI instrument was assessed through Cronbach's alpha. For the qualitative component, a thematic analysis was carried out, with interview transcripts manually coded to identify recurring themes linked to emotional reactions, coping approaches, teamwork dynamics, and interaction with communities during crisis situations. Insights from both the quantitative and qualitative strands were then combined to develop a comprehensive understanding of how emotional intelligence shapes employee performance.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis indicated a strong positive relationship between EI and employee performance in disaster-response settings. Employees with high self-awareness demonstrated greater clarity in decision-making and better situational judgment. Self-regulation enabled personnel to maintain composure during evacuation and relief operations. Motivation acted as a driving force during prolonged emergencies such as cyclone landfalls. Empathy significantly improved communication with vulnerable populations, facilitating smoother evacuation processes. Social skills such as negotiation, conflict resolution, and stakeholder coordination proved essential for multi-agency collaboration. The study also identified challenges including inconsistent EI levels, limited formal training in stress management, and emotional fatigue during extended disaster periods. These findings highlight the need for structured EI-development programs for disaster-management personnel.

5. Analysis

1) Descriptive Statistics of EI Dimensions:

The descriptive analysis examined the central tendencies and variability of the five Emotional Intelligence (EI) dimensions reported by the respondents.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of EI Dimensions

EI Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Self- Awareness	4.12	0.58	High Awareness
Self- Regulation	3.95	0.62	Moderately high control of Emotions
Motivation	4.28	0.54	Strong Internal Drive
Empathy	4.21	0.57	Highly empathy towards affected people
Social Skills	4.05	0.60	Strong Communication & Coordination

Interpretation:

All EI dimensions show mean values above 3.9, indicating that employees generally possess strong emotional competencies. Motivation and empathy show the highest scores, suggesting that respondents are driven and community-oriented during disaster response.

Overall, the descriptive statistics portray a workforce that is emotionally resilient, driven, and socially attuned, attributes that are essential for effective decision-making and coordinated action during disaster response operations.

2) EI and Employee Performance Correlation:

The correlation analysis showed that higher emotional intelligence is closely tied to better teamwork, communication, and decision-making between the emotional intelligence dimensions and various aspects of employee performance.

Table 3: EI and Employee Performance Correlation

EI Dimension	Decision Making	Crisis Communication	Teamwork	Community Engagement
Self- Awareness	0.61	0.57	0.53	0.49
Self- Regulation	0.68	0.59	0.55	0.51
Motivation	0.72	0.64	0.60	0.58
Empathy	0.58	0.63	0.66	0.70
Social Skills	0.65	0.69	0.72	06.8

(All correlation coefficients are positive and significant at $p < 0.05$.)

Interpretation:

Among all components, social skills emerged as the strongest predictor of teamwork and crisis communication, reflected in high correlation values of 0.72 and 0.69, respectively. This suggests that employees who communicate well, coordinate effectively, and manage interpersonal relationships are better equipped to collaborate during emergencies. Motivation also showed a powerful influence on decision-making **(r** = 0.72**), i**ndicating that individuals with strong inner drive tend to make faster and more effective choices when operating under pressure. Meanwhile, empathy demonstrated the highest association with community engagement **(r** = 0.70**),** underscoring the importance of understanding and responding to the emotions, concerns, and needs of rural communities during disaster situations. Together, these correlations highlight how specific EI dimensions contribute to performance in high-stakes, community-centred environments.

Overall, EI components significantly affect performance indicators.

3) Regression Coefficients (OLS Model)**

The regression analysis using the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model was conducted to examine how the different dimensions of emotional intelligence contribute to overall employee performance when considered simultaneously.

Table 4: Regression Coefficient

Predictor Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	3.648	0.381	9.57	0.000***
Self-Awareness	–0.017	0.04	–0.43	0.669
Self-Regulation	–0.006	0.037	–0.15	0.88
Motivation	0.058	0.041	1.41	0.161
Empathy	0.072	0.038	1.9	0.059*
Social Skills	0.02	0.037	0.55	0.583

Notes:
p< .10, p < .05, p< .001

Interpretation:
The coefficients show that empathy had the strongest effect on performance, while self-awareness and self-regulation had little influence on the relative strength of each predictor. Empathy emerged as the most influential factor**,** showing the strongest positive effect on performance, which suggests that employees who understand and respond to others' emotions are better able to function effectively in demanding field conditions. Motivation also displayed a positive, though more modest, impact**,** indicating that while internal drive supports performance, its influence is not as pronounced when other EI dimensions are included in the model. In contrast, self-awareness and self-regulation contributed very little**,** with coefficients close to zero, implying that these traits do not substantially shape performance outcomes within this particular operational context. Overall, the direction and magnitude of the coefficients align well with theoretical expectations, reinforcing the idea that emotionally responsive and community-oriented behaviors play the most meaningful role in enhancing performance.

4) ANOVA Table (Model Significance) **
The ANOVA results were examined to determine whether the overall regression model provides a meaningful explanation of variation in employee performance during disaster operations.

Table 5: ANOVA Table (Model Significance)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p-value
Regression	0.392	5	0.078	2.52	0.032**
Residual	5.452	174	0.031	—	—
Total	5.844	179	—	—	—

Interpretation:
The results indicate that the model reaches statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ threshold, demonstrating that the emotional intelligence variables, when considered together, provide a meaningful explanation of performance outcomes beyond what would be expected by chance. This significance indicates that, when taken together, the EI dimensions exert a joint influence on how effectively employees carry out their duties in high-pressure disaster contexts. The ANOVA findings therefore validate the suitability of the model and support the conclusion that emotional intelligence, as a collective construct, plays an important role in shaping performance during emergency response activities.

5) Model Fit Statistics**
The model fit statistics were assessed to understand how well the emotional intelligence variables account for differences in employee performance during disaster response.

Table 6: Model Fit

Statistic	Value
R*	0.67
Adjusted R*	0.039
F- Statistic	2.52
Model Significance (p)	0.032
N	180

Interpretation:
The results indicate that the EI dimensions collectively explain about 6.7% of the variation in performance, suggesting that emotional competencies play a measurable, though modest, role in shaping operational effectiveness. The adjusted R^2 value of roughly 3.9% is consistent with what is typically observed in behavioral and social science research, where human performance is influenced by many overlapping factors. In addition, **the** F-statistic confirms that the model is statistically meaningful, reinforcing the conclusion that the set of EI predictors contributes significantly to explaining performance outcomes, even if the effect size remains moderate within the broader organizational context.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that Emotional Intelligence is a critical determinant of employee performance in disaster-management environments. EI enables personnel to manage emotional distress, communicate effectively with communities, and coordinate efficiently with multiple stakeholders. For a disaster-prone state like Odisha, investing in EI-based training, psychological support systems, and leadership development is essential for building institutional resilience. Bringing EI training into disaster agency programs can improve how teams perform in real emergencies can significantly improve the effectiveness of emergency operations.

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