

The Decency Quotient (DQ): Assessing its Relevance for Mba Students

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Abstract

Orientation: In an era marked by intense competition and rapid technological change, the professional landscape necessitates a broader set of skills beyond mere intellectual capability. While IQ (Intelligence Quotient) and EQ (Emotional Quotient) have long been recognized as pivotal for personal and organizational success, a new construct—the Decency Quotient (DQ)—has emerged as equally significant.

Research Purpose: This paper explores the DQ of MBA students in Bangalore, India emphasizing its role in fostering interpersonal decency, ethical conduct, and professional readiness.

Motivation for the study: The concept of DQ is comparatively new and its relevance to check it amongst MBA students will help the institutions to impart relevant training and make them industry ready with interpersonal decency and ethics.

Design and Method: A structured questionnaire with 43 Likert-scale items was administered to 352 MBA students across 34 institutions, with 330 valid responses analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis were employed.

Main Findings: Six dimensions- Respectful Interaction, Good Manners, Peer Development, Mutual Trust, Decent Feedback, and Active Listening-emerged as foundational to DQ. Female students reported significantly higher DQ scores, while age and formal education showed marginal or no influence.

Managerial Implication and Contribution: The study validates DQ as a significant predictor of ethical leadership readiness among MBA students. The findings urge higher education institutions to integrate decency as a core leadership competency, ensuring a balance between competence and character.

Keywords: Decency Quotient (DQ), Ethical Conduct, Professional Readiness, Leadership, VUCA World

Introduction

Higher education has always adapted to meet the changing needs of the society. However, in today's complex world, education sector is facing some most complex and unprecedented challenges. These challenges are not only numerous but also deeply interconnected, creating a volatile landscape that is difficult to navigate. The most critical among these include economic uncertainty, increased demands for accountability, rapid globalization, and the emergence of advanced technologies. This environment is best captured by the acronym VUCA, which stands for Volatile, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (Waller et al., 2019).

Universities and colleges across the world are no longer isolated entities but are now part of an interconnected global ecosystem that demands continuous adjustments. Conventional teaching research, and administrative methods are under review and institutions are compelled to rethink their missions, architectures, and curriculums. They are now required to serve increasingly diverse and global student populations, react to evolving labour market needs, and incorporate emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning and digital learning platforms - all while balancing quality, ethics and financial solvency. As these challenges emerge, higher education institutions are working to develop the capacity for agility and resilience. They are placing more

emphasis on adaptability, innovation, and readiness for the future. This includes not just adopting new knowledge and learning models but also creating cultures that support experimentation and interdisciplinary collaboration.

In a VUCA world, these work styles are no longer adequate. Systems thinking, comprehensive approaches, and collective problem solving are increasingly necessary. Higher education needs to move beyond its conventional boundaries and embrace systematic approaches that are flexible, continuously learning and responsive to change. Higher education leaders now need to not only run institutions but also lead transformation by driving innovation, forging strategic collaborations and thinking ahead (Waller et al., 2019).

In this present VUCA world, it is the duty of the Higher Education Institutions to develop the students and the upcoming generations to focus on ethical behaviour and interpersonal decency to adapt with the ever-growing environment in front of us. In this era of fierce competition and dynamic work environment, the need of ethical behaviour and interpersonal decency has gained importance in the corporate setting. In this situation fostering a strong Decency Quotient (DQ) has become essential for MBA students, who will be our future business leaders. The DQ, broadly defined, reflects an individual's capacity for respect, civility, and ethical conduct in interpersonal and professional interactions.

Jobs and talents of the future are evolving faster than the seasons. A few decades ago, IQ tests were used to predict students' success in their chosen fields. After realising that people with extremely high IQs were failing as expected, there came a period in the 1990s when everyone began discussing EQ. While EQ helps in controlling our emotions and stress when facing the final examinations or interviews, IQ helps to get into an institution or clear campus interviews. For a profession to be successful, IQ and EQ must coexist, and it is crucial to understand the following terms:

- **Reviewing IQ:** A person's IQ is a measurement of their intellectual capacity. Early in the 20th century, psychologists created assessments to gauge a person's intelligence and capacity for logical thought. This demonstrated the capacity for logical intelligence data interpretation for facts and information, and decision making based on reasoning and analysis.
- **Exploring EQ:** Daniel Goleman introduced the idea of EQ in the middle of the 1990s. The EQ is a metric that accesses a person's capacity for empathy self-awareness and emotional sensitivity. Understanding and managing one's own emotions as well as being perceptive of others' feelings requires emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2001).
- **Comprehending DQ:** Aggression and rudeness in the workplace have been extensively studied by social and organizational scientists. While workplace incivility is a "milder" form of interpersonal mistreatment where intentionality is less obvious and thus doesn't warrant legal attention, scholars have concentrated on behaviours that have a clear-cut intentional hostility (such as bullying, interpersonal aggression, and psychological aggression). Through their work, (Lim, Cortina & Magley, 2008) refute the idea that rudeness can be dismissed as fleeting and unimportant. They proved that even small acts of disrespect can have a quantifiable negative effect on employees.

Nevertheless, civility and decency are very different (McNamee, 2018). Given below lists the difference between the two:

- Civility is all about being polite, whereas Decency is ingrained in the character.
- In civility, the person may be polite yet have a wicked heart and mind, on the other hand in decency, there is a soul craft component.
- A civil individual may be racist, aggressive, or degrading to colleagues whereas, a decent individual isn't doing all this.
- Decency is the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of an idea or behaviour whereas, civility remains silent on this.

"If you can bring your decency quotient to work every day, you will make the company a lot of fun for people - and people will enjoy being there and doing the right thing," Ajay Banga, CEO of MasterCard, who coined the term "DQ".

Every choice a manager takes has an indirect effect on society, along with direct effects on stakeholders, customers, and staff. Bill Boulding asserts that managers must possess the triple-threat leadership competence of IQ+EQ+DQ to make these decisions in an ethical and moral manner (Boulding, 2019).

For success IQ is necessary but not sufficient and EQ is the ability to empathise and emotionally being aware but does not result into compassion and integrity. Many times, it is seen that EQ has been manipulated for self-interest. DQ stands in the next level of the EQ. The DQ reflects in the action and intent of a person, intention of something positive for others and the feeling of getting valued and respected (Boulding, 2019).

This study aims to investigate the concept of DQ, especially in professional settings where teamwork, leadership development, and academic rigor come together, such as MBA programs. The concept of EQ and IQ have been thoroughly researched in academic and professional domains, but DQ is still not well understood, especially when it comes to its measurement, contributing variables, and consequences for both professional and personal success.

In order to help educational institutions, develop graduates who are ethically grounded, socially conscious, and professionally capable, this study will examine the factors that influence DQ and its results. A thorough understanding of the DQ may open the door to curriculum innovation, institutional policies, and pedagogical strategies that emphasize competence and character in future business leaders. The study indulges to the students pursuing MBA program in Bangalore, Karnataka, India.

Literature Review

Education has been the tool in developing man in order to make him live an effective and meaningful life and to contribute to the development of society in which he lives. The impact of Intelligence Quotient and Emotional Quotient of the individual for developing innovative thinking plays a crucial role (Ramaraju, 2015). Boulding (2019) argues that decency is just as vital as emotional and general intelligence among leaders. Decency involves being dedicated to good results for all the members of the workplace and to the extent that everyone is valued and respected. Decency, it is argued, must be recognized as a vital characteristic of great leadership (Boulding, 2019).

Most business schools are reconsidering the fundamental design of their MBA programs. This is largely because of the business and economic environment at the moment, which has led to increased questioning and criticism of MBA programs. Ethical misconduct witnessed over the last two decades, along with the unprecedented meltdown of the financial system worldwide, has led to stakeholders across industries questioning the appropriateness of traditional approaches used in preparing business leaders for leadership and decision-making positions. A vast majority of these critics have begun questioning the overall relevance of the MBA (Elmore, 2010).

Performance and ethical behavior among MBA students have been demonstrated through studies to be influenced by a range of influential variables. Undergraduate grades and discipline are strong indicators of MBA performance (Sulaiman & Mohezar, 2006). Personality also influences performance, with detachment correlating with improved grades in all types of courses. Gender interacts with personality factors, influencing performance alternately in qualitative and quantitative courses (Whittingham, 2006). Ethical sensitivity is also varied and influenced by gender and culture, where Indian female MBA students are more ethically sensitive than males (Chully, 2017). Cultural influences also impact cheating behavior, where U.S. males cheat more than U.S. females, and Indian students have identical cheating inclinations across genders (Taylor-Bianco & Deeter-Schmelz, 2007). These results have implications for the design of MBA programs, recruitment, and programs to enhance ethical business cultures.

A study conducted in Saudi shows, the understanding of the variables that drive student learning outcomes and academic performance is a complicated task. Most research conducted to date has separately examined the influence of EI and IQ with minimal focus on their interactive influences. Academic achievement among business students in private universities is primarily set by high IQ and EI levels, while students in public universities exhibit moderate EI levels and minimal IQ (Khan, 2019).

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of EQ as well as conventional IQ in predicting academic and professional success among MBA students (Rathore, 2015). IQ and EQ have been known to have a positive effect on the psychological health of students (Zahra et al., 2024). Studies suggest that the development of EQ can play a pivotal role in recruitment, retention, and career development initiatives (Ramaraju, 2015). Further, the IQ, EQ, and spiritual quotient (SQ) of faculty members have been identified as key determinants that influence the satisfaction of students in higher education (Tiwary & Rao, 2020). Due to the increased emphasis laid on emotional labor and customer intimacy in contemporary workplaces, employers are preferring candidates with high EQ (Rathore, 2015). These conclusions are the rationale for the necessity for EQ development in MBA programs and reflect the multi-dimensional aspect of intelligence in academic and professional spheres.

Emotional intelligence, specifically the aspect pertaining to decision-making, is found to have an association with ethical judgment among MBA students. A research highlights the need to incorporate emotional intelligence and ethical judgment in corporate training programs and business school courses and also highlighting the need to bring the topic of ethical judgment from consciousness to a habitual practice of ethical behavior backed by responsibility (Hopkins & Deepa, 2018). Building EI can play a crucial role in hiring and retaining individuals as it provides a better analysis of the job requirements, the candidate's ability, of the gap between the two, and the development and training requirements to fill the gaps. As regards fulfilling an individual's career ambitions, once the company provides an employee with the vision of what is expected of him in order to attain a specific position, it motivates him to acquire the competencies for the same (Ramaraju, 2015).

Although decency is rarely acknowledged as a factor influencing business, organizations that fail to fulfil their responsibility of concern to their constituents are linked to a lack of compassion (Fotaki, 2015). Those who engage in the workplace bullying, humiliation, and discrimination are responsible for a variety of organizational misconduct (Walker & Jackson, 2017). As a result, early intervention is necessary to improve the quality of relationships in the workplace (Blustein et al., 2016; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016; Kenny et al., 2016). A manager's decency guarantees dignity and civility at work, which in turn is linked to equal chances, social security and protection, and ultimately the concept of quality-of-life (Faioli, 2009).

An effective leader uses teamwork to accomplish the shared objectives, but they must make sure that it is done correctly. *"A leader with a high DQ understands that leadership isn't about captivating from other people but helping other people. When it comes to talent, people think about what they can assess and measure, like IQ. But my view is that organizations should spend longer selecting on the idea of DQ. The DQ implies a person has not only empathy for employees and colleagues but also the genuine desire to care for them."* says Boulding. He emphasised the need for a decency quotient alongside intelligence and emotional quotient.

Based on this, it can be stated that:

Individual Success = f (IQ, EQ)

Organisational Success = f (Leader's IQ, EQ, DQ)

The four W's – Work, Workplace, Workforce and Worth – are being altered by technological advancements, automation, and disruption in the modern period. Although concentrating on the bottom line is crucial in today's fiercely competitive environment, decisions made have an impact on other people's lives. The recent HDFC video incident, which exposed the existence of negative and unprofessional behaviour that existed beneath the surface in an online meeting, is one example of how ethical transgressions like deceit, bullying, harassment, and other forms of interpersonal abuse continue to occur in organizational life and frequently negatively affect every day behaviour (Murphy & Petersen, 2017).

According to Suddaby (2010), a strong construct is built on clear and accurate terms. For this reason, we used Hadžiomerović et al. (2021)'s construct of perceived managerial decency as our foundation to determine the DQ of young, aspiring managers and their awareness of it. The following dimensions were selected for the study: (1) Respectful Interactions, (2) Treatment with Good Manners, (3) Employee Development, (4) Mutual Trust, (5) Decent Feedback, (6) Providing insight into Bigger Picture and (7) Active Listening.

Considering into account that India is a country that values individual accomplishments over group accomplishments. Based on the scarce scholarly research on DQ, we have seen that decency demonstrates a concern for others that goes beyond one's own interests. Lack of decency in both individual and group decision-making will hinder an organization's capacity to achieve its objectives and, more importantly, to make a positive impact on society as a whole. DQ requires doing the right thing, but EQ does not always imply doing it. This paper's objective is to ascertain and evaluate the DQ of students enrolled in MBA program in Bangalore. The study will also assist in identifying and preparing the pupils for the workforce.

Methodology

Statement of the Problem

The traditional emphasis on intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional quotient (EQ) alone has not been enough to give future managers the interpersonal and ethical skills required for sustainable leadership in the current business landscape, which is marked by rapid technological change, rising competitiveness, and a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment. Even though the Decency Quotient (DQ) is increasingly seen as an important addition to IQ and EQ, particularly in fostering civility, respect, and moral behaviour in work environments, management students lack empirical knowledge and evaluation of DQ. As future corporate leaders, MBA students in particular need to be nurtured in the areas of ethical behaviour and interpersonal decency, which are embodied by DQ, in addition to cognitive and emotional development. Academic institutions haven't, however, sufficiently incorporated DQ into their leadership development programs, evaluation systems, or teaching.

Research Gap

The ideas of IQ and EQ have been thoroughly examined in relation to professional growth, leadership, and student achievement; however, the DQ has not received as much attention, especially in academic contexts. Additionally:

- There is not much information on how MBA students' DQ differs depending on demographic characteristics like gender, age, or educational history.
- There is no scientific evidence supporting the effect of DQ on students' preparedness for moral leadership and professional conduct.
- Business schools lack curricular tools or pedagogical frameworks for actively building DQ.
- Most of the research focuses on professional settings; academic settings, particularly Indian MBA programs, have not well examined DQ.

This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating DQ among MBA students in Bangalore, identifying its determinants, and proposing strategies for its integration into management education.

Research Questions

1. What constitutes the Decency Quotient (DQ) in the context of MBA students?
2. How does the DQ of MBA students compare across different genders?
3. What are the key demographic or academic factors (such as age, gender and years of formal education) that influence the DQ of MBA students?
4. What institutional strategies can be adopted to foster and enhance DQ among future business leaders?

Objectives

1. To identify key factors affecting the DQ of MBA students.
2. To examine differences in DQ across MBA student's gender.
3. To analyse the demographic and academic factors that influence DQ among MBA students.
4. To propose strategies and institutional interventions to enhance the DQ among MBA students.

Hypothesis

H1: There is a significant relationship between demographic and academic variables and DQ.

H2: There is a significant difference in DQ scores between male and female MBA students.

Research Methods

This research is an empirical study based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire. Likert Scale was used to collect the responses of the respondents on 43 statements with the following scale: 1 (Never), 2 (Occasionally), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (Often), and 5 (Always). The survey was administered to assess MBA students' Diversity Quotient (DQ). The questionnaire was distributed among 34 Institutions (Colleges and University). Out of 352 respondents we had considered only 330 samples due to incomplete and/or patterned responses for the study. Convenience Sampling technique was used to collect the samples from 34 Higher Education Institutions in Bangalore, Karnataka, India.

Data Analysis

The statistical analysis was conducted through SPSS version 26. The data was inspected for outliers, skewness and kurtosis, in which no irregularities were observed. Descriptive Statistics is used to analyse the demographics. Descriptive Statistics, Correlation and Regression analysis were used.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to higher education institutions encompassing Affiliated Colleges and Universities in Bangalore offering MBA programs.

Results & Discussion

Based on the literature review and the constructs used by Hadžiomerović et al. (2021), the questionnaire was reconstructed keeping in view that the respondents were MBA students, a theoretical framework (Figure-1) was developed which may help us in understanding the key factors affecting DQ among MBA students in Bangalore.

The below diagram illustrates a conceptual framework positioning the Decency Quotient (DQ) as a central mediator influencing the development of future leaders among MBA students. Six core attributes - Respectful Interaction, Treatment with Good Manners, Peer Development, Mutual Trust, Decent Feedback and Active Listening – are depicted as foundational components that feed into and collectively shape the DQ. These elements are not isolated; rather, they reflect interrelated interpersonal behaviours that foster culture of empathy, ethical conduct and collaboration. At the culmination of the framework, the decency quotient channels these dimensions into nurturing Future Leaders (MBA students), thereby emphasizing the role of emotional intelligence and ethical sensitivity in contemporary business education. This model reinforces that MBA curricula must integrate decency centric competencies to produce leaders who are not only competent but also principled and people oriented.

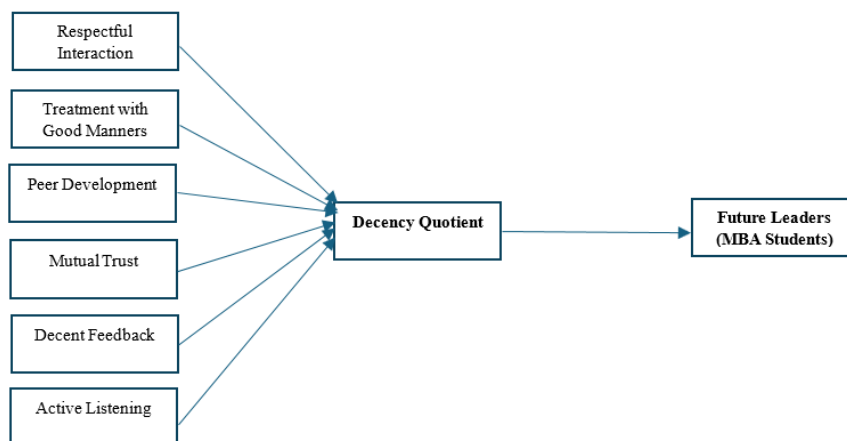


Figure-1. Showing the Conceptual Framework Linking Decency Quotient to Future MBA Leadership

A 43 Likert-type items were subjected to a reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha to assess the Decency Quotient (DQ) scale's internal consistency. With a Cronbach's Alpha of .922, the scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency. This suggests that the items on the DQ scale measure the underlying construct of decency in a cohesive manner, offering a trustworthy instrument for additional research.

Descriptive analysis of individual DQ items showed that mean scores ranged from 3.23 to 4.67, with most items scoring above 4.0, suggesting generally high levels of decency related attributes among the MBA students surveyed. The highest rated items pertained to respectful interactions and ethical integrity, while lower scores were noted on items associated with empathy and humility, indicating potential areas for targeted development.

To test the assumption of normality for the total DQ score, the Shapiro-Wilk tests was conducted. The test was non-significant ($p=.200$), indicating that the data was normally distributed.

Table 1. Showing Correlation Analysis

		Formal_Education	DQ_Total
Formal_Education	Pearson Correlation	1	-.071
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.196
	N	330	330
DQ_Total	Pearson Correlation	-.071	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.196	
	N	330	330

From Table 1, we can see that a Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between students' formal education level and their overall Decency Quotient (DQ). The analysis revealed a weak and non-significant negative correlation ($r = -0.071$, $p = .196$), indicating no meaningful linear association between years of formal education and DQ scores. This suggests that the amount of formal education completed does not significantly influence students' decency levels.

Table 2 (a). Showing Regression Analysis

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square			Std. Error of the Estimate			Change Statistics		Sig. Change	F	Durbin-Watson
			Adjusted	Rof	theR	Square	Change	F	Change	df1	df2		
1	.169 ^a	.029	.020	.46575	.029	3.196	3	326	.024			1.685	

a. Predictors: (Constant), Formal_Education, Gender, Age

b. Dependent Variable: DQ_Total

Table 2 (b). Showing Regression Analysis

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1(Constant)	3.796	.432		8.796	.000		

Gender	.114	.051	.122	2.219	.027.992	1.008
Age	.035	.019	.108	1.865	.063.896	1.116
Formal_Education-.034	.018	-.112		-1.948	.052.895	1.118

a. Dependent Variable: DQ_Total

From Table 2 (a) and 2 (b), we may interpret that, this multiple regression analysis revealed that demographic factors collectively explain a small but statistically significant portion of variance in DQ scores ($R^2 = 2.9\%$, $p < .05$). Gender emerged as a significant predictor, where female students reported higher DQ scores. Formal education was a marginally significant negative predictor, indicating a slight decrease in DQ as formal education years increase. Age did not have a significant effect.

The hypothesis H1 is partially supported. Gender and formal education influence DQ, but age does not significantly affect it. These findings indicate that student background characteristics subtly shape their decency-related behaviours and values.

An independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in DQ scores between genders ($t = -2.008$, $p = .045$), with female MBA students scoring slightly but significantly higher on average. This suggests that gender-based differences in perceptions and behaviours related to decency are present. This can be seen in the below given Table 3.

Hypothesis H2 is supported. Gender plays a significant role in shaping DQ among MBA students, with females reporting higher decency values.

Table 3. Showing the Independent Sample Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-Mean tailed)	Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower Upper
DQ_Total	Equal variances assumed	.040	.842	-2.008	328	.045	-.10354	.05155	-.20496 -.00212
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.009	327.937	.045	-.10354	.05153	-.20491 -.00217

Based on the above findings, there were certain strategic recommendations made that may be followed in every HEI's offering MBA courses:

1. A Gender-sensitive Ethics Workshops may be given to the students to encourage dialogue around decency from diverse gender perspectives.
2. A Peer Mentoring Program can be conducted to allow high-DQ students to model values for their peers.

3. Value-Based Curriculum Enhancements needs to be prepared to integrate DQ-building themes such as empathy, inclusiveness, and integrity into MBA courses.
4. A Behavioural Feedback Mechanism will help in regular assessments and feedback on decency-related conduct to promote accountability.
5. A Reflective Assessment can be done to implement reflective journals and self-assessments to increase student awareness and accountability regarding decency behaviours.

Conclusion

The study validates that the Decency Quotient (DQ) is a significant predictor of ethical leadership readiness among MBA students. While often overshadowed by IQ and EQ, DQ encapsulates core values essential for sustainable, human-centric leadership. MBA curricula must prioritize DQ through structured interventions such as peer mentoring, reflective exercises, and value-centric training modules. The findings urge higher education institutions to integrate decency as a core leadership competency, ensuring a balance between competence and character.

While the present study offers valuable insights into the relevance of the Decency Quotient among MBA students it is not without limitations. Firstly, the study is geographically restricted to MBA institutions in Bangalore Karnataka, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other regions with different cultural and educational dynamics. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling, although practical, introduces the possibility of sample bias as the participants may not fully represent the broader MBA student population across India. Furthermore, the study's cross-sectional design only records a single point in time and ignores how DQ changes over the course of MBA program. The narrow scope of demographic and academic factors that were considered is another drawback; although age, gender and education were examined, other potentially significant elements like socio economic background, institutional type or previous work experience were not considered.

Future research can expand on these findings in several ways. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in DQ throughout the MBA programme could offer richer insights into its development over time. Comparative studies involving MBA students from different geographic or cultural backgrounds would help validate the universality of the findings. Incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus group discussions could deepen the understanding of how students perceive and apply DQ in real world scenarios which could pave the way for its broader integration into leadership development programs.

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Declaration

The authors declare no conflict of interest relating to data presented in this paper. Its contents, including any opinions and conclusion, are completely those of the authors associated. The use of AI tools to paraphrase a few sentences for the grammatical purpose was used (Like Quillbot). The sentences paraphrased are duly cited and added in the references.

Informed Consent Declaration

There was human participation to this study and hence an informed consent was taken in the questionnaire itself, where the participants and Institutions names were kept undisclosed in this entire paper and they had given a consent to give their responses for the research purpose only.

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