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**Emotional Intelligence in Human Ecology and Hospitality
Services: Reflections on Human-Centred Leadership from
Lecturers at The Mico University College**



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Emotional Intelligence in Human Ecology and Hospitality Services: Reflections on Human-Centred Leadership from Lecturers at The Mico University College

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Abstract

This practice article considers emotional intelligence from the collective perspective of lecturers in the Department of Human Ecology and Hospitality Services at The Mico University College. Because our disciplines combine knowledge, practical performance, service, creativity and human wellbeing, the emotional climate of classrooms, laboratories, studios, meetings and supervisory relationships directly affects learning, safety and professional formation. Drawing on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management, we connect emotional intelligence to teaching, assessment, mentoring, departmental collaboration and institutional change. We argue that emotional intelligence does not replace expertise, standards or accountability; it enables these to be exercised with fairness, clarity and respect. The article concludes with a concise departmental agenda and a relational practice cycle for translating emotionally intelligent leadership into everyday action.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; Human Ecology and Hospitality Services; human-centred leadership; higher education; Jamaica

Introduction

As lecturers in the Department of Human Ecology and Hospitality Services at The Mico University College, we teach in a field where education is inseparable from human wellbeing, service, culture, creativity and work. Our classrooms extend into food laboratories, textile and apparel studios, demonstration spaces, teaching-practice sites, community projects and professional settings. In these environments, people must collaborate and feedback is often immediate. The quality of human interaction therefore influences not only morale, but also safety, confidence, learning and professional identity.

This reality shapes our understanding of leadership. Leadership is often measured by qualifications, authority, productivity and the ability to secure results. These matter, but they are incomplete. Leadership is also revealed in how people are treated while the work is being done. A technically competent leader may enforce procedures and meet deadlines while creating a climate in which colleagues fear questions and students are ashamed of mistakes. By contrast, a leader who listens, communicates respectfully can preserve standards while strengthening trust and responsibility.

Emotional intelligence helps make this difference. It enables us to recognise emotion, regulate our responses, understand context and manage relationships so that work can be completed with dignity. It does not require us to avoid difficult conversations, excuse poor performance or solve every personal problem. This article is a scholarly reflection grounded in our experience as lecturers, mentors and educators, supported by research on emotional intelligence, leadership and educational transformation. It is not presented as an empirical study of our department; rather, it offers a practice-informed perspective on how we teach, correct, collaborate and care within higher education.

Why Emotional Intelligence Matters in Human Ecology and Hospitality Services

Human Ecology and Hospitality Services provide an ideal context for examining emotional intelligence. These disciplines focus on people, relationships, health, resources, service, and everyday living. Students are expected not only to acquire knowledge but also to demonstrate skills, create, serve, organise, evaluate, and reflect. Because learning is highly practical and involves continuous practice, feedback, and collaboration, it can also leave students feeling exposed and vulnerable. A student presenting a food product, garment, lesson demonstration or service plan is presenting evidence of personal effort. Feedback that is vague, sarcastic or publicly humiliating may be remembered long after the technical lesson is forgotten. The same correction, delivered specifically and respectfully, can help the learner separate performance from identity: the product has not yet met the standard, but the learner can identify the gap, practise and improve. The standard remains intact; what changes is the learner's capacity to hear it without believing that one mistake defines personal worth.

Our work also involves emotional labour. Lecturers may teach, supervise practical sessions, assess portfolios, prepare laboratories, monitor safety, advise students, serve on committees and meet institutional deadlines within the same period. Students may arrive carrying financial pressure, family responsibilities, grief, anxiety or uncertainty about their future. Emotional intelligence does not remove these realities, but it helps us distinguish unwillingness from uncertainty, defiance from embarrassment and a genuine need for support from an attempt to avoid responsibility. It is also central to hospitality-related professional readiness, because service requires communication, composure, empathy, teamwork and constructive responses when expectations are not met.



Emotional Intelligence and Human-Centred Leadership

Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2005) describe emotional intelligence as an ability involving the perception, use, understanding and management of emotion. In our work, this becomes practical when a lecturer notices tension before a group task deteriorates, when a programme coordinator recognises that frustration is affecting tone or when a leader asks for the context behind a missed deadline before assigning blame. Human-centred leadership applies these capacities to authority while recognising that staff members and students are both accountable participants and human beings.

Human-centred leadership does not mean lowering standards or granting every request. A leader may be pleasant yet unclear, sympathetic yet inconsistent or supportive yet unwilling to confront repeated underperformance. Effective emotional intelligence combines empathy with judgment, courage, fairness and follow-through. Its value is shown when communication becomes more truthful, decisions become more proportionate and relationships remain strong enough to support improvement.

Four Capabilities Through Our Departmental Lens

Self-Awareness: Understanding the Educator Behind the Role

Self-awareness is the capacity to recognise our emotions, triggers, assumptions, strengths and limitations. In practical disciplines, where time, safety and quality standards matter, urgency can be mistaken for permission to speak harshly. A lecturer may be anxious because equipment is malfunctioning or an assessment is behind schedule, then displace that anxiety on students or colleagues. Self-awareness creates a pause in which the educator can restate the requirement, examine what support or consequence is appropriate and respond without allowing frustration to control the interaction.

Self-awareness also requires us to examine bias. We may interpret confidence differently among students, assume that quietness means disengagement, favour communication styles similar to our own or become defensive when a colleague challenges an established approach. Emotionally secure educators can receive feedback, acknowledge gaps and value the expertise of others. Authority is strengthened, not weakened, when it is exercised reflectively.

Self-Management: Responding Rather Than Reacting

Self-management is the ability to regulate emotion and choose a proportionate response under pressure. Higher education presents missed deadlines, student appeals, staffing constraints, policy changes and unexpected disruptions. When materials are unavailable before a practical session, a reactive response may involve blame or unsafe improvisation. A self-managed response stabilises the situation, determines what can proceed safely, communicates the adjustment and addresses responsibility once the facts are clear. Calmness is not passivity; it is disciplined leadership.

The same principle applies to supervision. When a deadline is missed, emotionally intelligent leadership names the requirement, asks for relevant context, determines permissible flexibility, agrees on the next action and follows up. It avoids permanent judgments based on temporary emotion. Compassion does not require unlimited extensions, and firmness does not require humiliation.

Social Awareness: Seeing Context Before Assigning Character

Social awareness includes empathy, sensitivity to context and attention to the emotional climate of a group. Observable behaviour rarely tells the whole story. A student who avoids a practical task may be unprepared but may also fear public failure. A colleague who becomes unusually quiet may be disengaged, but may also be overwhelmed by health, caregiving or workload pressures. Social awareness asks us to investigate before we label.

Understanding context does not excuse every difficulty; it supports fairer decisions. A lecturer can identify a change in participation or performance, invite relevant explanation and state what must happen next. Social awareness is also cultural and relational. Students and colleagues differ in age, background, faith, personality and professional experience, and power affects their willingness to speak. Silence may indicate agreement, but it may also signal uncertainty or the belief that speaking will make no difference.

Relationship Management: Building Trust Through the Work

Relationship management is the capacity to communicate clearly, resolve conflict, influence constructively and repair relationships. Within a department, disagreement about assessment, practical requirements, workload or innovation is inevitable. An emotionally unintelligent response treats questions as disloyalty and uses authority to end discussion. A relationally skilled leader clarifies the shared goal, invites evidence, explains constraints, records decisions and communicates the basis for them. People may not receive their preferred outcome, but they are more likely to trust a transparent and respectful process.

Relationship management also includes repair. Educators and leaders will sometimes speak too quickly, misunderstand a concern or decide without adequate consultation. An appropriate apology does not diminish authority; it demonstrates accountability. Trust is not built by pretending conflict never occurs, but by handling it in ways that preserve truth, dignity and continued collaboration.

Teaching, Assessment and Professional Formation

Lecturers exercise leadership whenever we organise learning, give feedback, interpret behaviour or respond to difficulty. Practical assessment is especially important. Students need clear standards, accurate judgments and feedback that identifies the criterion, the evidence of the gap and the next action. Comments such as "This is poor" communicate disapproval without teaching improvement. A more useful response explains why the work has not met the standard and what practice, revision or resubmission is required. Such feedback is demanding, but also fair and developmental.

Emotionally intelligent teaching contributes to professional identity. Our students are preparing for roles in homes, schools, businesses, communities and service environments. They must learn to manage pressure, receive correction, work with diverse people, respond to complaints and exercise ethical judgment. We teach these abilities not only through course content, but through modelling. The way we manage a delayed practical, address a mistake or resolve conflict becomes part of the curriculum students experience.



Collegial Relationships and Departmental Leadership

A department can possess strong individual expertise and still struggle when relationships are characterised by fear, poor communication or unresolved conflict. Classes may continue and reports may be submitted, yet colleagues stop volunteering ideas, avoid collaboration and contribute only what is formally required. The department remains functional on paper while losing creativity, generosity and institutional memory.

Research supports the connection between emotional intelligence and workplace outcomes. Doğru's (2022) meta-analysis linked emotional intelligence with organisational commitment, job satisfaction, citizenship behaviour and performance, and with lower job stress. Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez (2023) similarly found that emotional intelligence influences leadership, team behaviour and organisational outcomes. Pirsoul et al. (2023) associated it with career adaptability and satisfaction, while Sasere and Matashu (2025) identified self-awareness, empathy and relationship management as recurring competencies connected to teacher wellbeing, school climate and leadership effectiveness.

These findings must be interpreted responsibly. Emotional intelligence cannot correct inadequate staffing, inequitable workload, unclear policy, limited resources or poor compensation. It should not be reduced to a personality test or used to make employees quietly absorb unhealthy systems. It must operate alongside competent management, fair procedures and adequate institutional support. Empathy without structural action becomes empty reassurance; structure without empathy can become dehumanizing administration.

From Principle to Practice: A Departmental Agenda

Emotional intelligence should not depend only on individual personality. It can be strengthened through ordinary departmental systems and professional habits:

1. Model the expected behaviour. Leaders should communicate calmly, correct privately where possible, explain decisions, receive feedback, apologise appropriately and follow through consistently.
2. Create safer meetings and decisions. Circulate agendas, record decisions, allow evidence-based disagreement and distinguish clearly between consultation and final authority.
3. Strengthen feedback and mentoring. Assessment and supervision should make standards, gaps, required actions and timelines clear. Structured mentoring and referral pathways should support students and early-career educators without ignoring professional boundaries.
4. Plan for predictable pressure. Practical examinations, teaching practice, accreditation, major events and end-of-semester grading require advance attention to workload, equipment, deadlines and staff support.
5. Develop and evaluate relational practice. Case discussions, role-play, peer observation and coaching can strengthen difficult-conversation skills. Anonymous feedback, participation patterns, grievances, retention and perceptions of fairness can help departments identify strengths and concerns without punishing candour.

Conclusion

From our perspective as lecturers in Human Ecology and Hospitality Services, emotional intelligence is not an optional addition to professional competence. It is part of the relational infrastructure that allows competence to benefit people. It shapes the safety of practical sessions, the usefulness of feedback, the honesty of meetings, the repair of conflict, and the confidence with which students enter professional life.

We summarise emotionally intelligent action as five interconnected steps: pause, attend, clarify, act, and follow through. Pause before emotion becomes reaction. Attend to the person, facts, and power dynamics. Clarify the standard, context, and limits of authority. Act in a fair, proportionate, and specific way. Follow through so that care does not become an empty promise and accountability does not become a one-time threat. This cycle can guide classrooms, practical laboratories, meetings, supervisory conversations, and conflict-resolution.

The strongest educational leader is neither the person who generates fear nor the one who avoids every difficult conversation. It is the leader who combines clarity with dignity, empathy with accountability, and authority with service. This approach does not lower standards; it makes them more teachable, credible, and sustainable.

Human Ecology and Hospitality Services is fundamentally concerned with the quality of human life. Our leadership and teaching should reflect that commitment. When lecturers, students, and staff are treated as people rather than instruments of output, they are better positioned to learn, create, serve, and carry transformation forward. Ultimately, this is the practical promise of emotional intelligence in higher education.



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