

# Emotional intelligence and effective leadership

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## Abstract

Emotional intelligence has become increasingly popular as a measure for identifying potentially effective leaders, and as a tool for developing effective leadership skills. Despite this popularity, however, there is little empirical research that substantiates the efficacy of emotional intelligence in these areas. The aim of the present paper was to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and effective leadership. Emotional intelligence was assessed by a modified version of the Trait Meta Mood Scale in 43 participants employed in management roles. Effective leaders were identified as those who displayed a transformational rather than transactional leadership style as measured by the multifactor leadership questionnaire. Emotional intelligence correlated with several components of transformational leadership suggesting that it may be an important component of effective leadership. In particular emotional intelligence may account for how effective leaders monitor and respond to subordinates and make them feel at work.

## Introduction

During the last decade interpersonal skills have become more integral to effective leadership (Goleman, 1998a). Where leaders were once seen to control, plan and inspect the overall running of an organization, in today's more service-oriented industries, leadership roles are also to motivate and inspire others, to foster positive attitudes at work, and to create a sense of contribution and importance with and among employees (Hogan *et al.*, 1994). These contemporary leadership requirements have placed new demands on leadership training programs to develop these skills in evolving leaders and on organizations involved in leadership selection to identify them in potential candidates (Fulmer, 1997). As a result, research has been exploring the underlying attributes and behaviours of leaders who successfully perform these contemporary leadership roles in order to identify leadership selection and training criteria for the recruitment and development of effective leaders (Church and Waclawski, 1998; Pratch and Jacobowitz, 1998; Ross and Offerman, 1997; Sternberg, 1997).

One variable that has recently gained much popularity as a potential underlying attribute of effective leadership is the construct of emotional intelligence (EI) (Sosik and Megerian, 1999). EI is described as a set of abilities that refer in part to how effectively one deals with emotions both within oneself and others (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). It has been proposed that in leadership, dealing effectively with emotions may contribute to how one handles the needs of individuals, how one effectively motivates

employees, and makes them "feel" at work (Goleman, 1998b). Today's effective leadership skills have been described to depend, in part, on the understanding of emotions and the abilities associated with EI (Cooper and Sawaf, 1997; Goleman, 1998a; Ryback, 1998).

Exactly how, and to what extent EI accounts for effective leadership is currently unknown. Despite much interest in relating EI to effective leadership there is little research published that has explicitly examined this relationship. Popular claims regarding the extent to which EI accounts for effective leadership skills are at present misleading. For example, one search firm claims "Emotional Intelligence accounts for more than 85 percent of exceptional performance in top leaders" (HayGroup, 2000). This finding is unlikely – there has never been a psychological variable that has made any such prediction in a century of research in applied psychology (Mayer *et al.*, forthcoming).

Despite the misleading nature of such claims, popular literature has sought to highlight the utility a priori, of this potential relationship, and drawn important theoretical links between EI and leadership performance. Knowledge regarding exactly how EI relates to leadership may lead to significant advances in leadership training and development programs, and the ability to select potentially effective leaders. The aim of the present study was to explicitly examine the relationship between EI and effective leadership.

The transactional/transformational leadership model (Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1990; 1994) and the "ability" model of

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