Emotional intelligence and its relationship to workplace performance outcomes of leadership effectiveness

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Abstract

Purpose – This study seeks to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI), personality, cognitive intelligence and leadership effectiveness.

Design/methodology/approach – Senior executives ($n = 41$) completed an ability measure of EI (MSCEIT), a measure of personality (16PF5) and a measure of cognitive ability (the Wechsler abbreviated scale of intelligence (WASI)). Leadership effectiveness was assessed using an objective measure of performance and a 360° assessment involving each leader's subordinates and direct manager ($n = 149$).

Findings – Correlational and regression analyses revealed that higher EI was associated with higher leadership effectiveness, and that EI explained variance not explained by either personality or IQ.

Originality/value – This paper establishes a link between EI and workplace measures of leadership effectiveness.

Keywords Individual psychology, Leadership, Performance measures, Personality

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Despite a substantial amount of research on leadership, there is still much uncertainty about what is required to be an effective leader (Kets de Vries, 1993; Higgs and Rowland, 2000; Higgs, 2003). Questions still remain around why intelligent and experienced leaders are not always successful in dealing with environmental demands and life in general. Perhaps what leaders need is emotional intelligence (EI), rather than cognitive intelligence or specific personality traits?

Surprisingly, there has been little research investigating this possibility. The few studies that have been published have tended to focus on leadership effectiveness from the view point of Bass and Avolio's (1990, 1994) transformational/transactional leadership model (Barling *et al.*, 2000; Palmer *et al.*, 2001; Gardner and Stough, 2002). This research has been valuable in understanding the link between EI and leadership, but it has yet to examine objective indices of leadership performance. Thus, we can not be certain if EI is related to actual leadership performance rather than perceived performance.

Emotional intelligence

Popular definitions of EI refer to various things, including motivation, empathy, sociability, warmth, and optimism (Mayer *et al.*, 2001). EI approaches can be classified into two broad categories:

(1) ability models (Mayer and Salovey, 1997); and

(2) mixed models.

Ability models conceptualise EI in a similar way to cognitive intelligence (i.e. intelligent quotient (IQ)). EI is assumed to develop over time, be correlated with measures of IQ, and be measurable with a test based on performance (Ciarrochi *et al.*, 2000). In contrast, mixed models of EI incorporate both non-cognitive models (Bar-On, 1997) and competency-based models (Goleman, 1995). These mixed models tend to overlap or "mix" with traditional models of personality and tend to utilise self-reports as their primary mode of assessment. Both models measure EI in different ways.

There is now substantial evidence to suggest that self-report measures of EI correlate with personality (Ciarrochi *et al.*, 2000, 2001; MacCann *et al.*, 2004). Such overlap may make interpretation difficult. One can always question whether a result involving self-reported EI is really just a replication of a previous result using a similar personality measure. For example, research has clearly demonstrated a link between self-esteem and mental health (Ciarrochi *et al.*, 2003). Thus if an EI measure correlates substantially with self-esteem and mental health, is the EI test measuring something new, or is it replicating previous self-esteem effects?

While self-report measures have received considerable criticism, they have also shown utility, and there is evidence that some of them can be distinguished from other personality constructs (Van Rooy and Viswesvaran, 2004). However, an important point is that interpretation can sometimes be difficult, due to self-report measure overlap with personality.

Another potential limitation of self-reports is that they are subject to reporting bias, especially in organizational contexts where people might be motivated to fake good. Presumably, ability measures are more difficult to fake good, given that people do not know the "correct" answers ahead of time (Ciarrochi *et al.*, 2000; MacCann *et al.*, 2004; Dawda and Hart, 2000).

In contrast to self-report measures, EI ability measures correlate only slightly with personality. They also tend to correlate modestly with intelligence, as would be expected from Mayer and Salovey's (1997) theorizing. For this study the ability model of EI as defined by Mayer and Salovey (1997) will be used:

> ... an ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them. EI is involved in the capacity to perceive emotions, assimilate emotion-related feelings, understand the information of those emotions, and manage them (p. 267).

Emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness

Past researchers suggest that EI will be linked to transformational leadership style (Barling *et al.*, 2000; Palmer *et al.*, 2001; Gardner and Stough, 2002). Transformational leaders are seen as those executives that are able to create a vision, communicate this vision, build commitment amongst subordinates to the vision and model the vision

within the workplace. Transactional leaders are viewed more as managers that maintain the status quo. Their focus is on linking job performance to rewards and ensuring subordinates have the necessary resources to undertake their roles. It is felt that as transformational leaders are able to deal with strategic matters more efficiently and in turn are able to build commitment in employees, these leaders are more likely to take an organization forward. Thus the assumption is that transformational leaders are more effective than transactional leaders, at least in some instances (Bass and Avolio, 1994; McShane and Von Glinow, 2000).

Palmer *et al.* (2001) administered a self-report EI measure to 43 managers in order to evaluate the link between EI and leadership style. They found significant correlations with several components of the transformational leadership model. Specially, the inspirational, motivation and individualized consideration components of transformational leadership correlated with the ability to monitor emotions and the ability to manage emotions.

Similarly, Barling *et al.* (2000) conducted an exploratory study on the relationship between EI and transformational leadership. Their results suggest that EI is associated with three aspects of transformational leadership, namely, idealized influence, inspirational motivation and individualized consideration. The leaders who report exhibiting these behaviours were assumed to be more effective in the workplace.

Gardner and Stough (2002) and later Palmer *et al.* (2003) also examined the relationship between a self-report measure of EI (using the Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test (SUEIT) (Palmer and Stough, 2001), personality, and effective leadership as measured by the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass and Avolio, 1990). Their results indicated that EI, specifically the ability to perceive and understand emotions in others, accounted for the majority of the variance in transformational leadership when compared to other personality measures.

Dulewicz and Higgs (1999) examined the link between self-reported EI and job competence, and unlike many previous studies, did not focus on the transformational-transactional model. These researchers looked at leadership effectiveness from the perspective of progression within the hierarchy of an organization amongst 58 managers from the UK and Ireland. Using a self-report measure of EI, which they derived from a job competency survey, they found that EI was able to explain a greater proportion of an individuals' advancement than either cognitive intelligence (also derived from elements of the job competency survey) or personality traits (using the 16 personality factor and organizational personality questionnaire).

In summary, the available research supports the hypothesis that EI is linked to indices of leadership style and effectiveness. This research has focused on self-reports of EI and of leadership style. Research is needed to evaluate whether an ability-based test of EI is related to relatively objective (or non-self-report) measures of leadership effectiveness.

Leader effectiveness has always been difficult to measure as objective criteria are often absent (Murensky, 2000). Some have argued that emphasize must be made on shareholders return on investment (Bass and Avolio, 1990), while others have advocated for a more balanced approach which also incorporates non-financial measures (Kaplan and Norton, 1996).

Within the Australian Public Service, two measures of leader effectiveness are often used (the performance management system and 360 measures of leadership behaviours espoused within the workplace). They are measures that are intended to assist one's understanding of whether a leader has managed to attain organization goals in such a manner that the organizational is also able to grow. The purpose of the performance management system is to evaluate an employee's performance in achieving agreed business outputs (e.g. increased product turnover) in the previous financial year (known as the "what", i.e. what has been achieved?) and to evaluate how the employees demonstrate the expected leadership behaviours in achieving those outputs (known as the "how", i.e. how has it been achieved? Did the executive model the core values of the organization?). The "what" and "how" evaluations highlight two separate but related aspects of an individual performance (Management Advisory Committee, 2001).

The performance management system is seen as a good indicator of an individual's leadership effectiveness (Management Advisory Committee, 2001). That is, does an individual meet business outcomes in such a manner that they not only achieve results but also build effective working relationships? This leads us to our first hypothesis, which is the core focus of this study.

H1. An ability-based model of EI is positively associated with effective leadership as measured via a performance management system.

Ability-based measure of EI – relationship with personality and intelligence

A new ability-based measure of EI was used in this study, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, Version 2.0 (MSCEIT V2.0; Mayer *et al.*, 2002). The MSCEIT is intended to measure the four dimensions of EI as postulated by Mayer and Salovey (1997):

(1) perceiving emotion accurately;

(2) using emotion to facilitate thought;

(3) understanding emotion; and

(4) managing emotion.

The MSCEIT is based on the premise that EI involves problem solving with and about emotions (Mayer *et al.*, 2003). This concept is quite different to the many self-report measures of EI in that it does not correlate highly with personality, and tends instead to correlate modestly with IQ (Ciarrochi *et al.*, 2000; MacCann *et al.*, 2004; Dawda and Hart, 2000).

In a recent study by Mayer *et al.* (2003), the MSCEIT was found to show reasonable reliability and support for the dimensional structure postulated by Mayer and Salovey (1997) of EI. In another study, Brackett and Mayer (2003) found the MSCEIT to be distinguishable from well-studied measures of personality and well-being and predict important life criteria such as drug use, alcohol use and academic achievement. Other studies have found dimensions of the MSCEIT to predict high performance on a cognitive decision-making task (Day and Carroll, 2004), low levels of social deviance

(Brackett *et al.*, 2004) and higher levels of intelligence (MacCann *et al.*, 2004). These results suggest that the MSCEIT is reliable and valid in measuring something other than personality and well-being, and relates to important outcomes. This draws us to a second and third hypothesis.

H2. An ability-based measure of EI is distinct from the Big Five personality factors.

H3. An ability-based measure of EI is related to IQ but distinguishable from it. EI will relate to variance in performance that can not be explained by IQ.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 41 (*N* for the entire study) executives from a large Australian Public Service organization with 24 (57.14 per cent) respondents being male, and 18 (42.86 per cent) female. Participants' ages ranged from 27 to 57, and the average age was 42.24 (SD = 8.31). Seventy-five per cent of participants had been with the organization for 10 years or more (*M* = 15.56, SD = 8.20).

Procedure

We sought volunteers within an Australian Public Service organization to participate in a career development centre (CDC). As part of the CDC, the administrations of a battery of psychological tests (i.e. 16PF, MSCEIT and WASI) was given to all participants. All participants were provided with information regarding the instruments, consent forms, a copy the 16PF, and either a paper and pencil version of the MSCEIT or computer access codes for completing the MSCEIT online. Participants were also scheduled in to complete the WASI. In exchange for their participation, individuals were provided with a confidential feedback report on their results for each of the instruments.

Materials

Measurement of EI. The MSCEIT V2.0 (Mayer *et al.*, 2002) was used to assess EI. The MSCEIT is an ability measure of EI as it has participants complete a set of tasks associated with either perceiving emotion, using emotion, understanding emotional information or managing emotions. It contains 141 items, which are broken down into eight tasks, which are further divided into four branches of abilities including:

(1) perceiving emotion;

(2) using emotion to facilitate thought;

(3) understanding emotion; and

(4) managing emotions.

Mayer *et al.* (2002) reported reliabilities of $\alpha = 0.91$ for the full scale, $\alpha = 0.81$ for emotional management, $\alpha = 0.77$ for emotional understanding, $\alpha = 0.76$ for emotional facilitation, and $\alpha = 0.90$ for emotional perception.

Measurement of personality. Participants completed the well-validated 16 personality factor questionnaire (16PF) (Con and Rieke, 1998). The 16PF was chosen as it is widely used and recognised personality test within the Australian Public Service sector with the availability of Australian norms. The total scale contains 185 items and each subscale contains 10-15 items.

Measurement of cognitive ability. WASI (WASI – Psychological Corporation, 1999) was used to measure cognitive ability. The WASI consists of four subtests: vocabulary, block design, similarities, and matrix reasoning. These subtests measure an individual's expressive vocabulary, verbal knowledge, visual-motor coordination, abstract conceptualisation, verbal reasoning ability, and nonverbal fluid reasoning. The WASI is seen as a good measure of IQ, yielding the traditional measures of verbal, performance and full scale IQ in a relatively convenient fashion.

Leadership effectiveness. For the performance management system, both the "what" and "how" are rated on a five point scale (1-5) by the participants' direct manager. Individuals are not rated for their innate abilities, knowledge or skills, but rather on how well they achieved business outputs over the financial year. The meaning of the each rating are: (5) Exceptional – Performance well beyond expectations, breaking new ground, producing outcomes of considerable value to the organization, often quite unanticipated; (4) Superior – Achievement has been consistently high on the range of indicators, behaviours, capabilities and any leadership role throughout the financial year; (3) Fully Effective – Good and meritorious achievement. Has achieved standard detailed in performance agreement for both business outputs and behaviours; (2) Borderline performance – has slipped below standard detailed in performance agreement for either business outputs and or behaviours; and (1) Unsatisfactory – Continued failure to achieve expected standard.

The performance management system is seen as a good indicator of an individual's leadership effectiveness (Management Advisory Committee, 2001). It assesses not only whether a person achieve results (the "what" of performance), but also whether in achieving results they build effective working relationships (the "how" of performance).

With regards to the multi-rater (360°) assessment, all participants were asked to complete an online multi-rater (360°) instrument (perspectives on executive leadership capabilities (PELC)). It comprises 40 behavioural statements that relate to the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) leadership capability framework. Those core leadership capabilities included: shapes strategic thinking (i.e. someone who inspires a sense of purpose and direction, focuses strategically, can harnesses information and opportunities, shows judgment, intelligence and commonsense); achieves results (i.e. someone who builds organizational capability and responsiveness, can marshal professional expertise, ensures closure and delivers on intended results and steers and implements changes and deals with uncertainty); cultivates productive working relationships (i.e. someone who can nurtures internal and external relationships, values individual differences and diversity, guides, mentors and develops people and facilitates co-operation and partnerships); communicates with influence (i.e. someone who can communicates clearly, listens, understands and adapts to an audience and negotiates persuasively); and exemplifies personal drive and integrity (i.e. someone who engages with risk and shows personal courage, commits to

action, displays resilience and can demonstrates self-awareness and a commitment to personal development).

The PELC involves an individual rating his or her own leadership effectiveness, while direct staff and the individual direct manager rate the person on the same criteria. That is, it involves a manager and at least three subordinates ($M = 3.6$ subordinates per participating executive). No data on age or gender were collected to maintain the anonymity of direct managers and their participants' subordinates. While we would expect a positive correlation between individual's performance ratings and their results obtained on the multi-rater questionnaire, the multi-rater offers us further insight into leadership behaviours espoused by an individual as it includes views from staff and the manager. The PELC's scale reliability coefficient was 0.93.

Results

We conducted preliminary analyses on the relationship between EI and leadership effectiveness. Following these analyses, the study focused on the predictive and incremental validity of the MSCEIT (relative to personality and cognitive intelligence).

Emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness

For this group, the mean total EI score was 100.1 (SD = 15.17), experiencing EI score was 104.9 (SD = 19.54) and strategic EI score was 97.1 (SD = 13.57).

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine any relationships that may exist between EI and leadership effectiveness as measured through the performance management ratings. Table I showed that a relationship between the total EI score ($M = 100.1$) and performance rating on the "how" scale ($M = 3.61$) existed ($r(40) = 0.384$, $p < 0.05$). These results support the notion that EI is related to a leader's effectiveness in being able to achieve organizational goals through the obtainment of higher performance ratings thus supporting our *H1*.

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine any relationships that may exist between EI and multi-rater leadership feedback ratings. Table II showed significant correlations amongst various branches of the EI construct and the multi-rater leadership instrument. These results indicate that a leader's ability to perceive emotion and understand emotion impact three or more core leadership behaviours as measured in the multi-rater instrument.

Stepwise regression analyses were also calculated using the performance management measures of leadership effectiveness as the dependent variables and the four branch scores of EI, cognitive intelligence and any significant personality

	Performance "what" rating	Performance "how" rating
Total EI score	0.021	0.384*
Experiential EI score	0.123	0.342*
Strategic EI score	0.174	0.313*
Perceiving emotion	0.239	0.424**
Facilitating thought	−0.032	0.226
Understanding emotion	0.233	0.367*
Managing emotions	0.008	0.164

Table I.
Correlation coefficients between the MSCEIT total, area and branch scores with performance management ratings

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

factors as the predictors. Perceiving emotion emerged as the strongest predictor of the "how" measure of leadership effectiveness ($\beta = 0.424$, $p < 0.01$) which accounted for 18 per cent of the variance in the "how" score. This was followed by the personality factor of privateness ($\beta = -0.319$, $p < 0.05$) which explained an additional 10 per cent of the variance of the "how" score. The personality factor dominance emerged as the strongest predictor of the "what" measure of leadership effectiveness ($\beta = 0.439$, $p < 0.01$) which accounted for 19 per cent of the variance in the score.

To further explore the incremental value of perceiving emotions, hierarchical regression was conducted, with the Big Five personality factors and intelligence forced into the first step, and perceiving emotions entered in the second step. Perceiving emotions predicted "how" scores, over and above the other variables, R^2 change = 0.10, $\beta = 0.36$, p < 0.05. None of the other variables predicted significant variance (we perhaps did not expect to focus specifically on perceiving emotions).

Emotional intelligence and personality
No significant correlations were found between total EI score and any of the 16 personality factors, $p > 0.05$. At the four branch level small correlations were found between warmth ($r = 0.37$), vigilance ($r = -0.33$) and privateness ($r = -0.38$) and understanding emotion at $p < 0.05$. Similarly, warmth ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.05$), social boldness ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$) and privateness ($r = -0.44$, $p < 0.01$) correlated with managing emotion. Only vigilance ($r = -0.33$, $p < 0.05$) correlated significantly with perceiving emotion. These results support previous research, which showed that MSCEIT scores are distinguishable from personality scores (Brackett and Mayer, 2003; Brackett *et al.*, 2004) and generally support the *H2*.

Emotional intelligence and cognitive intelligence
The mean verbal IQ for this group was 117.2 (SD = 12.31), performance IQ 114.9 (SD = 10.67) and full scale IQ 118.3 (SD = 10.43).

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine any relationships that may exist between EI and cognitive intelligences. Table III shows that the relationship between the total EI score ($M = 100.1$) and verbal IQ ($M = 117.17$), performance IQ ($M = 114.85$), full scale IQ ($M = 118.26$) was significant, $r(40) = 0.336$, $p < 0.05$, $r(40) = 0.402$, $p < 0.05$, and $r(40) = 0.430$, $p < 0.01$, respectively. These findings suggest that the

	SST	CPWR	EPDI	CI	AR
Total EI score	0.200	0.341*	0.367*	0.155	0.218
Experiential EI score	0.076	0.238	0.318	− 0.014	0.204
Strategic EI score	0.351*	0.373*	0.283	0.370*	0.122
Perceiving emotion	0.176	0.331	0.385*	0.114	0.312
Facilitating thought	0.010	0.147	0.194	− 0.060	0.083
Understanding emotion	0.348*	0.365*	0.268	0.379*	0.161
Managing emotions	0.308	0.316	0.209	0.294	0.036

Notes: SST = Shapes strategic thinking; CPWR = Cultivates productive working relationships; EPDI = Exemplifies personal drive and integrity; CI = communicates with influence; AR = Achieve results; *$p < 0.05$

Table II.
Correlation coefficients between the MSCEIT total, area and branch scores with multi-rater leadership feedback ratings

MSCEIT in fact does correlate with cognitive intelligence, indicating that the construct constitutes a cognitive ability (Mayer *et al.*, 2000) thus support our *H3*.

Discussion

The findings suggest that executives higher on EI are more likely to achieve business outcomes and be considered as effective leaders by their subordinates and direct manager. Regression analysis revealed that EI, specifically the capacity to perceive emotions, was able to predict effective leadership. These result may have important implications on how we performance manage, select and develop executives. However, caution must be given in making to wide a generalization of these findings, as the sample size is small.

In terms of performance management, it is important for an executive to be able to not only deliver outputs ("what" performance), but also to deal effectively with colleagues and staff (the "how" of performance – MAC, 2001). It may be common for executives to have "what" but not "how" skills. For example, a technical specialist may perform complex tasks tenaciously and manage to produce business outputs, but may be ineffective at managing his or her subordinates, leading to staff turnover and underperforming. The results of this study show that EI may be useful in identifying who is and is not likely to deal effectively with colleagues and staff.

A central theme of the ability-based MSCEIT is that it has incremental value over both personality and cognitive intelligence (Mayer *et al.*, 2002). The overall EI score did not correlate with any of the 16 personality factors. Some of the subscales of the MSCEIT correlated modestly with warmth, vigilance, privateness, and social boldness. These results support previous research, which showed that MSCEIT scores are distinguishable from personality (Brackett and Mayer, 2003; Brackett *et al.*, 2004).

Concerning cognitive intelligence, correlations were found between the total EI score and verbal IQ, performance IQ and full scale IQ, supporting our final hypothesis. Worth noting is that the executives in this study had significantly higher IQs than the average adult population. This pattern of findings suggests that an executive may need a high IQ to get to the management or executive levels, but once there, IQ does not discriminate between better or worse performing managers. It may be useful to evaluate whether the MSCEIT can be used to help select the best performing managers.

	Verbal IQ	Performance IQ	Full scale IQ
Total EI score	0.336*	0.402*	0.430**
Experiential EI score	0.338*	0.40*	0.417**
Strategic EI score	0.165	0.248	0.259
Perceiving emotion	0.300	0.345*	0.365*
Facilitating thought	0.382*	0.416**	0.481**
Understanding emotion	0.201	0.280	0.299
Managing emotions	0.052	0.129	0.113

Notes: $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$

Table III.
Correlation coefficients between the MSCEIT total, area and branch scores with cognitive intelligence

The correlations between EI and performance measures of leadership effectiveness were modest (rs < 0.45). However, this level of correlation is the same or higher in magnitude as many other correlations observed in the personal selection context (Cook, 2004). For example, assessment centres show correlations with performance that often vary between 0.33 and 0.43. Indeed, many of the most important relationships observed in psychology occur at the $r = 0.35$ and below range (Mayer *et al.*, 2001), and correlations of this magnitude can lead to substantial increases in selection success rate (e.g. in picking high quality managers (Rosenthal and Rubin, 1982)).

The research had some limitations that will need to be addressed in future research. It will be interesting to evaluate the link between EI and leadership in larger samples, and across different industries. It will also be important for research to evaluate the ability of EI to predict future performance. We hypothesize that EI leads to better executive performance. However, it is possible that good executive performance leads to higher EI. One way to resolve this problem is to conduct a longitudinal study that involves measuring EI before newly hired executives start the job. This would allow one to establish if EI skills were likely to be antecedents to managerial success. In conclusion, EI shows much promise in the organizational domain and is worthy of further investigation.

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