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# Emotional proficiency for excellence: How to lead like a successful top chef

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## EMOTION-BASED LEADERSHIP RESPONSES TO INCREASING MARKET SHIFTS

In the last three decades, we have seen significant changes in technology, workforce practices, consumer behavior and expectations.

More specifically, new technologies and evolving business models are increasing local and global competition and accelerating the demand for more efficient business processes, rapid innovation, cultural evolution, and even radical strategic transformations. Meanwhile, a more diverse generation of employees is joining the workforce, many of whom are highly educated, more productive, and wildly creative. These new individuals are also transforming the business landscape, and they require advanced and up-to-date management and leadership practices. To add to the complexity, today's consumers demand products and services of higher quality, without delay, through multiple channels and engagement models.

These shifts continue to require that leadership teams are agile and respond with determination, innovation, to enable a workplace environment that facilitates change and ensures that individuals and groups align with the organization's vision and goals.

Leadership's responses and actions to cope with these complex business dynamics can unleash a set of individual and collective emotions in the organizations. On many occasions, an initial confrontation with a new reality can occur, with a negative bias and negative feelings about the potential impact on self and others. These emotions can develop into individual or group self-defense mechanisms and actions that can make a required adaptive or change process more painful or unsuccessful.

A critical and efficient vehicle for leaders to drive excellence and high-performing organizations, as investigated by

scholars, is the understanding and the practical use of emotion-based leadership behavior.

## EMOTION-BASED LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS: LEARNING FROM THE GREAT CHEFS OF THE WORLD

Combining my passions for organizational leadership behavior and gastronomy, I went to the field to talk with some top chefs to investigate **what the predominant emotional proficiency constructs identified in a group of best-in-class restaurants leaders are and how these competencies interact to enable operational excellence in their business environment.**

The gastronomic sector confronts many leadership challenges that are like those encountered by other industries' enterprises and entrepreneurs. Top chefs leading the gastronomic sector face intense competition from evolving and alternative business models and technological advances. They rely heavily on talent and innovation, and they must operate with a high level of efficiency to provide quality products and customer service.

I selected three existing core leadership theories to serve as a referential theoretical framework and leveraged them for further exploration of emotion-based leadership behavior in the context of my investigation. They are **transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and an emotion-based view of strategic renewal (Fig. 1).**

These three theories were developed in the last four decades. Most of the published research has emphasized each study in individual or single domain areas, thus few recent studies look at multiple elements and the interrelation of these theory domains and constructs.

The research group consisted of twenty-three recognized top chefs in the gastronomic restaurant segment. I

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## EMOTIONAL PROFICIENCY FOR EXCELLENCE

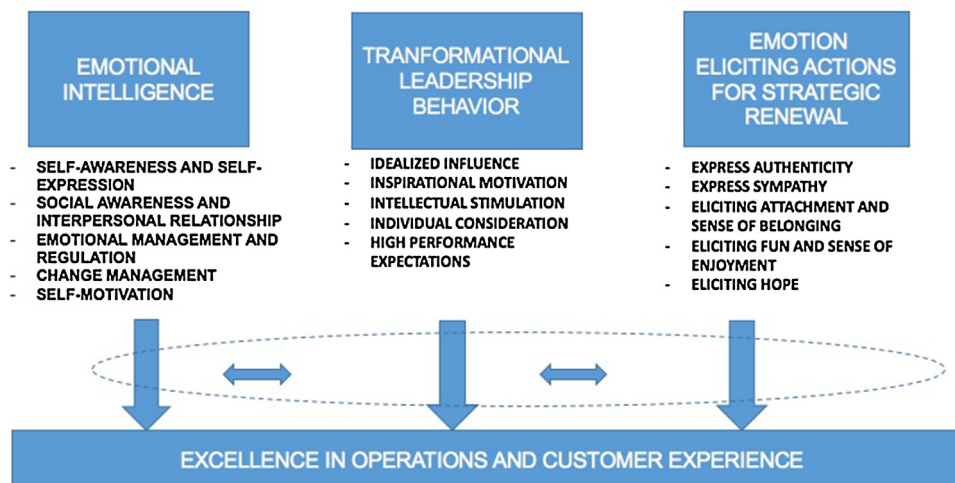


Figure 1 Emotional proficiency for excellence — referential theoretical framework

conducted fifteen semi-structured on-site interviews with top chefs of eight nationalities. They are all part of an elite group of professional chefs and are all highly ranked by recognized industry review institutions like the Michelin Guide or the World's 50 Best Restaurants.

Additionally, I evaluated the full customer experience and made observations regarding the food, service, workplace environments, and ambiance at the chefs' restaurant sites. I spend an average of four hours in each of the restaurants, located in Spain, France, Singapore, and the USA.

After analyzing raw data and following the qualitative research method, I identified twelve predominant competencies (from forty labeled as emotion-based leadership constructs) that appeared consistently in at least 60% of the top chefs that were part of the research group. The

top list of these leadership behaviors consisted of *flexibility; stress tolerance; emotional self-awareness; interpersonal relationships; consistency with ethics, principles, and values; individual consideration; enthusiasm and optimism; innovation and creativity*, and emotion-eliciting actions in the areas of *open communication, enhanced recognition, vision, and meaningful work*.

The investigation suggested that these elements have multiple and positive effects on their organization's emotional context. I integrated them into a comprehensive competency model that practicing managers can leverage as a reference framework for leadership development and coach by practitioners in different organizations and industry sectors (Fig. 2).

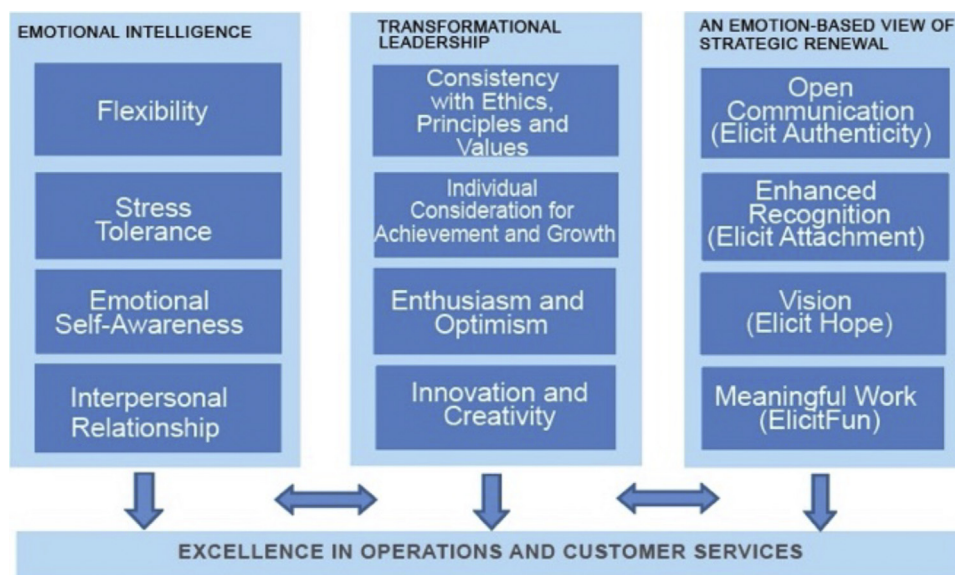


Figure 2 Predominant emotion-based leadership behavior — top chefs

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